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## We the undercounted

Transcending distrust to achieve a complete census

BY VICTORIA DAVIS

MARCH 12, 2020

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### TRENDING

#### Homeless in a pandemic

"With schools being closed it's difficult for families who are working, especially being homeless," says Melissa Sorensen, executive director of social services for the Salvation Army. "It's really making it hard for folks to have a place to go."

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#### Open for takeout!

This is an ongoing list of area restaurants continuing to serve food and drink via takeout, delivery, and curbside pickup – and various special procedures. We will continue to update the list.

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VICTORIA DAVIS

**Members of Mt. Zion Baptist Church pledge on Feb. 26 to participate in the 2020 census and help spread the word of its importance to friends and family.**

Baltazar De Anda Santana moved from Guadalajara, Mexico to the U.S. in 2000, making his way to Madison in 2008. He quickly made a mark on his new community, founding, in 2010, the Latino Academy of Workforce Development, which helps hundreds of Latinx students every

## Crisis mode

Prepare for the long haul. Madison and Dane County say extreme measures have been taken to limit the spread of the coronavirus. After the immediate crisis, local governments will reckon with the financial consequences.

## Who's got the right?

Have you heard of Marsy's Law? Voters will decide April 7 whether "additional rights" for crime victims should be added to the Wisconsin constitution.

## Gutted

So much has happened since March 11. And it changes every day.

year obtain their GEDs and train for jobs. That same year, the U.S. government was conducting its census count. Santana did not fill out the survey.

“I didn’t have documents, so I didn’t want to take any chances in letting the government know where I was,” says Santana. He also didn’t have a clue about the relevance of the census.

“I was never told about its importance or how it benefited me,” he says. “When you are emigrating from Mexico, your first priority is to get a job and make money so you can find a place in this country for yourself. We aren’t worried about community engagement or being counted, especially if we’re undocumented.”

But just 10 years later, Santana is in a very different place. In August, after living in the U.S. for almost two decades as an undocumented immigrant, he became a U.S. citizen. He is now part of the city’s [Complete Count Committee](#), a broad coalition working to make sure immigrant communities and other historically undercounted groups are included in the 2020 census, which launches April 1 and runs through July.



LAWD FACEBOOK

**Baltazar De Anda Santana, a citizen since August, understands the fear some immigrants have about filling out the census: “I didn’t have documents, so I didn’t want to take any chances in letting the government know where I was.”**

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The stakes are high, as Mayor Satya Rhodes Conway told the committee at a Feb. 17 meeting. “A complete count is vitally important to ensure that Madison receives its fair share of funding to

support critical services,” said Rhodes-Conway. “Dozens of federal and state funding streams are allocated based on the results of the census, and these add up to about \$2,000 per year, per person.”

If Madison’s population were undercounted by just 10 percent, the city would lose \$500 million over the next decade. Said Rhodes Conway bluntly: “We can’t afford that.”

**The United States** has conducted a census every 10 years since 1790. Under federal law, permanent and temporary residents of the U.S., its five territories (Puerto Rico, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam and the U.S. Virgin Islands) as well as the District of Columbia, are required to fill out the census, which consists of a series of questions about age, gender, ethnicity and the number of household members. Data derived from the census determines not just government funding, but representation in Congress.

By April 1, every home will receive an invitation to participate in the 2020 census; for the first time, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, **people can respond** to the survey online, by phone or by mail.

Beginning in May, census workers will also begin going door to door to collect information from people who have not responded. Many of these workers will be hampered by the public’s lack of understanding of how the census benefits residents, and the fear and distrust of a governmental entity seeking personal information. The two problems are related; not enough people know that, for example, it’s illegal for the U.S. Census Bureau to make public any personal, identifiable information gained through the census. The questions are confidential and the law makes clear that it can’t be used against any participants. Still, it’s a hard sell to undocumented immigrants who are worried about being discovered, homeless individuals who don’t want the government to know where they sleep and families housing a few too many people in their apartment.

The sell is even harder this time around, given the ramped-up rhetoric around immigration and the Trump administration’s push, last summer, to add a question on citizenship to the 2020

census. While this motion has been officially rejected, the Census Bureau is still paying for it, in the form of \$500 million worth of ads reassuring people that it's safe to participate in the census.

As a member of the Complete Count Committee, Santana is doing what he can to spread the word about the census at the Latino Academy of Workforce Development. With so many immigrant students, Santana doesn't know how many are undocumented, and he doesn't ask. Santana respects his students' right to privacy and their right to make their own decisions.

"My job is not to convince students to fill out the form," says Santana. "My job is to present the information and provide the right tools so students can make an educated decision about the census for themselves."

Students and staff at the school are also doing some of the outreach. One day in late February, Rocio Barrancas and Rosario Angulo went from room to room at the school, carrying a large poster board reading "Complete Your 2020 Census"; their goal was to teach adult students about the importance of census participation.

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VICTORIA DAVIS PHOTOS

**Rocio Barrancas (above), a student at the Latino Academy of Workforce Development, and Rosario Angulo (below right), a staffer, visit classrooms to talk about the relevance of the census.**

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"I've had many friends avoid taking the census, myself included, because we didn't even know what it was for many years," says Barrancas, a student. "I've already learned so much about why census participation is important from giving these presentations with Rosario."

"Our community trusts this academy," adds Angulo, special projects coordinator at the school. "If they learn more about the census in a language they understand from people they relate to, instead of those in the government, maybe they'll feel more confident about filling out the

forms.”

**According to** the U.S. Census Bureau, historically undercounted communities in the census include people who are Hispanic or Latinx, African Americans, Hmong (and those with other Asian heritages) and people who are homeless; children under the age of five are also historically undercounted. According to an *Isthmus* review of [federal census data from 2010](#), just under 28 percent of Madison’s population lives within at least one of these communities, not including homeless individuals.

The barriers to participation for these communities are nuanced. Corinda Rainey-Moore, who sits on census committees at the city, county and state levels, says that many African Americans are not inclined to open up about family details.

“The census requires you to share personal info and, typically, African Americans are raised to not share personal information with folks outside the home and outside the culture,” says Rainey-Moore, who is the community outreach and engagement manager for Kids Forward, a research and advocacy organization focusing on families and children. “That’s how I was raised, and I’m also someone who never used to fill out the census. It’s a habit that’s ingrained in us.”

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VICTORIA DAVIS

**Corinda Rainey-Moore (at podium), Rep. Shelia Stubbs (bottom, left) and members of the Mt. Zion Baptist Church kick off census outreach efforts to members of the African American community.**

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In 2012, the Census Bureau estimated [that two percent of African Americans](#) were undercounted during the 2010 Census, and more than 10 in every 100 black men were

undercounted. When adults are not counted, neither are children, points out Rainey-Moore. In the 2010 Census, children under five were missed by the millions, according to Becky Schigiel, partnership specialist with the U.S. Census Bureau.

“You can’t focus on kids 0-5 without focusing on their parents, because that’s who’s going to be filling out the forms,” says Rainey-Moore. “It’s why we’re working with African American churches like Mount Zion, because many of those parents are members of the congregation. A lot of African Americans tend to listen to their faith leaders and support any initiative the pastor takes on.”

Peng Her, associate director of the Hmong Institute, an organization focused on preserving and promoting Hmong heritage, also describes a reticence in his community around the census that is primarily cultural.

“Our people saved the lives of many U.S. soldiers and yet there were very few Americans who knew about our community,” says Her, noting how many Hmong were abandoned by the U.S. government after assisting American troops in the Vietnam War. “In fact, those who were fortunate enough to make it to the U.S. after fleeing Vietnam faced a lot of the same adversity Syrian refugees face today. Combine that with the 2001 Patriot Act that labeled us as terrorists, and it has had a profound impact on how we view authority.”

That is why, says Her, people of color have to be involved in educating people within their own communities. “You can’t send Caucasians with clipboards and a badge into neighborhoods that are majority Latinx, Hmong or African American and expect the doors to open.”

Ben Zellers, a planner with the city who serves as staff to the Complete Count Committee, concurs.

“The census is a bigger issue for communities of color and immigrant families, because there’s been a lot of mistrust of the government and the current political environment doesn’t help that,” says Zellers. “The questions are personal and it creates more questions in people’s minds about whether or not the census is undertaken for political purposes, and whether or not that

data will be used against them.”

**Gov. Tony Evers** tried to direct \$1 million in his last budget to state census outreach efforts, but the Republican-controlled budget committee **failed to act on the funding**, effectively killing it. The city of Madison, however, has allocated \$150,000 for efforts to get the word out about the census.

Some \$46,000 has been set aside to print posters and flyers, prepare inserts for city water and property tax bills and for other public relations efforts. The other \$102,000 is being distributed to seven community groups who are doing frontline outreach, including Centro Hispano, The Hmong Institute, Rebalanced Life-Wellness Association, Latino Chamber of Commerce, Northside Planning Council, Latino Academy of Workforce Development, and Freedom, Inc.

“City staff is partnering with local voices, trusted by these communities, to carry out the message about the importance of the census,” says Zellers. “People hearing about the census from those they know and who are active in their neighborhoods every day and who aren’t from the city, state or federal government makes a big difference for a lot of people.”

Santana’s students are not only doing in-school education, but visiting Latinx restaurants and grocery stores in Madison — La Concha, La Rosita Latina Grocery Store and Pancheros — to pass out Spanish-language census flyers and brochures. Santana says the academy will also have computers available for students and community members to use to fill out the census and provide staff members to help answer any questions participants might have.

“I think it’s important to be a leader in the community, but what’s most important is to be able to talk to your friend, who you’ve known for so long,” adds Brenda Gonzales, a member of the

**Peng Her: “You can’t send Caucasians with clipboards and a badge into neighborhoods that are majority Latinx, Hmong or African American and expect the doors to open.”**

South Madison Partnership and city Census Committee who is also helping do outreach to the Latinx community. “That’s how they know you’re bringing them true, concrete information with no other gain than making sure they have the representation they need.”

The paper and online versions of the census have a Spanish and English option, and those who wish to take the census over the phone can choose from 12 languages, ranging from Korean to Tagalog. But Hmong is not an option.

“It sends this message that it doesn’t really matter if we fill out the census,” says Her. But the Hmong institute, partnering with other Hmong community members like Sheesenpooyw Moua at Freedom Inc, are making efforts to ensure as many Hmong are counted this year as possible. Their biggest outreach event so far has been at the Hmong New Year celebration, where Complete Count Committee members handed out flyers and brochures while Freedom Inc staffed a census information booth. While the city is not able to provide direct translation assistance for Hmong or other languages, Zellers says it has tried to spread the word through Hmong-language handouts.

“We want to explain that the people who come to knock on doors aren’t from law enforcement, they’re not there to take you away or check your legal status,” says Her.  
“They’re there to help you get representation.”

Meanwhile, the African American Council of Churches, 100 Black Men of Madison, The Foundation for Black Women’s Wellness, Boys and Girls Club of Dane County and Urban League of Greater Madison are just a few of the African American-focused community organizations that have partnered with the city to rally their communities to participate in the 2020 census.

DAVID MICHAEL MILLER

The Urban League of Greater Madison is hosting Census Bureau job recruitment events at their offices every Tuesday and Thursday, and publishing information about the census in UMOJA, the local monthly magazine that focuses on news about the black community.

“There are a lot of services from childcare to foodshare that we have here at Urban League,” says Ruben Anthony, its president and CEO and a member of the Dane County Complete Count Committee. “An undercount would be detrimental to those programs.”

Rep. Shelia Stubbs (D-Madison), who is married to Pastor Bishop Godfrey Stubbs, is working with Reverend Marcus Allen, the president of the African American Council of Churches, to ask pastors to speak to their congregations about the importance of census participation and create census ambassadors for ministry communities.

“To reach marginalized communities, you need to go where people are,” says Stubbs, “and a lot of us are attending congregation on Sundays or Wednesdays.”

**Zellers** says the city’s outreach for the upcoming census is unprecedented. “While we certainly had outreach back in 2010, the extent to which we are partnering with community groups and nonprofits this year is at a new level,” he says.

In the upcoming weeks, members of the Census Committee will make appearances at an event hosted by La Movida Radio, women’s health sessions at the Black Women’s Wellness Center and Madison’s Latino Fair.

Committee members are even hoping to stir up some excitement with swag — 2020 census water bottles and backpacks, and buttons reading “I Count” in Spanish and Hmong.

There will also be opportunities for first-time census participants to learn about the census and get help filling out the forms at Madison libraries around the city, and at senior and community

**The city’s Ben Zellers: “The extent to which we are partnering with community groups...this year is at a new level.”**

centers. These spaces are meant to benefit people who are homeless as well as undercounted minority groups.

“People don’t trust ‘the system,’” says Rainey-Moore, “particularly in this climate. And that’s why we as community members, who already have the people’s trust, have a responsibility to listen to why these communities don’t want to participate and try to meet them where they’re at so they aren’t, once again, undercounted.”

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## COMMENTS (1)

Type subject here...

### Become a citizen

I would like to thank the undocumented person who became a citizens. It isn't just about money - representatives are also determined by citizen count - if you want proper representation then become a citizen and take part in the census. Something tells me we may have to forgo the count for a later time and date.

Dianne Carey 6 days ago | [REPLY](#)

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## RELATED

### After detention

When immigrants are released from detention centers to await their appearance in court, they often have nothing. Sarah Frank traveled to the border with much-needed supplies.

JUL 18, 2019

## **Where goes the neighborhood?**

In the early 1960s, Madison destroyed much of the Greenbush neighborhood, dislocating 1,150 people. Now the city is eyeing redevelopment of the so-called Triangle. Will it get it right this time?

AUG 15, 2019

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## **Supporting refugees**

On Friday, Madisonians protested both the conditions in facilities where asylum seekers are being held and a national raid on undocumented immigrants set to begin on Sunday. The protest coincided with dozens around the country.

JUL 13, 2019

HOLLY HENSCHEN

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