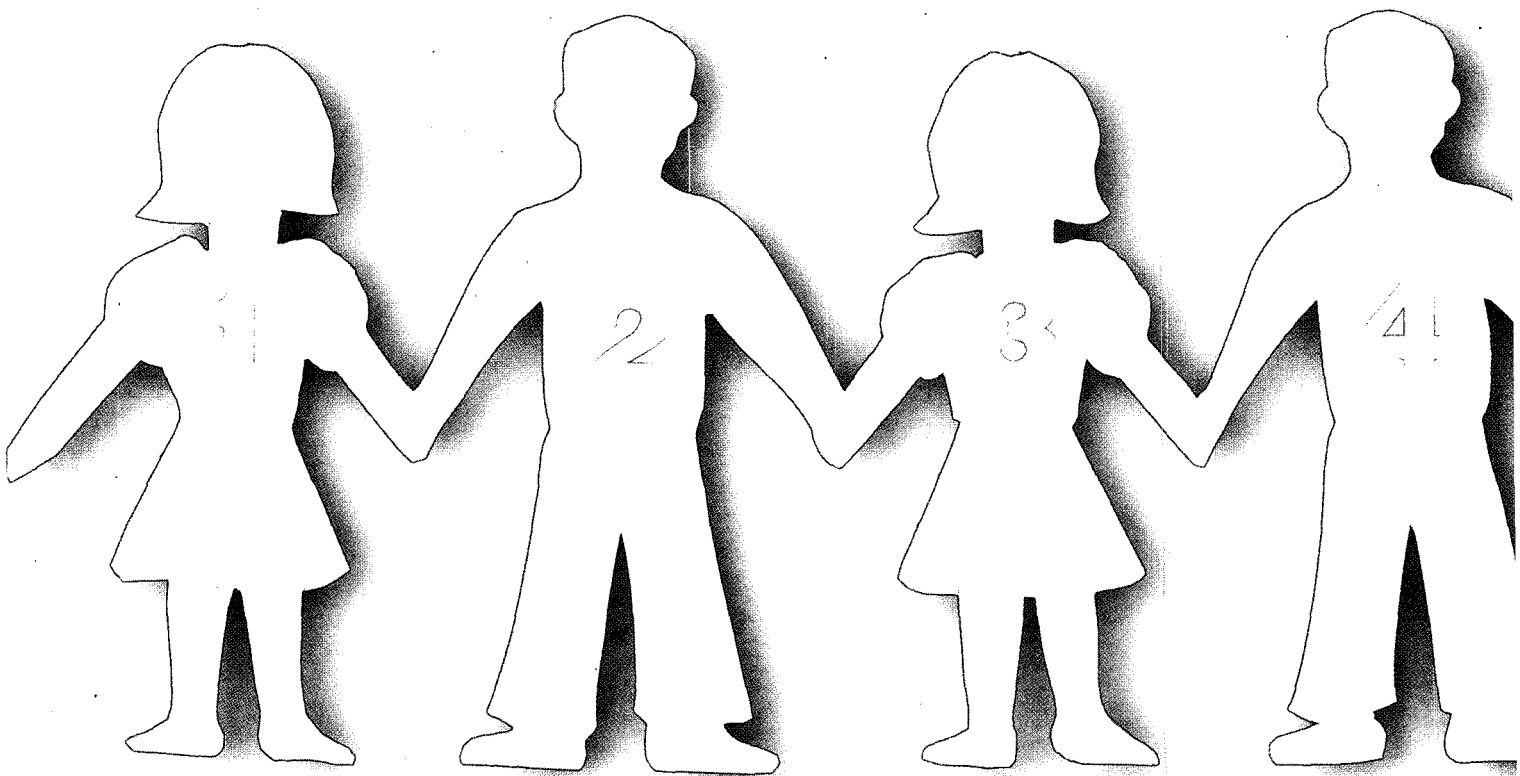


Y2K U.S. Census breakdown:

Counting heads
is hard to do.

By Herbert A. Sample



Partisan jockeying gets in the way of devising accurate 2000 Census counts, as Democrats and Republicans tussle over methods of counting heads. Less is more to the GOP, which fears a higher count will translate into more Democrats. Democrats, for their part, accuse Republicans of thinking small to retain an edge.

Politicians love polls. They pay millions to commission them. They make campaign decisions by them. And, once in office, they even hinge policy decisions on polls.

But not all polls are created equally — at least not in the minds of many Republicans in Congress who are intensely agitated over a Clinton administration plan to use similar statistical concepts in the 2000 Census.

The struggle over what's known as "statistical sampling" has been simmering outside the political radar range for a couple of years. It is just now getting attention precisely because results from each decennial census — the next one begins in 12 months — play such a central role in how congressional, state legislative and many local political boundaries are redrawn and how federal funds are divvied up between states and localities.

The stakes are particularly high in California, where Democratic Governor Gray Davis and his allies in the Legislature are almost certain to control the next round of redistricting in 2001, leaving Republicans in the unenviable position of hoping for the best.

"There's a lot of reason to believe that the undercount could be 2 million (in California) in 2000," said Joseph Remcho, a lawyer representing the Democrat-controlled state Legislature. "We could be talking about two or three (extra) congressional seats."

The Census Bureau is embroiled in this squabble because of two increasingly difficult problems it has faced in recent censuses. First, increasing numbers of U.S. residents just don't fill out census forms — some because they distrust the government, some because they don't know English well enough to read the forms, some because they don't have time or just are not aware of the count. These folks have been dubbed the "undercount." And second, many more ethnics and racial minorities fail to get counted than do middle- and upper-income whites. That is the "differential undercount."

The first problem has always existed because it is virtually impossible to count literally everyone in the coun-

