

Issue 50

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March 2020

# THE CHANGE AGENT

Adult Education for  
Social Justice: News,  
Issues, and Ideas



**2020** is a big year to **STAND UP AND BE COUNTED!** The March 2020 issue covers the census, the election, as well as other ways to make your voice heard. This packet is an excerpt of the magazine and includes just the census-related content, which was generously supported by a grant from the National Coalition for Literacy.

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**A MAGAZINE & WEBSITE: [CHANGEAGENT.NELRC.ORG](http://CHANGEAGENT.NELRC.ORG)**

*The Change Agent* is the bi-annual publication of The New England Literacy Resource Center. Each issue of the paper helps teachers incorporate social justice content into their curriculum. The paper is designed for intermediate-level ESOL, ABE, GED, and adult diploma classes. Each issue focuses on a different topic that is relevant to learners' lives.

In New England, online access to *The Change Agent* is available free of charge through NELRC's affiliated state literacy resource centers. Email [changeagent@worlded.org](mailto:changeagent@worlded.org) to learn how to access the site.

#### Submissions:

For the theme of our next issue, see the "Call for Articles" on the back cover. Note that we feature writing by adult learners. For submission guidelines visit: [changeagent.nelrc.org/write-for-us](mailto:changeagent.nelrc.org/write-for-us) or contact us at 617-482-9485 or [changeagent@worlded.org](mailto:changeagent@worlded.org).

#### Subscriptions:

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WORLD EDUCATION

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Look for this symbol, which indicates additional materials available for free download at our website [changeagent.nelrc.org/in-the-classroom/lesson-packets](http://changeagent.nelrc.org/in-the-classroom/lesson-packets). Find additional classroom and program materials about the census at [nelrc.org/stand-up-and-be-counted](http://nelrc.org/stand-up-and-be-counted). Many thanks to the National Coalition for Literacy for generously supporting our development of these census materials.

### Our Editorial Board



Many thanks to the members of our editorial board! Clockwise from back left: Carly Lacombe, Bristol Community College, Fall River, MA; Amgad Ahmedali, Community Learning Center (CLC), Cambridge, MA; Judy Burnette, City Life, Boston, MA; Jeannine Terra, Bristol Community College, Fall River, MA; Samsun Naher, CLC; Anne-Laure Perrot, CLC; Ebony Vandross, World Education; Cynthia Peters, World Education; Alice Gugelmann, CLC; Lily Wang, CLC. Not pictured: Ginette Chandler, Dir. of Professional Development, NH Adult Ed.; Federica Odetti, Second Start, NH; Heather Ritchie, Kelly Akemy Makimoto Murphy, and Ronald King, Carlos Rosario School, Washington, DC; Kathy Budway, Pima Community College, Tucson, AZ.



# We Count, Count Us!

Jeannette Jimenez



**BEFORE YOU READ:** Take the true or false quiz below. Then read the article to check your answers.

Statement	True or False
1. The census is a count of all people and pets.	
2. I should only count my children because they are citizens, and I am not.	
3. The government uses census information to decide how many schools to build.	
4. The 2020 Census includes a question about your citizenship status.	
5. There is a law that protects your individual data.	
6. In 2020, you can only fill out the census questionnaire online.	

**Answers to the quiz:** 1: F (the census counts people); 2: F (the census counts all people regardless of citizenship); 3: T (funds are distributed to states based on the state's population, and states use these funds to build schools, etc.); 4: F (the census does not ask about citizenship); 5: T (Title 13 makes it illegal for the Census Bureau to share your personal data); 6: F (you can also fill it out on paper, in person, and over the phone).

In 2020, the U.S. government will hold a census. I want to make a call to all people, especially the immigrant community. Please participate without any fear!

The census counts *all the people* living in the country, and this information tells the federal government how to distribute funds for each state. These funds benefit all people. If we do not participate in the next census, we could lose funds that help create new schools, hospitals, fire stations, and more.

I want to tell my immigrant people that the U.S. Census Bureau will not share your information under any circumstances. They will not ask about your citizenship status. They will not ask if you are an immigrant. Title 13 of the U.S. Code says that the Census Bureau cannot share your information. For this reason, do not be afraid to participate.

You can complete the 2020 Census on the web, by telephone, in person, or by mail. Thanks to the last census, we know that in 2010, the Latino community represented 11% of the people living in Washington, DC. Since then, the number has increased. We need to participate because we count, so count us!

**AFTER YOU READ:** Why does Jeannette want people to participate in the census?

Jeannette Jimenez is an ESL Hospitality student at the Carlos Rosario International Public Charter School in Washington, D.C.



# Who Counts? Everyone!

Cynthia Peters

**BEFORE YOU READ:** Make a list of everyone who lives with you. Write down their names and their relationship to you.

It is very important that we count everyone. But some people are not counted. People of color, immigrants, and people who are learning English are undercounted. Children are the most undercounted group. In 2010, the census did not count more than a million children under age five.

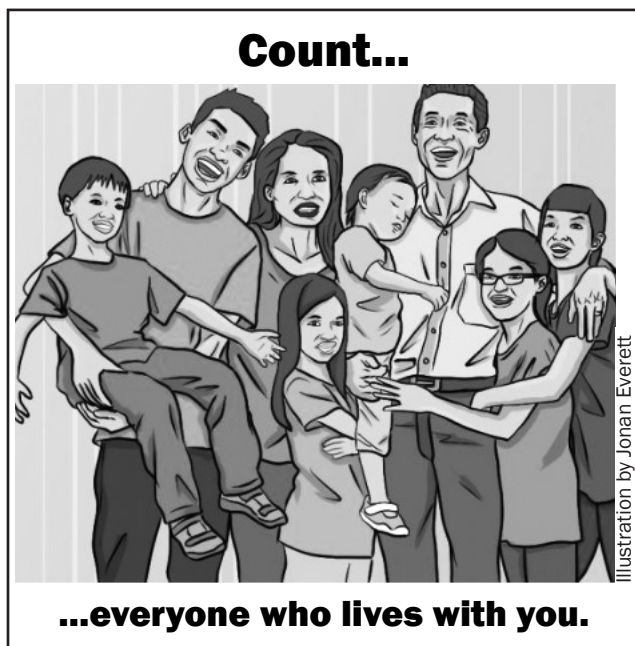
When people are filling out the census, they wonder: do children count? Yes, they do! Count *all* the children who live with you. They could be your own children or your grandchildren or your friend's children. Count them all. If your baby is just one day old, count that baby!

Your community needs schools, health care, and housing. The census wants to get a big picture of who lives in the U.S. so they can plan for the next 10 years. The next census isn't until 2030. Make sure to count everyone who lives with you!

**AFTER YOU READ:** Study the images on the right. Then check all the people in the list below that *you* should count when you fill out the census for your household.

- ☐ someone who is *away* at college
- ☐ all children (if they are living with you on April 1, 2020)
- ☐ babies born *on or before* April 1, 2020
- ☐ someone who is away in the military
- ☐ non-family members who live with you *most of the time*
- ☐ foreign-born people who live with you
- ☐ a child who splits time with you and another parent and is staying with *the other* parent on April 1, 2020

↓ Download a free lesson packet for ESOL students on filling out the census at <[changeagent.nelrc.org/in-the-classroom/lesson-packets](http://changeagent.nelrc.org/in-the-classroom/lesson-packets)>



# Still Undecided? Read This!

*Lucienne Pierre*

The word census comes from the Roman Republic. The Romans kept a list of all adult males who were fit for military service. Today in the U.S., we use the census to count *all people*. We need an official count of the population so that we have adequate resources and correct political representation.

I plan to participate in the 2020 Census. When I fill out the census, I will be following the law. There is a reason the census is required by law: the information is necessary for the government! If my community is not fully counted in the census, we will not get the services we need. We would not get all the funding we need for schools, healthcare,

and other important services. We would not get all the representatives we need in congress.

Would you want to be the cause of your community not receiving the services it needs? Well, then I recommend you learn more about the census, and I think then you, too, will want to be counted!

*Lucienne Pierre is from Haiti. She is a student in the ESOL College and Career Readiness class at Atlantic Technical College in Fort Lauderdale, FL. She goes to school because she wants to speak English fluently.*



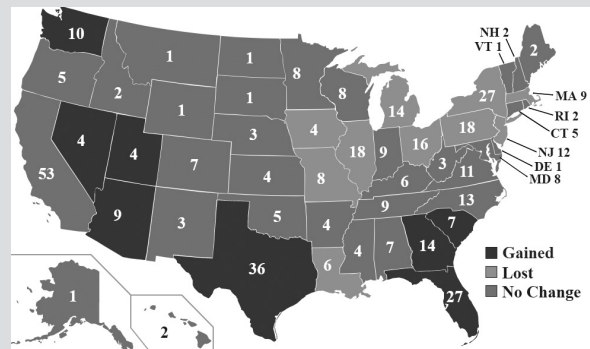
## How Much Money for your State?

The U.S. government gives money to the states based on their population. Let's say your state gets \$2500 per person per year from the federal government. A family of five adds funding to your state:

$$\begin{array}{r}
 \$2500 \\
 \times 5 \text{ (people)} \\
 \hline
 \$12,500 \\
 \times 10 \text{ (years)} \\
 \hline
 \$125,000
 \end{array}$$

In the example above, if a family of five were not counted, the state would lose \$125,000 over 10 years. Do the math for your family. If you do not count your family, how much will your state lose?

## How Many Members of Congress for your State?



*Apportionment based on the 2010 Census*

After each census, the total number of representatives is split among the states, based on their new populations. This process is called *apportionment*. If your community is not counted, you might lose representation in congress.

# Do People Feel Safe Enough?

*Shenayder D. Occius*

**BEFORE YOU READ:** Why might some people feel it is not safe to fill out the census?

In the U.S., there are many different people from all over the world. Some of them feel afraid because they do not have documents. It is going to be difficult for the census to get an accurate count.

Last year, a friend from my country had a dream to live in the U.S. He left Haiti and went to Brazil. He worked there for six months and made enough money to travel. He took a bus from Brazil to Mexico and then he crossed into California. Now he is in this country without any documents, but he is not the only one who comes to the U.S. this way. Millions of other people come to the U.S. this way. How will the census count all of these people? I say that this is an impossible feat.

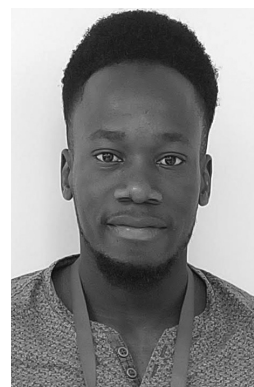
**It is going to be difficult for the census to get an accurate count.**

I think many of these people will not feel safe enough to fill out the census. Anyone who is an immigrant probably feels uncomfortable. Physically you are in this country, but you may not be a legal citizen. Even if you are a legal citizen, some people treat you like you are not welcome here.

I feel that if more people understood the purpose behind the census, they may consider being counted, although not likely.

**AFTER YOU READ:** How does the author answer the question he poses in the title? What does he think *might* change people's minds about the census?

*Shenayder D. Occius was born in Haiti. He lives in Lauderdale Lakes, FL. He attends Atlantic Technical College and is obtaining his GED. He lives with his parents.*



## How Would You Respond?

**Beginners:** Use the information on pp. 3-5. **Intermediate learners:** add information from pp. 7-9. **More advanced:** add in the article on pp. 12-13. Fill out an organizer modeled on the one below. Then use the information you gathered to write a letter to someone you know who might be feeling afraid to fill out the census. Cite your sources.

Page Number	Benefit to you and your community of filling out census	Ways your information is protected	Consequences of not filling out the census



Download beginner, intermediate, and advanced lesson packets, "Why Fill Out the Census? Adult Learners Explain" at [changeagent.nelrc.org/in-the-classroom/lesson-packets](http://changeagent.nelrc.org/in-the-classroom/lesson-packets).



# Know Your Rights & Responsibilities

*Sergio Aristeo*

**BEFORE YOU READ:** In a democracy, you have both rights and responsibilities. Discuss.

## People Protested the Citizenship Question, and They Won!

With posters that said, “America needs a fair and accurate 2020 Census,” hundreds of people protested at the Supreme Court in Washington, D.C., in June of 2019. They were protesting against the potential inclusion of the citizenship question in the 2020 census. Adding that question would have led to an undercount of noncitizens and minority residents. As a result, areas with more immigrants could have lost both representation and federal funding. Although the 2020 Census will not include the citizenship question, I still wonder how immigrants will feel about filling it out.

## Title 13 Protects Our Privacy

There are many fears people might have, but the worst would be targeting undocumented immigrants for deportation. However, it is unlikely that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) could target immigrants using census data. According to < census.gov >, Title 13 of the U.S. Code protects our privacy and the confidentiality of the census. This is what it says:

- Private information is never published. It is against the law to disclose or publish any private information that identifies an individual, such as names, addresses, and phone numbers.
- The Census Bureau collects information about groups of people to produce statistics. For example, the census will be able to tell us what percentage of people own their homes or that the population of a certain city is on average younger than in 2010. Personal information cannot be used against respondents by any government agency or court.

- Census Bureau employees are sworn to protect confidentiality. People sworn to uphold Title 13 are legally required to maintain the confidentiality of your data. Every person with access to your data is sworn for life to protect your information and understands that the penalties for violating this law are applicable for a lifetime.

Violating the law is a serious federal crime. Anyone who violates this law will face severe penalties, including a federal prison sentence of up to five years, a fine of up to \$250,000, or both.

## Know Your Rights and Responsibilities

In conclusion, we must participate in the 2020 census. I encourage you to know your rights as well as your responsibilities. It is your right to be counted, and it is your responsibility to demand compliance with laws that protect your privacy and confidentiality. Do not allow any misuse of information from the census! To maintain our democracy, we all must play an active role.

### AFTER YOU READ:

1. According to the author, why did people protest the citizenship question?
2. How does Title 13 protect our privacy?
3. For some history on how the census has been misused in history (and how things are different now), read the article on pp. 12-13.

*Sergio Aristeo is an ESL student at the Fayetteville Adult Education Center in Fayetteville, AR. He was born in Mexico City and received his Bachelor's degree in Pedagogy in 2009. He came to the U.S. in 2016, and he is now pursuing his dream of becoming a Registered Nurse.*



# Information Against Misinformation

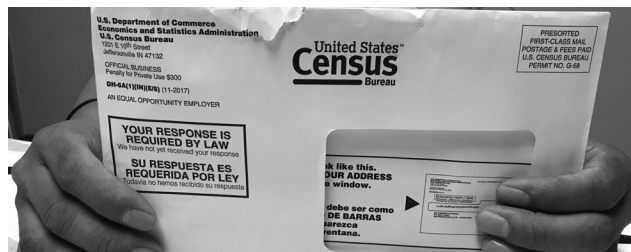
*Kelly Akemy Makimoto Murphy*

**BEFORE YOU READ:** What is misinformation? And what can you do about it?

As an immigrant in the United States, how can I make sure my voice is heard? I am not a citizen, so I cannot vote in the election, but I can participate in the census. However, there is a lot of misinformation about the census. Worse, because of this misinformation, many people in minority and immigrant communities may decide not to participate in the census. This would be a big mistake!

## Adult Students Want More Information

Before I started writing this article, I made a little survey about the census at my school. My classmates were divided between those who did not know anything about it and those who were afraid to participate. The result of my survey made me see how big the problem was. How can we expect the minority community to participate in the census if they do not know anything about it? My



classmates had so many questions about the census. Above all, they were surprised about how the census results could influence our community. I could see it on their faces and hear it in their voices: they wanted more information and knowledge about this important matter.

## What about Privacy?

One of people's biggest concerns is that they are giving private information to the government. They worry that their privacy will not be protected. It is good to know that Title 13 of the U.S. Code says it is against the law for the Census Bureau to

## How Much Money for Your State?

The census helps decide how much federal money your state will get. If your community is undercounted, you will receive less money for these programs. Check the programs that matter to you:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Medicaid and Medicare          | <input type="checkbox"/> Special education        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> College grants and loans       | <input type="checkbox"/> Housing loans            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Food stamps                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Home energy assistance   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Highway & Roads                | <input type="checkbox"/> Unemployment insurance   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> School Lunch Program           | <input type="checkbox"/> Child care               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Section 8 housing and vouchers | <input type="checkbox"/> Adoption and foster care |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Temporary aid for families     | <input type="checkbox"/> Adult education funding  |

Visit [nelrc.org/stand-up-and-be-counted/census2020](http://nelrc.org/stand-up-and-be-counted/census2020) and click on Classroom Resources for related lessons and activities.





publish any private information that identifies an individual, including name, address, and phone number. Furthermore, it is against the law for the Census Bureau to share information with immigration officials or any government agency.<sup>1</sup>

### What about Citizenship?

The biggest rumor about the census occurred after President Trump argued to include a question about citizenship. Even though the U.S. Supreme Court did not approve the citizenship question on the 2020 Census, the rumor has spread, and it may be enough to discourage the participation of both documented and undocumented immigrants.

One reason for the confusion is that the American Community Survey (ACS) *does* ask about citizenship. The main difference between the ACS and the census is that the ACS only chooses random residences in the U.S. to answer the questionnaire. And they conduct this survey every year. In addition, the ACS asks about more details, including the place of birth, citizenship, and year of entry into the United States.<sup>2</sup>

The census, on the other hand, happens every 10 years, and all people, whether they are citizens or not, are required to fill it out. (And remember: the census *does not* ask about citizenship!)

### Stop the Undercount!

In 2012, the Census Bureau reported that 16 million people were not counted in the 2010 Census. Overall, non-Hispanic whites were *overcounted*, and Native Americans, Blacks, and Hispanics were *undercounted*.<sup>3</sup>

With so much misinformation and lack of information, we are at risk of undercounting the minority population again. We cannot let this happen! We need to work together to inform each other about the census and understand our rights. We need to know that participating in the 2020 Census is our responsibility while we are living in the U.S. It will help us create a better community and support democracy in the country.

*Kelly Akemy Makimoto Murphy is a student at the Carlos Rosario Public Charter School in Washington, DC. She is from Brazil and lived half of her life in Japan. Kelly is a multilingual and multicultural person who defends social justice, diversity, and equality.*

**Endnotes:** 1. <[www.census.gov/history/www/reference/privacy\\_confidentiality/title\\_13\\_us\\_code.html](http://www.census.gov/history/www/reference/privacy_confidentiality/title_13_us_code.html)>; 2. <[www.census.gov/acs/www/about/why-we-ask-each-question/citizenship](http://www.census.gov/acs/www/about/why-we-ask-each-question/citizenship)>; 3. <[www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/2010\\_census/cb12-95.html](http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/2010_census/cb12-95.html)>



## Do Your Own Research; Report Rumors

**Conduct a survey of your class.** Create a survey that includes questions about the census, such as: What are three things you've heard about the 2020 Census? Do you plan on filling out the census? What concerns do you have about the census? Research the answers to the most common questions, and share these answers with your class.

**Report rumors!** If, in the course of your research, you find misinformation, report it to the Census Bureau, which has opened a website <[2020census.gov/en/news-events/rumors.html](http://2020census.gov/en/news-events/rumors.html)> for dispelling rumors. You can also report misinformation to <[rumors@census.gov](mailto:rumors@census.gov)>.



**For a lesson packet on hoaxes and scams,** go to <[changeagent.nelrc.org/in-the-classroom/lesson-packets](http://changeagent.nelrc.org/in-the-classroom/lesson-packets)>.



# Native Americans and the Census

*Carly Lacombe*

**BEFORE YOU READ:** Historically, who do you think the census has counted? How do you think it might have changed over time?

## Most Indians Not Counted for Most of U.S. History

Ever since the first census in 1790, Native Americans have either been severely undercounted or excluded all together. No counts of any Native person were taken by the Census Bureau until 1860 (70 years later)! Even then, the only Indigenous People that were counted were those who renounced their tribal membership and left the reservation. Those who stayed on the reservations were referred to as “Indians not taxed” and were not accounted for because they were not taxed.

It wasn’t until 1970 that the Census Bureau began collecting data for individual American Indian reservations. In 1980, the Census Bureau for the first time decided to actively seek American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) input into



*National Census Day is April 1, 2020, but the counting will start early in Alaska so that enumerators can reach Alaskans in their villages before hunting season begins.*

the census process. The Census Bureau conducted meetings with tribal leaders to go over the process of the census and to get help identifying and presenting a more complete inventory of American Indian Reservations with help from the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

## An Accurate Count Could Help Tribes

It has been a long and arduous journey for Native Americans to be counted. At the beginning of U.S. history, many Native Americans were killed by colonizers or they died from disease. Those who were left were forcefully displaced and made to live on reservations far away from their true homes. Today, they still face discrimination. No wonder some of them do not trust the government. (I can’t say I blame them!) “As indigenous people, we are a little afraid of the government,” explained Sidra Starkovich of the Bois Forte Band of Chippewa, “because we’ve been hurt by the government.”

With the 2020 census, Native Americans have the opportunity to bring more federal resources to their communities. An accurate count plays an important role in the fair distribution of billions of dollars to tribes and to AI/AN people everywhere.



*Enumerators will visit households in the striped areas on the map. Other areas received a paper questionnaire in the mail in 2010. The darker areas had lower response rates.*



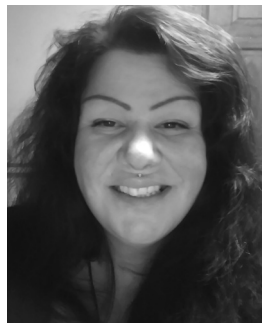
Native American community groups are encouraging Native people to participate in the 2020 Census.

Native American people can use federal funding for education, housing, health care, and economic development. If they are not enumerated fully and correctly they run the risk losing out on these resources.

I am impressed by Native American people's ability to survive despite a long history of genocide, displacement, and not being "counted" as people in this country. They have had to fight for themselves over and over again. I hope with this census, they can be fully counted and get the resources they deserve.

**Sources:** Tribal Consultation Handbook, Background Materials for Tribal Consultations for the 2020 Census. Fall 2015. U.S. Department of Commerce, <census.gov>. <www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/native-americans-census-most-undercounted-racial-group-fight-accurate-2020-n1105096>

Carly Lacombe is an ABE student at Bristol Community College in Fall River, MA.



To learn more about Native Americans and Indigenous People around the world, use your online subscription to The Change Agent to access a PDF of the Indigenous Peoples issue, published in March 2019.

DISTRICTS	Free white Males of 16 years and upwards, including heads of families.	Free white Males under sixteen years.	Free white Females, including heads of families.	All other free persons.	Slaves.	Total.
Vermont	22435	22328	40505	255	16	85539
N. Hampshire	36086	34851	70160	630	158	141885
Maine	24384	24748	46870	538	NONE	96540
Massachusetts	95453	87289	190582	5403	NONE	378787
Rhode Island	16019	15799	32652	3407	948	68825
Connecticut	60523	54403	117448	2808	2764	237946
New York	83700	78122	152320	4654	21324	340120
New Jersey	45251	41416	83287	2762	11423	184139
Pennsylvania	110788	106948	206363	6537	3737	434373
Delaware	11783	12143	22384	3899	8887	59094
Maryland	55915	51339	101395	8043	103036	319728
Virginia	110936	116135	215046	12866	292627	747610
Kentucky	15154	17057	28922	114	12430	73677
N. Carolina	69988	77566	140710	4975	100572	393751
S. Carolina	35576	37722	66880	1801	107094	249073
Georgia	13103	14044	25739	398	29264	82548
	807094	791850	1541263	59150	694280	3893635

## 1790 Census

1. Look at the count from the 1790 census above. What do you notice? Categories from left to right are:

Free white Males of 16 years and upwards, including heads of families.

Free white Males under sixteen years.

Free white Females, including heads of families.

All other free persons.

Slaves.

Total.

2. Make several true statements about the data in the chart. Go to <nelrc.org/stand-up-and-be-counted/census2020> for more lessons based on census data.

3. According to the "Three-Fifths Compromise" in 1787, enslaved people were counted as "three-fifths of a person." What do you think this "compromise" was about? Research it to learn more.



# Learning from History

Andy Nash

**BEFORE YOU READ:** Share what you know about Japanese internment camps during World War II. Read and discuss the vocabulary box below.

Many people are worried that the information they provide to the Census Bureau in 2020 will be shared with other government agencies. Here's how that happened in the past and what's different now.

## How Census Data Was Misused in the Past

In 1941, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. The attack raised Americans' fear of war and intensified racial prejudices against Japanese Americans. In the days after the bombing, the U.S. government arrested more than 1,200 Japanese community leaders and froze all bank accounts in U.S. branches of Japanese banks. The government also imposed nighttime *curfews* for all Japanese Americans.

Within months, President Roosevelt signed an order that allowed the military to *round up* 120,000 Americans of Japanese descent (who were mostly native-born U.S. citizens). The government gave Japanese-Americans on the West Coast only days

**Internment** is the wartime detention of "enemy aliens" (residents who come from countries we are at war with) but *not* of U.S. citizens. During World War 2, two-thirds of the Japanese Americans who were detained were U.S. citizens. Therefore, **incarceration**, **detention**, and **prison camps** are more appropriate terms. Discuss the words **curfew** (noun), **round up** (both as a verb and a noun), and **aggregate** (adjective). Try using them in sentences.



*Two Japanese-American children wait with their parents for an evacuation bus. Photo by Dorothea Lange.*

to decide what to do with their houses, farms, businesses, and possessions. According to the Manzanar National Historic Site webpage, "Most families sold their property and belongings for much less than they were worth. Some rented their properties to neighbors. Others left possessions with friends or religious groups. Some abandoned their property. They did not know where they were going or for how long. Each family was assigned an identification number and loaded into cars, buses, trucks, and trains, taking only what they could carry." The military transported Japanese Americans to temporary centers at racetracks and fairgrounds, and then took them to internment camps until the end of the war.

To make this *round-up* go more quickly, Congress passed a law that allowed the military to see confidential census information about individuals. Although the Census Bureau denied it for decades, researchers Margo Anderson and William Seltzer discovered that census officials had released block-by-block information about where Japanese-Amer-

icans were living in California, Arizona, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, Idaho, and Arkansas.

World War II is not the only time that the Census Bureau has shared information about individuals or communities. During World War I, the Draft Board got information from the Census Bureau to check the age of citizens they believed were lying about their age to avoid the draft. And after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the Census Bureau gave the U.S. Department of Homeland Security information about neighborhoods that were home to large numbers of Arab Americans, sorted by their country of origin. In this case, the information was publicly available, but not useful until the Census Bureau organized and shared it. The government claimed that the requests were made to help identify which airports required signs and pamphlets in Arabic to explain U.S. laws and regulations to travelers.

In response to concerns about this misuse of data, the Census Bureau implemented additional procedures to protect information requested by federal, state, or local law enforcement agencies or that involves a “sensitive population.”

## Strategies for Making Data Safe in 2020

There are three important ways that our data is being protected this year. First, current law (see p. 7 for more information about Title 13) ensures that individual information cannot be shared with any other agencies, including Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the FBI, the CIA or any other government agency. And no private company, landlord, or employer can get any household’s census information, even with a court order.

Second, the Census Bureau is using some strategies to protect against hackers. For example, the Census Bureau will scramble the data by swapping the information from two similar households in different neighborhoods. Mixing up individual information in this way ensures the *aggregate* data is accurate, while individual data is not traceable.

And finally, civil liberties groups such as the ACLU and Asian-Americans Advancing Justice are preparing to respond quickly in the courts if



*Signs instructing Japanese-Americans to report to the authorities for detention.*

any data are used improperly.

The fact is, there is never a way to be 100% sure that our civil rights and personal information are safe, especially during times of war. And this is not unique to the census. We need to constantly work to safeguard our rights and our personal data. We also have a responsibility to contribute to a full, accurate count of our population so that our communities get our fair share of the tax dollars we have paid. We can’t let anyone steal those resources by frightening us away from the census.

Andy Nash works at World Education and frequently writes for The Change Agent.

**AFTER YOU READ:** According to the author, what are three ways the government has misused census information and three ways to protect data?

**Sources:** “Yes, The Census Bureau Helped Make Japanese American Internment Possible,” Austin Cross, June 11, 2019, <laist.com/2019/06/11/yes\_the\_census\_bureau\_helped\_make\_the\_japanese\_american\_internment\_possible.php>; “Census Data HAS Been Misused Before—in WWII and After 9/11,” Anna Núñez, March 30, 2018, <americasvoice.org/blog/census-data-misuse>; “Census Confidentiality...,” Margo J. Anderson and William Seltzer, <paa2007.princeton.edu/papers/70299>; <www.sciencemag.org/news/2019/01/can-set-equations-keep-us-census-data-private>.

# Identity in a Box

*Ebony Vandross*

**BEFORE YOU READ:** Do you use a racial or ethnic category to describe yourself? Share and discuss.

Most of us have filled out dozens of forms in our lifetime, but have we ever asked: who decides how to define identity? On the 2020 census, what boxes will we check off when it comes to our racial and ethnic identities? Do the boxes even make sense?

Race is a social (not a scientific) construct. People decide what race means. For the most part, the idea of race has been used to separate people—to elevate one group at the expense of another. Even though it is not a biological reality, it's a powerful source of identity in U.S. society. The census only asks nine questions, and two of them are about race or ethnic origins. Let's examine them.

## Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish Origin

Question #8 asks: "Is Person 1 of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?" And it boldly states: "For this census, Hispanic origins are not races." According to the form, some examples of people of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin are Mexican, Chicano, Puerto Rican, Ecuadorian, or Spaniard. But what if you are from Brazil, which is part of Latin America, but you don't speak Spanish or identify as Hispanic? What if you are indigenous from Ecuador?

→ **NOTE:** Please answer **BOTH** Question 8 about Hispanic origin and Question 9 about race. For this census, Hispanic origins are not races.

### 8. Is Person 1 Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?

- ☐ No, not of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin
- ☐ Yes, Mexican, Mexican Am., Chicano
- ☐ Yes, Puerto Rican
- ☐ Yes, Cuban
- ☐ Yes, another Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin —  
Print, for example, Salvadoran, Dominican, Colombian,  
Guatemalan, Spaniard, Ecuadorian, etc.

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Should you put Hispanic anyway?

The Census Bureau has its reasons for asking about Hispanic origins. It separates this question from race "because people of Hispanic origin may be of any race(s)."<sup>1</sup>

Sociologist G. Cristina Mora reminds us that it was Latino activists who first went to the Census Bureau and advocated for a category that would distinguish Latinos from whites. Before that, the Census Bureau grouped Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans in the same category as Irish and Italian, which was a problem because it didn't reveal Latino poverty rates.<sup>2</sup>

Now it gets even more complicated.

## Are You White?

The next question is: "What is this person's race?" The first box is "White," and it lists "Egyptian" and "Lebanese" as examples of people who belong to the "white" race. But Egypt is in Africa, and Lebanon is in the Middle East. As Egyptian writer and professor Moustafa Bayoumi points out: "Every day, I live my life in America as a brown person. Defining me as white is absurd... To compel everyone from the Middle East and North Africa to select 'white' on the census is to force us to participate in our own official erasure."<sup>3</sup>

In contrast, consider the Irish. Today, most would consider the Irish to be white, but in the 1860s, "the Irish were part of a separate caste or a



See "Is Race Real?" by *Ebony Vandross* on p. 36 of the "Talking About Race" issue of *The Change Agent*.

1. [www.census.gov/acs/www/about/why-we-ask-each-question/ethnicity/](http://www.census.gov/acs/www/about/why-we-ask-each-question/ethnicity/)
2. [news.berkeley.edu/2014/04/29/hispanic-label/](http://news.berkeley.edu/2014/04/29/hispanic-label/)
3. [www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/feb/14/arab-american-census-america-racism](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/feb/14/arab-american-census-america-racism)



‘dark’ race... The Census Bureau regularly collected statistics on the nation’s ‘native’ and ‘foreign’ populations, but kept the Irish distinct from even the latter group. In short, it was by no means clear that the Irish were white.”<sup>4</sup> Clearly, “race” is constantly evolving.

## Black or African American?

Black people have a long and complicated history of representation on the census and in U.S. history. Black people have been categorized as enslaved or free; we have been considered only three-fifths of a person; and our identities have been determined by arbitrary rules like the “one drop” rule.<sup>5</sup> In response to calls for more accuracy, the census currently provides a space for people to write in the specific ethnic group they identify with. Immigration Specialist Niat Amare says, “I’m African. I identify as black. But I don’t see myself as an African-American... We are black from Africa, we are black from the Caribbean, we are black from everywhere.” In contrast, Fordham University Professor Christina Greer says “I consider myself a JB, which is just black...” Her ancestors were enslaved people. They may be from any number of African countries.<sup>6</sup>

## American Indian or Alaska Native?

American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) is another group that continues to struggle with participation in the census for many reasons, including the form literally not having enough space for them to write down their identity. Bois Forte Band of Chippewa tribe member Sidra Starkovich imagines her dad filling out the census and saying, “There isn’t even enough room for me to put my tribe name. I’m not gonna do it, it doesn’t fit me, they didn’t make it for me.”<sup>7</sup> Finally, the fact

### 9. What is Person 1’s race?

Mark ☒ one or more boxes **AND** print origins.

☐ White — Print, for example, German, Irish, English, Italian, Lebanese, Egyptian, etc. ↴

☐ Black or African Am. — Print, for example, African American, Jamaican, Haitian, Nigerian, Ethiopian, Somali, etc. ↴

☐ American Indian or Alaska Native — Print name of enrolled or principal tribe(s), for example, Navajo Nation, Blackfeet Tribe, Mayan, Aztec, Native Village of Barrow Inupiat Traditional Government, Nome Eskimo Community, etc. ↴

☐ Chinese ☐ Vietnamese ☐ Native Hawaiian

☐ Filipino ☐ Korean ☐ Samoan

☐ Asian Indian ☐ Japanese ☐ Chamorro

☐ Other Asian — Print, for example, Pakistani, Cambodian, Hmong, etc. ↴

☐ Other Pacific Islander — Print, for example, Tongan, Fijian, Marshallese, etc. ↴

Some other race — Print race or origin

that native people didn’t even appear on the census at all until 1860 despite being indigenous to the land is another example of how the U.S. government continues to fail them today.

## Asian (But This Is Not a Category)?

The census only began to include people of Asian descent starting in 1860, and the only group distinguished was Chinese.<sup>8</sup> Today, Asian is not a category. Instead, people of Asian descent must choose what country they or their ancestors are from. Research finds that Asian people are underrepresented in the census and less likely to specify their ethnic identity — with good reason! During World War 2, the Census Bureau shared data,

4. Roediger, David. “The Wages of Whiteness.” Race and the Making of the American Working Class (2001).

5. [www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/jefferson/mixed/onedrop.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/jefferson/mixed/onedrop.html)

6. [www.npr.org/transcripts/593272215](http://www.npr.org/transcripts/593272215)

7. [www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/native-americans-census-most-undercounted-racial-group-fight-accurate-2020-n1105096](http://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/native-americans-census-most-undercounted-racial-group-fight-accurate-2020-n1105096)

8. [www.vox.com/2016/8/18/12404688/census-race-history-intersectionality](http://www.vox.com/2016/8/18/12404688/census-race-history-intersectionality)

which led to the imprisonment of people of Japanese descent. (See pp. 12-13.) “We should be able to identify ourselves to you as who we are, as opposed to having other people identify for us,” says Massachusetts Representative Tackey Chan.<sup>9</sup>

### Some Other Race

The Census Bureau understands that race is a social construct. Their website says, “Censuses are not conducted in a vacuum. [The] data reflect the growth of the population as well as the changing values and interests of the American people.”<sup>10</sup> They leave space at the end of the race question for you to list any other race or origin. And at the beginning of the race question, they make it clear that you can check as many boxes as you like.

### Representation Matters

It is up to us to continue to demand categorization that properly represents us, because representation matters. From the beginning, marginalized groups have done the work to ensure that every

one is counted. Latino activists pushed to be distinguished from whites. Asian-Americans work to raise awareness and pressure the Bureau to include their demographics in more meaningful ways.<sup>11</sup> Due to the tireless efforts of native people, the Bureau will be taking extra effort to reach AIAN communities.<sup>12</sup> Despite repeated exclusion, Americans of Arab descent continue their demand for a Middle Eastern or North African (MENA) response category, which they believe would begin to pave the way for proper census representation of the population.<sup>13</sup>

A striking pattern in most of the census categories for marginalized groups is that they emerged from how these groups were seen by the majority. When thinking about your identity and the identity of your loved ones, who should decide what boxes are available to choose from?

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9. [www.statehousenews.com/email/a/20182226?key=426c63c](http://www.statehousenews.com/email/a/20182226?key=426c63c)  
10. [www.census.gov/history/www/through\\_the\\_decades/fast\\_facts/](http://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/fast_facts/)

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11. [advancingjustice-aajc.org/](http://advancingjustice-aajc.org/)  
12. [www.census.gov/newsroom/blogs/director/2018/11/the\\_2020\\_census\\_and.html](http://www.census.gov/newsroom/blogs/director/2018/11/the_2020_census_and.html)  
13. [www.aaiusa.org/2020census](http://www.aaiusa.org/2020census)

## Take It Further

**What does the author mean** when she says race is a social (not a scientific) construct? Look up her article in the “Talking about Race” issue of *The Change Agent* to learn more. Available at <[changeagent.nelrc.org](http://changeagent.nelrc.org)>. Online subscription (\$20 per year) required.

**Notice the author’s use of footnotes.** Compare it to another author’s use of endnotes (see pp. 8-9). Describe the two different approaches. Which would you prefer to use? Why? Next time you write an essay, include footnotes or endnotes.

**Visit this website** <[nelrc.org/stand-up-and-be-counted/census2020/classroom-resources/](http://nelrc.org/stand-up-and-be-counted/census2020/classroom-resources/)> to print out a PDF of a replica of the 2020 Census questionnaire. You can also fill out the PDF online, using the “fillable” boxes. After you fill it out, keep a copy for your records and use it to fill out the real census, once it is available.



# Ask Not What the Census...

## ...Can Do for You, But What You Can Do for the Census

*Raheem A. Forbes*

I have learned that some people in the U.S. do not want to fill out the census form. This news hits me hard. It is totally unacceptable! Think of all the money spent on advertisements promoting things for us to buy. By comparison, not very much money is spent educating the public about the census. I see we will have to make up the difference ourselves!

I am still learning about the census. As I learn about why it matters, all I know is I want in! And I want my community to be counted too.

I will share what I know with others. Here are a few ways you, too, can spread the word about the 2020 Census: You can start by going to your local library to get more information. You can visit the job booth and apply for a job with the Census Bureau. You can also encourage people in

your community to share census content via social media with their friends, family, and followers. I will pass on what I learn and encourage others to do the same.

John F. Kennedy said in a famous speech, “Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country.” He wanted us to contribute to society and take action instead of being passive. It is important that we use our resources to make change.

*Raheem A. Forbes lives in Florida; he is 23 years old and has lived here his entire life. He is an ABE student at Atlantic Technical College in Fort Lauderdale, FL. He likes to read and is open to new experiences.*



### Become a Census Ambassador

If you agree that the census is important, what could you do to spread the word? Consider Raheem’s suggestions and add your own. Use this grid to organize your ideas.

Ways I could learn more about the census:	Friends and family I could talk to about the census:	Community groups I could share information with:



**For a lesson packet on becoming a Census Ambassador, go to <[changeagent.nelrc.org/in-the-classroom/lesson-packets](https://changeagent.nelrc.org/in-the-classroom/lesson-packets)>.**



# Prison Gerrymandering

*Sergio Hyland*

**BEFORE YOU READ:** See p. 19 for a definition of and background to *gerrymandering*.

## Prisoners Add to Rural Count

One of the reasons for a census is to determine how many political representatives a certain district needs. A densely populated district should have more political representation in government and more federal funding than a sparsely populated district. It seems fair enough, right? But what happens when certain districts manipulate their residency count?

Take Pennsylvania, for example. According to <[justicemercy.org](http://justicemercy.org)>, we have roughly 50,000 state prisoners, housed in 27 state prisons, as well as 14,000 prisoners in federal prisons. Many prisoners are from larger cities, but the prisons are usually in rural areas with small populations. When a small rural county is home to a large state prison, that county increases its population count significantly. A larger population means more funding and more political representation. This is a legal process known as “prison gerrymandering.”

In the past, communities fought to stop prisons from being built nearby. Now, they lobby for the opposite. They see the advantage in having a large prison population: it adds to the amount of federal money they receive and increases their representation in government. Just think about it: a small town of 3,000 residents could double its population by allowing a prison to be built in their community. And all of this would happen **WITH-OUT** prisoners being allowed to vote, which is supposed to be the cornerstone of our democracy.

## Urban Communities Lose

Prison gerrymandering doesn’t only benefit small counties, it also harms the counties where prisoners call home. Every time an urban prisoner is counted in a rural county, it takes away from the

number of city residents included in the census report. Urban communities are often majority people of color, so this process contributes to disempowering black and brown people.

Gerrymandering extends to immigrant detention centers. Immigrants are coming to America in large numbers. They are economic and political refugees seeking nothing more than the possibility of a better life. Thousands of these immigrants are arrested and housed in detention centers, and the Census Bureau counts them as residents of those districts. Ironically, some politicians generate anti-immigrant hysteria to justify long detentions; meanwhile their districts benefit from having all those detainees counted as residents.

Those of us in prison and detention centers are being used against our own interests! We should support laws that prevent prison gerrymandering and give prisoners the right to vote. Voting is the most important part of democracy! We should all play a part in deciding our future.

**AFTER YOU READ:** Explain in your own words how prison gerrymandering works. Research how prisoners are counted in your state. Visit <[prisoners-ofthecensus.org](http://prisoners-ofthecensus.org)> to learn more.

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*Sergio Hyland is incarcerated at SCI Chester in Pennsylvania. He is the editor of “The Ledger,” the prison newsletter.*

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**Just think about it: a small town of 3,000 residents could double its population by allowing a prison to be built in their community.**

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