

# DAILY SUNDIAL

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## THE 2010 UNITED STATES CENSUS

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The census requires that we be counted every 10 years, and the demand is stronger than ever in 2010. The next two days' editorials will discuss the quirks, importance and outrage over the specifics and nuances of the census. Stay tuned for pertinent information and the significance of being counted.

### Prisoners can't vote, but do count

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**T**en years ago, I did not think twice about the census. I filled it out and sent it in, no questions asked.

However, this time, I got to thinking about the logistical nightmare in attempting to count every single body, especially the hard-to-reach people like the homeless. Another group then crossed my mind: what about the incarcerated? Just how does California count those who are currently living in the state prison system, which cannot be counted as a permanent residence?

There is a huge number of prisoners in state institutions; more than we should have. Overcrowding is still a hot topic in California. Earlier this year a panel of federal judges ordered the state to reduce the prison population by 40,000 prisoners. (The order has since been stayed until review by the Supreme Court.)

There is a statute in place, as well, that specifically states that California prisons cannot be called

home.

Currently, the U.S. Census Bureau counts prisoners as residents of the area in which they are jailed and not residents of where they permanently reside. If you count tens of thousands of people as members of a community where they do not live, that can significantly alter legislative districts and bruise the democratic system. For us non-political majors, the official term is gerrymandering.

One of the purposes of the census is to assess how legislative districts are drawn. Districts are drawn based on population, thus giving everyone equal representation in our state legislature.

Therefore, by counting non-voting prisoners in a specific area as residents of that area, those that can officially vote are given less representation. Simply put, a district with a lesser number of voting individuals has the same representation as a district with the same population, but 100 percent voting eligibility. This practice by the bureau, however legal, is lopsided and a little unfair.

There is a solution, though it seems a bit cumbersome. California does have the authority to readjust the census figures by reassigning prisoners to be counted in the district of their permanent address. In addition, the districts have the right to not count prisoners at all by claiming that their home addresses are unknown. According to the "California 2010 Census Guide," most counties that have large prison populations have taken this route.

The census is beneficial to our community; there is a whole slew of reasons why, some of which have been discussed this week in the Sundial. Yet, the census bureau's prisoner policy does not make it easy for California, and other states, to establish a true census number and make sure that all voices are counted fairly.

The census bureau spends so much time, effort and money to get the most accurate count possible; why wouldn't they want to make it accurate for everyone? Why burden an already taxed state of California?