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Afro-Latinos Oppose Proposed Changes that would not count the Race of Latinos at the Federal Level

Changes to the OMB could reduce the counting of Afro-Latinos and other groups throughout the country.

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A national coalition of Afro-Latino scholars, activists, and organizations oppose initial proposals from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to change federal standards for the collection of race and ethnicity data that could reduce the counting of Afro-Latinos, Indigenous Latinos, and other Latinos in the next U.S. Census and other federal agencies.

The OMB just released proposed changes that would make the Latino/Hispanic ethnicity and the race category equivalent by proposing a combined question format. For years the Census has asked two questions, one asking if you are Latino/Hispanic and giving you the opportunity to indicate your ethnicity (e.g., Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Salvadoran, Dominican, Colombian, etc.), the second question asking your race (e.g., white, Black, Indigenous, etc.). However, the OMB is proposing to have only one question: What is your race or ethnicity? This may mean that many people who would have marked they are Hispanic and Black in the two-part question, would now be more likely to mark just Hispanic and even provide an ethnicity (e.g., Honduran, Panamanian, Argentinian), but nothing else about their race.

The coalition of Afro-Latino activists, scholars and organizations are launching a campaign “Latino/Hispanic is Not a Race” (latinoisnotarace.info / hispanicisnotarace.info), which they hope will educate about why the proposal to combine Hispanic origin and race into one question will lead to erasure and impact the accurate count of Afro-Latinos and ultimately negatively impact the distribution of resource to vulnerable communities.

If people are confused about the difference between race and ethnicity, then we must do better in communicating this difference and why it matters. Professor Thomas LaVeist, Dean at Tulane School of Public Health & Tropical Medicine, and one of the leaders of this coalition, says “It is true that race and ethnicity are both social constructions; however, as sociologists we define race as a position that is based on social meanings attributed to a conglomeration of skin color, facial features and other physical attributes, including hair texture, etc., or the race others would assume you are based on what you look like. Ethnicity refers to your cultural background (e.g.,

Colombian, Salvadoran, Argentinian, Mexican, etc.). My research shows why two different questions are needed for health equity.”

There is vast literature of peer-reviewed research in the social sciences, law, health sciences that shows the importance of keeping the current two-part question on Hispanic origin and race as separate for civil rights policy in fair housing, employment, voting rights, education, etc.

Professor Tanya Katerí Hernández, Professor of Law at Fordham University and author of *Racial Innocence: Unmasking Latino Anti-Black Bias and the Struggle for Equality*, and one of the leaders of the coalition, says: “Whiteness and Blackness make a real difference in the lives of Latinos, and we need statistical data that helps to measure that for social justice interventions.” Professor Hernandez’s book, which deals with Latino Anti-Blackness, shows that when employment discrimination cases do not explore the difference between Hispanic ethnicity and race, the anti-Blackness experienced by Black Latinos becomes unreported.

Professor Nancy López, the Director and co-founder of the Institute for Study of "Race" & Social Justice at the University of New Mexico, and a leader of the coalition, further explains “We would not use one question to collect data on income and educational attainment or gender and sexuality, so why would we collect data on Hispanic ethnicity and race in one question? Ten years from now, what do you think will happen when folks answer the combined question format by marking Hispanic and even writing a Hispanic origin, but nothing else about their race? How will that lead to reductions in the Afro-Latino count and useful data for interrogating inequalities and redistributing resources?” Dr. López’s research has also found that including more than one measure of race (both self-identified *and* street race or race you believe others believe you are) is important if we want to identify and rectify racial discrimination.

The coalition stresses that should this change go through, it will have dire impacts on social justice matters and civil rights monitoring, enforcement and remedies for Afro-Latinos and many others. They also stress that regardless of intent this initial proposal contributes to color and power-evasiveness, and specifically anti-Blackness. At the very least the coalition requests a moratorium on the initial proposals to combine Hispanic ethnicity and race until there is a targeted test and the impact of this proposed question on Afro-Latinos and other impacted communities, including Indigenous communities.

The coalition remains hopeful that the OMB working group can consider the potential for major loss of race data as they consider the impact of a combined question for literally erasing the ability to examine racialized inequities within those who identify as Hispanic/Latino ethnically, but don't identify a race. Dr. López says, “If we are to maintain the scientific integrity of our data system for civil rights enforcement, the preponderance of social scientific research on the real difference between race and ethnicity cannot be dismissed.”

The coalition will be holding a virtual event on March 9, 2023 to discuss the importance of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and other federal agencies, particularly the Census, and what Afro-Latinos, and others, can do to combat these proposed changes. For more information about the event and this campaign visit latinoisnotarace.info or hispanicisnotarace.info.

About the coalition partners

The **afrolatin@ forum** is a non-profit organization based out of NYC that centers Blackness within Latinidad and focuses on Latin@s of African descent in the United States to provide a bridge that expands our understanding of the African Diaspora.

Website: <https://www.afrolatinoforum.org/>

Encuentro Diaspora Afro is a Boston-based grassroots organization strengthening Afrodescendent voices, AfroLatino identity, and empowering youth of African descent while centering Blackness.

Website: <https://www.facebook.com/encuentrodiaspораafro/>

AfroResistance is a non-profit that educates and organizes for human rights, democracy and racial justice throughout the Americas.

Website: <https://www.afroresistance.org/>

AfroLatinx Travel is a travel and education resource centering Black history, memory, legacy, spirituality, resistance, politics, and contemporary life in the Caribbean and Latin America.

Website: <https://www.afrolatinxtravel.com/>

The **International Society of Black Latinos (ISBL)** is a non-profit based out of LA that seeks to educate the local and broader communities of the existence of Afro-Latinos and the influence that the African Diaspora has had and continues to have on the Latin cultures around the world.

Website: <https://blacklatinos.com/>

The **Black Latinas Know Collective** is a collective of Black Latina scholars, producers of innovative and important intellectual contributions to the intersectional study of race within Latinidad and Blackness. Website: <https://www.blacklatinasknow.org/>

IamNegrx grew out of Black Latinidad: Building Siblinghood to end Child Sexual Abuse a project founded by Luz Marquez Benbow and funded by Just Beginnings Collaborative.

Website: <https://www.facebook.com/IamNegrx/>

The **DC Afro Latino Caucus** has a mission to bring visibility and improve the quality of life to Afro-Latin@s in Washington DC. Website: <https://www.facebook.com/AfroLatino202/>

The **Puentes Collective** is an LA-based collective forming and nurturing young leaders committed to lasting social change. Website: <https://www.puentescollective.org/>

The **AfroLatine Theology Project (ALTP)** seeks to expand the narrative of Latine and Black theologies by centering the voices of Black Latines within theological/religious spaces.

Website: <https://www.afrolatinetheology.com/>