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As members of the next generation, it may feel like the weight of the world falls on our shoulders to make things right, especially in our country. It can get overwhelming, like we are suddenly in charge of so many lives that were made unbeknownst to us beforehand. However, as people proactively seek knowledge and experiences—just trying to make a difference in our world—I know that we are not alone in our efforts; by working together we can rise.

Therefore, in order to better advocate for our country's needs, it is time we start identifying people as human beings first rather than just labels. We first must begin to recognize the humanity of undocumented immigrants in the United States of America. They are widely underrepresented in the official resources and programs made available to those who live here. This creates evolving issues that need to be addressed and resolved before our next census count.

It does not take an economist or mathematician to acknowledge the inaccuracy of the U.S. census in terms of counting the needs of all those living in America, even with different citizenship statuses. Undocumented immigrants not getting counted in the official census is an important issue that illuminates the socioeconomic divide and disparities in healthcare and services offered in our nation.

It is important to continue spreading awareness about the significance of the census and what it will mean in a post-COVID-19 society. As outlined by the Constitution, the census is only administered once every ten years, meaning that we only get one shot to get it right every decade and ensure that enough resources and organized action plans are put in place.

The official U.S. government website regarding the census defines the operation as “a comprehensive count of every resident in the United States... The data collected

by the census determines the number of seats each state has in the U.S. House of Representatives (a process called apportionment) and is also used to distribute billions in federal funds to local communities.”

The U.S. census is the largest peacetime operation conducted in the U.S., and requires years of research and planning to ensure that it is a successful and accurate count of the population.

In his television show last year, comedian and commentator John Oliver emphasized the significance of filling out the census, even if it appears to be a daunting task. In a Time Magazine article regarding Oliver's show, it is declared that, “Census data helps determine Congressional representation and is used as a basis to distribute federal funds, and businesses use census data to decide where to open new branches. The census was considered so critical to the founding fathers that it's the sixth sentence in the U.S. Constitution.”

The impacts of getting an inaccurate census count can be dangerous and even lead to deadly occurrences. Inaccurately gathering census information affects how a particular geographic area can readily respond to a crisis or offer resources to its people in times of need. If undocumented immigrants are not counted, then needs of an area are underestimated.

Excluding people and their children based on citizenship status causes them to suffer and is harmful to the whole population. Undercounting the residents of a district by discouraging undocumented immigrants from completing the census restricts access opportunities for those living in a particular area. For example, counting the census wrong for a specific location in a city can cause an area to be underfunded; this can lead to only one hospital in an area where two are needed. Consequently, both undocumented immigrants and citizens all suffer the effects

of underfunding.

Former President Donald Trump attempted to exclude people in the official count of the 2020 census, and we must ensure that never happens in the future for the sake of our nation. The Trump administration, according to The Washington Post, attempted to include a question regarding citizenship on the U.S. census in 2020. Even though information obtained by the census is only intended for data collection, Trump actions were seen as a method to discourage the undocumented immigrant's participation in the census. This was a divisive move that irrationally caused fear, excluded people and built a metaphorical border between citizens and non-citizens. Though struck down by the Supreme Court and subsequently not included on the census, this question was undoubtedly an act of intimidation and bias.

Pursuing policies to make undocumented immigrants less likely to respond impacts how a county receives federal funding for public services, including everything from health care to education, and only produces more harm than good for all of us.

However, with the U.S. Senate now being 50-50 in terms of Republicans and Democrats, there is more talk of

conducting the census in a just and collaborative manner.

Better ways to focus on encouraging everyone to fill out the census include the use of the internet to increase self-response and other methods designed to boost productivity. As well, steps can be taken to ensure that undocumented immigrants—who are loved, validated, worthwhile and essential humans to this nation—are counted fairly and fully.

All in all, undocumented immigrants are still using our roads, our libraries and our resources, so if the census does not include them, then the government does not have the knowledge to make sure that resources are made available to the people that need it.

It is time that these invisible numbers are brought to light; it is time that people get counted for being just, well, people. Americans come with an assortment of different needs—whether or not they are documented. Counting people and using inclusivity as well as mathematics to include everyone living in America is not a political issue, but a human rights one.

NOT JUST NUMBERS



UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRATION
AND THE U.S. CENSUS