

# THE CHANGE AGENT

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



**2020** is a big year to **STAND UP AND BE COUNTED!** In this issue, students write about the census (pp. 3-18), the election (pp. 19-31), as well as other ways to make your voice heard in your family, your community, and your workplace (pp. 32-55). Read on to discover strategies adult learners use to “stand up and be counted,” and how you can, too!

## ENGAGING, EMPOWERING, AND READY-TO-USE.

Student-generated, relevant content in print and audio at various levels of complexity.  
Designed to teach basic skills and transform and inspire adult learners.

**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](http://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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Look for this symbol, which indicates additional materials available for free download at our website. More classroom and program materials about the census and VERA (NELRC's Voter Education, Registration, and Action) are available 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 the 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)>

**Count...**



**...everyone who lives with you.**

Illustration by Jonan Everett

**Do not count people living in...\***



**college**



**prison**



**a nursing home**



**someone else's home on April 1**



**the military**

\* All these people will still be counted, just not by you.



# 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.*



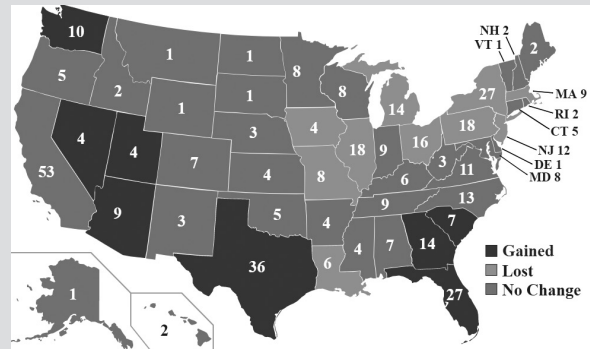
## How Much Money for your State?

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.

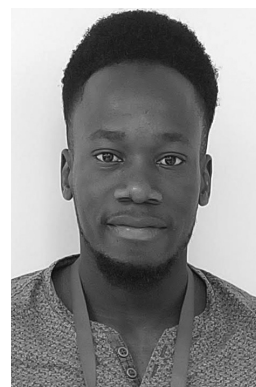
**It is going to be difficult for the census to get an accurate count.**

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, DC, 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

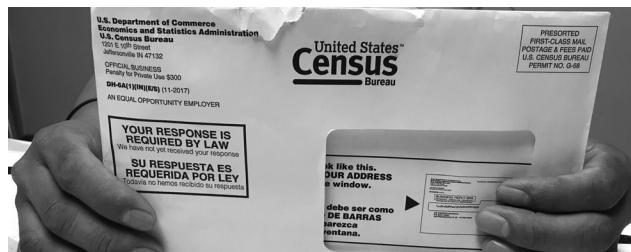
*Kelly Akemy Makimoto Murphy*

**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.*





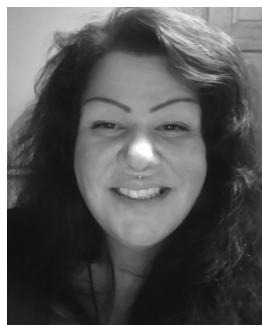
Native American community groups are encouraging Native people to participate in the 2020 Census.

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 peoples 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	19728
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-

Americans 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.

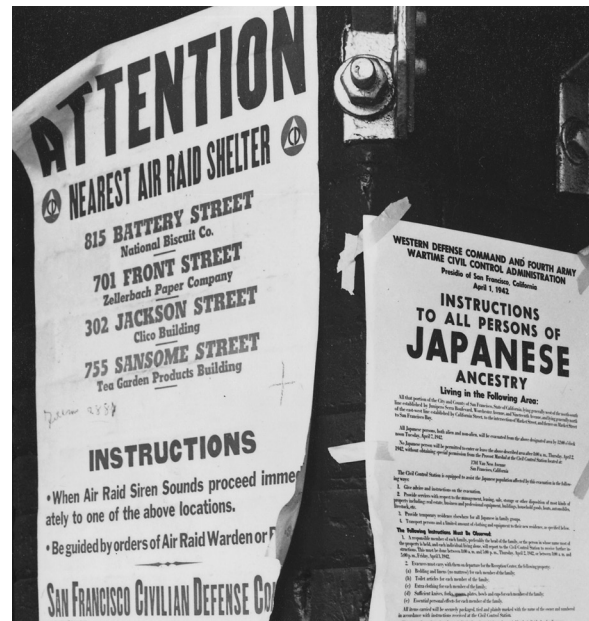
In response to concerns about this misuse of data, the Census Bureau implemented additional procedures to protect information requested by federal, state, or local law enforcement agencies or that involves a “sensitive population.”

## 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 II, 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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*Ebony Vandross is the E-Learning and Communications Associate at World Education, and she regularly serves on the editorial board of The Change Agent.*

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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.

**Practice filling out the census!** Visit <[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 and/or practice on a replica of the online questionnaire. After you fill it out, keep a copy 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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# Gerrymandering and the Fight for Democracy in 2020

Annette Bowen

**BEFORE YOU READ:** Read the title, headings, and information in the box below. What do you think this article will be about?

## We Won Voting Rights in 1965

As a child, I remember my momma taking me to the neighborhood recreation center where she voted. It was 1966, about a year after the Voting Rights Act passed. Being a black woman, my momma faced many obstacles, and voting was one of them. I remember the long line of black

people waiting in line to vote. I remember the look on the faces of the white poll workers. Some half-smiled. Some had scowls. It was like they didn't want us there, but we had a right to be there. We stepped into the booth together, and pulled the curtain for privacy. There was a paper ballot and a little hole puncher, which she used to mark the ballot.

**Often it is African American and Latino voters whose voices are not properly counted because of gerrymandering.**

The expression on her face was one of determination and pride. Once, I asked her why she voted. Her reply was simple, "If you don't vote, you shouldn't complain."

Today, I remember her words, and I always vote. Many people fought for the rights of black people to vote. They were beaten and jailed, and some were killed, just so I could vote.

## But Voting Rights Are Still Under Attack

Unfortunately, some people have figured out ways to disenfranchise voters even though we have the Voting Rights Act. Take, for example, gerrymandering. Gerrymandering is when a political party changes the boundaries of a voting district to create a result that helps them or hurts the opposition. Often it is African American and Latino voters whose voices are not properly counted because of gerrymandering.

According to Fair Districts Georgia, "In 2015, GOP legislators changed district lines for House Districts 105 and 111 to protect two Republican

## Gerrymandering



"Gerrymandering" is when people manipulate voting districts to help them and/or hurt others. The name comes from Eldridge Gerry, a "Founding Father" and the governor of Massachusetts, who in 1812 signed a bill that redrew a district in Massachusetts to be more favorable to him. The new district was in the shape of a salamander.





Photo by Michael Fleshman from Flickr. Shared under Creative Commons.

representatives who had barely won re-election the year before." If you take a district that is mostly people of color and carve it up so that the people of color are moved to more white districts, then their voice is weakened. They're not a majority anywhere, so they can't get anyone elected to represent them.

We also had a problem in Georgia in 2018 when Brian

Kemp, our Secretary of State, was running for governor. As Secretary of State, it is his job to make sure the voting is fair, but how can he do that if he is one of the people in the race? He should have stepped aside.

Prior to the election, the Associated Press found 53,000 voter registration applications being held by Kemp's office. The issue was they did not "exactly match" the records the state had on file for the applicant. It turned out that 70% of these voter registration applications were from black people.

In the governor's race, Brian Kemp (a white male Republican) was running against Stacey Abrams (an African-American female Democrat). Kemp won.

## The Fight for Fair Elections Continues

Stacey Abrams has now gone on to be a champion against voter suppression and gerrymandering. Her organization, Fair Fight, works tirelessly to promote fair elections, not only in Georgia, but all over the United States.

According to FairFight, voter suppression is a big concern.

- 1.6 million people were improperly purged

## Voting Rights Over Time

The articles on pp. 18-22 discuss the struggle for voting rights. Name some of the groups that have had to fight for suffrage. Name some of the groups that do not have suffrage currently in the U.S.

There are lots more *Change Agent* resources on voting, including Issue 26, "Democracy in Action" (you need an online subscription to access this), as well as Lesson Packets, which are freely available to all.

Find additional classroom and program materials about the census and VERA (NELRC's Voter Education, Registration, and Action) at <[nelrc.org/stand-up-and-be-counted](http://nelrc.org/stand-up-and-be-counted)>.

from the voter rolls from 2010 to 2018, leaving them ineligible to vote.

- Tens of thousands of people waited in long lines, and some of them left before they could vote.
- Thousands of absentee ballot applications were lost or rejected, disenfranchising voters, particularly voters of color.

<[fairfight.com/why-we-fight](http://fairfight.com/why-we-fight)>

It is imperative not just that we vote, but that we keep up the fight for full voting rights. If something in government upsets you, do something about it!

Annette Bowen is a former student at Literacy Action in Atlanta, GA. After finishing her courses, she volunteered as a teacher's aide. She still loves to write and has added coloring as a means of relaxation.



# Thanks to My Great Aunt

## She Fought for Women's Suffrage

Anne-Laure Perrot

**BEFORE YOU READ:** What is suffrage? Do you know anyone who has fought for it?

The first time I voted was very memorable, because my great aunt Marie-Claudia enthusiastically came with me. It was special to have her with me because when she was much younger, after World War I, she advocated for women's right to vote. With other women, she went door-to-door, explaining again and again how important it is for all people to have suffrage.

**With other women, she went door-to-door, explaining again and again how important it is for all people to have suffrage.**

Finally, in 1944, women gained suffrage in France.

Thanks to them, I too can add my voice to decide what's the best for the future of France and my community. I can choose my presi-

dent, my senators, and my representatives, and I can give my opinion on Constitutional amendments. I grew up knowing that I had both the power and duty as a citizen to make decisions at the voting booth. My voice matters and is sure to be counted.

Today, I live in the United States, where I have neither citizenship nor the right to vote. It's a weird situation: I respect the laws and pay taxes, but I cannot express my opinion at the ballot box! Isn't this what people fought against during the American Revolution? Didn't the colonists think that, if they were being taxed by the British, they should have a say in how they were governed?

Fortunately, the U.S. democratic system still gives me the chance to be counted: the census. In



2020, I can and must make my voice heard by respecting the Constitution of the United States and filling out the census form. This will ensure that my community has its fair share of resources from the federal government and the right number of representatives in congress.

Marie-Claudia was almost 50 when she voted for the very first time. Until she passed away, at the age of 102, she listened twice a week to the French ministers answering questions from the French House of Representatives. She carefully tracked the work of both the executive and the legislative branches. She listened to all their points, and that is how she made up her mind about how to vote. She truly believed in democracy and that voting is one of the most important civic rights we have.

When we left the ballot box that day, she told me how she was happy to have played a role in winning the right to vote for women!

**AFTER YOU READ:** According to the author, what was memorable about her first time going to vote? What is "weird" about her current situation in the United States? And how does she still plan to be "counted" (even though she can't vote)?

Anne-Laure Perrot is a student at the Community Learning Center in Cambridge, MA. She attends an English as a Second Language class. She has lived in the U.S. with her husband and daughters for more than a year.



# Fight Like Hell for the Living

Art Ellison

**BEFORE YOU READ:** Look at the title, the headings, and the photo of the author. What do you think his perspective will be? Why?

## People Died for Our Right to Vote

We vote because we want a better community, state, nation, and world for ourselves but more importantly for our children. People throughout the centuries in this country have fought for the right to vote so that their voices could be heard.

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**People throughout the centuries in this country have fought for the right to vote so that their voices could be heard.**

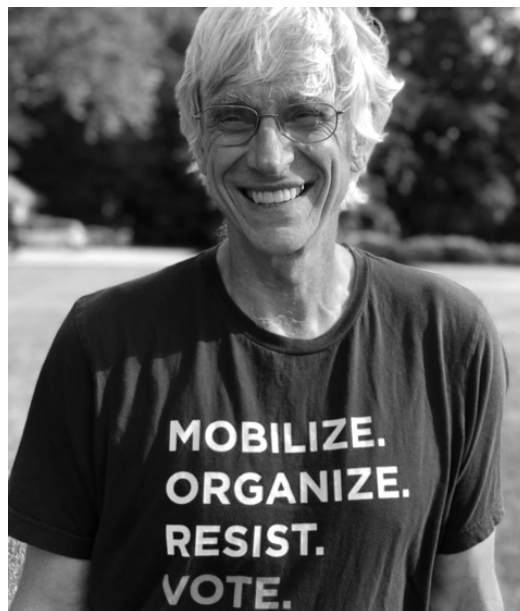
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The men who founded our country limited the right to vote to white males who owned property. After the Civil War, black men got the right to vote, but racism created barriers (poll taxes, literacy tests, and terror from

groups like the Ku Klux Klan), which often prevented them from voting. It wasn't until 1920 that women finally won the right to vote. And it wasn't until the 1960s that people of color gained true voting rights. During both the women's suffrage movement and the civil rights movement, people died to ensure access to the ballot box.

## Every Vote Counts

We should keep in mind that even one single vote can make a difference. I am a member of the New Hampshire House of Representatives. During our last session, we had a vote to override the Governor's veto of the bill to abolish the death penalty in our state. In order to successfully override his veto, we needed a minimum of 247 votes (two-thirds of the House). The final vote had exactly 247 in favor. If we had lost a single vote, we would not have been successful. The New Hampshire Senate



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Art Ellison is the former New Hampshire State Director of Adult Education. He currently is a member of the NH House of Representatives, and he serves on the Education Committee.

also overrode the veto, so the bill abolishing the death penalty became law.

## But Don't Just Vote

While voting is at the very core of letting our voices be heard, we should be willing to amplify those voices by helping our friends to vote and to work for the political candidates who support our philosophies and beliefs. Meanwhile, we keep in mind the words of the famous labor organizer Mother Jones who said, "Pray for the dead, and fight like hell for the living."

## AFTER YOU READ:

1. How does Art Ellison feel about voting? How do you know?
2. Explain in your own words what happened in the "Every Vote Counts" section.
3. What if you can't vote? (See pp. 28-29.)



# Voter Issues 2020

Heather Ritchie



There are many issues that are important to people in elections. Look at this word cloud of issues that the Republican and Democratic parties, along with the general public, have identified as important.

What are the most important issues? Are there any issues missing? If so, which ones?

Read the articles on the next four pages. Each article addresses a key issue in the upcoming election. Organize the information from those articles into the chart below. Add more issues to the chart and say why they matter. Write your own article about an issue you think is important.

Page #	Voter issue	Reason why it matters



**Where do key political parties stand on these issues?** Go to <[changeagent.nelrc.org/issues/issue-50-march-2020-stand-up-and-be-counted](http://changeagent.nelrc.org/issues/issue-50-march-2020-stand-up-and-be-counted)> and print out a grid showing the position of four major parties on a selection of issues. (Online subscription required.)

# If It's Broke, Fix It!

## No More Mass Incarceration. End Solitary Confinement.

*Sterlin Reaves*

**BEFORE YOU READ:** What do we mean by “mass incarceration,” “solitary confinement,” and “reduce recidivism”?

As the election season nears, most of the U.S. electorate is focusing on what the candidates are saying about the economy, health care, and immigration. Here in prison, most of us are paying close attention to where the candidates stand on the two issues that affect us the most: *mass incarceration* and *solitary confinement*. Most prisoners can't vote, so we try to make our voices heard in other ways.



A PDF of “Prisons and Justice” (Issue #40, March 2015) is available online.

a negative impact on communities, particularly in the black and brown communities. Many state and federal penitentiaries in the U.S. are filled with nonviolent offenders. Some of them are drug users or petty dealers who would be better served in treatment programs. All people in prison deserve rehabilitation. Researchers and common sense tell us that sending so many people to prison is not the answer. Our communities would be better served if we offered prisoners rehabilitation and education, both of which

have proven to be the best predictors of future success and the most effective at *reducing recidivism*.

### Solitary Confinement: A Form of Torture

I have been a victim of Pennsylvania's abusive use of solitary confinement. Solitary confinement is one of the most detrimental forms of punishment. The United Nations calls it a form of torture. In whose mind is it productive to leave people languishing in 7'x12' cells for 23-24 hours a day with little access to educational or psychological services and no opportunities to socialize? According to Solitary Watch, a non-profit that studies the use of solitary confinement, more than 61,000 people are in solitary confinement in the U.S. on any one day. Solitary confinement is so hurtful that many of these people will be worse off when they are released back to society!

### All People Deserve Rehabilitation

Incarceration rates are higher in the U.S. than almost any other country. Mass incarceration has

### I Hope You Vote!

Over the past few years, there have been some efforts to reduce the prison population and cut back on long-term solitary confinement. As someone who has been in prison for nearly at 20 years, I know there is much more work to be done. Excitingly and surprisingly, when I watched the presidential debates, I heard the candidates discussing these issues. Those of you on the outside, who can vote, I hope you vote for candidates who will work to lower the rates of incarceration and outlaw solitary confinement.

**AFTER YOU READ:** How does the author hope you'll vote? Why?

*Sterlin Reaves is incarcerated at SCI Pine Grove. You can write to him at SC - Sterlin Reaves, DX 5999, PO Box 33028, Saint Petersburg, FL 33733.*

**Sources:** <[solitaryconfinement.org/mandela-rules](http://solitaryconfinement.org/mandela-rules)>; <[solitarywatch.org/2019/01/04/how-many-people-are-in-solitary-today](http://solitarywatch.org/2019/01/04/how-many-people-are-in-solitary-today)>.

# U.S. Needs Affordable Health Care

## Medicare for All: A Plan that Protects Families

Mariko Takeda

**BEFORE YOU READ:** How is health insurance and the cost of health care working out for your family?

A key issue in the next election is health care. Health care is important, but insurance is very expensive. One year ago, I had surgery. At that

**I didn't want to care more about money than about my health.**

time, I worried more about paying the bills than I did about my body. I have insurance, but some of the tests and treatments (for example, the anesthesia), were not covered. The hospital

outsourced these things to another facility that was not covered by my insurance. I didn't want to care more about money than about my health. In my country, Japan, schools and companies provide free check-ups. They also provide healthy food. Also, Japan has National Health Insurance. It covers 70% of medical and dental costs for us. It is great because we know exactly how much we will

pay in advance. Even if the charges are expensive, we can receive a subsidy to help cover the costs.

In the next election, people should vote for candidates who will be more concerned with the cost of health care. I support candidates who want Medicare for All. Medicare for All would protect families from worrying about medical bills when they are sick.

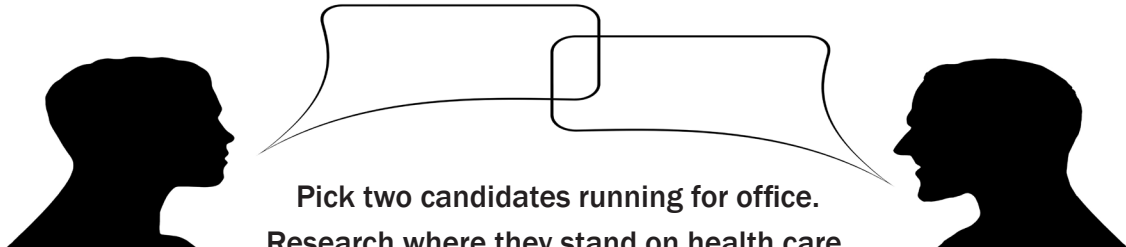
### AFTER YOU READ:

1. What is the problem that Mariko poses? What solution does she propose?
2. See "Health: The Big Picture" (Issue #28) of *The Change Agent* for more articles about health and health insurance.

Mariko Takeda is a student at the Community Learning Center in Cambridge, MA. She has been in the U.S. for two years and lives with her five-year-old son and husband in Cambridge.



## What do the Candidates Say?



Make a poster, write an essay, or create a slideshow that explains these candidates' points of view on this issue. What is your opinion? What could you do to work for a candidate you like? Is there another way you could work on this issue?



# Our Environment, Our Vote

Laiza Gois Cruz

**BEFORE YOU READ:** What are some activities in your life that are compulsory? Do you agree that these activities should be compulsory? Why or why not? (*If you're not sure what compulsory means, read the first two sentences of this essay for context clues.*)

Voting in Brazil is compulsory. Every citizen over 18 years old is required by law to vote. However, according to the Supreme Electoral Court, in the presidential election of 2018, 42 million voters voted null, voted blank, or just did not vote.<sup>1</sup> This turned out to be negative for my country and maybe even the world.

Jair Bolsonaro won the presidential election in Brazil with 57.7 million votes. His opponent Fernando Haddad received 47 million votes. If all the non-voters had voted, the results of the election could have been different.

In the election of 2018, I didn't vote because I was in the U.S., and I forgot to request an absentee ballot. As a result, my voice wasn't heard in this

election, according to *The Washington Post*.<sup>2</sup> When a large percentage of people don't vote, the government does not represent the community. When we don't vote, we let other people write our own history.

**AFTER YOU READ:** Why didn't the author vote? How does she feel about it? In her opinion, what was at stake in the last election in Brazil?



Laiza Gois Cruz, a 26 year-old Brazilian, works as an au pair in the U.S. She is a writing student at ERACE in Branford, CT. She has earned a Bachelor's Degree from the University of São Paulo. She enjoys reading, traveling, and learning about different cultures.

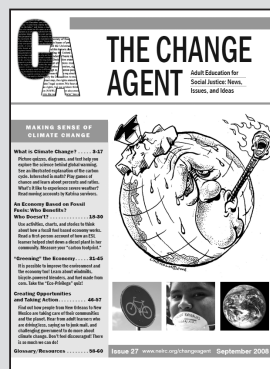
**Sources:** 1. Grandin, Felipe, et al. "Percentual De Voto Nulo é o Maior Desde 1989; Soma De Abstenções, Nulos e Brancos Passa De 30%" G1, 28 Oct. 2018, <g1.globo.com>. 2. Ingraham, Christopher. "About 100 Million People Couldn't Be Bothered to Vote This Year," *The Washington Post*, 29 Apr. 2019, <www.washingtonpost.com>.

**When we don't vote, we let other people write our own history.**

election. I do not agree with Bolsonaro's ideas, particularly about the environment. I believe the Amazon rainforest is a Brazilian treasure, and we should preserve it. It is important not just for Brazil. The Amazon provides oxygen for the whole world. But Bolsonaro took no action when the wildfires caused a lot of destruction in the Amazon in August 2019. I felt frustrated, and so did a lot of other people around the world. The fact that I did not vote against this candidate made me feel even more frustrated.

In the U.S. presidential election in 2016, 100 million eligible people did not vote. That means 43% of the country was not represented in that

## Oxygen for the World



The author says that what happens in the Amazon affects all of us. Read more about the earth's ecosystems and climate change in Issue #27 of *The Change Agent* (Sept. 2008).

# Education Matters

*Aida Shtiwi*

**BEFORE YOU READ:** What type of government does your home country have? What are some political differences between your home country and the U.S.?

I have never voted in my home country of Syria. Even though I was born in Syria, I am the daughter of Palestinian refugees. This means I was considered a temporary resident of Syria, and I didn't have the right to vote. All other Syrians over the age of 18 can vote.

Now I am a citizen of the United States, and for the first time in my life, I have the right to vote! I am especially excited to participate in the local election in my town because I am very interested in education. Education builds strong communities, reduces crime, and improves the economy. Education is important for everyone because it expands our horizons.

Before I vote for school board candidates, I try to get to know them, check their resumes, and see what they are offering to improve public school education. Is the candidate trustworthy for this

position? Can they improve the public school?

Think carefully about the candidates running in your local election. And don't forget to participate on election day! This day is important to our community.

**AFTER YOU READ:** Can you name an implied difference between voting rights in Syria and the U.S.?

Note: the author does not state the difference explicitly. You will have to use inference.



*Aida Shtiwi is a student at the Community Learning Center in Cambridge, MA. She came to the United States 6 years ago.*

## Looking for clear, unbiased information for elections?

**[www.vote411.org](http://www.vote411.org)** asks for your address and then tells you who in your area is running, the dates of events, and facts on the issues. "VOTE411 is committed to ensuring voters have the information they need to successfully participate in every election."

**[www.factcheck.org](http://www.factcheck.org)** monitors the factual accuracy of political candidates in their TV ads, debates, speeches, interviews and news releases. You can read articles and post questions for them to research about the current news and elections.

**[ballotpedia.org](http://ballotpedia.org)** allows you to look up elections at the local, state, and federal levels. "Ballotpedia is the digital encyclopedia of American politics and elections. Our goal is to inform people about politics by providing accurate and objective information about politics at all levels of government."

*Divide into groups and visit these websites. Try them out. Report back what you find.*

# What Can You Do If You Are Not a Citizen?

*Dieuseul Camille*



**BEFORE YOU READ:** What do you see in the picture above? What does it mean to “make things happen”? How do you make things happen?

If you are not a U.S. citizen, you might think that you can’t participate in a U.S. election. Actually, you can! How?

There are various ways to get involved. You can engage in debates and discussions. You can set up little meetings with friends and talk about the issues that are important to you. You can set up meetings at school, at church, or at work.

Also, you can try to motivate your friends who are U.S. citizens to vote. At my job, I have many friends who can vote, so I will organize a meeting with them to convince them to vote for candidates that I think will do a good job. I will

make sure they register to vote and they know where to go to vote.

Voting is an obligation for all citizens! Even if you are not eligible to vote, there is still a lot you can do. I suggest you help educate people about the issues and make sure that everyone around you votes!

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*Dieuseul Camille is a student at the Community Learning Center in Cambridge, MA. When he finishes studying, he hopes to get his GED. He is from Haiti, and he came to the U.S. in 2014. He thinks that voting is important because he has seen how many bad things can happen in the government and believes that voting helps people choose a good leader who will do the right things.*





# Many Ways for Immigrants to Participate

*Sawdatou Dia, Meskerem Hailemichael, and Hanan Serbaga*

We believe that participating in a community is important because it allows immigrants' voices to be heard. When our community is affected by a common problem, we come together to help find solutions. As immigrants, we may not be able to vote, but we can participate in religious groups, fundraisers, protests, neighborhood groups, and school organizations.

When we are involved with our community, we experience teamwork. We gain awareness and learn how to take action. Each one of us participates in our community by being active in our church or mosque. For example, we help organize

**When we went on the stage, we were very nervous but by the end, we felt confident.**

field trips, wedding programs, graduations, holiday celebrations, funerals, and other events that impact our community. We are active in community programs that help prepare food for the needy. We load and unload goods, and we collect money. We also volunteer in our school government. We coordinate donations of food and coats for the winter.

Sometimes, immigrants are hesitant to participate because we feel we have no time or that we do not speak English very well or maybe we feel afraid. Recently, our class spoke in front of the whole school. We shared with other students in the auditorium about why they should take the English Health class. When we went on the stage, we were very nervous but by the end, we felt confident. We wanted to share our message about how you can be healthy and learn English. We believe immigrants should stand up to be counted!



Sawdatou Dia is from Mauritania. She has two children, and she likes to play with her kids in her free time. Meskerem Hailemichael is from Ethiopia. Her son and daughter live in Ethiopia with her husband. She works as a floor attendant in the Delta Sky Club at Reagan National Airport. Hanna Serbaga is from Ethiopia. She wants to go to college for nursing. She loves to play with her cousin's kids and read in her free time. All three writers are students in the English Health class at the Carlos Rosario Public Charter School in Washington, DC. (To protect her privacy, one student turned her back to the camera.)

## AFTER YOU READ:

1. List some of the *general* as well as *specific* ways the authors participate in community. What might make them hesitate to participate? And what are some of the benefits they get from being involved?
2. Read the article on p. 28. Make a list of some of the ways you could get involved.

# One by One, We Make a Difference

Yancy Reyes

**BEFORE YOU READ:** Have you ever had jury duty? Share what happened.

I believe in democracy, which gives a voice and vote to each of its citizens. For a democracy to work well, everyone needs to take their rights and responsibilities seriously.

I developed this opinion after an event that changed my way of thinking: I got called for jury duty. The person on trial was the mayor of the town in El Salvador where I lived. He was on trial for child abuse. The jury included different people who, like me, had come to serve and obey the laws of the country. I liked being on the jury. It was my first time being in a position to say my opinion on things. I was 24.

I never used to think politics was important. I never voted. After the trial, I started taking action, and now I vote. The first time I voted, I took my son with me. I wanted to teach him about the election.

This event made me understand that in a democracy, we all count. Even though the result of

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**This experience made me take an active part in our democracy and exercise my responsibilities.**

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this trial was not what I wanted, this experience made me take an active part in our democracy and exercise my responsibilities. I thought that the mayor was guilty. Two other jurors thought he was guilty, too, but six jurors thought he was innocent. I felt a little frustrated, but I also felt satisfied because I was part of the jury.

In my country at that time, there were many bad people in the government. They took money from the people and the country. So, I voted for a new president. The person I voted for became president. The new president had different ideas.

There was a little change. I felt good because a new president had the opportunity to help my country. It is important to vote. Every vote counts. One by one, we make a difference.

**AFTER YOU READ:**

1. Tell the sequence of events that led Yancy to feel that “one by one, we make a difference.”
2. The jury’s decision did not reflect Yancy’s opinion, but she still felt satisfied with her participation. Why? Have you ever been in the minority but felt that your voice still counted? Explain.



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*Yancy Reyes is a student at the Carlos Rosario Public Charter School in Washington, DC. She is from El Salvador. She is the mother of three children. She likes reading and listening to music in her free time.*

## A Jury of Your Peers

In the United States, courts randomly select citizens’ names from lists of registered voters and people with drivers licenses who live in that district. These people complete a questionnaire to help determine if they are qualified to serve on a jury. This selection process helps to make sure that jurors represent a cross section of the community, without regard to race, gender, national origin, age, or political affiliation.

<[www.uscourts.gov](http://www.uscourts.gov)>

# Voting Does Not Ensure Democracy

Renold Laurent

**BEFORE YOU READ:** Discuss the title. How could it be true that voting does not ensure democracy?

Voting is very important in a democratic process. It is a good way to express your opinion on the issues and decisions that influence your life. Voting

contributes to the proper functioning of society. But democracies are not perfect.

My country Haiti has been democratic since 1990. In 1990, the people overthrew the dictator Duvalier and introduced universal suffrage. Every two years, we elect our local officials and one part of

the Senate. Every four years we elect our congresspeople, and every five years we elect the president.

The voting process, however, is very difficult. The government often does not respect the elec-

**The government often does not respect the election schedule, and the election results often do not reflect the voting.**

## Clean Elections in the U.S.

Some people argue that the role of money in U.S. elections makes the elections less democratic. Fourteen states now give candidates the option to run a “clean” election. These candidates accept small donations from individuals and not big donations from special interests. In return, they get public funding for their campaign. What do you think about the role of money in elections? Research clean elections and write about or report back what you learn.



General election in Haiti in 2006. Photo from Wikimedia.

tion schedule, and the election results often do not reflect the voting. For several decades, the international community has influenced the vote count in a way that locals are not happy with. Often, after the vote, people protest against the result and it ends in violence. Therefore, from the outset, the elected officials have a deficit of legitimacy. Nowadays, voter participation is very low because people are tired of promises being broken.

Fair elections have not been held in Haiti for decades. How long can this situation continue?

## AFTER YOU READ:

1. According to the author, what are three ways the vote in Haiti is not democratic?
2. Have you experienced anything similar in your country or in the U.S., where voting took place, but it wasn't democratic in the end?

Renold Laurent is a Haitian painter and poet based in Cambridge, MA. He is also student at the Community Learning Center in Cambridge, MA.





# Transportation for Disabled People

*Lupe Martinez*

In my family, there is a disabled person. He is my son. His name is Pedro and he is 43 years old.

He attends a program for disabled adults in Berkeley, Monday to Friday. The bus must pick him up at 8:30 am and return him at home at 3:30 pm. But the bus is not usually on time, and I think many families have the same problem as me.

Some days, the bus arrives on time, but other days, it doesn't. I call the office to find out what time they will pick him up, and I only get the voicemail. Sometimes, they forget to pick him up in the morning or in the afternoon. Somebody in my family has to drive to the program to pick him up. They never call me to explain.

These changes in the schedule do not help him, and they are not good for me or my family. He gets very anxious. Routine works well for him. When my son is anxious, the whole family suffers with him. I take English class every day, but because of these changes I can't always attend my class. I can't look for a job because I'm not sure what will happen tomorrow with the transportation.

Who speaks for disabled people? Our special children need safe and sure transportation.



*Guadalupe Martinez is an ESL student at the Literacy for Every Adult Program (LEAP) in Richmond, CA. She came from Mexico almost 40 years ago with her husband and children.*

**What barriers does Lupe face?** Discuss in a small group. Create a table showing the barriers and their consequences. What ideas do you have for Lupe? Read other articles in this issue to get ideas about what she can do. Write an email to the bus company explaining the problem as if you are Lupe. Are there individuals or agencies you can copy (cc)? What should the subject line say?



# Advocate for Your Loved Ones

*Velma Betz*

When my son was in high school, I had to advocate for him, because the high school did not supply him with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

My son was born with a disability. His development was slow. He had a learning disability and a speech impediment. They put him in Early Childhood Development classes.

I had to go to the special education office and the Principal's office. Finally, I had to file a complaint with the Los Angeles School District, Division of Special Education.

It was hard. I had to fill out papers and send them to different people. I had to get help from my daughter. It took us three weeks to fill out all the paperwork! I got a lot of resistance from his teachers and the principal.

Then, at last, I got a positive reply. I got my son all the things he was supposed to get. I felt good. I think my son felt good about what I did for him. My son is now 31.

This experience taught me how to advocate for myself and my family. Now, I am pursuing a career in advocacy.



*Velma is a student at East Village Access in New York City. She was raised by her aunt and uncle in Texas. A former special education student, she graduated from high school in 1984. Her goal is to become a Peer Specialist and to get off SSI. She says, "I am a very determined person, and I will not let anything get in my way."*

**What barriers does Velma face?** What does she do address the problem? Discuss in a small group. Share a time you have had to advocate for your child. How did it go? What did you learn from the experience? Read Lupe's story on p. 32. What is the same and what is different about the challenges these two moms have faced? Create a Venn diagram to organize your analysis.

# #NewWaytoSpeakUp

## Activism in the #Hashtag Era

*Ai-Ling Liao*

**BEFORE YOU READ:** Share what you know about hashtags. Read about them in the box below. What hashtags have you used?

Voting matters, but it takes place only once every few years. Fortunately, in between elections, we can use social media to express our opinions. What's even better, we have a little extra help from the "hashtag."

A hashtag allows people to share information and ideas about a common theme. They can build an online community, which can sometimes develop into a movement. #MeToo is a good recent example of how a hashtag can start small and then, over time, bring about a real change in the public discourse.

At first, a few survivors of sexual abuse courageously shared their stories on social media. They used the hashtag #MeToo. Soon millions of people added their voices. Before this wave of #MeToo messages, victims of sexual abuse were often blamed for what happened to them. People would say, "She must have wanted it," or "She was wearing provocative clothing." These kinds of assumptions are not fair to survivors of sexual abuse. The #MeToo movement helped uncover the magnitude of this serious problem in our society.

As a result of this #MeToo movement, there has been some progress in how our society responds. Take Nike corporation, for example. After the #MeToo movement, Nike sent out a survey asking female employees whether they had suffered sexual harassment at the company. According to the *New York Times*, this survey led to the resignation of several executives. Another example is the streaming radio company, Spotify. Spotify stopped promoting the pop star R. Kelly's music because of the allegations of sexual abuse against him. In France, the government made a law

against catcalling and other forms of public harassment.

This little tool, "the hashtag," changes individual struggles into collective ones and can "set off the cataclysmic transformations"

in our society, argues Catharine MacKinnon. Using hashtag is a trending way to stand up and to be counted. We don't need to be celebrities to bring issues into the spotlight. We can stand up and speak up wherever we are and whenever we want. With a small fire of a post with the hashtag, the forest can be set aflame.

**AFTER YOU READ:** Explain the metaphor in Ai-Ling's last sentence. What evidence does she use to make the case that #MeToo became a powerful movement?

*Ai-Ling Liao is a student at the ESL class in Branford Adult Education. She recently moved to Branford from Taiwan and will stay in this beautiful shoreline area for a year during her husband's sabbatical at Yale University.*

**Sources:** Bennett, Jessica, "After #MeToo, the Ripple Effect," *The New York Times*, 28 June 2018, <[www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com)>; "Hashtag," *Wikipedia*, 2 Oct. 2019, <[en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org)>; MacKinnon, Catharine A., "Where #MeToo Came From, and Where It's Going," *The Atlantic*, 24 Mar. 2019, <[www.theatlantic.com](http://www.theatlantic.com)>.



## What Is #Hashtag?

People who use social media can generate any hashtag they want. People around the world can search for messages and posts under the same hashtag and connect with people who care about the same subject.

# Sudan Uprising and Social Media

Even if you are not in your country, you can make your voice heard.

*Amgad Ahmedali*

**BEFORE YOU READ:** What is social media? Give some examples. What social media do you use?

For 30 years, Omar al-Bashir was the president of Sudan. He was a dictator who didn't care about the people of Sudan. He only cared about himself and his family and the people that worked with him. Many people struggled. They were hungry, couldn't go to school, or get health care or jobs.

In September 2018, people decided they couldn't live like this anymore. They started protesting in the streets, but the president's people used violence against the protesters. The government tried to make everyone stay inside. But the Sudanese didn't listen. They continued going out and protesting against the president. Every day, there were more people out protesting, and the president kept using violence to suppress them. More than 50 people died, and many more people were injured. People became more angry. They used their phones to record what was happening. They posted pictures and videos on social media, so everyone in the world could know what was happening on the streets of Sudan.

When the government shut down the internet in Sudan, all the Sudanese outside of the country, including me, kept posting and writing online to share everything with the world. We asked the International Criminal Court (ICC) to overrule the president of Sudan. (The ICC is an international court that can prosecute world leaders for war crimes.) Finally, in June 2019, the Sudanese military put the president in prison. The Sudanese people were happy. It was through the actions of local and international Sudanese making their voices heard that led to big political change. Now the military and the protesters are trying to negotiate for the future of Sudan. I feel optimistic that life will get better in my country.



*This photo of a Sudanese protester in Khartoum went viral across the world. It became a symbol of the female leadership in the uprising against Omar al-Bashir. Photo by Lana Haroun on Twitter.*

**AFTER YOU READ:** Describe what you see in the photo above. What does it mean for an event or an image to “go viral.” According to the author, how did Sudanese expatriates keep the movement against al-Bashir going?

*Amgad Ahmedali is a student at the Community Learning Center in Cambridge, MA. She is from Sudan and has lived in the U.S. for 10 years. She has five kids in Cambridge, and is always thinking about her family in her country. She visits them every two years.*





# Protesters in Hong Kong Fight for Democracy

*Carmen Chu*

**BEFORE YOU READ:** What is a protester? Share a time you participated in (or witnessed) a protest.

“Speak the truth, even if your voice shakes.” This quote means a lot to me. I am a U.S. citizen, but recently, I have become proud of the citizens of my home country, Hong Kong. In the past, I didn’t care about the political issues of any country. I always thought political issues were too complicated. Nowadays, that has changed. In June 2019, people in Hong Kong started protesting to make the country more democratic.

The protests started because many people opposed a new bill that would make it easier for

people from Hong Kong to be extradited to China. The protestors were so powerful, they convinced the government to withdraw the bill. But the protestors wanted more. They started calling for more democracy in Hong Kong. News stories about the protests started popping up on U.S. news channels. All of a sudden, the whole world was watching as regular people pressured their government to listen.

Supposedly, police officers were there to protect people. Unfortunately, Hong Kong police officers attacked protesters. They sprayed them with tear gas and blasted them with water cannons. They used rubber bullets. They punished the courageous protesters. Many protesters were arrested and charged with crimes, such as trespassing and rioting.

I admire the protesters in Hong Kong. They sacrificed themselves to speak their truth—“Liberate Hong Kong; revolution of our lives”—with their shaking voices. My family and I will support them by following the news and donating money to organizations that support the protesters. No matter how far away they are, I care about my people and my hometown, and I will show it with my voice and actions.



*Hong Kong protesters brave heavy rain as they march against a law that would allow extradition of Hong Kong residents to China. August 18, 2019. Photo by Studio Incendo, from Wikimedia Commons.*

*Carmen Chu is a student in the Adult Literacy Program at Alameda Reads in Alameda, CA. She immigrated to the U.S. from Hong Kong in 2008. She became a naturalized citizen in 2013. Carmen would like to thank her writing teacher, Cecile, who inspires her.*

**Sources:** <[www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/10/hong-kong-police-are-targeting-press/599815](http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/10/hong-kong-police-are-targeting-press/599815)>; <[www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-49317695](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-49317695)>







*Police fire tear gas at Hong Kong protesters. Members of the media are on the left with helmets and cameras. September 29, 2019. Photo by Studio Incendo, from Wikimedia Commons.*

## What is Happening?

Learn the words *extradition* (noun) and *to extradite* (verb). Try explaining them in your own words. Use them in several sentences.

Look at the photos and read the captions carefully. Describe what you see.

After you read the article and study the photos, tell in your own words the story of what has been happening in Hong Kong.

Have you ever spoken the truth “even if your voice shakes”? Tell or write the story of what happened.

# We Need Basketball Courts

Jia Yang

**BEFORE YOU READ:** Learn and try using the following vocabulary and phrases: *relatively new*, *dynamic*, *roar of the waves*, *rejuvenate*, *vigor*, and *vitality*.

My family lives in Richmond, California. Our city is so big. It has a beautiful bay. It also has many people, including immigrants from all over the

**I wish we had a way for people to play together outside.**

world. But the city seems so quiet. There are no young people outside.

When people come back from school or work, they stay indoors. They do something by themselves. I wish we had a

way for people to play together outside. I wish it were not so hard to find a basketball court. Even when we find one, it is old and shabby. When we look around Marina Bay, we cannot find any area where we can play basketball, although it is a *relatively new* part of the community.

If Marina Bay had a basketball court, it would add a lot of value. Marina Bay would have a better environment. We would not only see the beautiful

beach, but we would also see the *dynamic* crowd. We would hear the *roar of the waves* accompanied by the cheers on the court. This would make the whole area jump!

Richmond is a growing town. We want to *rejuvenate* it. We need more laughter and cheer. We need Richmond to be full of *vigor* and *vitality*. We need more high quality basketball courts. I will send a letter to my city officials. I will tell them that we need more basketball courts.

I will ask my teacher in LEAP to help me write the letter.

**AFTER YOU READ:** According to the author, how would a basketball court improve her community? What ideas do you have about rejuvenating your community?

*Jia Yang comes from China. She is a student at Literacy for Every Adult Program (LEAP) in Richmond, CA. She likes sports. She wants Richmond to be vibrant.*



## So You Want to Make a Change in Your Community?

Things you can do alone	Things you can do with others

Think of a change you would like to make in your community. Make a chart like the one above. Brainstorm a list of steps you could take alone and with others to bring about the change you desire. Which actions do you think would be most effective? Why?

# Children Count

Renee Chaco-Aragon



*Children from the Tohajiilee (Navajo) Reservation in New Mexico play on a new basketball court. Thanks to the efforts of the One Accord Youth Council, the children in this community now also enjoy a new softball field and volleyball court.*

**BEFORE YOU READ:** Describe a time you have stood up for a child or children in your family or in your community. In what ways do children need adults to stand up for them? In what ways can they stand up for themselves?

Standing up and expressing the need for change can be difficult, especially in a community affected by historical trauma. But, being counted is not impossible. Making a noise, having a strong will, and being covered with prayers are ways to bring change. In the summer of 2019, I finally stood up for myself and my community.

## No Playgrounds, No Parks

I was not raised in Tohajiilee, New Mexico, the community I live in now, but my mother was. In 2010, I came here in search of a place to recover from a divorce. I wanted peace. My adjustment to this community was difficult at first, sometimes bringing me to tears, leaving me fearful of the

future, and often lonely. My children and I experienced culture shock. We came from a town that had different things for children to do. However, Tohajiilee had no brightly colored playgrounds, no peaceful picnic areas, and no sidewalks for walking or biking. There was nothing but open prairie. We had to drive over 30 miles to the nearest city to enjoy parks and other recreational activities.

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**I let them know that I was not going to stop trying. Someone would hear me someday.**

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I tried to make the best of our new home. Every evening, I would sit outside and watch the sun set over open land. I began to wonder what it would be like to see children playing basketball among the cedar trees. It got harder for me to ignore the children's isolation and watch them wondering around trying to find something to do.



## The Children's Wish List

I decided to seek the assistance of our leaders. Together, we could figure out how to provide some type of recreational areas for our children. I spent a year going to chapter meetings, where I listened and offered ideas for our community, but nobody wanted to hear me. I would come home from the meetings and through frustrated tears, I would talk to my children and the neighborhood

children. I let them know that I was not going to stop trying. Someone would hear me someday.

I decided to write down their wish list of things

they wanted in the neighborhood. They did not want much. They wanted a safe place to gather – a playground and a basketball court. I decided I would take this wish list to the next chapter meeting. I went to the meeting and nothing happened. I felt defeated. I did not tell the children anything that night. I prayed and fell asleep.

**The time had come for the children to speak. I gave him my children's wish list.**

## Forming an Organization to Make Change

The next morning, there was a knock at my door. It was a local pastor. He introduced himself and said, "Something you said yesterday struck me to my core, and I am guilty of not helping to keep this community together." I told him the truth is hard to hear and hard to say, but it brings hope for change if heard by the right people. The time had

come for the children to speak. I gave him my children's wish list.

Since then we have formed One Accord Youth Council and started seeking donations. My children now have a softball field, bleachers, a volleyball court, and half of a basketball court. My children now have the courage to stand up and be counted. My children now have a voice. My children now have a sense of unity. My children now have hope and a sense of ownership in the community they will one day lead.

*Renee Chaco-Aragon is a student at the Tohajiilee FACE program in Tohajiilee, NM. She is working on obtaining a Bachelor's Degree in Behavioral Science. She is a mother, daughter, sister, aunt, and grandmother, and she is a strong Native woman because of all the obstacles she has faced and overcome, not by her strength but by God's. She also contributed to the "Indigenous Peoples" issue of The Change Agent.*



## What Can You Do?

**What was the problem** Renee faced, and what did she do about it?

**Do some research** online and see if you can find 1) a community organization that focuses on developing local resources, like parks for children, and 2) a local government official who could play a role in supporting the development of parks.

**If you are interested** in improving options for children in your community, write an email to the organization and/or the government official. Or call or visit them. Report back what you learn.

**Read the articles on pp. 33 and 38** to see what other parents have done to advocate for their children.

**THE CHANGE AGENT**  
Start Your Own for Social Justice, Peace, Health, and Hope

Use your online subscription to The Change Agent to access a PDF of the "Indigenous Peoples" issue, published in March 2019. When did Native Americans in the U.S. get the right to vote? See our History of Voting Rights activity and an article by Sheila Mailman on p. 37 of Issue 26, "Democracy in Action."



# Speaking Up about My Housing

Martha Salas



## Rats, Mice, and Trash

I moved to this apartment building in 2012. Over these years, I have seen many things happen in our building, and they are not pleasant and that is NOT acceptable. There were rats and mice, trash on the floor for many days, extremely dirty carpets, and walls that needed painting.

In our building, when we need something repaired, we call the landlord. However, he usually does not answer the phone. If we leave a mes-

sage, he does not usually call back. If the landlord decides to fix something for us, he usually takes three to six months. Many tenants fix things by themselves.

## I Reached Out for Help

One day, I got tired because these things happened very often to us. I decided to ask for help. I went to the Latino Economic Development Center (LEDC). The LEDC helps the neighborhood in many ways. In my case, they helped me bring inspectors from the DC government to see our building. I also contacted the representative from our Advisory Neighborhood Commission, Patience Singleton. These authorities took action in our building. They made sure that the landlord made big changes at our building.

The landlord had never listened to us until now. Even though I am very busy at school, I will continue to speak up about my building because there are other issues to resolve.

*Martha Salas is from Lima, Peru. She is a student at the Carlos Rosario Public Charter School in Washington, DC, where she is learning English so she can help communities speak up.*



## What Can You Do?

**What was the problem** Martha faced, and what did she do about it?

**Do some research** online and see if you can find 1) a community organization that might be able to help with local housing problems, and 2) a local government official. (You may have a city councilor or a neighborhood advisor like Martha has.)

**If you have a problem with your housing**, write an email to the organization and/or the government official. Or call or visit them. Report back to the class about what happens.

**Read the articles on pp. 42-45** to learn about two community organizations fighting for fair housing.

# I Used to Shake My Fist at Injustice, Now I Organize

Judy Burnette

**BEFORE YOU READ:** Discuss the title. What does it tell you about what this article is about?

## They Tried to Evict Us

I have seen a lot of injustice in my life. I read a lot and I understand there is a lot of greed in the world. But it wasn't until an order of nuns and a big real estate company tried to evict me from my home that I learned how to fight back.

In 2008, I was living in Our Lady's Guild House (OLGH). The rooms were affordable and modest, and there was a feeling of community. There were five floors of single rooms for nuns, low- and moderate-income women, and retired

women. There were kitchens on three floors. Some women put their money together and cooked together and ate together.

The building is owned by The Daughters of Mary of the Immaculate Conception. In 2012, a new nun

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**I've worked hard, I've played by the rules, and here I am as an older person getting kicked out. And I thought to myself, "Oh no you don't!"**

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took over. She called herself Mother General. She brought in a new on-site manager, who immediately started intimidating everyone. No one felt comfortable in the common spaces. It seemed as



*Judy Burnette at a protest in front of her apartment building. Photo by Marilyn Humphries.*

though her purpose was to destroy the peace and harmony that this diverse and cordial community of women used to enjoy.

Soon after the new manager was hired, OLGH announced that everyone's rent would go up \$100 per month. This was too much for a lot of the women. Some of the women tried to form a residents association. Their aim was to push back the rent increase. But whenever they met, the new manager would interfere and try to intimidate them. The leaders of the resident association were identified and given eviction notices. The on-site manager was so threatening, people stopped eating together. Instead, they stayed in their private rooms.

Meanwhile, the Mother General formed an unholy alliance with Marc Roos Realtor to abandon the charitable mission of OLGH, drive out long-term residents, and turn the building into a profit-making AirBnB. They even posted on their website that the building was for "professional women" and "women under 50" — clear discrimination, which is against the law. In 2014, we were

informed that, starting in 2018, they would no longer be renewing leases. So people gradually left.

I knew that as an African American single woman living on a fixed income, I was not going to find an apartment that I could afford in Boston. A small group of OLGH women started coming to City Life/Vida Urbana (CLVU) meetings. We also held meetings in one of the common spaces at OLGH. People came. Once management noticed where we were meeting, they closed that room and said it was “under construction.” Not a thing has happened in that room. It’s still closed, and it is still under construction.

## We Fought Back

When our eviction date rolled around, we decided not to leave. We had nowhere to go. This was our home. And we hadn’t done anything wrong. They just wanted to get rid of us and move in higher-paying tenants. Just because you get older doesn’t mean you have to step to the side. I’ve worked hard, I’ve played by the rules, and here I am as an older person getting kicked out. And I thought to myself, “Oh no you don’t!”

When I told my sister about this, she sort of shrugged, and said, “Well, there’s nothing you can do.” She wanted to know how I managed to get into this fix. That’s what a lot of people do. They blame you. Everyone assumes it’s your fault.

At City Life, we learned we could fight the eviction, and we realized we were not alone. Lots of other tenants in the city were fighting to stay in their homes and to keep affordable rents. In August 2018, we held a rally in front of Marc Roos’s office on Commonwealth Avenue. We raised hell! We had a petition that had been signed by 1000 people. They wouldn’t open the door, so we slid all the pages under their door.

This rally was so inspiring for me. I was so surprised to see all these people from CLVU come out and support us. They were holding signs and chanting. “Marc Roos, you can’t hide. We can see your greedy side.” I think it surprised the hell out of him.

CLVU takes public action. We do not plot

behind the scenes to solve a problem. It scares the owners and the real estate companies because they aren’t used to people fighting back. They don’t know how to handle it.

Some of the OLGH women felt like victims. Once you feel like a victim, your energy is gone. CLVU says, “You have power.” We offer strategies for how to fight

back. We have free lawyers and a movement of people who are fighting for the same thing. Most importantly, City Life takes a moral stand: that housing is a human right.

## This Is How It Changed Me

I was not involved in the civil rights movement. I’m shy. I’m from a small town in New Jersey. I never imagined myself standing in front of people and talking about these issues. But now I speak in front of City Life meetings and at rallies. I’m having my first real experiences of solidarity, and so my response to injustice is completely different than it used to be.

Recently, I read that the federal government is cutting off food stamps to 750,000 people. In the past, I would be shaking my fist in anger at all the injustices in the world, but I wouldn’t know what to do. Now I do. Now I understand solidarity. I know that by organizing people, we have power, and we can do something about it.

And now my sister is spreading the word about City Life.

*Judy Burnette now works at City Life/Vida Urbana. She is helping to organize a citywide Tenant Association made up of Section 8 tenants to help them fight for their rights.*

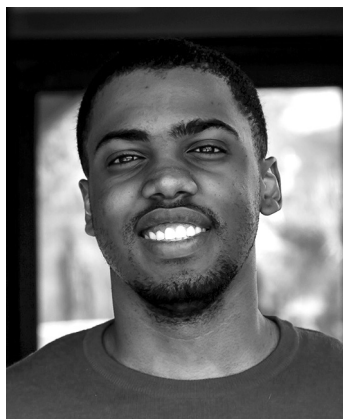
**AFTER YOU READ:** Describe in your own words the change that the author experiences. What form of power does she discover? Have you ever witnessed or experienced similar forms of solidarity?

**Public protest scares the owners and the real estate companies because they aren’t used to people fighting back.**

# The Fight for Fair Housing

*An Interview with Andres Portela by Mireya Escamilla and Kathy Budway*

Andres Portela (right) is the Education, Outreach and Media Coordinator of the Southwest Fair Housing Council (SWFHC) in Tucson, Arizona. SWFHC is a non-profit organization that works to uphold the Fair Housing Act (FHA). The FHA is a federal law that makes it illegal to discriminate against people in any housing transaction based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, disability, and familial status.



## **How did you get interested in fair housing?**

When I was a student at the University of Arizona, my girlfriend, who is now my wife, and I experienced housing discrimination. We went to a few different apartment complexes and we were told, “Because you are not married, we can’t rent to

you.” At the time, we accepted it. We didn’t realize that the law made it illegal to discriminate based on marital status. We were like most people. We didn’t know our rights!

## **Describe your work at SWFHC.**

Now I work with members of the community who may be experiencing housing discrimination. We do workshops at churches and schools about housing rights. If you try to get an apartment, and you are denied because you have children or a disability (or because you’re not married!),

that is illegal. Also, you should not be treated differently based on your race, sex, or religion. If you are, you can come and talk to us, and we will support your case.

## **What are some of the issues that keep people from access to fair and affordable housing?**

The FHA makes housing discrimination illegal, but that doesn’t guarantee you can afford the housing that’s available. Let’s talk about Section 8, for example. We have an eviction crisis in Tucson. There were approximately 13,000 evictions last year. The housing authority in Tucson issues about 5000 vouchers for Section 8. But there are only about 2000 housing units that will accept vouchers! And there is a 7-8 month waiting list to even get the voucher.

## **What do people do in the meantime?**

In the meantime, there is very little protection for them because:

- Arizona does not mandate that housing providers take Section 8 vouchers.
- We have the Arizona Landlord Tenant Act, but it is very favorable to landlords. For example, there is no time frame for how quickly the

## **How the Census Connects to Equity**

The census helps advocates fight for equity. It reveals where the public and private sector need to invest in communities so that there are adequate jobs, schools, and clinics. To achieve equity in society, we need all our communities to have access to these basic resources, so that there is a level playing field.



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).





*The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) created this Fair Housing Door Exhibit to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Fair Housing Act (April 2018). Photo from Wikimedia Commons. Discuss what you see in the photo. What is the symbolism of putting the words on doors?*

landlords should make repairs. So tenants live with mold and no access to heat or hot water.

- There is no agency that is even in charge of enforcing the Arizona Landlord Tenant Act.

Fortunately, we have non-profit organizations like Step Up to Justice, which has pro-bono lawyers that help tenants trying to address these local housing violations.

### **So, what can be done?**

If I were in charge, I would create an office of equity in every city in this country, like they have in San Antonio and Austin. If an Office of Equity sees that the Landlord Tenant Act is not being implemented, they can put pressure on city officials to do something. We also need emergency rental assistance with the focus on keeping tenants in place to curb our eviction crisis. Most people in Arizona are about a paycheck away from getting evicted. If they lose their job or run into unplanned expense, like a hospital bill, they won't be able to make rent.

### **What stories of discrimination do you hear about at SWFHC?**

In the past we saw more explicit bias due to race, etc. But today, we see what we call disparate impact. For example, Arizona has a huge prison population. And when we look at who is being incarcerated, it is mostly people of color, and people are often denied housing on that basis. We also see this with people in domestic violence situations. Let's say I call the cops because my spouse is beat-

ing me. Well, the Arizona nuisance ordinance says, if the cops are called to the property more than four times in a month, you can be evicted.

### **What advice do you have for readers?**

It is our responsibility to join with others to create communities that are inclusive and affordable for everyone. One way to do this is to work with the grassroots organizations that are fighting for fair housing. Another strategy is to vote for legislators who will advocate for us. Also, you should participate in the census, so we make sure our communities are counted. If we don't vote and don't participate in the census, then we will keep getting what we are getting; and what we are getting is not enough. We need to understand the power of our vote and the power of sending back our census forms!

### **AFTER YOU READ:**

1. What is the problem? What does SWFHC do about it?
2. Read the articles on pp. 41-45. What are some strategies people use to fight for fair housing?



*Mireya Escamilla and Kathy Budway are from Pima College Adult Basic Education (PCC).*

# A Person with Autism Finds his Voice

Todd Washburne

**BEFORE YOU READ:** Share what you know about autism. Read the box on p. 47 to learn more.

## Mute, Angry, and Frustrated

While I was a child until my late 30s, I could not communicate with anyone because my level of autism prevents me from speaking coherently. I make strange noises and body gestures that I cannot control. I was *mute*, angry, and frustrated. My parents sent me to a special school because the public schools considered me retarded, unreachable, unteachable, and uncontrollable. I learned nothing in school. I was just holding a pen. All the kids were there for different reasons. Teachers were not trained to help us. I eventually went to high school and then aged out. I soon learned there were not enough services for adults.

## I Found My Voice

Now I use a keyboard to communicate, and it has opened my life. I can focus my thoughts by looking only at the keyboard. It helps to have a *facilitator* with me. She touches my arm or shoulder, and this quiets the *turmoil* in my head. When I learned how to communicate this way, I was *ecstatic* that I found my voice. My life is now filled with conversations. I write stories and articles, many of which are collected in a book called, *My Random Thoughts and Feelings: Speaking Out from Autism*. And my poetry has been published in the local weekly paper, *The World*.

## Speaking Up for Myself and Others

I have had to speak up for myself or others on several occasions, and I have learned to defend myself against being treated rudely. For example, one day, I was putting away groceries at the local food pantry where I volunteer. Another volunteer came over and took my cart. I asked why she was



Todd Washburne (with his mother) testifies at a hearing.

taking it, but she never answered. She then started putting the groceries away. My facilitator always makes me speak up for myself, and so I did. This woman assumed that I was not capable of doing this very *minor* task. I told the woman that I was quite capable of doing this task, and I then took the cart back and put away the groceries.

Teachers at a local elementary school invited me to speak with them about working with children with autism. They asked for my advice about what to do with students when they act up. I shared a suggestion that works for me: when the child starts to act up, hold their hands and have them breathe in and count to four and then breathe out and count to four. This breathing exercise helps me focus my brain, and it quiets the noises in my head.

## Voting and Volunteering

I registered to vote at about age 40. The political news is now more important to me than ever before. I have learned a lot by voting, and I am

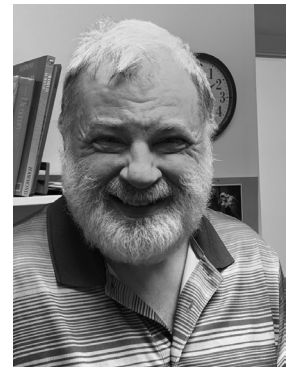
proud to have a say in how the government is run. In addition to voting, I have been involved in politics in other ways. I was a member of the Vermont Autism Task Force, which was created to inform the public about autism. I have attended legislative breakfasts in Montpelier to protest proposed cuts in spending for the disabled. I also went to the Barre mayor's office to discuss autism and the many needed services for autistic adults. I want to help educate the public and key government agencies about autism. I want to show them that autistic people are smart. I have also written to both President Obama and President Trump about climate change, services for the disabled, and many other national and international issues.

I like volunteering and speaking out for several reasons. I want to help people learn about autism. I am giving back to society, which provides me with medical and dental care and financial support that allows me a home and the means to hire people so that I can function in society. Now I am known as an intelligent adult who advocates for himself and others.

#### AFTER YOU READ:

1. Look at the words *mute*, *facilitator*, *turmoil*, *ecstatic*, and *minor*. Can you tell from the context what these words mean?
2. What are some of the ways Todd has used his voice to speak up for himself and others?
3. Share something that you find particularly surprising or interesting about Todd's story.
4. In this story, Todd explains how he *literally* and *figuratively* found his voice. Explain.

Todd Washburne does not have a high school diploma due to a lack of educational opportunities afforded to autistic children when he was growing up. He has taught himself how to read, do math, and study history, and he avidly watches the news. He and his facilitator Gail go to the theater, listen to music, visit art galleries, and do many things in the community. He is a student at Central Vermont Adult Basic Education in Barre, VT.



## What Is Autism?

Autism, or autism spectrum disorder (ASD), refers to a broad range of conditions characterized by challenges with social skills, repetitive behaviors, speech and nonverbal communication. According to the Centers for Disease Control, autism affects an estimated 1 in 59 children in the United States today.

We know that there is not one autism but many subtypes, most influenced by a combination of genetic and environmental factors. Because autism is a spectrum disorder, each person with autism has a distinct set of strengths and challenges. The ways in which people with autism learn, think and problem-solve can range from highly skilled to severely challenged. Some people with ASD may require significant support in their daily lives, while others may need less support and, in some cases, live entirely independently.

<[www.autismspeaks.org](http://www.autismspeaks.org)>



# Family Meetings

Lily Wang

**BEFORE YOU READ:** How does your family make decisions? Is there a hierarchy in your family? If so, describe it.

## A Chinese Tradition

Most of the families in China have a tradition of discussing anything important together in a meeting. I have a big family in China with 11 people: my parents have three daughters, three sons-in-law, two grandsons, and one granddaughter.

Everyone in the family expresses their opinions in the family meeting. Sometimes in a family, there is a hierarchy. First, the oldest child says what he or she is thinking. The last person who makes a speech is almost always the father. Finally, the father will make the decision.

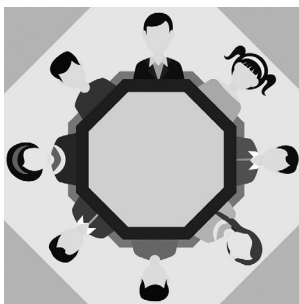
## Staying Connected by Video Call

I am the oldest sister in my family. As an adult, I lived in Beijing, and my parents lived in another city, which was a long way from Beijing. My two sisters lived in the same city as my parents. They often visited my parents and took care of

them. Although I was rarely present for family meetings, I would tell my father about my opinion by video call. My father always shared my ideas with other family members. If someone did not agree with my opinion,

the family meeting would take a break and call me to ask my feelings and give me a chance to express them again. Finally, my father would announce the final decision of this meeting.

These family meetings taught me about ne-



gotiation. I learned that it is possible to find a solution by discussing a problem together. When I worked as chief editor in the publishing industry for over 10 years in China, this model helped me resolve many problems.

If something is going on with my family in China, we still have a family meeting. My mother always

tells everyone that it is very important to hear my opinion because I am the oldest daughter of my family. I love my family and miss them, and I have a deep respect that they still need my thoughts and ideas from so far away.

## AFTER YOU READ:

1. Describe the problem-solving model that Lily's family uses. Has she used this model in other parts of her life?
2. Describe a problem-solving model in your family. How might this model be helpful or not helpful in other parts of life, such as in politics or in the workplace?
3. Read the article on the next page. How does that writer solve a problem in her family?
4. Notice how you make the plural of "son-in-law" (first paragraph). Compare it to how you make the plural of "grandson."

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**I learned that  
it is possible to  
find a solution  
by discussing a  
problem together.**

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*Lily Wang is an immigrant from China, and she has been living in Boston for less than a year. She is a student at the Community Learning Center in Cambridge, MA. Her wish is to be able to write a book introducing the real United States to Chinese immigrants. She would also like to translate U.S. literature into Chinese.*



# My Family Heard My Voice

*Meriem Asri*

**BEFORE YOU READ:** Think about the phrase “I stood up for myself.” What does it mean? Share a time you stood up for yourself.

Let me share with you how I made my voice heard in my family. When I won the Diversity Lottery Visa, no one in my family wanted me to leave Morocco and go to the United States alone. I explained to them that it would be good for me to go to the U.S. I would learn a new culture and new language, and I would have a better life and career.

At first, my family tried to convince me that I would have similar opportunities in Morocco. But I stood up for myself, and I said no. I gave them an example of my friend Sofia who won the Diversity Visa Lottery before, and now she is doing great in Texas. She became a nurse after four years of hard work. My family was amazed by this story and actually started listening to my plans. I told them that I would follow similar steps as my friend Sofia. I would learn English, and then I would go

**“Each time a woman stands up for herself, without knowing it and possibly without claiming it, she stands up for all women.”**

– Maya Angelou



to school in Information Technology (IT). My plan is to work for one of the biggest IT companies in Boston.

When they saw how motivated and serious I was, they eventually agreed with my plan. To sum up, I want everyone to know that I am a hard-working young lady and if I have something that I want to achieve in my life, no one can stop me, not even my own family. My family once disagreed with me, but now they are really proud of me.

## Making an Argument? Use Evidence!

“Evidence is anything that you see, hear, or read that causes you to believe that something is true or has really happened.” – <thefreedictionary.com>

When you are reading, notice what evidence a writer is using to prove his or her point. Check the sources for the evidence. Are the sources credible?

When you are writing, make sure to use evidence to prove your point. Cite your sources.

### AFTER YOU READ:

1. What are some strategies Meriem used to convince her family that she should come to the U.S.? What strategies of persuasion do you use when you are making an argument for something?
2. Read about evidence in the box below. Write a persuasive paragraph (about any topic) that uses evidence.
3. Discuss the quote by Maya Angelou above and relate it to the essay by Meriem Asri.

*Meriem Asri is a student at Community Learning Center of Cambridge, MA. She is from Morocco and has been in the U.S. for 1.5 years. She works hard and hopes to use her degree in technology to find work in the U.S.*



# Speak Out about What Matters

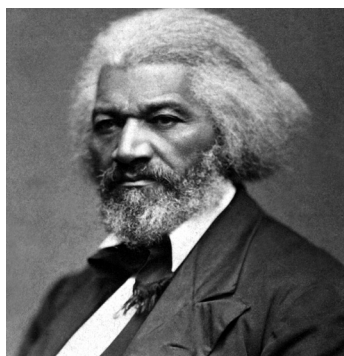
Hannah Dodge

## BEFORE YOU READ:

1. Share what you know about the people in the pictures below. What did they speak up about?
2. Note that LGBTQ stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer. People who are transgender or queer may not identify with a certain gender (male or female) and/or they may not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth.

The quote “Speak the truth, even if your voice shakes” means to stand up for what you believe in (even if things could go wrong or you’re scared to speak up about it).

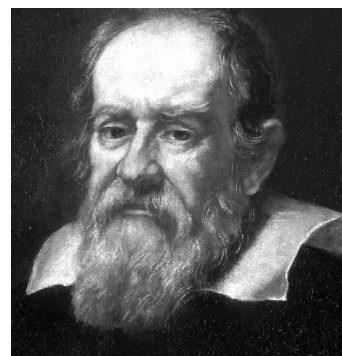
Throughout history, many have spoken up about the truth and made a difference in the world. Take the famous abolitionist, Frederick Douglass, who spoke up about the rights of enslaved people. Or the famous suffragist, Susan B. Anthony, who spoke up about women’s voting rights. Going way back in history, there was the famous astronomer Galileo Galilei who discovered the Earth revolves around the sun, rather than vice-versa. He spoke up about it, but no one believed him. He ended up under house arrest for committing heresy because the church thought the Earth was the center of the world and did not move.



Frederick Douglass



Susan B. Anthony



Galileo Galelei

One time, I spoke up about an issue that matters to me. I wrote a letter to the editor of my local paper about how we need to protect the voting rights of LGBTQ people. (See next page.) In the letter, I wrote about how when you register to vote, you are required to identify your gender. If you are transgender, your gender might not match what you put on your voter registration card, and so you might not be allowed to vote.

My letter was published in the *Ellsworth American* newspaper, which covers my home county in Maine. Writing this letter was a small step toward making a difference about something that I think is important. It made me feel vulnerable and nervous to see my letter published in the newspaper. It was scary, and I wasn’t sure what would come of it, but it turned out all right.

## AFTER YOU READ:

1. Did you ever “speak the truth, even if your voice shook”? How did it turn out for you?
2. Read Hannah’s letter on the next page.
3. What other groups (besides African Americans and women) have had to fight for voting rights? How did they do it?

**Source:** <[www.aclu.org/blog/lgbt-rights/transgender-rights/voting-rights-lgbt-rights-fight](http://www.aclu.org/blog/lgbt-rights/transgender-rights/voting-rights-lgbt-rights-fight)>



## The Ellsworth American.

Dear Editor:

Did you know LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning and other) people are paid less than cisgender (the gender you were born with) heterosexual people? Did you know that the current administration's position on transgender people in the military is discriminatory? Did you know that, according to Bernie Sanders, "Today LGBTQ+ people are more than 4.5 percent of our population but only hold 0.1 percent of elected offices?"

If these things bother and/or disturb you, there is one thing you can do—vote (especially if you are between the ages of 18 and 24)! People in this age group tend not to vote and do not realize they have the power to make changes affecting the LGBTQ+ community in the United States.

It is difficult for LGBTQ+ people to register to vote in some states because applicants are required to identify their gender status. While states like Maine do not require gender identification on their registration application, states like New Jersey do. If LGBTQ+ citizens in New Jersey attempt to complete the voter application, they're stopped in their tracks by question number 11 (there are only two boxes to check—male or female.) This is discouraging to LGBTQ+ citizens because their gender status is not represented.

The solution to this problem is to eliminate the gender question altogether. More people would vote and all segments of our society would be represented in the next state and national elections.

—Hannah Dodge, Franklin, Maine

**Source:** <<https://twitter.com/BernieSanders/status/1113178745244971010>>.

**Reprinted from:** <[www.ellsworthamerican.com/opinions/letters-to-the-editor/lgbtq-voting-rights/#](http://www.ellsworthamerican.com/opinions/letters-to-the-editor/lgbtq-voting-rights/#)>



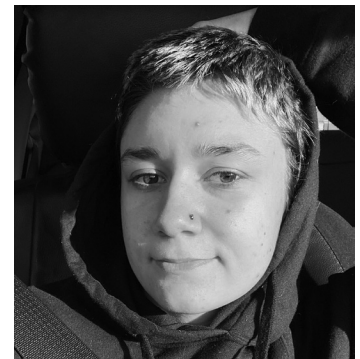
### How Mighty is the Pen?

**There is a saying** that “the pen is mightier than the sword.” What does this quote mean to you? Discuss.

**Read some letters** to the editor published in your local newspaper. Identify a few qualities that make a letter effective.

**Write your own letter** to the editor and consider submitting it to your local newspaper.

*Hannah Dodge is a student at RSU 24 Adult Education in Sullivan, Maine. She is a bisexual girl who is just trying to make a positive difference in this crazy world. And she loves cows!*



Hannah Dodge

# An Advocate for Literacy

Lou Pinkoff

**BEFORE YOU READ:** What does it mean to be an “advocate” (noun, *pronounced ad-ve-kit*) and “to advocate” (verb, *pronounced ad-ve-kate*)? Try using the words in different sentences.

I try to be an advocate for adult literacy. Education means a lot to me. If I had a better education when I was young, I would have been able to make better choices in my life. It’s not too late for me to get an education now and to advocate for adult literacy so that others in my community can take classes too.

## Speaking Up about Adult Literacy

Twice in the past, I have spoken with elected officials. One was a county board member, and the other was a state legislator. I had this opportunity because I have been an advocate for Alameda Reads and their programs. How did I become an

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**If I want what I never had, I have to do what I never did.**

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advocate? I just started speaking at different types of meetings, and it grew from there.

What is surprising to me is that after I have spoken in public meetings, people have come up to me to talk about adult literacy. They are looking for classes. I have suggested programs, and some of them have gone to the places I recommended.

Another way I advocate for adult learners is that I speak to tutors in training. I share with them my experiences as a learner. I hope it has been helpful to them. Being an advocate is easy for me, for I know it has helped me.

## Persisting Despite Discouragement

I understand that learning is a process, so I just keep chipping away at it. Sometimes it is easy, and

sometimes it is hard. Now I can write notes to myself, read them a day or two later, and know what I wanted to remember. In the past I could not understand what I wrote. My spelling and writing were so bad I could not make sense of it. Now

my spelling has improved, and my writing skills have come a long way, so I know it can be done.

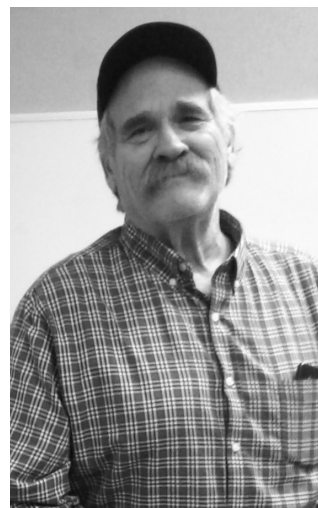
Sometimes I feel discouraged, and I wonder why I keep trying, but that feeling passes fast. I just have to keep going, for I understand if I want what I never had, I have to do what I never did.

## AFTER YOU READ:

1. What are two ways Lou advocates for adult literacy?
2. What helps him persist?

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*Lou Pinkoff is a student at Alameda Reads in Alameda, CA. He is 66 years old and has been with Alameda Reads for 11 years. He is glad he got past his fears of others knowing about his reading and writing skills.*



## Be an Advocate in Your State

Contact your state adult education organization and find out how adult education is funded in your area. Ask if there are ways you can support. Write a letter or call your state representative. Read the article on the next page to learn about more training.

# Learn How to Be an Advocate

Ana Chavarin

**BEFORE YOU READ:** What is a legislator? Share what you know about what legislators do. If you were going to travel to Washington, DC, to speak to your legislator about funding for adult education, what would you want him or her to know?

When I was an adult basic education student at Pima Community College, I took the Adult Education Ambassador training. I learned how to advocate for funding for adult education. After my training, I took a trip to Washington, DC, to meet with legislators.

This trip to DC was very important to me for several reasons. First, I was representing other students like me. We have worked so hard to manage time and energy to be head of household and also go to school and pursue an education. I wanted to tell my story (and the stories of people like me) to our elected officials in DC. If they see our faces and hear our stories, they learn that we are more than just a line in the budget.

Second, as immigrants and as working parents, we have much to give to our new country, the United States. We want to better our lives and give back to the community. I wanted to make sure that the elected officials in DC looked at us as an investment and not as a burden to our economy. When congresspeople invest in education, they are investing in the whole community.

**AFTER YOU READ:** Write a letter to your state or federal representative. Tell your adult education story. Explain why funding for adult education is “an investment and not a burden to our economy.”

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*Ana Chavarin is a former adult basic education student at Pima Community College in Tucson, AZ. In 2019, she finished her Associate's degree at Pima Community College and has transferred to the University of Arizona to pursue a Bachelor's degree in Psychology. She works as a community organizer with the Interfaith Council, and she still works at her original night-time job from when she came to Tucson in 2003 — cleaning offices.*



Ana Chavarin (right) with other advocates (left) and Arizona federal representative, Tom O'Halleran, at the Capitol in Washington, DC.

## Attend the Training!

Every year at COABE, there is a full-day training for adult education students and teachers about how to be an Adult Education Ambassador. You learn background information about adult education, how to tell your story, public speaking skills, and how to plan and carry out meetings with elected officials. Students in 20 states have learned how to be “ambassadors” and have taken the training back to their state to teach others.

Are you interested in getting trained as an Adult Education Ambassador? Visit [coabe.org/student-ambassador](http://coabe.org/student-ambassador).



# Standing Up for Workers' Rights

Zinash Fereja

## BEFORE YOU READ:

1. What workplace rights do we have in the U.S.? How do you think people won those rights?
2. What workplace rights do people have in your country of origin? How did people win them? How do they compare to U.S. labor rights?

## In the U.S.

I like that U.S. workers have rights in the workplace. If your employer discriminates against you, you can protect yourself under the U.S. labor law.

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**In the U.S., if your employer discriminates against you, you can protect yourself under the U.S. labor law.**

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We have these rights in the U.S. because of the labor movement, which has a long history of fighting for protections for U.S. workers. For example, in 1834 mill girls in Lowell went on strike to protest

wage cuts. In 1890, the carpenters union went on strike for the eight-hour day. In 1903, the labor organizer "Mother Jones" led children in a march from Philadelphia to New York. They wanted better child labor laws.

The fight for a fair workplace continues to this day. In 2009, President Barack Obama signed a law that said working women could sue over pay discrimination. Recently, people have fought for a higher minimum wage. Over time, workers have won many things, including health and safety laws, higher wages, and other protections.

## And in Ethiopia

In Ethiopia, where I am from, we have some labor laws, but most of them have failed. For example, men and women are equal under Ethiopian law, but women still face discrimination in the workplace. Women cannot get equal opportunities. They don't have equal access to education and scholarships, and it's hard for them to advance in their careers. Women experience sexual harassment at work, but the law does not punish the men who are responsible. In some cases, if a woman wants a better job, she has to satisfy her boss's sexual interest, and that is really embarrassing for women in the workplace.

Since I grew up in a family business, I did not have personal experience of discrimination. But my women friends in Ethiopia have shared their stories with me, and I have read about the problem. Fortunately, the current Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Dr. Abiy Ahmed, is taking the country in the right direction. For example, in his current cabinet, 50% of ministers are women, and

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**Men and women are equal under Ethiopian law, but women still face discrimination in the workplace.**

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*Ethiopia supports women entrepreneurs by giving them loans and training. Photo: World Bank.*



Photograph shows Mother Jones with children and adults beginning their walk from Philadelphia to New York, to publicize the conditions of children working in textile mills (1903). Source: Library of Congress.

Sahle-Work Zewde is the first female president of Ethiopia. Many Ethiopian people are fighting for women's rights at work and in society, and I feel that, over time, we can establish more freedom for women in Ethiopia.

In conclusion, discrimination in the workplace not only hurts the person who has been targeted, but it hurts the whole society. People in the U.S. and in Ethiopia are still fighting for workers' rights.

**AFTER YOU READ:** According to the author, what are some of the ways people fight for workplace rights?

**Source:** <[afclcio.org/about-us/history](http://afclcio.org/about-us/history)>

Zinash Fereja is a student at the Community Learning Center in Cambridge, MA. She is married, has two beautiful children, and is interested in arts and design.



## Take It Further

**After reading** the article and the caption under the photo on p. 54, discuss the possible benefits (and limits) of supporting women entrepreneurs. How might it work as a strategy for addressing discrimination against women in the workplace?

**Learn more** about Mother Jones and the march to New York. Watch this 5-minute video about child labor in Philadelphia in the early 1900s: <[vimeo.com/321012568](https://vimeo.com/321012568)>.

**Share a time** you have stood up for your rights on the job. Were you by yourself or with others? What happened? (See the "Good Jobs..." issue of *The Change Agent*.)

## Write for The Change Agent

### CALL FOR ARTICLES

**YOU MUST:** Include contact information in *all* articles and emails. *Please cite sources.*

**THEME:** “Water.” *The Change Agent* is looking for stories by adult learners on the following:

- Share a memory or a special time that involves water.
- Write about your relationship with water in your country of origin compared to in the U.S.
- What is important about water – for our health & the health of our communities and the planet?
- Research who or what are the biggest consumers of water in your area or in the U.S. Share what you learn. What do you think about it?
- What do you do in your life and in your community to protect and conserve water?
- Discuss bottled water. Do you drink bottled water? Why or why not? What is the recent history of bottled water? Where does it come from? How does it affect the environment? What happens during the bottling process? Is it safe? How do you know?
- Discuss your tap water. Who owns it? Where does it come from? How is it processed? Is it safe? How do you know? What can you do to make your tap water safer?
- When water is contaminated, who pays for it to get cleaned up? Who absorbs the consequences of contamination? Have you ever lived downstream from a major polluter? What happened?
- Share a story of a contaminated body of water that got cleaned up. Who advocated for it to be cleaned up? How did they do it?
- Write (from your own experience or by researching) about a key current event involving water, such as any of the below. Please include some discussion about what people are doing in response to these issues:
  - the Great Pacific Garbage Patch (a vortex of plastic & other garbage in the Pacific Ocean)
  - Climate-change-related problems, including rising oceans, melting ice caps, droughts, flooding, and powerful storms
  - The lead (and other contaminants) in the water in Flint, Michigan, and other locations
- Write (from your own experience or by researching) about the Water Protectors, Extinction Rebellion, or some other group that is organizing for clean water
- Should water be privatized – i.e., privately owned and marketed to consumers? Or is it part of the public good – like the air we breathe? Explain.
- Discuss recent changes to the law that affect our water supply. What sorts of laws would you support when it comes to water pollution?

**DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSIONS:** May 4, 2020. *Make sure to include contact information.* Send to: [cpeters@worlded.org](mailto:cpeters@worlded.org). Learn more at: [changeagent.nelrc.org/write-for-us](http://changeagent.nelrc.org/write-for-us).

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