CANADIAN DIVERSITY
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The New Data on Ethnic Origin

This special issue of *Canadian Diversity* has been put together to provide a background and stimulus for discussion on the conceptual framework and the development of indicators of ethnicity in Canada. Currently, the most comprehensive and consistent data source for measures of ethnicity is the Census of Population, conducted every five years, which asks a 20% sample of the Canadian population to report on the ethnic origin(s) of their ancestors. In addition, in 2002, a new survey on issues of ethnicity in Canadian society – the Ethnic Diversity Survey – was conducted by Statistics Canada in partnership with the Department of Canadian Heritage. The goal of the survey was to deconstruct issues of ethnic ancestry and identity in order to better understand people's lived experiences of diversity in Canadian society. The collection of articles brought together here provide context for current applications of research on ethnicity in Canada as well as stimulating discussion about how best to collect data and do applied research using these concepts in the future, given the changing demographic of our country.

The articles selected for this publication have been taken from a symposium on "Ethnic Origin Data from the 2001 Census: Implications for Policy Research", held in Ottawa on March 28th, 2003. The symposium was organized by the Citizenship and Heritage sector of the Department of Canadian Heritage, which is proud to encourage and facilitate such a discussion on issues of ethnicity and diversity. These are issues which are of importance to all Canadians, as well as being an integral part of the mandate of the Department of Canadian Heritage.

The contributors to this volume come from a wide range of disciplines and backgrounds, but they all share a common interest in researching issues of ethnicity and diversity in Canadian society and have experience with the complex and detailed data on ethnic origin we are privileged to have access to through Canada's Census of Population. In particular, 2002 and 2003 have been exciting years for researchers as new data is released from first Canadian Census of the millennium, which was carried out on May 15th, 2001. Most significant to the analytic articles in this collection, the 2001 Census is unique in that it provides current data not only for ethnic origin – using the traditional question about a respondent's ancestry – but also for the place of birth of each of the respondent's parents. This combination of available information is precious to those who work in the realm of research, program development and policy-making in Canada, as it allows for timely analysis and comparison of different concepts related to measuring ethnicity – origin and place of birth of parents.

All of the articles make a contribution to the debate around data on ethnicity and diversity in the Canadian context. While the perspectives presented do differ on the utility of ethnic origin data from the Census and the need for measurements and indicators of present day ethnic identity, each article eloquently outlines applications and challenges related to the use of ethnic origin data in diverse fields of study. Disciplines ranging from geography to psychology to demography to health all rely on ethnic origin data as an integral element of their baseline portraits of Canadian society. Questions remain, however, of how best to capture that data, how indicators can be improved to more accurately reflect the diversity and increasing complexity of our population, what data gaps exist that still need to be filled and how that will be done. Our hope is that these articles will provide both the background context and the impetus for a more vigorous and informed discussion on these issues, as we work more with the data from the 2001 Census, await the results of the groundbreaking Ethnic Diversity Survey, and move towards the next Census of Population in 2006. We encourage comments and feedback, both directly to the authors and to the Department of Canadian Heritage.

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