

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Committee on Oversight and Reform

Reaching Hard-to-Count Communities in the 2020 Census

Testimony and Statement
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Introduction

Good Morning, Chairwoman Maloney, and Members of the Committee on Oversight and Reform. I am Marc Morial, President and CEO of the National Urban League. Thank you for this opportunity to testify on *Hard to Count Communities and the 2020 Census*.

Today, I will speak briefly about the undercount of African Americans, our challenges in the upcoming Census, and how the National Urban League is mobilizing for an accurate count.

Thank You for Fully Funding the Census

Before continuing with my presentation, I would like to join my colleagues in thanking all of you for ensuring a fully funded 2020 census. The Census has been underfunded for much of the decade, causing significant operational and IT delays, recruitment and hiring challenges, and cancellation of critical tests to improve the 2020 Census count. Your leadership on this issue is in the best interest of the American people who are entitled to an accurate count.

Urban League Background

Founded in 1910, the National Urban League was established as a nonpartisan, nonprofit civil rights organization dedicated to the economic empowerment of African Americans and other underserved populations. We conduct our work through a network of 90 Affiliates across 36 states and the District of Columbia, *and a Washington Bureau*. The National Urban League proudly serves 2 million constituents each year.

The Browning of America

The Urban League Affiliate network has witnessed the *browning of America* in real time; from California to Connecticut, and in Missouri, Massachusetts, Maryland, New York, Virginia, Illinois and right here in the District of Columbia—YOUR jurisdictions, your communities and your constituents.

Similarly, we have witnessed growing needs in real time--the true faces of the undercount: the Black immigrant, Black and Brown children, former inmates, the homeless and displaced, the gentrified; the digital illiterate and *digital homeless*, those with no Internet address or access, to speak of.

This is why I am here, today—to tell you what we have seen and what we know to be true.

The Census is a Big Deal

The census has been a big deal for the National Urban League for decades. Fifty years ago, in 1970, my predecessor, former Urban League, Executive Director, Whitney Young, Jr., testified before the then, Subcommittee on Census and Statistics; Committee on Post Office and Civil Service. At that time, he spoke passionately about the need for a full and complete count of Black and underserved communities in the 1970 Census.

Whitney Young expressed fears of a significant 1970 Census undercount, citing serious shortcomings in the Census Bureau's plans including:

- inadequate assistance for competing census forms,
- poor community educational outreach
- the lack of Spanish language forms
- inadequate community outreach and education to reach "minority" populations, and
- The prior decade 1960 Census which missed *one in ten Black people*, including *one in every six Black men*.
- distorted publicity *from the Census Bureau* which shifted the blame for a potentially large undercount of African Americans, to a "hostile" black community—on the heels of the civil rights movement and still simmering tensions following Dr. King's assassination.

Fast Forward to 2020: Many Parallels to 1970

There is much to applaud about the 2020 Census: IT improvements, technological advancements, and operational modernization, however, the National Urban League sees many parallels to the 1970 Census and even more uncertainties:

- In 2010, a million children didn't show up for the Census—disproportionately Black and Brown. Six out of 10 Black children between the ages of 0-4 years old were missed. The undercount of Black and Brown children has grown exponentially each census and will not abate without extraordinary outreach, education and messaging in the Black community to count everyone in the household—infants, newborns, grandchildren, foster children, and all unrelated persons in the home.
- African American men are still missed in staggering numbers—almost at every age.
- Formerly Incarcerated men who are re-entering our communities across the country to the tune of about 700,000 each year, must be counted.
- We must count the digital divide in rural and poor Black communities, and those with low digital fluency.
- We fully anticipate disinformation campaigns designed to mislead communities of color about the census and sow seeds of fear about Census participation.
- Gentrification: Displaced Black communities view the Census warily: Some of the poorest residents in our urban cities are skeptical that government funding will be spent for their benefit!
- The Prison Industrial Complex's, uninterrupted, unabated mass Incarceration of African Americans, and police shootings increase fear and distrust of government in our community which could spill over into Census participation. We just don't know.

Significant Concerns Despite 2020 Census Improvements

The National Urban League has partnered with the Census Bureau to help achieve an accurate count in our community. We commend the rank and file staff, the regional offices and partnership teams charged with conducting the census. I don't envy them.

However, there are still **significant gaps** regarding "coverage" in African American communities:

- ***Significant hiring delays and backlogs*** are a huge problem that will impact door-to-door enumeration in the Black community. The Bureau must recruit 2.7 million applicants to hire 500,000 enumerators to knock on doors. The African American population will need a robust field footprint to ensure an accurate count. [**NOTE--Only 39 percent of African Americans self-responded to the Census via Internet during the 2018 Census test (Dress Rehearsal) in Rhode Island. The remainder of the Black count was achieved by door to door enumeration and the Bureau's use of administrative records.**]
- ***Hiring delays impact "indigenous hiring"*** of enumerators within our communities. Indigenous hiring in Black communities builds public trust in the census.
- ***Census paid media campaign ads place disproportionate emphasis on Internet participation.*** Paid ads during Nonresponse Follow-up are few and short-lived. They do not target the Black population, even though Census research demonstrated that a significant proportion of African Americans did not self-respond by Internet or phone in the 2018 dress rehearsal. The 2020 Census Ad Campaign ends in late June/early July—**Non-Response Follow Up ends July 31—nearly a month after the campaign.**
- ***Census paid media campaign for African Americans is not fully developed;*** Want to applaud Carol H. Williams Advertising for developing great tv ads for the Black community, including Black immigrants, but minimal digital and print media is available. If there are additional funds to increase Black ads and media, it should be strategically increased for the hardest of areas—Chicago, Detroit, Los Angeles, and especially the South, where a third of all Blacks reside.
- ***Census Plans for Mobile Questionnaire Assistance are vague*** and lack strategic placement regarding HTC communities. Census must ensure targeted placement of Mobile QACs in HTC African American communities. More transparency is needed from Census on this issue.

- The Census Bureau will rely heavily on Administrative Records to close out Hard to Count communities, rather than make repeated visits to homes (up to six). African Americans were enumerated via Administrative Records significantly in the 2018 Test.

Conclusion: Make Black Count

In closing, two years ago, the National Urban League established a 2020 Census Black Roundtable of civil rights organizations, advocates, and national leaders, Black Clergy and Black immigrant groups to mobilize and work collectively for an accurate count.

In addition, The Urban League has launched a 2020 Census “Make Black Count” initiative to increase public awareness and educate our community about the importance of the Census. Last October, we held a **2020 Census National Tele-Town Hall** to speak with communities across the country on the importance of participating in the 2020 Census. Former Gubernatorial candidate Stacey Abrams, Founder, Fair Count, was our featured speaker, as well as Congressman Horsford who chairs the Congressional Black Caucus’ 2020 Census Task Force.

We are planning another 2020 Census Tele-Town Hall in early March, before Census mails out letters inviting the public to participate in the census. We must get our community educated and ready to participate. We invite all of you and the listening audience to join us in March for this important National teleconference. It is free and open to the public. We will post information at www.nul.org with more details next week.

Thank you for your time this morning. The National Urban League stands ready and willing to help you in any way possible to achieve an accurate count of all populations.