

CENSUS + FOURTH ESTATE = POWER TO THE PEOPLE

California s Native Population Push for Full Count

by Rose Davis

The Census is more than just counting noses. It is an empowering tool to give power to the citizens. The Founders of this fledgling nation had a bold and ambitious plan to empower the people over their new government. Jefferson, Madison and the Founders enshrined the Census in the Constitution. The plan was to count every person living in the newly created United States of America, and to use that count to determine representation in the Congress (a concept inspired by the Kayanerenko:wa.) They accomplished that goal in 1790 and our country has every 10 years since then.

This invention in our Constitution marked a turning point in world history. Previously censuses had been used mainly to tax or confiscate property or to conscript youth into military service. The genius of the founders was taking a tool of government and making it a tool of political empowerment for the governed over their government.

Censuses of American Indians

This purpose has been overshadowed in today's world with its emphasis on corporate wealth and finance. The tenuous and complex relationship with the US government and our Native population deems education and understanding critical to the outcome of the census as it relates to tradition, sovereignty and trust in a community dealing with the psychological consequences of domination and colonization.

Prior to 1900, few Indians are included in the decennial federal census. Indians are not identified in the 1790-1840 censuses. In 1860, Indians living in the general population are identified for the first time. Nearly all of the 1890 census schedules were destroyed as a result of the fire at the Department of Commerce in 1921.

Beginning with the 1900 census, Indians are enumerated on reservations as well as in the general population.

1907 Census of Seminole County, Oklahoma. This census was taken pursuant to a presidential directive ordering a census of the population of Indian Territory and the Territory of Oklahoma prior to their admittance to the Union as the State of Oklahoma. Only the schedules for Seminole County, in what was then Indian Territory, survive. Enumerators were to identify Indians by "In" in the color or race column. There is no name index for this census.

As with many other segments of the population, Native Americans are considered "hard-to-count" – a term used for those groups of people where the rate of initial self-response to the Census was below 73% in the 2010 Census. That status stems from

various factors including income levels, geographical distribution, language diversity, and of course, their complicated relationship with the federal government.

The 2020 count, which begins Thursday, March 12, will be additionally complicated by its heavy reliance on a digital questionnaire, which requires internet infrastructure that is not as readily available in rural parts of the state and on reservations. There are ten American Indian territories in New York for example.

There's much at stake if there's an undercount. Census data determines the re-drawing of federal, state, and local electoral districts and the number of seats allocated in the House of Representatives, and it forms the basis for the distributions of many billions of dollars in federal aid for everything from infrastructure projects to education and healthcare services. Inaccurate data could mean underfunding of programs for the most undeserved populations, including food stamps and housing vouchers.

In 2010, nationwide, American Indians and Alaska Natives living on reservations were undercounted by 4.9%; for those living outside of reservations, the statistical error was close to zero, according to U.S. Census Bureau estimates from 2012. But that overall undercount was far higher than for other populations. There was a 2.1% undercount of the black population and 1.5% for Hispanics, while non-Hispanic whites were overcounted by 0.8%, according to the Census Bureau.

The Census Bureau has acknowledged the challenges of reaching Native Americans and has been working to ensure an accurate count. "With the Native American community, that's something we work on throughout the decade," said Jeff Behler, director for the U.S. Census Bureau's New York Regional Office.

Some of the highest rates of "hard-to-count" populations have been identified in our region, which include various ethnic groups, immigrants, refugees, military veterans, the LGBTQ community, seniors, young children, individuals and families experiencing homelessness, and residents of traditionally disadvantaged neighborhoods.

TOP 3 REASONS WHY COMPLETING THE 2020 CENSUS IS CRUCIAL FOR OUR COMMUNITY:

Participation is vitally important because the data collected is used to allocate funding for our communities, ensure public safety, and plan new schools and hospitals.

Due to San Diego County having high rates of "hard-to-count" populations, the nonpartisan Count Me 2020 Coalition was formed. This network of community groups have been working for over a year as the "on the ground" catalysts to lift the key barriers to Census participation. These are the most trusted messengers and understand it is essential that every person is counted.

The 2020 Census is also the first 'digital' Census for all U.S. households. In the past, only a small part of the population responded online, but this is the first time that all households nationwide will be able to respond to the 2020 Census questionnaire online. Individuals can respond using their own computers, tablets or other devices or they can

visit a wi-fi enabled kiosk designed for easy access for self-reporting -- these kiosks will be in community run assistance centers hosted by the Count Me 2020 Coalition members throughout the entire county. Individuals can drop in to ask questions and get the support they need to complete the Census.

It is for these reasons that a determined effort is being made by the Native Media, groups to get the word out to the "Hard to Count" population in San Diego and elsewhere. Ethnic Media Services has been at the forefront of this effort and guided by Founder, Sandy Close.

A Roundtable event Conversation Before the Count at the Pala Casino Resort took place March 9. Moderated by Mark Trahant, Indian Country Today, Editor. The event brought together Jessica Imotichey, US Bureau of Census Lycia Maddocks, National Congress of American Indians, Jordan Bennett-Begay, Indian Country Today Kayla Olvera Hilario Tribal Affairs Specialist CA Complete Count-Census 2020. It was a multi-media event recorded and documented by First Nations Experience.

The main focus and emphasis of all concerned is alerting the community that there is much at stake if there's an undercount. Census data determines the redrawing of federal, state, and local electoral districts and the number of seats states are allocated in the House of Representatives, and it forms the basis for the distributions of many billions of dollars in federal aid for everything from infrastructure projects to education and healthcare services. The most vulnerable populations would be underfunded as a result of inaccurate data including food stamps and housing vouchers.

The Native Media event at Pala was intense and stimulating. The participants deftly walked between two worlds while attending to the business at hand. Perhaps this continued effort will offer optimism to our Elders, Wisdom Keepers and Traditionalists who have been waiting in the wings of the world stage for a sign from the Ancestors to amplify and manifest the indigenous intelligence, spiritual strength and wisdom necessary to provide healing for a wounded universe.