



**COUNTING THE
INVISIBLE MAN:
BLACK MALES AND
THE 2010 CENSUS**

JANUARY 2011

PUBLISHED BY
TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY FOUNDATION

WRITTEN BY FRONTLINE SOLUTIONS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Written and edited by Ryan Bowers & Karen Cherfils,
Frontline Solutions (www.helpingchange happen.com)

Design by Jesce Walz (jesce.net)

Published by Twenty-First Century Foundation (www.21cf.org)

Special thanks to Thomasina Williams, Program Officer at the Ford Foundation, for her visionary leadership. We are also grateful for The Brisbane Institute at Morehouse College, Youth Uprising, Moving Forward Gulf Coast, One Voice, United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania, and MAGIC (Metropolitan Areas Group for Igniting Civilization) for their commitment to equipping Black men to be changemakers in the 2010 Census.



TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY FOUNDATION
GIVING FOR BLACK COMMUNITY CHANGE

icount

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I am an invisible man. . . . I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids - and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. . . . When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination - indeed, everything and anything except me.

— Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*

INTRODUCTION

In 1952, the novel *Invisible Man* was published. Ralph Ellison's famous work is narrated in the first person, by a black man who considers himself "socially invisible." Sixty years later, how are Black men "socially invisible?" And what does being 'socially invisible' cost?

This briefing paper, *Counting the Invisible Man*, attempts to explore some of these questions through the lens of a very specific project that endeavored to increase the participation of Black males in the 2010 Census. Seeking to impact a demographic that has been historically undercounted, Ford Foundation invested in Twenty-First Century Foundation (21CF) to develop an initiative and grantmaking strategy to attract Black males to be socially visible, by way of being counted in the 2010 Census.

The resulting initiative, iCount, provided local and national organizations with an array of opportunities to learn about engaging Black males. That learning focused on the community impediments to Black male civic participation; the use of technology as a mobilization and engagement tool for Black males; and specific planning strategies to engage Black male participation in the 2020 Census.

Counting the Invisible Man recounts the 21CF-supported iCount Initiative, and in the process, examines why targeting Black males is vital and why undercounting them is costly. In addition, the paper shares a detailed narrative of iCount's methodology and implementation; amplifies the strategies, ideas, and challenges articulated by on-the-ground local partners; and identifies some recommendations for targeting Black males for the 2020 Census.

Ultimately, 21CF believes that by reading this report, activists, funders, nonprofit leaders, and those committed to Black communities can better understand the significance and consequences of undercounting Black males in the Census; increase their awareness of the iCount Initiative as a collaborative model for building a stronger democracy; and more easily generate new solutions and ideas about creating more accessible venues for Black male civic participation.

ABOUT iCOUNT

In October 2009, the Ford Foundation provided Twenty-First Century Foundation with planning grant funds to identify strategies to reverse the trend of undercounting Black males in the U.S. Census. The resulting effort—the iCount Campaign—eventually reached thousands of Black males across four cities by leveraging the work of a group of local partners with proven track records in serving Black males. The Campaign also set a precedent for the Census Bureau on how to effectively engage this population.

iCount was really a campaign in two acts. The planning phase began with a large set of cities, the development of strategies, research, and materials, and finally, through a vetting process, four cities emerged with a lead agency in each. (The specific criteria used to identify those cities are discussed in the “iCount Strategy” section.) The implementation phase marked the beginning of the official iCount Campaign with a coordinated rollout across the four distinct geographies. The accompanying section is the story of the campaign and the interplay between its design, planning, partners, strategies, and implementation.

iCOUNT PLANNING IMPLEMENTATION

How does one even go about reaching Black males? Fortunately, iCount's three national partners, Twenty-First Century Foundation, Frontline Solutions and Thinking Man Consulting, had a strong track record of researching issues, convening partners, and implementing programs to support the life outcomes of Black men and boys across the country.

Prior to founding his firm, Thinking Man Consulting, Loren Harris had a record of three years as a Ford Foundation program officer, during which he funded a swath of research and exploratory grantmaking around the country that targeted and reached Black males through several avenues, including education, workforce development, and health and human services.

Frontline Solutions, a national social justice organization, had been commissioned as Ford's consultants to conduct several early scans of the extant nonprofit organizations and philanthropic involvement in what would come to be known as "Black males work."

Twenty-First Century Foundation, through its Black Men and Boys grantmaking and its incubation of the 2025 Campaign for Black Men and Boys, had funded advocacy and organizing regional networks across the country as well as a national campaign targeted to improve the life outcomes of Black men and boys.

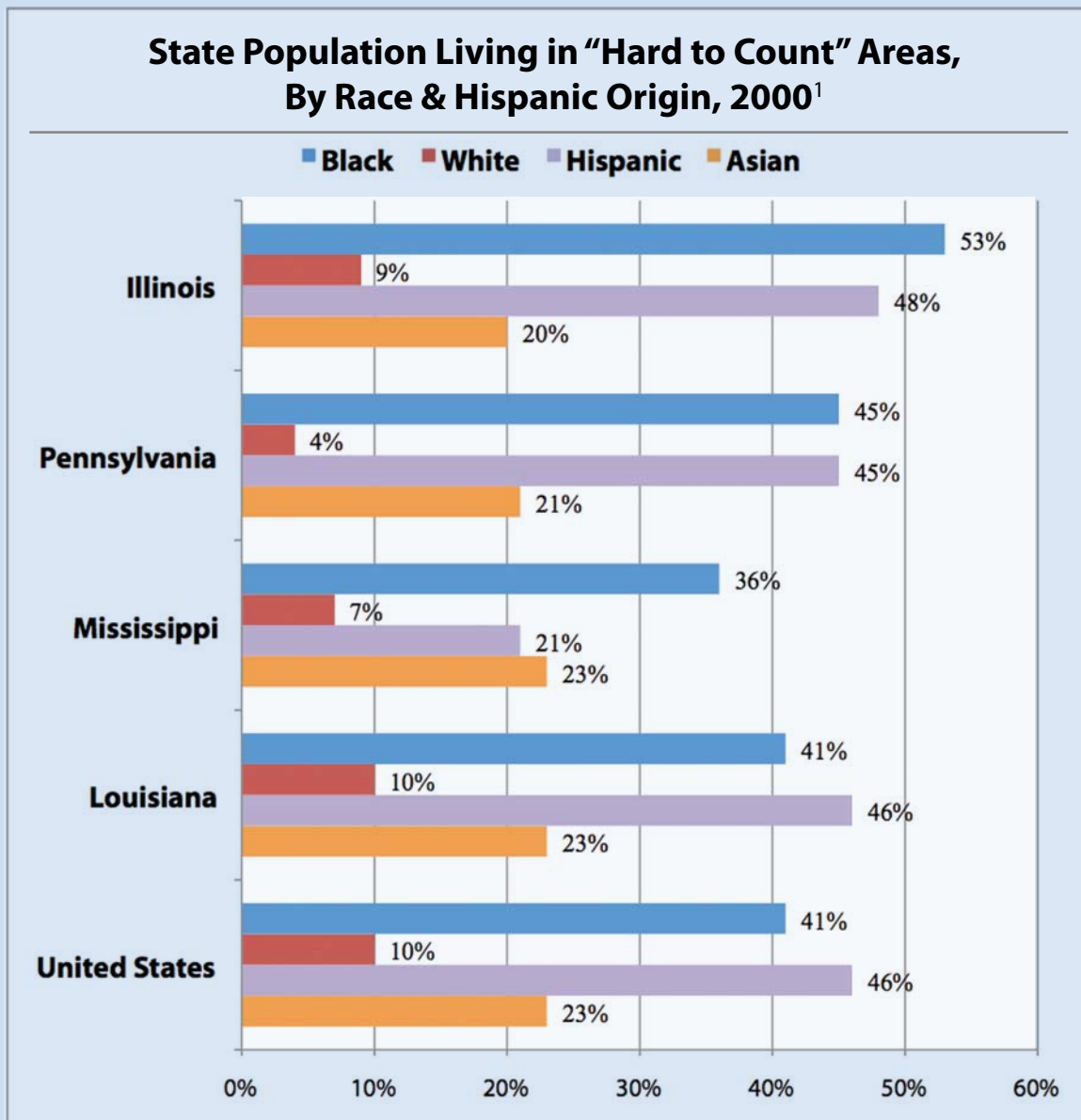
As longtime allies in the broader effort to support Black male outcomes, the three national partners came together to explore the possibility of launching a large four-state initiative to increase the count of Black males in the 2010 Census. After 21CF successfully submitted a planning grant to Ford, all the team needed was to identify the sites. Their list was narrowed down to Illinois, Pennsylvania, Mississippi, and Louisiana, along with partners on the ground in each location to do the work.



WHY BLACK MALES?

THE CENSUS AND HARD TO COUNT POPULATIONS

The notion of the iCount Campaign was based on the grim picture that the 2000 Census data revealed about engaging and counting Black males in the United States. Nearly a decade ago, in anticipation of the 2010 count, the Census Bureau determined that to increase its response rates for all individuals, it would need to better identify and deploy its resources in a way that focused on populations likely to have a lower response. However, upon a closer examination of how race and geography impacted Census outcomes, what became clear was the sheer magnitude by which Black males had been undercounted in the 2000 Census.



Black Male Participation in the 2000 Census

According to 2000 Census results, 12.9 percent of the total population reported that they were Black. Within the Black population, the Census counted 16 million Black males in the United States, comprising 6 percent of the country's total population.²

Overall participation by Black individuals in the Census was noticeably less than that of other populations. Nationwide, 78 percent of White residents, 65 percent of Hispanic residents, and 60 percent of Black residents returned forms in the 2000 Census.³ Further analysis shows that Black males eighteen and over were undercounted at a rate of 7.67 percent, compared to 0.29 percent for white males and 0.75 percent for Black women in the same age range.⁴

At the time that the 2000 Census figures were released, the low response rate of Black males had posed several important questions for the Bureau and the country: Were Black male response rates low because Black males did not want to be counted, or because they were not aware of the Census and its importance? Was the Census Bureau not trying hard enough to count them? Were they not trying the right things, or were there other entities better situated to reach Black men? With 10 years to prepare for the 2010 Census, the Bureau, if it deemed it a priority, would have ample time to figure it out.

¹ The Census Project (2009). "Hard to Count" Populations By State. <http://www.thecensusproject.org/factsheets/CP-HTC-States-Race-4-27-09.pdf>. Data based on the 2000 Census.

² McKinnon, Jesse D. and Claudette E. Bennett (2005). *We the People: Blacks in the United States*. The Census Bureau. <http://www.census.gov/prod/2005pubs/censr-25.pdf>.

³ Government Accountability Office (2008). *2010 Census: The Bureau's Plans for Reducing the Undercount Show Promise, but Key Uncertainties Remain*. <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d081167t.pdf>.

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau (2001). *ESCAP II: Demographic Analysis Results*. <http://www.census.gov/dmd/www/pdf/Report1.PDF>.

2010 Census in Context

The 2010 Census was designed to be the most meticulously planned and accurate Census in national history. The Census Bureau made several notable improvements from the 2000 Census, including:

- A new short and simplified form that went out to every household.
- Two new questions to ascertain if people are being counted twice or if missing people are living in another residence.
- An unprecedented funding increase to the Census Bureau through a \$1 billion investment of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds, allocated for early Census planning, a communications campaign, increased partnership support, and a follow-up program.

However, no amount of planning and improvements would have prepared the Bureau or its partners for the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. As 2008 drew to a close, the United States witnessed the stock market plunge and state, local, and private dollars dry up. Early reconnaissance for the iCount Campaign revealed several important findings regarding the country's

Census readiness. Drastic reductions in state and local funding for the 2010 Census efforts had severely impacted the prominence and visibility of targeted strategies by Complete Count Committees. (CCCs are groups of state, city government, and/or community leaders organized to plan and implement Census awareness campaigns tailored to the special characteristics of local communities.) With the exception of Chicago, which benefited from greater investment from municipal and philanthropic leadership, each city's CCC was significantly behind schedule and had few activities underway.

Additionally, a 2009 report by Pew Charitable Trust found that of 11 major cities investigated, almost all had fewer financial and human resources than they did for the 1990 Census. According to the report's authors, the most common reasons cited for the scaled-back operations were "recession-driven cutbacks and budgetary distractions."⁵ In light of how unforgiving the economic climate had become, the iCount needed an exceptional focus and vision to succeed.

⁵ The Pew Charitable Trusts (2009). *Preparing for the 2010 Census: How Philadelphia and Other Cities Are Struggling and Why It Matters*. http://www.pewtrusts.org/uploadedFiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/Reports/Philadelphia-area_grantmaking/Census%20Report%20101209_FINAL.pdf?n=8566



iCOUNT STRATEGY: PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

The iCount national partners were convinced that the Campaign could succeed if organizations that were already engaging Black males in their communities could integrate the message of the Census into their existing work – and through it mobilize Black males to be on the supply side of community change.

The Planning Phase

The planning of 21CF's iCount Campaign centered on three goals:

1. Identify a set of target cities where there was a significant undercount of Black males in 2000 and the infrastructure to engage them;
2. Gather a “lay of the land” analysis in each of those cities to assess the opportunities, barriers, and key considerations for conducting a place-based outreach campaign to increase Black male participation in the 2010 Census; and
3. Create local grassroots multimedia strategies to reach, educate, and encourage Black males to participate.

The three-pronged plan began by examining roughly thirty cities as potential places to launch the work.

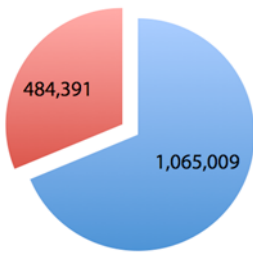
A number of criteria were used to narrow down the list to a final pool of cities, including **1)** the presence of high populations of hard-to-count Black men, based on 2000 Census numbers; **2)** the visibility of the iCount national partners in local media markets and their potential for both utilizing strategic connections and mounting low-cost media campaigns; **3)** the level of past and present philanthropic activity in each city supporting males of color, which could help leverage additional funding; **4)** the prevalence of multiple local organizations that were already targeting males of color; and **5)** the potential to collaborate with other national partners funded by Ford to engage Black communities around the census, such as the NAACP, the National Urban League, the National Coalition for Black Civic Participation, and the Praxis Project.

The national partners translated these factors into a rubric, and assigned a score to each of the cities. What emerged was a picture of eight cities with the potential to be a part of a coordinated and well resourced national effort. Those cities were Atlanta, Georgia; Chicago, Illinois; Detroit, Michigan; Houston, Texas; Jackson, Mississippi; New Orleans, Louisiana; Oakland, California; and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

<< Black Male Population By City, Census 2000⁶

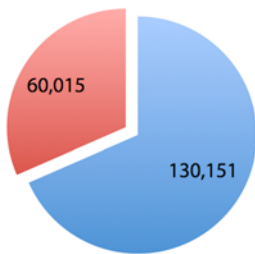
CHICAGO

Total Black Population
Black Males



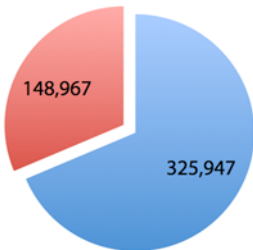
JACKSON

Total Black Population
Black Males



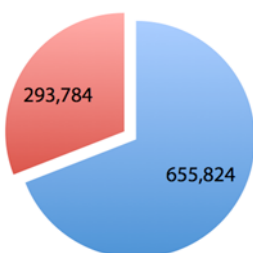
NEW ORLEANS

Total Black Population
Black Males



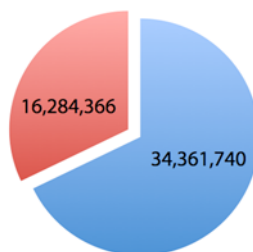
PHILADELPHIA

Total Black Population
Black Males



UNITED STATES

Total Black Population
Black Males



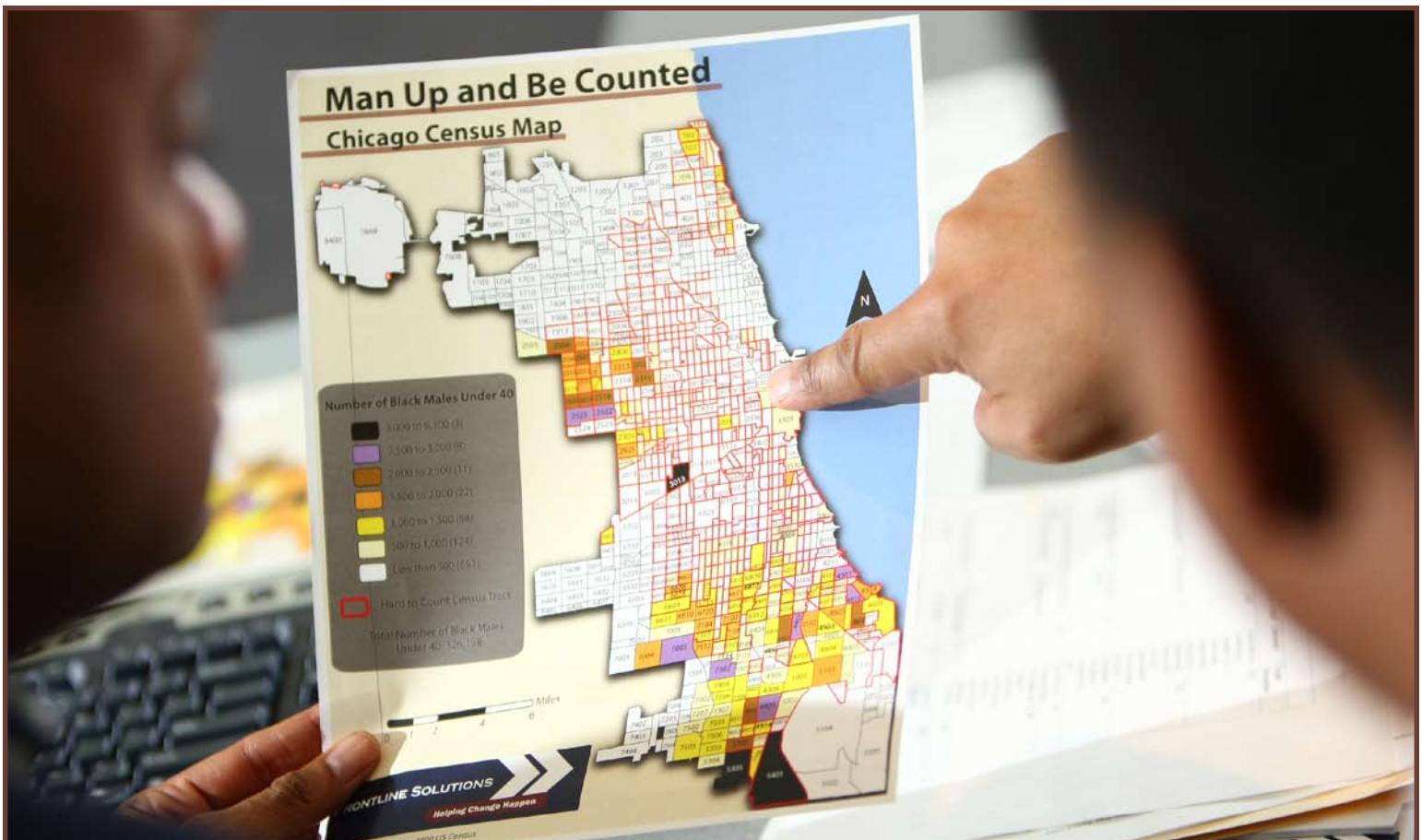
To contextualize the appropriate strategies for iCount, the planning team analyzed local demographic data as well as data collected by a number of local research and advocacy groups. The data served to determine past, current, and projected Census activity of Black males and to assess whether there have been any significant changes in the populations of Black males in certain neighborhoods due to redistricting, the creation or demolition of housing projects, or any other neighborhood shift since the last Census.

It was critical to learn from organizations working for or in Black communities in the target cities, thus interviews were conducted with organizations in the area that were already engaging Black males, identifying those that were working with or considering working with the Census Bureau. Even those not considering this option but that were poised to significantly increase the count of Black males were identified.

The reconnaissance research revealed eight cities with distinct opportunities and barriers to launching a robust implementation effort. Some of the characteristics shared by the eight cities were as follows:

- In most of the cities there was a coalition of nonprofits working collectively around improving the life outcomes of Black males.
- There was a general interest among potential local partner organizations to engage Black men as carriers of the message that being counted was important, as opposed to Black males merely being the recipients of the message.
- The organizations that were interacting with the target population of Black males living in the most marginalized communities had generally not been organizations that have had substantial interactions with each city's Census efforts or viewed the 2010 Census effort prominently on their agenda.

⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, American FactFinder, Census 2000 data.



Lead organizations were identified in six of the eight cities and were given planning grants of \$3,000 to \$4,000 to further conceptualize their approach. Detroit and Houston were the two cities that were not funded due to the lack of leverage points, organizational capacity, and obvious choice for lead agency to oversee the effort and mobilize others. However, it was determined that Ford would work to identify a different set of opportunities for those cities based on partnerships with local funders.

Thus, the six lead organizations that were chosen to move forward with planning grants were: 1) The Brisbane Institute at Morehouse College in Atlanta; 2) MAGIC (Metropolitan Area Group for Igniting Civilization), Inc., in Chicago; 3) One Voice in Jackson;

4) Moving Forward Gulf Coast in New Orleans; 5) Youth Uprising in Oakland; and 6) The United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. All six provided core programs and activities that target Black males, and each had worked extensively in Census tracts where the undercount of Black males was significant in the 2000 Census. With the cities and their lead organizations chosen, the national partners would provide a set of materials and supports to aid them in their planning efforts. Developing a messaging and communications platform that involved a very clear branding identity was essential to supporting each lead organization's efforts to activate and mobilize a population that had been otherwise disengaged during previous Census counts.

A strategic communications firm was engaged by Twenty-First Century Foundation to develop a culturally competent messaging and communications strategy. The posters, banners, and digital communication tools designed for the campaign incorporated creative concepts that were based on recent marketing research. The iCount web portal that was produced, www.whyicount.com, supplemented outreach strategies, enabled local partners to connect with each other around campaign developments, and provided a link to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2010 website.

In addition, the national partners created geographic maps for each of the local partners that incorporated the newly minted iCount brand. The maps outlined Black male Census data by Census tracts in each city and were central to helping the grassroots partners further define their outreach strategy. Specifically, the aids enabled organizations to identify which Census tracts in their area had been the hardest to count in 2000 and the pockets in the city that had the highest density of Black males, and to determine if these areas overlapped or intersected with others areas where their initiatives had a strong local presence.

THE ICOUNT CAMPAIGN,
A PROJECT OF THE 21ST
CENTURY FOUNDATION,
IS A TARGETED NATIONAL
EFFORT THAT AIMS TO
INCREASE THE COUNT OF
BLACK MALES IN THE
2010 CENSUS.

Our work includes formal engagement and partnership with community based nonprofit and faith groups, local businesses, civic organizations and the U.S. Census Bureau as well as its local and regional affiliates. Our core team is comprised of experienced professionals representing deep experience in philanthropy, media and communications, grassroots and grassroots coalition building with males of color and organizations representing their interests.

For more information or questions
please direct inquiries to:
RYAN BOWERS, Partner
Frontline Solutions
rbowers@frontlinesol.com

For further information on 21CF please
visit our website at www.21cf.org or call 212-662-3700.

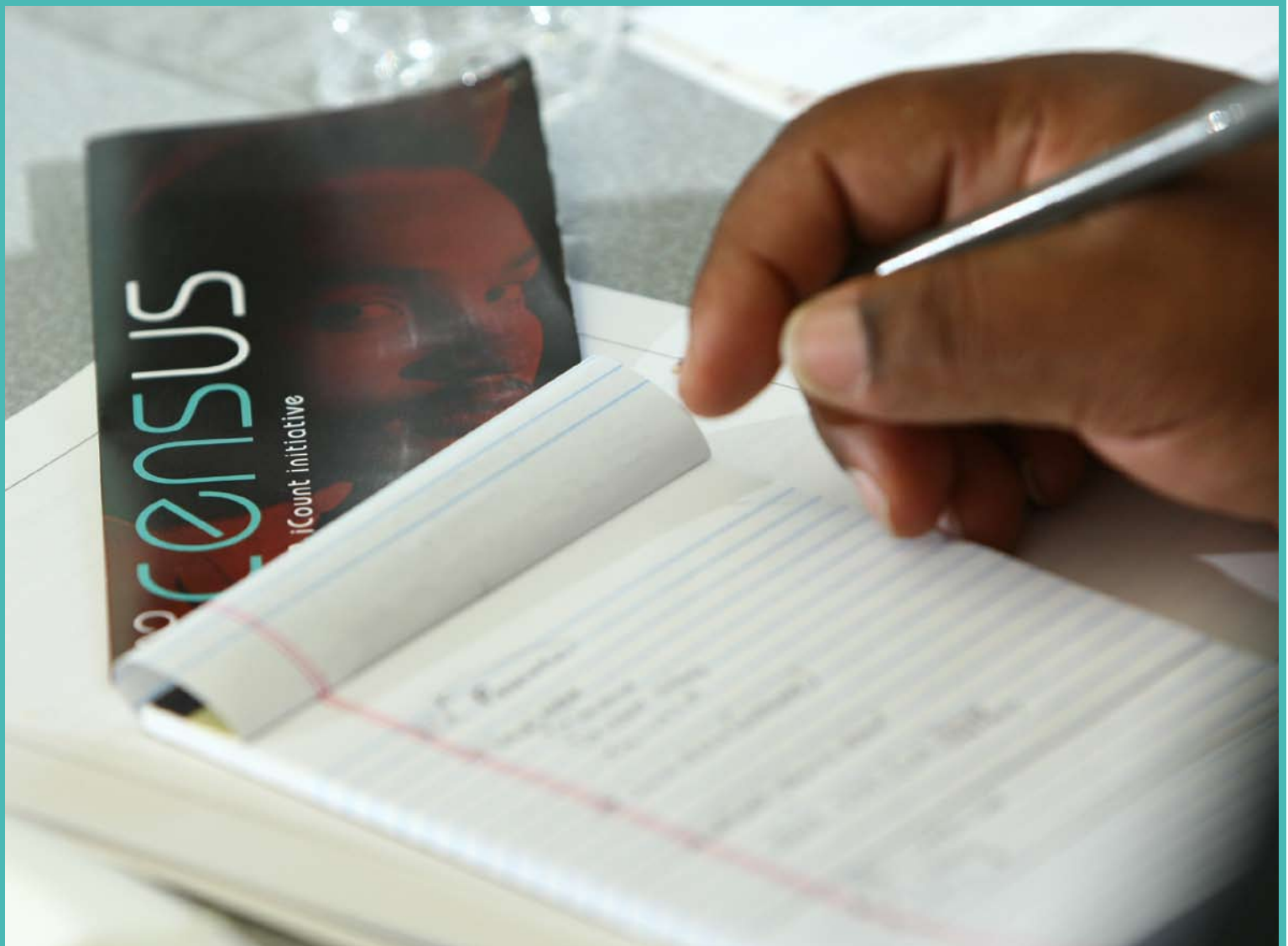


CENSUS
2010 i-count initiative

Another finding from the messaging research—which was also substantiated in the interviews with local community organizations in the eight partner cities—was that ***the best way to reach Black men in marginalized communities is through Black men with whom they identify and can relate.*** This finding guided iCount planners throughout the initiative’s duration.

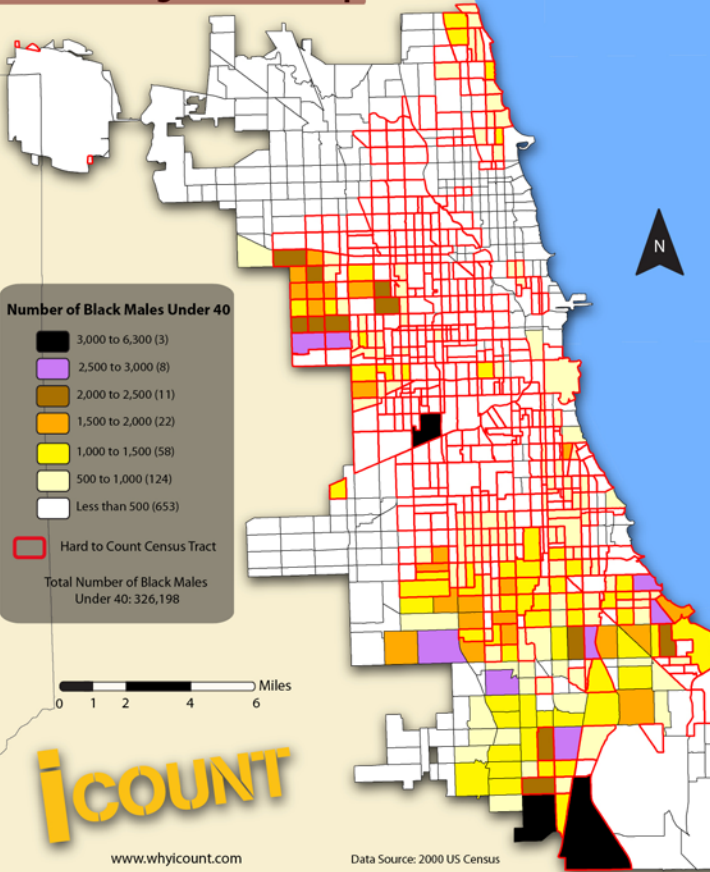
Following the release of the planning grants, iCount was poised to request from Ford larger \$40,000 implementation grants for each of the four cities. By this time the same recessionary forces that

had devastated municipal treasuries was also impacting even the largest of foundations, including their plans to support the fledgling census efforts. By mid-2009 the Ford Foundation, like every other major philanthropy, had experienced a major drop in its assets and also had to eliminate positions. These macro forces resulted in a six-month delay of the full implementation funds and a reduction of the number of grantees from six to four. Below are brief profiles of the four local partners and the work they set out to accomplish during the grant period of January 1, 2010 through July 31, 2010.



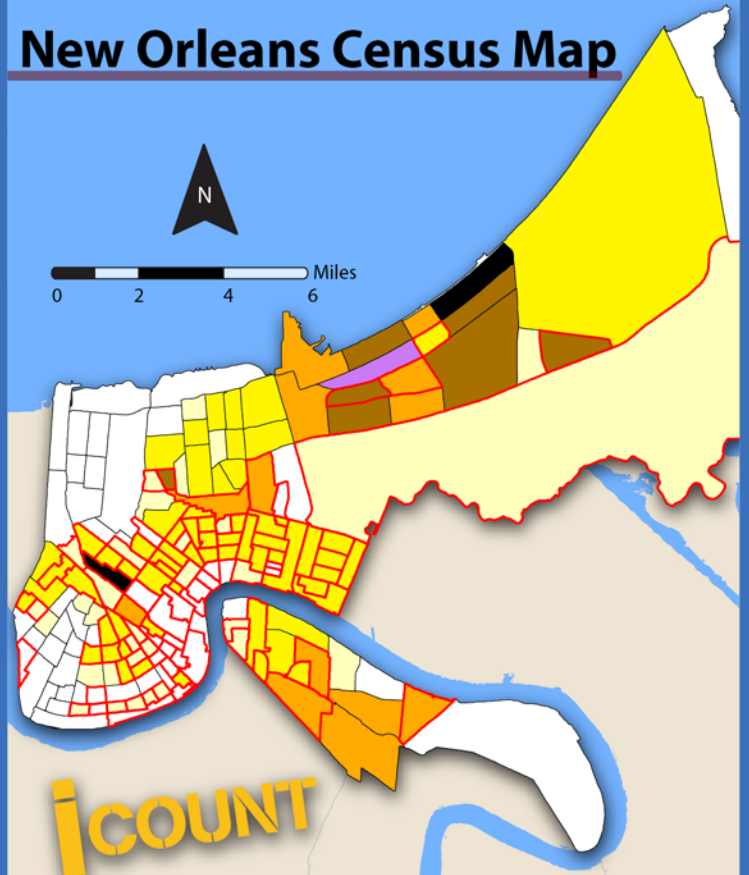
iCount

Chicago Census Map



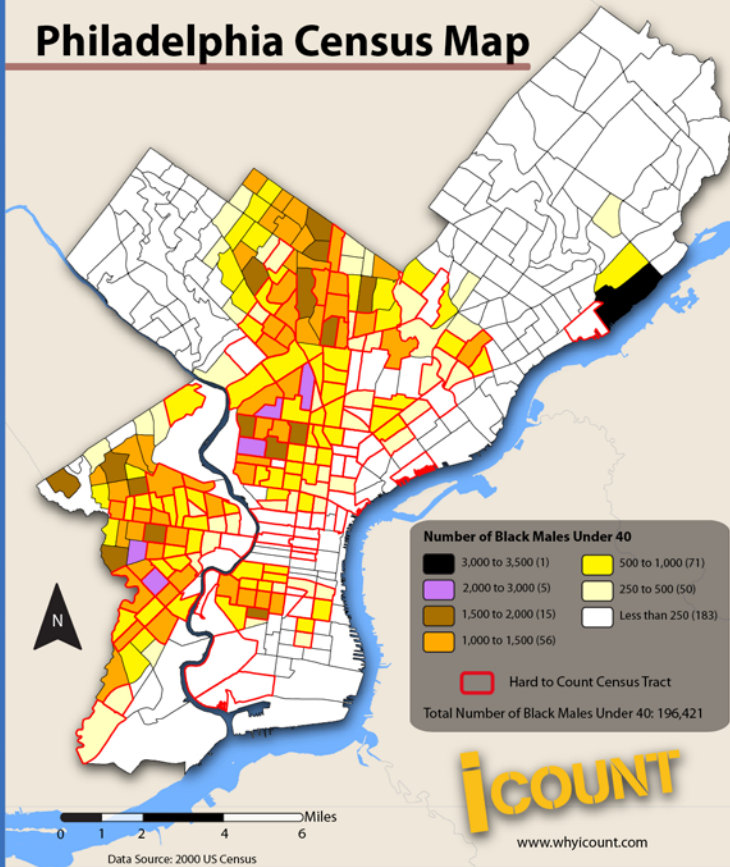
iCount

New Orleans Census Map



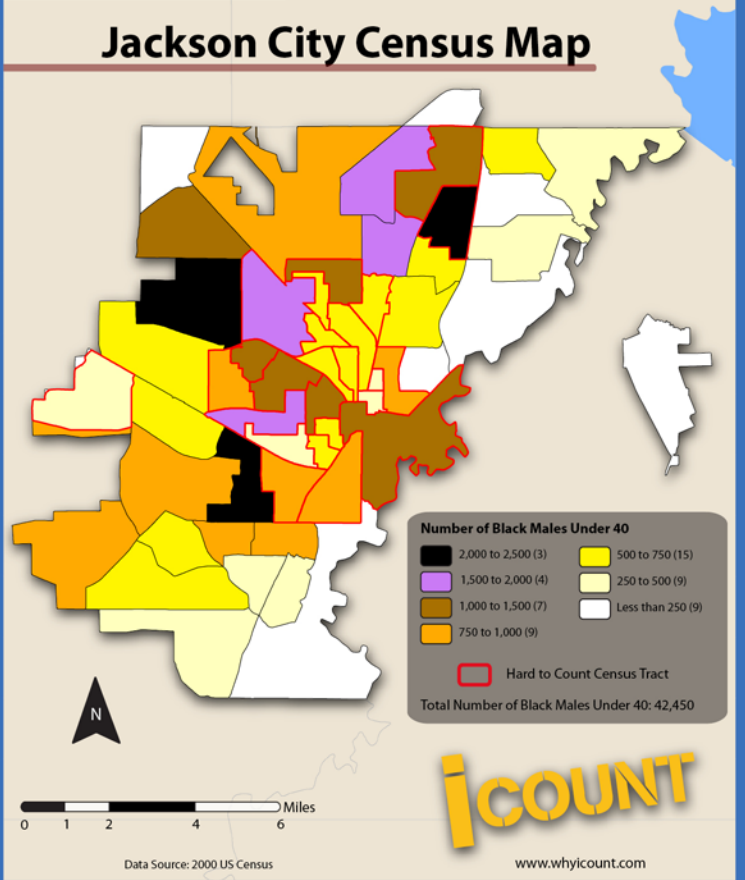
iCount

Philadelphia Census Map



iCount

Jackson City Census Map



FOUR SNAPSHOTS OF LOCAL iCOUNT PARTNERS

*AN OVERVIEW OF THE ORGANIZATIONS, THEIR STRATEGIES,
AND GENERAL THOUGHTS ON iCOUNT*

The United Way of Southeastern Philadelphia (UWSEPA)

Philadelphia, PA

Project Director: Cheryl Oakman

Founded in 1921 to eliminate overlapping charities so money could be raised and distributed more efficiently, UWSEPA's mission is to improve people's lives by mobilizing the caring power of donors, volunteers and communities. It is committed to treating entire communities by providing the tools, services, and expertise necessary to enable those communities to become stronger and more independent.

iCount Approach: UWSEPA synergized its Census efforts with others in Philadelphia. In this vein, United Way partnered with MEE productions to develop a collaborative relationship with the citywide PhillyCounts campaign that had an established network of diverse leaders representing many constituencies and neighborhoods to help spread the word about why participating in the Census was so important to Philadelphia. Then, United Way engaged young Black men ages 16–19 using MEE's peer-to-peer outreach model, through which Community Action Teams consisting of five Black

male youth and an Adult Coordinator would conduct community outreach and education around Census 2010. MEE also conducted Chat & Chew sessions with community leaders and community-based organizations to promote the 2010 Census in their communities.

Oakman: "Our young men internalized the message and were able to articulate the value of the census personally and to the community."

Moving Forward Gulf Coast, Inc.

New Orleans, Louisiana

Project Director: Trap Bonner

Moving Forward Gulf Coast, Inc., is a community-based initiative committed to Restorative Justice for residents of the Gulf Coast region. Since the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the organization has worked throughout Alabama, Mississippi, Texas and Louisiana to dispense information and implement strategic solutions and new media efforts to counter blatant attacks on human dignity.

iCount Approach: Moving Forward laid out a three-tier plan to inform and educate "hard to count" communities

across the Gulf Coast through a media campaign, community events/canvassing, and census assistance forums. The media campaign was intended to help fill in the gaps statewide across the region where organizing would not be concentrated.

Bonner: “Our message was ‘fill it out the Census form protect your right to vote.’”

One Voice

Jackson, Mississippi
Project Director:
Anthony Witherspoon

The nonprofit arm of the Mississippi State branch of the NAACP, One Voice seeks to improve the quality of life for all African Americans and other disenfranchised populations in the American South. Its mission is to enhance civic engagement in the formation of public policy through leadership development, research support, training, and technical assistance for advocacy groups, associations and community based-organizations.

iCount Approach: One Voice’s campaign had three main components. One, the organization hosted or co-hosted community events that targeted Black males (i.e. documentary screenings and town hall meetings at local churches and community centers). Two, One Voice partnered with local organizing

groups in order to recruit and equip them with the iCount message and talking points to produce long-term, sustainable activism within hard-to-count areas. Three, the organization engaged young Black Males as interns in a variety of outreach capacities including maintaining social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, and participating in door-to-door canvassing campaigns to encourage Black males to register for the 2010 Census.

Witherspoon: “When you’re trying to tell someone who’s 150 percent under the national poverty level (and a lots of folks here are), you’ve got to create a message that ties the census and their economic situation together, and that’s a real challenge.”

MAGIC (Metropolitan Area Group for Igniting Civilization), Inc.,

Chicago, Illinois
Project Director: Bryan Echols

Located on the south east side of Chicago’s Woodlawn community, MAGIC is a youth empowerment, youth leadership development organization that focuses on improving the family through the relationship with the child. Its mission is to organize and mobilize community residents to create and stimulate social change to improve their quality of life. MAGIC pursues its goals and mission through engaging in street level intervention, youth programming and community forums.

iCount Approach: MAGIC hosted three levels of convenings to strategize and develop partnerships to reach Black males in Chicago: 1) Youth Focus/Strategy Groups brought together young men between the ages of 18–30; 2) Adult Focus/Strategy Groups convened male leaders and elders in the city to focus on strategies to reach Black males ages 31–40; 3) Youth/Adult Strategy Groups brought the two populations together for an intergenerational summit of Black males to share best practices and ideas toward formalizing cross-cutting strategies to reach all levels of Black males in the community. Additionally, MAGIC engaged the youth through its Youth Digital Arts Program, recruiting participants to create short webisodes or PSAs that speak to the importance of being counted.

Echols: “We talked about the importance of the Census to brothers from the Masonic lodge, the nation of Islam, everywhere. It’s very difficult to get those brothers to do anything government-related. How did we break down those barriers? We just talked to them. They trusted us that we wouldn’t be involved in some craziness and bringing it to them.”

IMPLEMENTATION PHASE

The strategy for the implementation phase was centered on providing technical assistance and coordination to the local partner organizations in support of the following activities:

- Increasing Census awareness among Black males
- Sponsoring local Census-related events
- Mobilizing local stakeholders from the business and nonprofit sectors to participate in Census efforts engaging Black men
- Employing local youth to organize and canvass communities to encourage Black male Census participation
- Becoming an official Local Census Information Center
- Quantifying the local impact of their Census awareness/education events

Thinking Man Consulting partnered with Frontline Solutions to engage the local partners by providing them with a venue—in the form of a one-day convening followed by a one-hour telephone debriefing, bimonthly conference calls, and a final close-of-project debriefing—to build their capacity, equip them with tools and strategies to assist their media and messaging efforts, and address any questions, concerns, and information gaps that they may have had about 21CF's iCount Campaign or about the Census in general

On February 3, 2009, Frontline and Thinking Man Consulting brought all of the local partners and the iCount strategic team together to launch the iCount Campaign. This day-long convening of the local stakeholders and the strategic team served as a venue to devise strategies, discuss best outreach practices, and become oriented with the campaign's tools and resources. It was vital to develop a coordinated strategy to effectively increase Black male participation in the 2010 Census from the outset. Each grassroots partner rose to the challenge with a targeted plan that suited its local conditions.



THE VIEW FROM THE GROUND

The local partners were without a doubt the heart and soul of the campaign. As the campaign unfolded, they quickly had to adjust their proposals to meeting the shifting landscape in each of their communities. Black men responded to some messages better than others. In some cases, partnering or even hearing from the Census Bureau was like trying to hit a moving target. Taking advantage of windows of opportunity would require improvisation and lightness of foot. Yet nothing influenced the outcome of the campaign as much as the six-month delay in receiving the grant funding to begin. But here, too, the grantees rolled with the punches, kept their heads down, and pushed forward with the work.

Several months after the campaign concluded, the grantee partners were asked to reflect on their varied experiences in the field. What follows is a collection of stories and insights from four leaders of iCount partner organizations: Cheryl Oakman (United Way), Bryan Echols (MAGIC), Trap Bonner (Gulf Coast Moving Forward), and Anthony Witherspoon (One Voice).

Employing Strategies to Engage Black Men

The iCount partners combined their experiences, intuition, and cutting-edge research to tailor their engagement strategies to the needs of Black men in their particular cities.

Cheryl Oakman: The most inspiring thing for me was watching these young men. I can recall going out to one of the trainings pretty early on and standing back and seeing these three young men who gathered around three other young men and they were like really selling it. There were three of our young men and a group of five young adults in their 20s, and our young people were telling them point by point the importance of the Census. Our young men completely internalized the message and the

value of it, and they were able to riff and dialogue as if it was second nature. It was great.

Trap Bonner: We focused on explaining how the census numbers play a role in elections. We told folks not to take the census because it's your civic duty, but more because it's your personal duty—to protect your right to vote. The Bureau needs to downplay the \$400 billion message, and play up redistricting, protecting the boundaries where you'll live, where you'll vote, and where the money is going to flow. The redistricting message resonated with folks way more than the normal language of \$400 billion federal dollars going to your school district. Because down here, people don't see how that money has ever or will ever get back to and work for them.

Anthony Witherspoon: You have to make sure that your messaging is good for two important reasons: First, the illiteracy levels [in Mississippi] are very high, so you have to make sure that you're not talking over anyone's head with the information you're trying to communicate. Second, your message has to be persuasive. We are the poorest state in the union. Poverty here is so extreme that folks are constantly living in the first level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

Looking at the entire campaign, people could wrap their mind around census concepts more easily when they had an individual to either blame or believe in. What I mean by that is when you go into impoverished communities and you start talking to people about change, to them it starts with the people in power.

WE TRIED TO SHOW FOLKS HOW REDISTRICTING IN MISSISSIPPI HAS BEEN A MISUSED AND ABUSED PROCESS TO DILUTE THE VOTING STRENGTH OF MINORITY POPULATIONS. PEOPLE STARTED TO SEE THAT IF THEY LEARNED THIS, THEY COULD POSITION THEMSELVES TO ELECT A PERSON OF THEIR CHOICE FROM THEIR COMMUNITY SO THEY COULD START TO FEEL EMPOWERED.

People need someone directly they can point to and hold accountable for their economic conditions.

So the redistricting piece empowers them politically. They can put their priorities on someone's campaign agenda and hold them accountable.

Bryan Echols: What really got to the people we talked to was letting them know all of this census stuff is for the benefit of the community. And then we asked if they could help out. Can you put a poster up, pass out some materials? Our skepticism as a community is causing us to lose too much ground. Plus, we're being counted in other districts down state and they're reaping the benefits. When you told cats things like that, it opened their eyes up in new ways. When we talked about how each person represents a certain amount of resources, and when brothers from Chicago are counted in the prisons down state, the resources are being taken down there. That got them pissed off, which was really our whole intent—to engage them and let them see why they should care. It's like the saying, "Where there is no knowledge, my people perish."

NAACP leader concerned about Census in SW Miss.

SUMMIT, Miss. — The leader of a civil rights group says he's worried that some southwest Mississippi communities were not properly counted in the Census.

Anthony Witherspoon, president of the McComb branch of the NAACP, says he believes the small town of Fayette is among those overlooked. In the 2000 Census, 97 percent of Fayette's 2,242 residents were Black.

The Enterprise-Journal of McComb reports that Witherspoon spoke Monday night in Summit during a public hearing about legislative redistricting.

Lawmakers will receive the 2010 Census information early next year and will use the new population numbers to draw 122 districts in the state House and 52 in the Senate. Legislative elections are in November 2011.

Working with Local Partners and the Census Bureau

A campaign is only as successful as its partners. The local partners went to great lengths to leverage productive collaborations, which weren't always clear from the beginning.

A.W.: At one point we were making calls to survey community members to see if they'd seen a census worker out during the post-enumeration phase, and what their experiences were like engaging with census workers. This was a way for us to try to gauge whether what we had done in the field had been effective. Jefferson County was one of the branches we surveyed. That county branch reported that when the Census was calling the town of Fayette, one of the elected officials was complaining that they hadn't seen Census workers on the ground in the community doing the work. The important thing was that the whole town of Fayette had recently switched over to using PO boxes instead of street addresses. But the law prohibits census workers from targeting PO boxes, so 90 percent of the town wasn't going to receive a Census form. By surveying our branches and community groups, we were able to find out things like this.

We contacted the circuit clerk of the town, who confirmed this, but still didn't know why members of the community hadn't received any

forms or why workers had yet to visit the houses. Next we decided to go the Census Bureau's website, where we saw that the country had a 78 percent return rate and that Mississippi only had 67 percent return rate, and that Fayette had a 37 percent return rate. This was alarming for a number of reasons, one being that this town is almost totally dependent on federal funds. By the time the Census Bureau stopped updating the mail response rates online, Fayette's still hadn't budged past 37 percent. So the MS NAACP became part of a state coalition of organizations that reached out to Dr. Robert Groves, the National Census Director, and we got him to come to Mississippi so he could hear directly from all of us what was happening on the ground.

He met with us and was totally blown away by the Bureau's lack of presence in Fayette. He said he was committed to putting double the people on the ground in the town to fix this. Of course, we won't see the returns until the numbers are released so we're preparing to challenge these numbers just in case because of the huge potential undercount.

T.B.: Our partnerships had a big range, from the Biloxi NAACP to the Urban League of New Orleans. We ran into a lot of national organizations with local offices which were supposed to be beneficial because they distributed

more funding. But as it played out the national partners were surprisingly tight with their money, and you saw very little of it actually hit the ground. It was jive that Moving Forward Gulf Coast was putting out more money than the highly funded national organizations were for events and materials. In the future, I'd rather have partnerships with more membership-based organizations than with these national organizations. What would you rather have: the executive director of some national organization showing up with just one of their staffers, or these grassroots membership organizations showing up with 10 community folk? I'd bet my money on the membership organizations because they bring more person power.

B.E.: MAGIC got a ton of use from Gulf Coast Moving Forward's documentary on the Census work. Our team members also valued being able to point folks to iCount's Facebook page or being able to highlight clips on YouTube that other cities were putting up. It really gave our younger brothers new ideas on how to approach the work and think outside of the box. We constantly reminded our young people that the census work is really about us being us. I'd tell them, "You all are brothers on the frontline every day. Be you, because it's you who we're trying to reach." Our guys ended up documenting their own stuff, which was inspired by Trap Bonner's work.

C.O.: It was good for United Way to be a part of a larger federal effort, which was also a citywide initiative. What was really exciting for me was that while the United Way had bought into the fact that we needed to focus on Black males, this campaign brought it home to folks that supporting Black males really needs to be a priority because both the city and federal government are not honing in on this population. It helped that there was already other excitement beginning to brew around Black males, so it helped to position us well with regard to our investments. And it was great to be a part of something that could really have an impact on the community, bring resources to Philadelphia, and really get out there on the street and convince these men to allow themselves to be counted.

Adjusting to the Funding Delay

The local partners employed a range of strategies to mitigate the sixth-month delay in receiving their implementation grants, with less than a quarter of the grant period to put them to use.

A.W.: One thing is that we had too many days of no movement because of waiting for the funds. We were stuck in a holding pattern from February until July. In retrospect, instead of waiting around we should've accepted the fact and done some low-cost activities like social networking activities and online work until the funds came. We would've used our other funds, but most of it was restricted or designated

for other projects. During that six-month waiting period we executed about 25–30 percent of what we hoped to do in our original work plan. Fortunately, the work we were able to start was being duplicated throughout the other NAACP branches. For most organizations that don't have nearly as large of a constituent base, their productivity depends on the work they do. But for us, by focusing on a train-the-trainer style, our partners and the community takes on and carries out whatever we invested in them, multiplying our efforts.

C.O.: Funding was such an important issue, really number one. Even though some critical time had lapsed while we waiting for the funding, there was still time to make an impact, so we wanted to capitalize on that as much as possible. The other very real thing was that we promised these young men something, and there was no way that we were going to break that promise, disappoint them and not follow through. The delay made us lose some young men who were trained, but we persisted and were able to gain a few more. If the funding had come in just a little later, we even talked about ways we could raise a small amount of money to maybe give the guys a stipend or something. We didn't want to disappoint them with the experience because they were really excited to take the message to the street. We couldn't let ourselves disappoint them with the promise of a job—and a meaningful one at that—and some income they were really counting on.



BLACK MALES AND THE 2020 CENSUS

While the iCount work of the local partners officially concluded in August 2010, there is reason to continue following developments around the 2010 Census. As of the writing of this report, the public is still waiting for the release of U.S. population figures, and with it the official numbers of Black men in the four target cities. Regardless of the final results, there are several lessons learned that can contribute to increasing the accuracy of the count of Black males for the 2020 Census campaign in terms of both policy and practice. Below is a review of those lessons.

Using Appropriate Terminology

Perhaps the single largest Census-related policy request by those advocating on behalf of the Black community is to remove the word *Negro* from the list of possible identity options for Black residents on the Census's questionnaire. Many believe that the term is outdated, offensive, and a possible barrier for many who already distrust the government and are skeptical about filling out a Census form. It was noted that the term still exists because in the 2000 Census, 56,000 Blacks wrote in the term *Negro* despite the fact that it was already listed as one

of the options on the questionnaire.⁷

When asked about the use of the term, Census Bureau Director Robert Groves apologized, noting, "My speculation is that in 2020 that word will disappear and there are going to be other words that are going to change."⁸

Counting in Disaster - Affected Regions

Another issue that needs to be addressed is the federal requirement that all residents of the United States be counted in the residence where they reside on April 1, and the ways in which this requirement disadvantages many Black residents—particularly Black males—given today's realities. There is near-universal agreement that the intent of the framers of the constitution was to use the census as a tool of political empowerment of the governed over the government, so that the census would accurately describe their voice and represent who they are and where they live, and apportion representation accordingly.

Many argue that post-disaster regions, such as New Orleans and parts of the Gulf Coast five years after Hurricane Katrina, should be given a waiver whereby the Bureau would count those

⁷ Kiviat, Barbara. "Should the Census Be Asking People if They Are Negro?" *Time* magazine, January 23, 2010. Accessed on December 8, 2010. <http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1955923,00.html>.

⁸ C-Span. 2010 U.S. Census. *Washington Journal*. March 26, 2010. Accessed December 8, 2010. <http://www.c-spanarchives.org/program/id/221684>.

who intend to return to those regions as if they were already living there. As Mayor of New Orleans, Ray Nagin drew attention to this issue when he publicly encouraged those who were displaced by the storm to return home to be recorded in New Orleans.

Counting Prisoners

Where residents are counted also has implications for Black males in U.S. prisons. For years, civil rights organizations have cried foul regarding how states and localities are permitted to count prisoners in the jails where they reside on April 1, rather than where they lived prior to their sentencing. Because many small, rural districts depend on correctional facilities—and the revenue generated from operating prisons with inmates hailing from large urban areas—many rural areas appear to be more populous than they are, causing urban areas to be undercounted. While rural populations should be declining, their numbers are often increasing because of prison expansion, aided by draconian sentencing laws. Thus, when redistricting takes place, elected officials—engaging in what many call “prison-based gerrymandering”—will often draw political boundaries around prisons to capture inmates as if they made up legitimate voter constituencies. Because Black men comprise a

disproportionate percentage of the country’s prison system (they make up 13 percent of the U.S. population but account for 40 percent of all U.S. inmates), the outcome is what Peter Wagner of the Prison Policy Initiative calls “a system distortion.”⁹ The prisoner counting practice resulted in Chicago having an undercount of 26,000 in 2000 Census, which amounts to over \$50 million in lost government funds.

Fortunately there is still some light at the end of the tunnel. In 2010, New York, Delaware, and Maryland become the first three states to require their prisoners to be counted at their last place of residence prior to incarceration. Similar legislation is pending in Florida, Wisconsin, and Illinois. Such a change would clearly benefit mostly minority, Democratic cities – and more accurately reflect the count of tens of thousands of Black males.

Improving the Partnership Program

Not all improvements to the Census require change through the policy process. The following are a set of recommendations that, through adjustments in implementation, practice, and operations, stand to significantly improve the Census count of Black males in 2020.

⁹ <http://census.pewsocialtrends.org/2010/counting-prisoners-in-the-2010-census>

¹⁰ Census Bureau website. Accessed December 18, 2010.

One key issue where the Bureau stands to make significant improvements is the Community Partners program. At the local level, Census Bureau regional offices deploy Partnership Specialists with the intent to recruit, train, support and advise trusted local leaders who will use their influence and existing networks to motivate their constituents to participate in the 2010 Census.”¹⁰ However, the local iCount partners all faced difficulty identifying, hearing back from, or collaborating with their local Partnership Specialists. In some cases this was due to the limited capacity of the Census’ regional offices, its hesitancy to collaborate with individuals it had not previously worked with, or because the local iCount partners, who generally knew much more about the partnership program than other local groups, came to the Specialists with very specific requests, which often pushed the boundaries of the specialists’ positions or their knowledge of what they were or were not able to do.

Three changes could increase the partnership program’s effectiveness moving forward: 1) Institute a stronger branding and certification process so that it is clear who is an official partner; 2) Streamline partners’ access to information and the readiness of the Specialists to work with them or respond to their requests; and 3) Improve customer service and the speed at which local partners are communicated their approval status.

Decentralizing Communication

A second area for growth is the Census Bureau’s communication structure, specifically the way its messages travel both vertically and horizontally. Currently, organizations and individuals interested in acquiring or sharing information about Census outreach strategies or promotional materials have two main options: they can join a sub-committee of their local municipality’s Complete Count Committee or they can utilize any of the available toolkits or customizable promotional materials made available on the census.gov website.

Unfortunately, both the CCC structure as well as its website have been found wanting, particular in relation to reaching subsets of hard-to-count populations. For example, the local County Executive or Mayor running the Complete Count Committee may or may not have funding or staff capacity to operate effectively, a website or offices where potential community partners can reach them, or even an interest in conducting outreach or know-how to engage in effective outreach to local partners. At the federal level, the Census Bureau’s website, www.census.gov, has available printable and customizable outreach materials and some suggestions on broad strategies that are intended to reach broader populations. However, the iCount Campaign’s research and experience have confirmed that the vast majority of the suggested materials and strategies

would actually turn off many Black males. The local iCount partners all heard the common refrain that in order for the Census program to succeed, all staff in the bureau must conform to a uniform message, hand out the same materials and not veer from their common talking points. That level of inflexibility and lack of nimbleness becomes a major barrier in reaching populations that have had significant distrust of and negative interactions with Census workers or government representatives.

Any serious effort to revamp the communications infrastructure would first need to flatten and decentralize the access points and control of communication in a way that positions the Bureau and the CCC as a facilitator and aggregator of information—not a gatekeeper that controls it. To open the door to innovation, the Census Bureau would benefit by borrowing from the principles of “Government 2.0,” by engaging with user-generated sites and data mashers to harness the interests of partners and citizens and allow them to help themselves and one another. Some examples might include the following:

- Utilize wiki, message boards and online forums where individuals and organizations can self-organize and communicate with each other and decentralize the process of sharing and learning. Bringing the conversation online would ensure that the success of community partners would not be determined by the capacity or ability of a local partnership specialist or Complete Count Committee. Citizens would be able to communicate across the country and find groups trying to reach similar populations.
- Facilitate the exchange of user-generated content through YouTube, Flickr, and other document-sharing platforms. By increasing the volume and rate of exchange of videos, documents and pictures, the Bureau would exponentially increase people’s ability to discover and share helpful content about the Census.
- Allow users to rank and vote on outreach strategies and ideas for improvement that they deem most helpful.

These “crowdsourcing” elements were all aspects of the iCount Campaign’s website and were the preferred means of how local partners shared information and learned from each other. Stepping back and facilitating the open flow of information would also allow the Bureau to allow data sharing while not endorsing it, and facilitate the creation of more useful and tailored ideas to meet the needs of individual populations.

CONCLUSION

This publication documents the iCount Campaign by highlighting learnings about the ways in which local organizations engage Black males; sharing examples of community impediments to Black male civic participation; exploring how to utilize technology as a mobilization and engagement tool for Black males; and presenting planning strategies to engage Black male participation in the 2020 Census.

Taken together, there were three main strategic benefits that the iCount Campaign added to the larger constellation of census efforts:

Specialization and competitive advantage. The Census Bureau provides nearly 22 toolkits to its community partners to aid in reaching American subpopulations, including the Black community, the Hispanic community, renters, parents, the Disability community, migrant workers, retirees, faith-based veterans, college students, and business. These toolkits all possessed a certain level of focus, but more specialization was needed. In the majority of cases, organizations or initiatives that were funded to reach any one of these subpopulations did not have the time, capacity, or resources to further subdivide their population of focus and create a differentiated strategy for each of them. The iCount Campaign, on the other hand, was uniquely positioned to do such a thing. It aimed to impact a distinct niche within

the overall Black community—Black males—and specifically those Black males in four distinct geographies who would not otherwise be counted in the census.

Experimental design. The iCount Campaign was innovatively designed for continual assessment and adjustment throughout the life of the initiative. By rolling out the Campaign in four cities, 21CF was able to test unique strategies within each city, creating a feedback loop through which successful tactics in one city informed efforts in the next. For instance, the Campaign developed YouTube videos and pamphlets and postcards that served as “leave-behind” marketing collateral. After these marketing strategies were piloted and tested in Chicago, they could then be implemented in Jackson. Likewise, youth engagement street teams that were employed in Philadelphia and Chicago could inform one another as they were rolled out.

A faster funding stream. iCount also added value to the larger constellation of Census efforts targeting the Black community by quickly and effectively channeling national dollars to smaller groups on the ground. This approach stood in contrast to previous Census-focused initiatives, which saw national organizations laboring to connect their dollars and program with local initiatives in a way that didn’t sacrifice quality and efficiency.

Counting the Invisible Man recounts the iCount Campaign as an example of a civic engagement strategy targeting an under-engaged sub-population—Black males. The Ford-funded iCount project serves as an instructive case study in civic engagement, and contributes to the growing body of work that values implementing specific strategies for increasing Black male outcomes.

Positive life outcomes and civic engagement are not loosely related concepts; rather, they are tightly bound fundamentals of healthy societies. A

population cannot reap the benefits of democracy without being an active participant in it, and next to elections, the Census is the biggest single civic engagement vehicle in Black communities. Thus, iCount is not just a foundation-supported 18-month initiative; it is also part of a long-term, urgent commitment to building a stronger democracy—a democracy that will not reach its potential until Ralph Ellison’s main character is no longer invisible, has a voice and a seat at the table, *and* knows that he indeed does count.

iCOUNT



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