A.

Messrs. Hodge and Siegel present a mass of thoughtful provocative analysis. I shall regretfully have to ignore this and concentrate on their three key conclusions.

1. "The most important deficiency in the . (Census) occupational classification" they say, "is heterogeneity of the specific jobs assigned to many detailed codes." P. 31. "For the sociologist who wishes to use detailed occupation as an indicator of social economic status, the lack of homogeneity of the n.e.c. code can only comprise a major source of inaccuracy which afflicts 32.8% of the...labor force." P. 9. Two comments on this conclusion.

a) That the Census labels occupations as "not elsewhere classified" hardly creates any "inaccuracy." Just the opposite: it gives a precise and accurate definition.

b) The central problem here, however, is lack of information on the part of the respondent. Indeed although I applaud the enterprise and responsiveness of the Census in investigating the point, I do not imagine that the reduction of the n.e.c. category from 36% to 30% of the labor force -- I utilize Mr. Greene's table of ratios as a guide -- will cheer Messrs. Hodge and Siegel very much either. Manipulating the occupational classification is going to do little about the respondent's lack of information of the kind we seek, and the lack of time in a national decennial inquiry for extensive inquiry.

2. They urge "a complete revision of the system of occupational classification" to rely on a single criterion -- "similarity of tasks performed." P. 3. Doing so would replace the Census use of "many characteristics" p. 32, the Census code being "at best a multitudinous typology" at its best. p. 6. Given a single dimension for classification sociologists could more clearly test the relationship between occupation on the one hand and industrial affiliation (p. 32), subordination and superordination (p. 4) etc. on the other.

a) I can well understand the desire for a single criterion. But the Census must serve many uses, as the Cain, Hansen, Weisbrod paper notes. Its first responsibility must be to use as many relevant dimensions for classification as it has available. It is up to the analyst in a specific area then to try to redeploy the data for his uses.

b) Judging from the examples the paper gives, however, this is an unnecessary battle. For example, the title "optometrist" is given high marks because it relates to tasks performed, while "foremen" "messengers" and "office boys" and "buyers of farm products" are given low marks -- because they are defined on the basis of "the relationship of subordination and superordination," place of work, etc. I really don't believe the Census is that fancy. The title of foreman is usually a handy proxy for a set of tasks, involving supervision. Similarly that of messenger also indicates a set of tasks, although also redolent of place of work.

c) At the same time, they contend, that the Census unwisely distinguished a variety of occupations -- e.g., "receptionists" from "attendants in physicians' offices" although "many perform tasks essentially the same." Here I am puzzled. Why should we not accept as full detail as is feasible? For a particular problem we always have the option of pooling Census data to a grosser level.

3. They do not want to sacrifice "intercensal comparability in any degree" - this in order to permit cohort analysis, etc. How the other changes they want are to be achieved without a break in comparability is difficult to see. However, I should like to differ with this proposition, and for two reasons. As probably the only person present who has utilized the occupation estimates back to 1820 to make comparable series, I am intellectually aware of the delights of comparability. And having spent an agonized six months trying to adjust Census of Mfrs. data for comparability I am emotionally on their side. Nevertheless, I differ flatly with this proposition for two reasons.

a) It is wrong. The Census data are primarily used for clear and present problems. As these problems change, as our insight grows, we must make changes. Since the structure of any government agency, and its scholarly advisory committees, normally slows down the rate of change, I also think it superfluous to be worried about the rate of change in the classification.

b) It is unnecessary. Given modern sampling and modern computers, samples of the micro observations can be maintained and recombined in any scheme that a scholar may desire.

I should like to turn to two general observations that bear on both papers. One gets the feeling that we have been discussing Hamlet without referring to the Dane, or the royal family, and concentrated instead on Ophelia. We have had no reference to one of the most important occupational classifications in use in the nation, namely that used in the BLS wage rate surveys. The wage rate helps define "classified" and "not elsewhere classified" occupations as few other single bits of evidence do. For economic analysis we should be relying much more on the surveys that can give us wage rates. The report that one "mechanic" receives \$1 an hour and another \$5 tells us a good deal about what kind of a mechanic each one is.

4. Amidst all this pother about classifications we have had not even a passing regret about the quality of the data. In a real world if we persuade the Census to spend a lot of time on jiggling the classifications, the staff concerned will have little time, and no energy, to pursue ways of improving the data. I find it hard to know why that is a wise choice. The 1960 evaluation results have been provided us by the Census, with a frankness in testing its own work not matched by any public or private agency with which I have any acquaintance. And we are ignoring its findings. They tell us, for example, that on the average, 28% of the employees classified by Census in any major occupation group belong in another major occupation group if one relies on their employers' reports. The percentages reallocated from individual occupations must be at least as staggering.

Some years ago I proposed that we utilize employer reports for occupation industry and wage rate. Given wage rate data we could classify more accurately. Given employer reports we could come closer to tabulating data that are worth tabulating. I assume that we are all in hearty agreement with Messrs. Cain, Hansen and Weisbrod that an effective system should have standardized and homogeneous categories, should report an optimal level of detail. Certainly Messrs. Greene and Lewis ought to agree. The rub comes in the rules of application.

To classify jobs so that the elasticity of substitution is greater within jobs in a class than among classes is triply difficult. (1) Elasticities change as the structure of relative prices do: Hence a 1960 classification might no longer suit by 1970. (2) We still need a principle for aggregating 75 million workers into less than 75 million occupations. Perhaps there is less substitution between GM foremen and Ford foremen than between operatives and foremen within either firm? Do we show an occupation title for "GM foremen" or do we put up with the combined foremen category despite the substitution ratio? I can imagine no congregation willing to substitute the Reverend Billy Hargis for the Reverend Martin Luther King, or more generally, Baptist ministers for Greek Orthodox ones -- although within denominations substitutions of ministers for social welfare personnel occurs. Do we therefore cease to tabulate data for ministers? (3) I would much like to see the authors compute elasticities for even a few pairs of occupational classes so that we could also join in evaluating this novel, potentially very helpful criterion.