



Everything Michigan

Experts say Detroit's Census review unlikely to boost population

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Experts tell the Free Press that city officials basically missed its chance to boost Detroit's Census count.

April 4, Detroit Free Press: "It has to be a very tight approach," said Kurt Metzger, demographer at Data Driven Detroit, a nonprofit data firm. "You can't just whine about missing people. You had plenty of opportunity to beat the bushes. Now your best chance is to launch this effort at the nitty-gritty."

The Census Bureau counted 713,777 Detroiters, and the city lagged well behind the county, state and the nation in its mail-in response. Just 64% of questionnaires were mailed back from the Detroit addresses, compared with 74% for all of Wayne County and 78% for the state.

Metzger's assessment that revising the Census figure upward is a daunting task seems to validate **City Councilman Gary Brown's contrarian view** that Detroit should just accept the Census number and move on.

But maybe this discussion really misses the point. When Detroit households, at a rate 10-15% higher than average, fail to voluntarily participate in the Census, then something is very wrong that has nothing to do with the actual number of people in the city.

In a very bread-and-butter sense, too many Detroiters don't believe participating in basic acts of citizenship matters.

As much as it is **fashionable** to think Detroit is a war zone, the truth is something else altogether. A war zone requires at least two factions passionately fighting. Detroit doesn't have a war. It has apathy.

The 230,000 people (give or take) that left the city in the past decade didn't leave because they hated the city or because someone in the city hated them. There was no big event that led to this exodus. Instead, there was an accumulation of a lot of little things.



AP file photo

Streetlights don't work, the schools are a disaster, and in so much as crime is an issue, people aren't so much afraid of getting shot as they are annoyed to discover their catalytic converter was stolen last night. People leave because there are fewer and fewer good reasons to stay.

That reality is reinforced by a third of the population without the desire to even fill out a Census form. The level of disconnect is really inexcusable, but it's also understandable. After all, what's the best that comes from an accurate Census count? The status quo continues?

Regardless of whether a review process changes Detroit's official population total, the lesson for city officials isn't that Detroit needs reform. Everybody already knew that.

The lesson should be that unless a reform plan offers compelling benefits to the day-to-day quality of life for rank-and-file Detroiters, they probably won't care. And any reform met with apathy is as likely to fail as badly as the status quo.

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