

Census Taker

By Reg P. Wydeven
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On Valentine's Day of 1991, Anthony Hopkins introduced us to Hannibal Lecter, the brilliant but psychotic killer featured in 'The Silence of the Lambs.' Hopkins won an Oscar for his role, as did Jodie Foster for her portrayal of FBI Agent Clarice Starling. The movie also won an Oscar for the year's best picture.

Hopkins was positively spooky as Hannibal. Just saying, "Hello Clarice," was enough to send shivers up your spine. The full body restraints and face mask certainly didn't make him any warmer or fuzzier.

The creepiest part of the movie is when Dr. Lecter says, "A census taker once tried to test me. I ate his liver with some fava beans and a nice Chianti," and then he makes a disturbing "ff-sph-ff-sph-ff-sph-ff" sound. I'm convinced that because that scene was so creepy, the U.S. Census Bureau decided to do the census by mail now.

If you haven't already, it's important to fill out your census form and mail it back. The census is vital, as it determines the numbers of seats each state occupies in the U.S. House of Representatives. The government uses the census data to allocate more than \$400 million for disaster relief, education, hospitals, and infrastructure, such as highways, bridges, tunnels and other public works projects.

Article I, Section 2 of the U.S. Constitution empowers the Congress to conduct the census in "such manner as they shall by Law direct." Historically, other nations had used the census to tax its populace, confiscate their property or conscript its youth into the military. Our founding fathers intended the census to not only count our citizens, but also to empower them with representation in Congress.

The first U.S. census was taken in 1790 and has been taken every decade since. In 1954, Congress codified previous census statutes collectively in Title 13 of the U.S. Code. Title 13 protects the confidentiality of this information, including names, addresses, and telephone numbers, and violating this law is a crime with a fine of up to \$250,000 or up to 5 years in prison. All Census Bureau employees take an oath to not disclose census data and are sworn for life to protect the confidentiality of the information they collect.

It's also mandatory to complete the census form. If you fail to mail it back in, a census worker will most likely visit you. Knowing this, scam artists are already on the move, posing as government employees.

The 2010 census questionnaire has a total of 10 questions, however, none of the questions ask for bank account, credit card or Social Security numbers. The census is not conducted by email, so delete any messages you receive that are purportedly from the U.S. Census Bureau.

If a census taker does visit you at home, make sure he or she is actually from the U.S. Census Bureau. Any person claiming to be a U.S. census worker should have the following items:

- A badge
- A handheld device
- A Census Bureau canvas bag
- A confidentiality notice.

Before giving a taker any information, ask to see their identification and their badge. A census worker who comes to your door will only ask you the questions that are on the survey. And if you're drinking a Chianti, don't be surprised if the census taker flees.