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- *From:* "drydem" <walter_lee@xxxxxxxxxxx>
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Confirmed: The U.S. Census Bureau Gave up
Names of Japanese–Americans in WWII
– Government documents show that the agency
handed over names and addresses to the
Secret Service

JR Minkel. Scientific American. March 30 2007

<http://www.sciam.com/article.cfm?articleID=A4F4DED6-E7F2-99DF-32E46B0AC1FDE0FE&chanID=sa003>

excerpt:

Despite decades of denials, government records confirm that the U.S. Census Bureau provided the U.S. Secret Service with names and addresses of Japanese–Americans during World War II.

The Census Bureau surveys the population every decade with detailed questionnaires but is barred by law from revealing data that could be linked to specific individuals. The Second War Powers Act of 1942 temporarily repealed that protection to assist in the roundup of Japanese–Americans for imprisonment in internment camps in California and six other states during the war. The Bureau previously has acknowledged that it provided neighborhood information on Japanese–Americans for that purpose, but it has maintained that it never provided "microdata," meaning names and specific information about them, to other agencies.

A new study of U.S. Department of Commerce documents now shows that the Census Bureau complied with an August 4, 1943, request by Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau for the names and locations of all people of Japanese ancestry in the Washington, D.C., area, according to historian Margo Anderson of the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee and statistician William Seltzer of Fordham University in New York City. The records, however, do not indicate that the Bureau was asked for or divulged such information for Japanese–Americans in other parts of the country.

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Anderson and Seltzer discovered in 2000 that the Census Bureau released block–by–block data during WW II that alerted officials to neighborhoods in California, Arizona, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, Idaho and Arkansas where Japanese–Americans were living. "We had suggestive but not very conclusive evidence that they had also provided microdata for surveillance," Anderson says.

The Census Bureau had no records of such action, so the researchers turned to the records of the chief clerk of the Commerce Department, which received and had the authority to authorize interagency requests for census data under the Second War Powers Act. Anderson and Seltzer discovered copies of a memo from the secretary of the treasury (of which the Secret Service is part) to the secretary of commerce (who oversees the Census Bureau) requesting the data, and memos documenting that the Bureau had provided it

The memos from the Bureau bear the initials "JC," which the researchers identified as those of then–director, J.C. Capt.

"What it suggests is that the statistical information was used at the microlevel for surveillance of civilian populations," Anderson says. She adds that she and Seltzer are reviewing Secret Service records to try to determine whether anyone on the list was actually under surveillance, which is still unclear.

"The [new] evidence is convincing," says Kenneth Prewitt, Census Bureau director from 1998 to 2000 and now a professor of public policy at Columbia University, who issued a public apology in 2000 for the Bureau's release of neighborhood data during the war. "At the time, available evidence (and Bureau lore) held that there had been no ... release of microdata," he says. "That can no longer be said."

The newly revealed documents show that census officials released the information just seven days after it was requested. Given the red tape for which bureaucracies are famous, "it leads us to believe this was a well–established path," Seltzer says, meaning such disclosure may have occurred repeatedly between March 1942, when legal protection of confidentiality was suspended, and the August 1943 request.

Anderson says that microdata would have been useful for what officials called the "mopping up" of potential Japanese–Americans who had eluded internment.

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