

1980

Object: *1980 Census Advertisements*



The Census Bureau has a long history of conducting publicity or promotional campaigns to encourage participation in the census. In the early years, the door-to-door enumerators and newspapers/magazines were used to educate respondents about the census process and how the data were used. However, in [1940](#), for the first time, the Census Bureau encouraged area managers and district supervisors to establish contact with local organizations and officials in order to obtain their cooperation in promoting a complete and effective census. The hope was that this organizational cooperation would create public interest in the census and circulate information.

Beginning in [1950](#), the Census Bureau worked with the Advertising Council to get its census messaging to the public. The Advertising Council represents the advertising industry and was formed to work with the federal government on public service (information) campaigns. For the [1950 Census](#), the organization prepared newspaper and magazine advertisements that were paid for by the sponsoring business firms, and it designed and distributed posters.

In later censuses, the Advertising Council also produced radio and television [public service announcements](#) (PSAs) as part of census promotional campaigns. The [1970 Census](#) public service advertising campaign was the first to target ads to minorities and other hard-to-count populations. The effectiveness of this campaign was important because, that was the first one to extensively use [mailout/mailback responses](#). As a result, most households no longer saw an enumerator, which eliminated the major avenue of education about the census.

The [1980 Census](#) campaign significantly expanded on those efforts. It was the most creative and effective publicity effort in U.S. census history up to that time and was deemed a great success. The campaign produced various promotional materials such as information guides, posters, flyers, buttons, and stickers in a variety of languages.

In the [1980 Census](#), with approximately 95% of the nation's housing units situated in mailout/mailback areas, the advertising campaign became more sophisticated and integrated with the overall design of the census plan.

The promotional campaign was directed by the Census Promotion Office (CPO), with the involvement of other divisions, including the Public Information Office and Field Division. The main focus of the campaign was to stress the importance of obtaining as complete a count as possible and the confidentiality of respondents' data. The slogan or tagline of the promotional effort was "Answer the Census, We're Counting on You."

For this census, the Bureau again secured the services of the Advertising Council for the development of a major media campaign—to include television, radio, newspapers, transit cards, billboards, business and trade press/publications—which was developed by the firm of *Ogilvy & Mather*. Broadcasting industry leaders from all major media markets were brought together to ensure radio and television [PSAs](#) were broadcast in their areas. A number of celebrities recorded radio or TV PSAs, some of which were in foreign languages (e.g., Spanish and Chinese).

The decision to again use public service advertising rather than seek funds from Congress for a paid advertising campaign was controversial – some doubted the effectiveness of the pro bono advertising. Nonetheless, the effort was clearly substantial: the commercial dollar value of the advertising the Bureau obtained in the period from January to June 1980 was nearly \$38 million.

The promotion program also included the mailing of census informational kits to more than 44,000 magazines; and to over 18,000 newspapers and television and radio stations. The latter kits were tailored for each state and type of media. Special kits were produced for Black, Hispanic, American Indian, and Asian & Pacific Islander news media.

Kits with census materials were also sent to over 100,000 elementary and secondary schools across the country. These kits included take-home assignments for younger children as a way to raise their parents' awareness of the upcoming census and preparatory materials for teenagers who would be assisting in filling out the questionnaire in households with language or reading difficulties.

Additionally, the Census Bureau enlisted various large organizations—corporations, non-profit or advocacy organizations, and federal government agencies—to get the messaging to the public. For example, AT&T included census messages with 90 million telephone bills that were mailed out in March 1980; the Boy Scouts went door-to-door delivering 30 million census promotional flyers that month; and the Social Security Administration included census messaging with benefit checks also sent in March.

In the field during the enumeration, public relations and community services specialists worked out of the regional and district offices in major metropolitan areas to perform a variety of functions: obtaining airtime for PSAs on local radio and television stations; advising district office managers on interacting with the press; obtaining the cooperation of local companies and organizations in helping to promote the census; and serving as liaisons to [complete count committees](#) (CCCs).

The concept of CCCs had its origins in the 1970 census, but the program was not developed by the Bureau until the planning and development phase for 1980, and it was first implemented in that census. For the 1980 census, over 4,000 local jurisdictions formed CCCs to aid the Census Bureau in promoting the census at the local level. The Bureau provided a kit of reproducible promotional materials and background information, and responded to questions about the program. The jurisdictions were responsible for funding their own publicity activities and events.

Clearly, one of the goals of the program was to encourage respondents to mail back their completed questionnaires as nonresponse followup is the single most costly operation in the census. The Census Bureau had established an 80 percent mail return rate as its target--the actual [1980 mail return rate](#) was 81.3 percent and net undercount dropped from 2.71 percent to 1.22 percent. According to one [evaluation of the promotion program](#),

[t]he promotion campaign did appear to have increased mail response, primarily among the low-income and non-White households which were the campaign's key targets. Mail response seemed to have been influenced both by the sheer amount of exposure to the campaign, and by the campaign's ability to instruct people regarding the purpose of the census.

This achievement was fairly remarkable and led to much higher expenditures on promotion and outreach for the following censuses, including paid advertising campaigns in the hundreds of millions of dollars in [2000](#) and [2010](#).

Final population count: 226,542,199