

## 'Jews' Or 'Other White?'

San Francisco Jews were recently asked whether the government should list a category for "Jews" on various employment and school forms. These forms now list several different ethnic categories such as "Black," "Spanish speaking," "Chinese," and the catch-all "Other non-white".

Over two thirds of San Francisco Jews said "No." But a quarter of San Francisco Jews said "Yes."

Being raised again is the question of whether Jews want to consider themselves a "minority", or to emphasize their separate ethnic character in the public realm. The question is precipitated because ethnic classification is becoming an official way of life in America. For years, of course,



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the Jews and many others fought to remove racial or ethnic designation from any official forms. This is not a concern restricted to American Jews. Just this month, after years of bitter protest from Jews, the letter "J" was eliminated from tax assessment notices sent to Jewish property owners in Montreal. It had appeared - as had the letters "C" and "P" for Catholic and Protestant property owners - for school tax purposes. Now, following Jewish protests, the code classification has been changed to "C," "P" and "N" for Neutral.

So, Jews are classified as "Neutral" in Montreal, as "Other-White" in this country.

**The original opposition of the Jews had resulted from an historic fear of official classification. You will remember that the U.S. Census Bureau attempted on several occasions to include a census question on religion. This foundered on Jewish objections. First of all, we said, people should not be questioned by the government on matters of personal belief. And, second, we were uneasy about any kind of "list" of Jews which might be held by the government.**

It is for the same reason that some Jews have a bit of concern about the growing movement for master computerization of the whole population. One number for everyone could retrieve information about everyone at the push of a button; or create a national "list" of classified people at another push of the button.

There was a thoroughly practical reason for opposing classification on, say, employment forms or college application forms. That made it too easy to discriminate. Jewish agencies, such as the Anti-Defamation League and the American Jewish Committee spent long hard years getting that classification eliminated from college and employment forms.

Of course, a new direction developed to become "race conscious" in order to measure what progress was being made to advance the employment and education of racially disadvantaged groups. The question of when benevolent measurement slides into malevolent quota is, of course, one that troubles many people today, and has received much discussion.

But beyond that, there is a new question. If for various reasons, certain racial and ethnic groups are being identified - should the Jews be included? Should we also demand some special attention? Should we at least demand identification as a legitimate ethnic group? This would reverse a former desire to integrate into American public life, while maintaining our private institutional identity. Is there reason now to change?