



# LACK OF COMMON SENSE

BY DAN BAIN

As the 2010 Census winds down, I'm hoping for a closing ceremony that tops the Olympics. The process certainly started with fireworks when households across America received not the questionnaire, but an advance letter announcing its imminent arrival. This was part of an \$85 million campaign in which US Census Bureau Director Robert M. Groves personally reminded 120 million of us in mid-March that "About one week from now, you will receive a 2010 Census form in the mail." Did anyone else camp out by their mailbox in anticipation?

The Census Bureau claimed the campaign would actually save us money; this was undoubtedly based on data provided by an impartial source – such as the Census Bureau. Regardless, the letter was really nothing more than a "save the date" mailer. Yes, our government resorted to the methods of a wedding planner.

Next came the questionnaire. Thanks to Robert M. Groves' warning, I watched for it and gave it the appropriate attention – I stuck it in a pile of unpaid bills. Good thing he followed up with a postcard, or I might have forgotten it was there. That correspondence

was to remind Americans of two things: we had received the questionnaire, and Robert M. Groves resembled not so much a wedding planner as a nagging in-law.

The postcard told us, "If you have already provided your census information, please accept our sincere thanks. There is no need to provide your answers again." Having spent \$85 million to beg Americans to respond once, did he seriously think someone might respond twice?

Not to mention, the postcard was dated March 22nd – why would anyone have provided their information by then if it was supposed to be based on their situation as of April 1st? A lot can change in 10 days, particularly in today's economy. I wouldn't have dared to predict on March 22nd how many people might still be living in my house as of April 1st – by then, it might have already become the bank's house and we might have been living in our car.

They posted a similar presumption on their Twitter page. (You read that right – the Census Bureau has a Twitter page.) The afternoon of April 1st, they tweeted that it wasn't too late to return our forms. Again, this was the first day on which anyone could

logically answer the questions, let alone mail them in – it's more likely we were all thinking it was still too early to return them.

There was also a problem with the questionnaire's due date, in that it didn't have one. Out of three pieces of mail reiterating that our answers are required by law, not one indicated when they were required. Imagine a hypothetical boss who does something like that...

First he sends you an email telling you he's going to send you an email. Two days later, he sends the email. The next day, he sends an email saying he sent the email mentioned in his previous email. In all three emails he threatens to sic an intern on you if you don't answer him by the due date, which he never provided. At what point during this process would you take a three-martini lunch and head to Kinko's with your resume?

I knew I could probably find the due date online, but I was busy providing some equally pesky data to another branch of the government – namely, the IRS. The day after I finished my taxes (aka April 16th), I turned my attention back to the Census. Their website said the form was due in the mail that day. This left me little time to ponder

the question of why the website also made a Questionnaire Assistance line available through April 20th – four days after the completed questionnaires were supposed to be in the mail. It also left me no time for my original plan; I'd wanted to send Robert M. Groves an advance letter, telling him to expect my completed questionnaire in about a week and thanking him in advance for promptly opening it and reading my answers.

Despite my rush to fill out the questionnaire, I had to stop for at least a full minute of confusion over the second question. The first one had asked, "How many people were living or staying in this house, apartment, or mobile home on April 1st, 2010?" Simple enough...until Question 2 asked, "Were there any additional people staying here April 1st, 2010 that you did not include in Question 1?"

What were they getting at? Question 1 seemed pretty simple; why ask it again? Did they think they might catch us in a lie by repeating it? If so, someone ought to tell them that particular style of rapid-fire cross-examination typically works only when it's conducted in person. Also, most people weren't likely to lie about having additional

people in their house, seeing as we don't live in a V.C. Andrews novel.

But we might be living in a Thomas Harris novel, given the number of Americans who've been ready to try Hannibal Lecter's fava bean recipe whenever a census taker comes to their door. I don't understand the anger; in spite of mocking the logistics of the Census, I'm still willing to participate in it. Others are against it, claiming questions about gender, age and race violate their right to privacy. Is it possible to be private about something the casual observer can discern? What's the point in me not telling the government I'm a middle-aged, vampirically pale white guy when a quick glance makes it obvious, anyway?

Plus, answering the questionnaire actually helps keep the cost down – postage is a lot cheaper than the personal visit you're guaranteed to get if you write "MYODB" on the form. Yet people are determined to keep the gubmint outta their bidness – to the point of trying to literally shoot the messenger. Census takers have reportedly been threatened with dogs, guns, cars, pickaxes, lawsuits and crossbows. (About that last one, Boss Hogg must have been across the

county line, leavin' them Duke boys to take out their frustrations on some other varmint.)

The Senseless Bureau may be inefficient, but they're just doing what the Constitution mandates. Let them do their job, but feel free to voice your opinion. Threats won't make a statement, but a follow-up postcard to Robert M. Groves? That makes census to me....

*Editor's Note: If you enjoy reading Bain's Beat, be sure to check out Bain's book! Laugh your way through 28 life lessons in A "Nay" For Effort, available online only and benefitting North Carolina's schools. Please see [www.danbain.net](http://www.danbain.net) for details.*



**Dan Bain**, Decennial Dissident  
mail@danbain.net

check out  
our sister  
publication...

[www.caryliving.com](http://www.caryliving.com)

**dsparada**  
color salon

As always, call for  
a complimentary  
color consultation

Specializing in corrective color, but at dsparada, you won't need correct color.

As Featured In...

ELLE W BAZAAR allure

Hours  
Tuesday-Friday 10am-8pm  
Saturday 10am-5pm  
[dsparada.com](http://dsparada.com)

North Ridge Business Park  
6520-100 Falls of Neuse Rd.  
North Raleigh  
**790.1707**