NOTE: This transcript was generated using an automated transcription service, and may contain typographical errors.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:00:00] Hey, Nick.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:00:00] Yeah.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:00:01] If you had a grand and you could put that to going anywhere on this planet. Where would you go?

**Nick Capodice:** [00:00:09] I've always wanted to go to Scotland.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:00:11] Scotland. That's a good one. All right.

[00:00:14] Well, I've got some great news for you and some not so great news for you.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:00:18] Give me the good news first.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:00:24] We just started our end of the year fund drive and this one includes a drawing for a thousand smackers in AirBnB gift cards.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:00:32] That is tremendous news. So what's the bad news?

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:00:34] The bad news that we can't enter, so say goodbye to Brigadoon.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:00:38] Well, just knowing that a Civics 101 listener may get to achieve their travel dream is enough for me. Mostly.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:00:45] Here's the deal. During this fund drive, when you make a gift to support Civics 101 from NHPR you will be entered into a drawing for one thousand dollars in AirBnB gift cards and they come in two hundred dollar denominations so you can keep them all for yourself or you share with family and [00:01:00] friends.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:01:00] Which would be the neighborly thing to do. But would it be the Civics-y thing to do?

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:01:06] What do you mean by that?

**Nick Capodice:** [00:01:07] I have no idea.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:01:11] Also, when you become a new sustaining member, you can request NHPR's argyle wool blend socks. Perfect for keeping your toes warm on your walking tour of Philadelphia or your 'round the world comparative democracies trip or your trip to Seneca Falls to reenact the Women's Rights Convention. The AirBnB drawing, by the way, ends at midnight on December 31st 2019. And this is only open to residents of the U.S. and Canada. Sorry, Scotland.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:01:38] And on top of all this excitement, of course, you will be supporting Civics 101 and helping us to continue to make this show and to have conversations about what it means to be here in America and participate in this democracy.

[00:01:50] So if the spirit moves, you head on over to Civics101podcast.org to make your gift and to get more details. And thank you.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:01:57] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:01:59] Here's [00:02:00] the episode.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:02:01] Yeah, here's the episode.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:02:02] And on today's episode...

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:02:05] Say it in a Scottish accent.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:02:05] And now onto the show. And now today's episode. And now let's get on with the episode.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:02:15] That was the best one.

**CPB:** [00:02:22] Civics 101 is supported in part by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:02:26] Nick, you've heard of We Are the World. Right?

**Nick Capodice:** [00:02:29] Are you kidding? I lived through it.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:02:31] Oh, yeah.

[00:02:41] What about Do They Know It's Christmas?

[00:02:47] Tears are not enough?

**Nick Capodice:** [00:02:50] All of them good causes, cheesy, cheesy songs. I always wondered, is [00:03:00] that the best way to encourage charity?

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:03:02] Right.

[00:03:02] Yeah, I mean, but that was the 80s for you, it's this the hotbed of cause-driven, star-studded ensemble ballads. Did you ever catch, um, Can we count on you?

**Nick Capodice:** [00:03:13] No, I missed that one.

**Archival:** [00:03:16] You can count on me. Can we count on you?

**Nick Capodice:** [00:03:22] Is that Mickey Mouse?

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:03:23] One of the most famous celebs on the planet.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:03:36] This is a song about the census.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:03:39] Correct.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:03:41] The U.S. Census, which is, correct me if I'm wrong, the mild mannered survey that Americans fill out every 10 years.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:03:48] Mild mannered until it comes out of the phone booth in a cape and tights. The U.S. Census is about people, money and power. It defines whole decades, Nick. It determines [00:04:00] how much of a say you or I or anyone has in the political process. The census determines what resources we have access to and how many of those resources we actually get.

[00:04:12] The census is a tool at the very core of our democratic system.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:04:18] So what you're trying to say is good cause, cheesy song.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:04:22] Good cause, cheesy song.

**Archival:** [00:04:24] You make it sound like it's my cue to get to the question. It is your duty. Answer the census.

[00:04:30] It counts for more than you think. It counts for more than you think. It counts for more than you think.

[00:04:35] And what is your part in this enterprise? It's to cooperate with the enumerator. Do answer the census question.

[00:04:41] Answer the census on April first, I'm going to.

[00:04:44] Our separate identities will be lost in the process, which is concerned only with what we say, not who said it.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:05:01] This [00:05:00] is Civics 101. I'm Hannah McCarthy.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:05:03] I'm Nick Capodice.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:05:04] And today, we are covering the U.S. Census.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:05:08] Brass tacks first. How does the U.S. Census actually work?

**Hansi Lo Wang:** [00:05:10] The census process

[00:05:12] Well, basically, for most households, what they experience is they get a letter in the mail from the Census Bureau.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:05:20] This is Hansi Lo Wang.

**Hansi Lo Wang:** [00:05:22] I cover that people power and money behind the 2020 Census for NPR.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:05:26] So some day between March 12th and March 20th, most American households are going to find an envelope from the Census Bureau in their mailbox.

**Hansi Lo Wang:** [00:05:36] And in past years, people most households have gotten an actual census form. But in 2020, most households are going to get a letter explaining that they should go online and there will be a link to fill out a form on the Internet and also a code.

[00:05:55] And basically, people go on to a form, fill it out.

[00:06:00] And [00:06:00] then the Census Bureau collects that information.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:06:05] What is the information they're asking? What's the Census Bureau actually collecting? The main point of it is just to count us, right?

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:06:12] Yes, right. That and only that is the part that is constitutionally mandated about the census. The enumeration of people in the United States, they want to know how many people live in your house from the youngest baby to the oldest adult. And before we go any further, I should say that the questions on the U.S. Census shift, the census of 2020 will look very different from the census of nineteen hundred.

[00:06:41] But at the moment, when you count people in your house, you're counting people who spend most of their time there and people who are living with you as of April 1st because they have no other permanent residents.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:06:52] But if the point is to count everyone, what do they do with the deployed troops, kids away college? And [00:07:00] what about people who live in group settings like prisons or nursing homes?

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:07:04] So the Census Bureau has a whole category called group living arrangements. That's military bases, colleges, nursing homes, residential treatment facilities and correctional facilities. In those cases, the bureau contacts an administrator and establishes a process to count everyone living there. So sometimes that means that individuals get their very own census form. Sometimes it means that an administrator counts and identifies the population based on their own data. And of course, hundreds of thousands of people experience homelessness every year. And in that case, the Census Bureau deputizes workers, they call them enumerators to check in with shelters and soup kitchens and non shelters, outdoor locations to make sure that everyone is counted. But it's actually so much more than just the numbers.

**Hansi Lo Wang:** [00:07:58] It will ask whether the home that you're [00:08:00] living in, whether that's owned and if it's owned, if there's a mortgage and if it's not owned, whether it's rented or occupied without rent.

[00:08:08] And also ask about the race of every person living in the household and also whether every person living in a household identifies as being of Hispanic, Latino next origin. It will ask about the relationship between the people living together in a household, whether they are, for example, a married couple or unmarried couple. It will ask about the sex of every person living in the household and also ask about the age as well as the date of birth. I think that's about it. Yeah, those are the basic questions.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:08:45] I have a bunch of questions about this. First was Hansi saying that the census both asks whether you're Hispanic or LatinX and asks you what race you identify as?

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:08:55] Yeah, this is one of those questions that has shifted over time. So in [00:09:00] order to figure out what the census should be asking what federal agencies feel, they need to know to figure out budgeting and resource allocation. The census works with the White House's Office of Management and Budget. At that office requires that the bureau ask about Hispanic or LatinX ethnicity before asking about race, which has made the category at some other race the most often selected after white and black or African-American.

**Hansi Lo Wang:** [00:09:28] And there was a proposal to change the way these questions are presented on the forms, essentially have a combined question and asking for people's race and ethnicity and in when combined question. But that proposal required approval by the White House to change how the standards are set. But the White House's Office of Management and Budget has been silent publicly. And so we're going to still see a separate question [00:10:00] for Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:10:02] All right.

[00:10:02] So my next question is about the sex category. Are male and female the only choices?

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:10:06] They are.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:10:07] Can you just leave it blank?

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:10:09] You can skip questions. Plenty of people do submit an incomplete census form and they're still included in the head of the United States. But I should say that you can be fined for refusing to answer a census question. It could also trigger a visit from an enumerator, although that has been enforced pretty rarely in the past.

**Hansi Lo Wang:** [00:10:30] It is not a question about gender identity and the two options to to answer the question about sex. Yeah, it's male or female.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:10:41] All right. So let's get to the big question. What is the census for? Why does the government need this data and what do they do with it?

**Sharon Tosi Lacey:** [00:10:48] So the census is actually in the constitution. They require a count of the people every 10 years. While there's a myriad of reasons why we want to understand the size and characteristics of our population. [00:11:00] There are a few critical elements that go into it. First, the census is used to determine the apportionment of congressional representatives and that is actually in the constitution.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:11:11] This is Sharon Tosi Lacey.

**Sharon Tosi Lacey:** [00:11:13] I am the chief historian at the Census Bureau. I oversee a team of four other historians and a researcher. And we are charged with being the institutional memory of the Census Bureau.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:11:24] And what she means by determine the apportionment is that the population numbers of the census are used to figure out how many congressional representatives a state should get in the House.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:11:36] Right. So the greater your population is, the more representatives you get in Washington, D.C. Also, how many electoral votes your state has. And that means every 10 years we redistribute. And when I read that Texas and Florida are going to gain seats in 2020, for instance, that's contingent upon census data.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:11:55] Yeah. And the United States was the very first country to constitutionally [00:12:00] mandate a census. And it's way up there. It's Article 1, Section 2 -- it's the enumeration clause, clause 3. And we were one of the very first to use the resulting population count from the census to decide how many reps a state gets in Congress.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:12:17] So the census is essential to how our government operates.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:12:20] Crucial, yeah. And think of all of the other ways that the census affects us, because it's not just how many reps you have in Congress or how many electoral votes you have. I mean, that is a huge part of the power element. But then the census also tells us how many men, women, children, married people, elderly people, people of a certain race, even adopted people there are in this country and where in the country they are.

[00:12:50] Remember, the census is people power and money.

[00:12:55] And here comes the money part.

**Sharon Tosi Lacey:** [00:12:57] The next is determine the distribution of billions [00:13:00] of dollars in federal funding and that affects what goes to hospitals, fire departments, roads, other resources like that. Billions of dollars are in the balance. The federal government determines where to send this money. They're going to put schools where there are children. They're going to put the roads where there are businesses and where there's houses. And without an accurate count. You're never going to be able to put those in the correct places.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:13:32] So if for some reason someone doesn't or whole bunch of someones don't fill out the 2020 census, it could mean the difference between having a school in your community or not?

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:13:42] Or even just having a well-funded school in your community or not.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:13:48] Ok. So I would imagine that anything that is likely to deter someone from actually answering the census and making sure the population count of their community is accurate so that the community can therefore get stuff, that might [00:14:00] raise some red flags. I mean, this was part of the fear about the citizenship question. Right?

**Hansi Lo Wang:** [00:14:06] The Trump administration make this last minute request for a citizenship question which has not appeared on a census form for all households for decades.

[00:14:18] And so it would have been a very significant change if you were added and that was part of the debate.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:14:24] Now, it wouldn't be legal for the census to, say, pass on information about individuals to Immigration and Customs Enforcement or something like that, because they're actually laws in place to prevent the Census Bureau from sharing information that could identify you for 72 years after that information is collected. So it's not like answering honestly that you are not a citizen could have affected your ability to stay in the United States.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:14:51] Yeah. But, Juan, if I'm worried about being deported, I'm not going to answer an official question about my status.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:14:58] Right.

**Hansi Lo Wang:** [00:14:58] That is one [00:15:00] of the biggest challenges facing the census, because the Constitution calls for a total head count of every person living in the country, regardless of immigration status, regardless of citizenship status. If you're a resident of this country, the Constitution says we want to know you're part of this population count. But there are people who do not want to be counted and do not see the purpose of being counted, do not see the value being counted, and are worried that any information collected about them could be used against them.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:15:35] There is a reason that ads like this --.

**Archival:** [00:15:37] In 80 million mailboxes across the USA, the Census is a'comin' to help us plan the way!

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:15:48] Exist.

[00:15:49] The Census Bureau has been trying to make the census inviting and non-threatening pretty much forever.

[00:15:55] Even if you don't somehow fear for your chances of staying in this country, this [00:16:00] is a document that asks for the essential facts about you.

[00:16:05] And we as a nation aren't typically thrilled to give that information up.

**Sharon Tosi Lacey:** [00:16:10] Well, it's funny you said that because I actually have editorials from 1790 where people complain the census was too intrusive and too expensive. So some things never change. So America was kind of founded on a little bit of mistrust of the government. So you always had these questions of why did the government want to know what's happening in my household? We saw this especially in 1810 when we started doing the census of manufacturing. And we had to assure people and it was in the legislation that nobody could identify their business from their answers. And that was kind of the beginning of the idea of confidentiality.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:16:46] The Census Bureau has to toe this fine line between hey there, we're your friendly pals the Census, nothing to see here. And also, please, please, please pay attention to us. We really need you to do this thing for the good of life in America.

**Sharon Tosi Lacey:** [00:17:03] The [00:17:00] census is here to make your life easier. So people shouldn't fear it.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:17:07] So basically, as it stands right now, the only thing that can hurt you about filling out the census is not filling out the census. It sounds like the basis of so much that we count on.

**Hansi Lo Wang:** [00:17:17] Census is such a wonky, boring sounding word.

[00:17:24] But really what we're talking about is money and we're talking about power. And this is a concept. This is a requirement of the constitution that's mentioned before voting, before any mention of a president. This is fundamental to how we set up our representative democracy in the United States of America. And it also helps form our -- the reality that we live under for the next 10 years.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:17:55] Federal funding is tied to census data. The population of your state [00:18:00] determines how much your state can get for Medicaid. Medicare, funding for the Department of Health and Human Services. Funding for transportation. Funding for public schools. Funding for public housing.

[00:18:13] If the government has an inaccurate count of your state's population, that can mean losing out on hundreds of millions, if not billions of dollars.

**Hansi Lo Wang:** [00:18:24] There are no do overs.

[00:18:26] It's -- it's a one shot deal. And I think if people realize that so much is at stake and it is again, about money, about power, I think everyone would become a census nerd.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:18:44] There's this ad from 1920, interesting in part because it focuses on new immigrants answering the census. Anyway. It ends on this line that made made me do a double take.

**Archival:** [00:18:55] And when job is over, town shows nation's population is one hundred [00:19:00] five million, all Americans.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:19:04] All Americans.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:19:05] Yeah, it's almost impossible for me to conceive of a tool that is so closely tied to government and politics that also cares more about your living here than it cares about your being a citizen.

[00:19:22] And that element was actually built into all this from the start.

**Hansi Lo Wang:** [00:19:29] You know, I based my reporting on on primary documents and then, you know, the primary document on the Census beat is the U.S. Constitution and, you know, Article 1, Section 2 does not use the word "citizen" when figuring out how to conduct a census.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:19:47] In my time, I've looked at a lot of old censuses from the 1900s and the 1920s. And to be fair, they did have language in there like where are you from? Where is your mother from? What language do you speak in your house? But [00:20:00] the census still operates under the assumption that if you're a person and you're here, you are counted.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:20:05] Yeah, and you know what?

[00:20:07] Sharon Tose Lacey told me that the Census Bureau will never ask about your legal status. Right. They'll never ask, like, are you here in the country unauthorized? Because for them, the thing that matters the most is how many of us there are.

[00:20:25] They have a job to do.

**Archival:** [00:20:26] We must have many facts about ourselves as a nation and as a people. The census is the machine we have jointly established for finding and publishing these facts.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:20:55] Civics 101 was produced today by me, Hannah McCarthy with Nick Capodice and [00:21:00] help from Jacqui Fulton and Sarah Ernst.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:21:02] Erika Janik is our executive producer and does it daily -- not decennial --enumeration of the entire radio station. Music in this episode by Jahzzar, Junior85, Sarah the Illstrumentalist and Scanglobe.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:21:12] You can find loads more helpful information about the U.S. Census at census.gov.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:21:19] And just a gentle reminder, December 31st is the deadline for our student contest. Give us your 60 seconds stump speech.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:21:25] You can find all of the information for that at civics101podcast.org/contest.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:21:26] Civics 101 is a production of New Hampshire Public Radio and is made possible, in part, by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.