

# The Oakland Tribune

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## Faith leaders meet to galvanize participation in census

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Rev. Bonita Kitt of the Allen Temple Baptist Church, addresses a gathering of the Oakland Citizen's Committee for Urban Renewal at a prayer breakfast Friday Jan. 22, 2010 in Oakland, Calif. Partnered with the U.S. Census Bureau, the event in Preservation Park focused on making sure the 2010 census gets an accurate count of people in the region, especially the African-American community. (Karl Mondon/Staff)

OAKLAND — Hoping to avoid the miscounts that affected their communities in decades past, African-American faith leaders gathered for a prayer breakfast Friday intended to galvanize local participation in the upcoming 2010 census.

"Most of you do a census every Sunday morning," said the Rev. Arnold Townsend, co-pastor of the Rhema Word Church in San Francisco. "When you look out, as big as your church is, you can tell who's missing."

A new survey released this week shows African-Americans are more likely than other Americans to consider the census critically important to the country, though they are no more likely to say they will "definitely" participate.

Seventy-four percent of African-Americans consider the census very important, compared with 60 percent of all Americans, according to the survey by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press.

"The hope is if we are counted accurately, we will be heard in Washington," said Townsend, speaking at a meeting house in Preservation Park in downtown Oakland, where about 100 people met for an event organized by the Oakland Citizen's Committee for Urban Renewal with the backing of the U.S. Census Bureau.

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The count determines how congressional districts are apportioned and how much federal money goes to cities and counties.

About 84 percent of Americans have heard of the census, and 58 percent said they would definitely participate in it, according to the survey released Wednesday. About 78 percent of African-Americans have heard of it, and 57 percent said they would definitely participate.

Many East Bay pastors said they would include messages about the census in their church bulletins in the coming weeks.

The official date of the once-a-decade count is April 1, though the U.S. Census Bureau begins sending questionnaires March 15 to every household in the country.

The questionnaires must be mailed back, and if they are not, census officials will visit homes and knock on doors to ask residents to fill them out. Officials and pastors said their biggest worry is reaching out to young black males, who historically are the least likely to participate.

Norman Brown first began knocking on Bay Area doors for the Census Bureau in 1960, when the United States had half as many people and when California was not yet the state with the highest population.

"We've never had as much outreach as we have this time," said Brown, 73, who is now working on his sixth census and attended the Oakland event Friday.

He said no matter what decade, residents whose homes he visits have always had the same concerns about federal officials invading their privacy, but he argues that the 10-question survey is not that invasive.

"We ask less information than Safeway," Brown said.