

## THE CENSUS POWWOW TRANSCRIPT

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[SNAP JUDGMENT STUDIOS ID]

**GLYNN WASHINGTON (HOST):** What if everything you've seen, everything you've learned, taught you that the powers that be, want to make you, your family, your community . . . Disappear? What do you do?

**Today, my heart is swelling . . . Because we're going on a journey, following one woman who decides to take responsibility for counting everyone she holds dear.**

**A very special Snap Judgment, years in making. We proudly present the Census Powwow.**

**And understand, because this is real life, the story includes descriptions of genocide and historical trauma. Sensitive listeners, please be advised.**

**Our story begins in a conference room. Early 2020. At a tribal government building in North Dakota. Writer Julian Brave NoiseCat takes us there. Snap Judgment.**

[STORY STARTS AT 01:24]

**Cheyenne Brady stood before the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation Tribal Council—the leaders of her people who had, in generations past, led the warriors, signed the treaties and posed for those stoic photos.**

**Those guys.**

**They meet in the tribal building on the opposite side of the Four Bears Casino parking lot.**

**CHEYENNE BRADY:** It's, um, it's not the biggest room in the world. They sit on the North side and they're kind of just all in a little row, like a little horseshoe almost. And then there's a little tiny table up at the front.

**At the table, there's a mic.**

**CHEYENNE BRADY:** Yeah, and I'm like, like getting warm thinking about how I was in that moment. Like the council's a big deal. It's like going in front of. I dunno, the Senate or you know, whoever you're going in front of and you're like, don't, don't want your voice to shake. You don't want to be nervous. Because then it's like, I had to be the one to do most of the talking.

**She was asking for money—a lot of it, \$50,000—to count people.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: I thought that was way too much. You know? I'm like, dang, you guys, like we're putting, we're really pushing it right here.

**Cheyenne didn't know anything about the U.S. Census until a few days ago, when she got the assignment.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: Nobody was reaching out to take on the job. You know, because it's a, it's an extra duties, it's an extra duties job.

**She had no clue what she was getting into—I mean, she barely remembered the last census.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: At first we were feeling like, kind of scared, you know, 10 years is intimidating because 10 years ago, um, I had just graduated, I was graduating high school.

**Every ten years, the Census Bureau works with local communities to tally up all the residents of the United States. On Cheyenne's reservation, home to just over 6,000 in the last census, she would be their woman.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: I was like, okay, um, somehow we have to figure out how to count every person on our reservation. All right. And then I was like, wait a minute. Our reservation is huge. Uh, like, then I began to figure out like how difficult it would be.

**The census actually has a term for it:**

CHEYENNE BRADY: Reservations are hard-to-count populations. We're in the country already, but then you have people who live in the country of the country.

**Fort Berthold, which is bigger than Rhode Island and a couple hours' drive from Minot (which, let's be honest—you've probably never heard of) is pretty damn country.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: There's just areas that are dirt roads or houses that don't have 911 addresses assigned.

The streets might be marked, but then the street might be called one thing to us and then the city might have the street called something else.

You know what I mean? So they call it the hard-to-count within the hard-to-count.

**You see, the census has never accurately counted every Indian in the United States. They always undercount.**

**There was the 2010 census, when the bureau missed one in every twenty Indians on reservations.**

**Not quite as bad as the 1990 census, which missed more than one in ten on Indian land.**

**The constitution explicitly says the census should exclude “Indians not taxed” and the government didn’t even bother to officially count us until 1850.**

**And if there’s one demographic throughline in Native American history—that’s it: we do not get counted.**

**And when we don’t get counted, we don’t get government funding for things we need like education, healthcare, housing, food stamps, even roads.**

**A recent estimate found each uncounted Indian cost their tribe about \$3,000 a year.**

**On Fort Berthold, that's money for stuff like the Tribal 477 Program.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: So that's a program that helps individuals with their daycare bills. And if they, if they can't pay daycare, then they can't work. You know, it just creates a snowball effect of other issues that can happen for, for some families on the reservation. Um, our –

HOLY ROPE: Mommy –

CHEYENNE BRADY: Oh, sorry. Should I pause my thing?

HOLY ROPE: Mom? Who's that mom?

CHEYENNE BRADY: Okay. You have to go see daddy.

**That's Cheyenne's boy, Holy Rope.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: I have a three year old and a one year old. This is my life guys. Welcome to my life. Just kidding. Um --

**Back in the conference room, the Tribal Councilors knew they had to get an accurate and complete count. One of them stood up.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: I motion to double their budget. And I was like, Oh my God. And I don't even know what I was like, try like, you know, when you're trying to be like, like you're trying to stay professional and you're not, you don't want to be like, Oh my God. But inside I was like, Oh my God. Then like immediately, like within a couple seconds, another council rep seconds it.

**The council votes unanimously: \$100,000 to Cheyenne and the census.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: And then I got up and just out of respect, go and shake all of the council members hands you know, they're all like, 'You're gonna do a great job. Thank you. You'll do a good job.' And you're just like, thanks, but I'm scared, but thank you. I'm going to try. You know, like, Dang. Like, Oh my God, I have to do a good job now.

**But, of course, Cheyenne gets this assignment.**

**I mean, she was ‘Miss Indian World.’**

JULIAN BRAVE NOISECAT: And you were the basically the biggest powwow princess that they're ever that you can possibly be right?

CHEYENNE BRADY: Yeah I was, aye. You probably don't recognize me. No, I'm just kidding.

**(I never told her this, but I actually did know who Cheyenne was before doing this story. Being Miss Indian World—it's a big deal, in Indian Country.)**

*With 2,675 points, representing the Sac in Fox, from New Town North Dakota, Cheyenne Brady!*

CHEYENNE BRADY: Yeah, that's me. That's when I got crowned. Oh my God, I haven't watched this in a long time.

**That's a clip from the 2015 Gathering of Nations.**

JULIAN BRAVE NOISECAT: Can you explain the gathering of nations to people? Pretend I'm someone who's never heard of the gathering of the nations.

CHEYENNE BRADY: But you're not. No, I'm just kidding. Um so the gathering is – Oh you might have to help me.

**The Gathering of Nations is like the Super Bowl of powwows. It's held every April in Albuquerque, New Mexico. I used to go back when I traveled and danced on the powwow circuit.**

**And each year, they host a pageant at the Gathering—kind of like the contest to become a rodeo queen, but for Indian skills like knowing traditional dances and speaking your language. At the end, they crown 'Miss Indian World.'**

**She even gets her own beaded sash and tiara.**

*ANNOUNCER: Everybody wave at her. Wave at her! Oh, she's beautiful. Cheyenne Brady, our new Miss Indian World.*

CHEYENNE BRADY: The next day my arm was so sore, but by the end of my year, it was nothing, aye. I had one strong shoulder, aye.

**Census Day—the day that determines who is counted and where they're counted—is April 1<sup>st</sup> 2020 and the counting is supposed to stop in July.**

**It is now January 2020. Cheyenne has seven months.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: I can't fail, first of all. Let me put that out there. But if something were to lag then I'm hurting our federal programs that are in operation here and all the people who rely on those federal programs. We'd just be hurting our entire community. Like, I can't, uh, we can't fail.

**And — she's got backup.**

CHERYL ANN KARY: I've worked with Beauty Queens before. And I might say, I might add, I was a Junior Miss Standing Rock at one time.

**Former Junior Miss Standing Rock Dr. Cheryl Ann Kary.**

JULIAN BRAVE NOISECAT: Do powwow princesses make the best census workers?

CHERYL ANN KARY: Yes, I have to say we, we don't have crown envy. We just, we just work together as princesses.

**Cheryl runs a nonprofit out of a small office in Mandan, a town just outside the state capital of Bismarck. She's a member of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe.**

CHERYL ANN KARY: B-Y-O-T. Bring your own Tiara.

CHEYENNE BRADY: Dr Cheryl Kary works for the census Bureau as a tribal partnerships specialist, so she's kind of the middleman that gets us our information on where the census is at.

JULIAN BRAVE NOISECAT: Describe Cheyenne for me.

CHERYL ANN KARY: She's a firecracker. I just love her. She reminds me of me when I was that age, you know, just like she's just all over and she's just willing to do anything and just jumping in, yeah, I like her. I like her a lot.

**Cheryl gets how important the census is—her office doubles as a social service hub for the area's Native population. So, when a friend sent her a job opening at the Census Bureau in early 2019, she applied.**

CHERYL ANN KARY: It's one of those systems that, okay, we have to pay attention to. Cause it's not sexy, you know what I mean? Like it's not, it's kind of boring stuff that has to do with data and it has to do with numbers and things like that.

**After she got the gig, the bureau flew her down to Texas.**

**In a Lone-Star-state-sized brick building in Dallas, census workers were learning the ropes and getting their marching orders—one day one direction from management, the next day another from the President.**

CHERYL ANN KARY: So we got to see the whole operation get up and running, which was kind of cool, you know. Seeing all of the chaos and the, the anthill being built, you know.

**Amidst the pandemonium of bureaucracy, Cheryl got a crash course in counting Indians.**

**You see, the census has never trusted tribes to just count themselves.**

**Until 1890, the census didn't even count Indians on reservations.**

**Until about 1930, Indian agents would estimate reservation populations.**

**And it wasn't until 1970 that people were allowed to self-report their tribal affiliations.**

CHERYL ANN KARY: Prior to that, the Census Bureau would go to the door and assign a race. It wasn't until the eighties that they really even started, um, having native tribal voices at the table.

JULIAN BRAVE NOISECAT: So in 2020, the Census is still just learning how to, how to count native people and tribes?

CHERYL ANN KARY: I think so, yeah.

**So what's Cheyenne's strategy to beat the odds, to beat history and to get the count right?**

CHEYENNE BRADY: Basically to me the census is a huge marketing campaign.

JULIAN BRAVE NOISECAT: Can you, can you, uh, elaborate on what you mean by that?

CHEYENNE BRADY: It takes five times, it takes an individual to see something five times before it actually resonates with them.

**To get people to stand up and count themselves, Cheyenne needs to get the word out.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: We're going to have billboards, they're gonna pass that billboard at least five times this month. So hopefully by that fifth time, they will look up census dot gov.

**She kicks off her campaign with a mass mailing.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: Just some postcards. Most people, and I understand this, will look at it and be like, 'Oh, the census. Okay.' And they're going to toss it. But that's one time that they're going to see the census and know that, okay, census dot gov, I got to fill out my census.

*CHEYENNE RADIO BROADCAST: Hi everyone, this is Cheyenne Brady ...*

**Next up: radio and billboards.**

*CHEYENNE RADIO BROADCAST: You can go online, you can mail it in ....*

CHEYENNE BRADY: Our billboards are ordered, which is amazing. So people will be seeing census left and right, hopefully.

**They feature local celebrities, like everyone's favorite kid grass dancer: Payton White Buffalo.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: Generic stuff doesn't always catch people's eye. But if you know the little boy that's on the billboard, that might catch your eye and you might actually read what it's saying.

**But by March, when the first round of census packets hits mailboxes, well, you know what happens...**

CHEYENNE BRADY: There's not a lot of people you can reach out to with expertise on how to go about doing this during a pandemic.

**Many of the things that make Indians hard to count—poverty, overcrowding, lack of infrastructure, failing government programs—also make us vulnerable to the virus.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: As soon as we started hitting a stride in communities, it's like COVID came up and then we haven't gotten to go back into the communities.

**Cheyenne takes in-person events off the table until it's safe and doubles down on the marketing.**

We did some videos of different stakeholders throughout the reservation. Cowboys, dancers, the full spectrum.

[NATIVE LANGUAGE INTRO]

*VIDEO: What matters to you? Schools, transportation, hospitals, veterans. Data from the US Census Bureau ....*

**Cheyenne posts the videos online. They're a combination of census talking points and off-the-cuff interviews about why it matters to be counted.**

*VIDEO: And make sure to include relatives who are just staying with you temporarily. Like Uncle Joe on the couch, who just never left yet.*

*VIDEO: Be seen, be heard and make a difference in the 2020 census.*

**But there's one person Cheyenne absolutely has to hear from. I mean, you can't do anything big on the rez without this guy's voice behind it.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: Everybody knows who he is, you know? He's just like everybody's uncle or everybody's grandpa. He's everybody's friend.

Everybody else, we kind of had scripts for them. Like, okay, you're going to talk about the importance of counting kids. You're going to talk about this. You're gonna talk about him. We're like, you know what? You're really great. You just talk about whatever you want to talk about.

[HIDATSA LANGUAGE]

CHEYENNE BRADY: His, um, message was like, I know that we're trained to not trust the government.

*VIDEO: ... not to trust the government, but this one you can. Please come on in, trust me on this one, the government ain't gonna come and get you on this. It sounds crazy, but all your information is protected and it's mostly just for statistics. They're not going to come back after you, as far as law enforcement, they're not going to knock on your door and say, this is a warrant, we know where you live. They don't do those kinds of things. The guys in the green little cars from the border can't come and get you. The welfare people can't come and get ya ...*

CHEYENNE BRADY: Yeah, that was something that I was like, whoa, there might be a generation of people out there, like, you know, our older ones who might not want to get counted because they have, you know, they don't trust the government still.

CHARLIE MORAN: We're in the Four Bears Park. This is a place where I grew up when I was a kid and there was no noise here. Yeah. It's sure changed.

**Charlie Moran drives around the reservation with a sound system in the bed of his pickup. He's the emcee at all the powwows and rodeos, a teacher of the Hidatsa language and the keeper of many tales.**

**His family's plot is a narrow spit of reservation land in the middle of North Dakota, that's surrounded by water.**

CHARLIE MORAN: When I was, when I was being brought up as a little small child, The water was still not this high yet.

JULIAN BRAVE NOISECAT: Do you have any memories of the water rising over time?

CHARLIE MORAN: I remember seeing a lot of land that's covered today. Yeah. I guess to me it wasn't, I didn't know nothing. I was a little boy, you know, a little boy. I didn't know where this water came from. You know, it wasn't like overnight where, you know, it just came in and was here. It gradually came up.

CHEYENNE BRADY: We have a bridge here. If you look online, if you look at our map, there's, there's, um, it's Lake Sakakawea,

**Lake Sakakawea isn't really a lake. It's a reservoir.**

**In 1947, the US government started building a dam on the Missouri River, flooding the fertile bottomlands where Lewis and Clark met Sacajawea.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: They flooded out of a town called Elbowoods. The government flooded out that town.

**The town of Elbowoods—it's hospital, high school, main square, general store, courthouse, jail—is submerged at the bottom of the lake.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: It flooded like, like a quarter of the reservation, and it relocated 80% of the population. That's kind of why our town is called 'New Town' because it was just a 'new town' created up on higher, higher ground.



**The Three Tribes who call Fort Berthold home —The Mandan, the Hidatsa, and the Arikara —lost some of the most fertile farmland in North America.**

**The Army Corps of Engineers literally took reservation houses off their foundations and moved them to higher ground—sometimes with people still inside.**

**Entire families ended up sleeping in cars and barn sheds. Kids died of hunger and exposure. The cemeteries filled up with little graves in the years after the flood.**

**“It seemed like every ten minutes we were going to a funeral,” recalled one resident years later.**

CHARLIE MORAN: The taking of lands through water, through damming. I think that was probably one of the last biggest pushes to, to split our people up. And that's pretty bitter, you know, because it's not like five, six hundred years ago, it's real recent. A hundred years ago is still pretty recent. I hope that doesn't ever come again or we're forced to play a hand that we can't win, you know?

**There's a photo of the Interior Secretary signing an order to build the dam in Washington D.C. in 1948. A bunch of other white guys in suits are standing around him, as his shiny pen presses down on the paper. To his left, George Gillette, the chairman of the three tribes, has cast his gaze aside and removed his glasses to wipe the tears welling from his eyes.**

**Gillette is Cheyenne's great grandfather.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: There's definitely, um, a history of mistrust there. So I could see and understand why there may be people who would not even care to get counted.

JULIAN BRAVE NOISECAT: Would um any amount of marketing, postcards, billboards, overcome the flood and the history of the federal governments' mistreatment of your people?

CHEYENNE BRADY: No. There's traumas that our people carry, that you can't undo it with good publicity or with, uh, stuff like that.

JULIAN BRAVE NOISECAT: Do you feel like you're fighting against that history?

CHEYENNE BRADY: I feel like I am, I am that history. We are all that history. Uh, we carry it with us. Yeah, it's just, it's just who we are.

[AD BREAK]

**GLYNN WASHINGTON: When we return, Cheyenne takes the census out on the road. Stay tuned.**

[PROGRESSIVE AD]

[MONDAY DOT COM AD]

[STORY RESUMES AT 24:40]

**GLYNN WASHINGTON: Welcome back to Snap Judgment, you're listening to "The Census Powwow" episode. This is real life, and our story does include reference to violence and historical trauma. When we last left Cheyenne Brady, she was struggling to count every person on her reservation in the middle of a pandemic. But all that's about to change. Writer Julian-Brave Noisecat has the story.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: Hey guys, it is June 25. We're coming into twin Buttes. It's myself, Cheyenne Brady, Mr. Charlie Moran.

CHARLIE MORAN: Hi ...

**By June, as the first wave of the pandemic ebbs, things are looking safe enough that Cheyenne can host a few census events out in the community.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: Dr. Kary, do you have anything to say?

CHERYL ANN KARY: I'm just so proud of you guys, kind of like a mother hen, I'm just sitting here smiling watching you guys, ya know ...

**Cheryl walks Cheyenne through the process—which, like everything else during the pandemic, has to be done carefully.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: The event is going to be a stay-in-your-car event due to the COVID pandemic. You're going to drive up to one of the four or five stations that have computers, you'll complete your census there with one of our trained workers. I'm hoping it takes 10 minutes max.

MONTAGE:

*Did you complete your census yet?*

*I have no idea*

*Alright, well we'll help you complete one right now. ...*

**Soon, Cheyenne is zipping across Lake Sakakawea on the narrow bridge that connects New Town to the Four Bears Casino—a big cross on the west bank and a medicine wheel on the east. Elbowoods submerged below.**

*Identify as American Indian? What tribe? Turtle mountain tribe ....*

CHEYENNE BRADY: It is nice and hot outside. Almost have a face mask tan.

**She and her team set up in parking lots. They give out free food and gift cards to help convince residents to come get counted.**

*Thank you for completing your census. And if you know anyone, send them over ...*

**With each event, more and more people show up.**

MONTAGE of CHEYENNE:

*We had over 50 people, no, over 50 households come in and complete their census*

*We did a total of 64 questionnaires,*

*I would say we did a little over a hundred for sure.*

CHEYENNE BRADY: It's been nonstop so I'm pretty proud. I think that the response rate a little bit today, anyways. And that was the goal!

**Cheyenne keeps track of her progress at census.gov, where the Bureau publishes the estimated percentage of Fort Berthold households that fill out their census.**

**Early on, Cheyenne set some lofty targets.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: A success for me would be at least a 90% response rate, and a failure would probably be a 30 to 40% response rate.

So my first date that I ever wrote down was March 23rd, 2020. And on that day, the response rate for Fort Berthold. It was 0.5%. So we were at less than 1%

As of yesterday, our response rate was 10.3 percent. So about 10 out of every a hundred people on the reservation have done their census

**That's a lot lower than the rest of the state, where, to put it simply: they've got it a lot easier than in Fort Berthold.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: All of the towns around us are, most of them have received their census packets on their doors. Um, Fort Berthold hasn't received those yet. The state of North Dakota is response rate in it right now, um, is almost 60%.

I guess, yeah, kind of frustrating. Mmm. But I think sometimes you just get used to the way things are. But I'm also. I know that my, my overall being is just optimistic, like overly optimistic sometimes. And so maybe that's why I don't get, that's why I don't dive too, too deep into those feelings maybe. Maybe they are still doing the towns, you know, this is the optimistic me, like maybe the towns around us aren't all done yet. But they probably are.

**Cheyenne keeps hustling, hosting events across the reservation: at the North Segment Car Wash in New Town, at the Red Hall gymnasium in Parshall, at the One-Stop Gas Station in Mandaree, at the Cultural Center in White Shield. But:**

CHEYENNE BRADY: Dang it. I don't want to tell you guys what our response rate is right now. Just kidding. It's 10.9. It's almost 11. So it hasn't gone up that much.

**She does add at least one more household to the pile.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: I'm filling my census out now and maybe it's just me, but it feels really good to like, to be typing my kids' names. Like, I have two little boys, so, like it just

feels really good to know that my boys are counted and that they matter and that, you know, these two little beings are part of the bigger picture.

**The number starts to creep up.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: The response rate is slowly rising. I looked at it today and it's 18%.

Today is July 16th, 2020, and the current response rate for MHA nation. Is 19.2%.

Today is July 23rd. And the response rate is still reading at 19.7.

I looked up the census rates just now, we broke 20%. So that's exciting. It'd be really awesome if we could get to 25% pretty soon here.

**By late summer, with some tribes' response rates as low as 1%, Cheyenne is leading one of the most effective counts in Indian Country.**

**But she's not competing with the pack. No, she has her eyes set on a cross-state rival.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: My goal is to catch Standing Rock.

CHERYL ANN KARY: (laughs) They just went up again, but you guys did too, so ...

**And Standing Rock, which boasts a response rate of 28% in late July, is in the lead.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: Dang. Dang! We've got some ground to make up ...

CHEYENNE BRADY: I feel like I'm only competitive with standing rock, because that's where Cheryl's from. Like, that's the only reason why.

JULIAN BRAVE NOISECAT: Do you think standing rock is gonna win this friendly competition?

CHERYL ANN KARY: I don't know, I'm a little biased, you know.

**With the race on, the count approaches its final phase: The Non-Response Follow Up. This is the part where canvassers sent in by the federal government go door to door to count people by hand.**

**But July comes and goes without a single one setting foot on Fort Berthold. Then August.**

**The response rate plateaus at about 20%. Coronavirus returns with a vengeance.**

JULIAN BRAVE NOISECAT: Are you guys having cases on the res?

CHEYENNE BRADY: Yeah, so we did a mass mass testing on Monday. Tuesday a lot of people started getting positives. It kind of created like a, like a little bit of chaos

**Cheyenne, being Cheyenne, gets roped into the tribe's coronavirus response and helps set up a facility for patients to quarantine.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: I'm tired, I haven't worked out in like two weeks ...

**Meanwhile, the Census Bureau, having missed its goal to finish the count by August, pushes the deadline back to Halloween.**

CHERYL ANN KARY: I just told the coworker the other day, I was like, I'm. Uh, you know, that point in your relationship with a person of the opposite sex where you're like, okay, what was my attraction again to this guy?

**As the end nears, Cheryl grows more and more frustrated with the bureau.**

CHERYL ANN KARY: You know, I just got this little tiny package of promo stuff that's like 40 notepads and, and you know, 50 pins. And I'm like, what the hell am I going to do with this shit at this point in the game? You know? Hey, we're, we're down to the wire. Is this really helping me right now?

**At the end of July, the Trump administration moves up the census deadline again. From Halloween to September 30th.**

**Cheyenne loses a month.**

CHERYL ANN KARY: We all got blindsided, basically.

**Cheryl learns that her position with the Census Bureau will be eliminated.**

CHERYL ANN KARY: Well it came out on the, in the media first, before we heard it internally. Then we got an email that was basically you may have seen in the media, this is what's happening. You'll probably be ended in September, if not earlier, and so now our, just the thing is, put the pedal to the metal and try to get it done before the 30th date.

**By September, according to the census website, most Indians remain uncounted. And as far as Cheyenne knows, enumerators haven't even showed up on Fort Berthold.**

JULIAN BRAVE NOISECAT: How does this story end?

CHERYL ANN KARY: How would it? Well, I'm a happy endings girl, so I'd like it to have a happy ending, but I'm also a realist. So I don't think it will. I'd like to say the story ends with, um, all of the tribes making a really big surge at the end and getting, uh, awesome self response rates. I don't think that's gonna happen.

**Cheyenne keeps checking her response rate: still 20%—about 10% lower than Standing Rock.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: And so when I was talking to Dr. Kary, I was like, so what does that mean for, like, what if, like right now we're at 20%. So if it, if we were at 20%

September 30th, what does that mean? And she's like, that just means that we're under counted. There's no redo. So that, that's scary.

**Even Miss Indian World starts to crack.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: I'm like, kind of, I'm not angry, but I'm kind of annoyed by like, I'm not annoyed. I'm just like, I wish that we could like sit down and talk with the Census Bureau, like, what's going on? Like, how can we figure this out? How can we work together? Like being able to have that dialogue would be really cool.

JULIAN BRAVE NOISECAT: How do you like stay so like positive and like, I don't know, you just have such a go-getter attitude amidst all this. I mean like I would be worn down and probably grumpy and like I don't know. How do you do it?

CHEYENNE BRADY: This is just how creator made me, aye? Um, I do get frustrated sometimes, or I get tired, but, um, I don't know how I do it.

**With things looking desperate, Cheyenne turns to what she knows best.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: Maybe, maybe if I can get people's buy in, I think it would be really cool to have like a, um, some type of powwow. Obviously not the traditional powwow.

**Ok, a census powwow might sound a bit out of the box, but it actually makes a lot of sense if you think about it.**

**It would bring a bunch of people on the reservation together and it would be enough of a local happening that anyone who didn't make it would at least hear about it and be reminded to fill out their census.**

**Plus, powwows are pretty much a way of life for Cheyenne and her family. I mean, this time of year they'd usually be on the road headed to one.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: Parents will literally take off Friday, leave Thursday after work, drive all night, find wherever, wherever the powwow was. Show up there on Friday. Powwow Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and leave Sunday night so that they can get back to work on Monday.

**With census.gov showing just one in five Indians counted on Fort Berthold, no enumerators in sight, and a powwow on the calendar, I fly to North Dakota.**

[AD BREAK]

**GLYNN WASHINGTON: A Hail Mary, buzzer beater, walk-off, census powwow. Can Cheyenne pull it off? Find out when Snap Judgment returns. Stay tuned.**

[STORY RESUMES AT 38:00]

**GLYNN WASHINGTON: Welcome back to Snap Judgment, "The Census Powwow" episode. My name is Glynn Washington. When last we left, Cheyenne Brady, she was struggling to count every person on her reservation in the middle of a**

**pandemic. But all that's about to change. Writer Julian Brave NoiseCat has the story.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: Oh my God, I'm excited. Cause we're about to have a powwow. Um, and I'm nervous. We only have three hours but um, Julian's gonna help us.

**On the reservation, Cheyenne brings me to the Antelope Society Powwow Grounds.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: Now we're sitting in our announcer stand looking out at our powwow grounds. Um, it's kind of like a bowl. Is it a bowl? What is this called? Like an amphitheater. A baby amphitheater, I guess. Beyond the powwow grounds, you can see Lake Sakakawea. It's a really pretty sight.

**The powwow grounds, like most I've danced in over the years, are arranged in a circle—shaded seating and a roofed announcer stand ringing a grass dance floor.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: I'm pretty sure this has never happened before. I'm like 99.9% confident that there has never been a powwow centered around the census or centered around people completing the census.

**Cheyenne needs the Census Powwow to be a smashing success.**

**The census's bureau's efforts on Fort Berthold have seemingly gone AWOL.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: There are people that are just now getting their census packets, like you're dropping off census packets at the beginning of September. You're closing the census, September 30th, people around the country got their census packets back in January. Like we approved enumerators to come on, but they've never been like, okay ...

**The bureau hasn't communicated much about what to expect to Cheyenne.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: We don't know that information. So like when I get people texting me saying, is this a real census worker at my door? I have no idea. Like, I really don't know. So –

JULIAN BRAVE NOISECAT: *Do you feel like defeated, exasperated, frustrated? I would, in your circumstance.*

CHEYENNE BRADY: I don't feel defeated. I feel a little exhausted if I'm being honest um.

JULIAN BRAVE NOISECAT: Is this the end of your census journey?

CHEYENNE BRADY: It is, I think it is. It's like the last hurrah, that's for sure.

**But for the Census Powwow to work, people have to actually show up.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: That might be 20 of us. That might be a couple hundred of us. I don't know. Like, I don't know what it's gonna look like tonight.

JULIAN BRAVE NOISECAT: Do you mind if I record you guys putting this stuff in?

CHEYENNE'S UNCLE: Uh uh.

**A couple hours before the powwow is supposed to start, the grounds are deserted, save for a Native American Church group making a big cauldron of stew.**

CHEYENNE'S UNCLE: The meat's done so basically just getting the flavors into the meat and corn.

**Cheyenne's uncle is one of the men preparing the meal...**

CHEYENNE'S UNCLE: To be honest, I've never filled out a census in my whole life. And I'm like sixty years old, but like I've never seen it to be, you know, where it was going to help me.

**Coronavirus deaths are on the rise in the community. One elderly couple, a grandmother and grandfather, passed within weeks of each other.**

CHEYENNE'S UNCLE: I think it might have something to do with the outcome today. People being afraid to come out and be around people.

JULIAN BRAVE NOISCAT: And which of the Three Affiliated Tribes are you?

HOLLY: I'm Hidatsa.

**On the far side of the arbor, I meet a local vendor setting up her booth for the evening.**

JULIAN BRAVE NOISCAT: ...what you're selling?

HOLLY: I am selling headbands, bead work, badge holders, pop sockets, earrings.

JULIAN BRAVE NOISCAT: This must be your first powwow all year, huh?

HOLLY: Yes. That's how I was telling her. Yeah. He said, well, I would have been polling all, all season long. This would have all been done by now. Yeah, I'm really rusty.

JULIAN BRAVE NOISCAT: And, um, have you completed your census?

HOLLY: No. I guess I just never really did it. I don't know. I just, I see it. I've gotten letters. I see it in my emails and stuff, but I just, you know, I just never really I've never really counted myself before. I don't know if I've ever counted myself. I don't remember.

JULIAN BRAVE NOISCAT: Are you going to do it this year?

HOLLY: Um, I dunno. But I heard on, on, uh, the news that Trump already wanted it closed. So I don't know if I could even do it now.

**So far, for most 'Census Powwow' attendees, the census is barely even an afterthought.**



**But parked next to the beadwork vendor, I meet a dude who damn near has a Doctorate in Counting Indians:**

JEFF BAKER: Now don't be afraid. It's all confidential. No one from housing, no one from immigration, no one from the federal government can have anything to do with your answers. And if they do, you call me. And I'll report them to the federal authorities because I'm in good standing with the Denver office.

**Jeff Baker is a citizen of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa. He was the tribal census specialist for North and South Dakota in 2010. So, basically, ten years ago, he was Cheryl.**

**Nowadays, he's the owner of Rez Famous Lemonade, which operates out of the back of a yellow school bus: "Rez City Express" emblazoned on its side.**

JEFF BAKER: You know, we'll do powwows, weddings, bar mitzvahs, funerals. Irish funerals are a blast. You know they'll put on a party if you want, for an Irish funeral and we'll do those too.

JULIAN BRAVE NOISCAT: What, uh, flavor should I try today?

JEFF BAKER: Well, it depends on your flavor pallet, you know. By far the most popular and just blows everything away as the blue rezberry. It's just a crowd favorite. Everybody likes it.

JULIAN BRAVE NOISCAT: And that's blue REZ-berry

JEFF BAKER: Yep, quotation marks, REZ, R-E-Z, berry.

JULIAN BRAVE NOISCAT: I think I'll get the blue rezberry in the 24 ounce.

JEFF BAKER: Alright, we'll hook you up boss.

CHEYENNE BRADY: Grand Entry is going to be at five and we're going to start on time. Okay. Hopefully, yes, we are gonna put that into the universe.

**Charlie pulls up with his sound system in tow.**

CHARLIE MORAN: Please, again, wear your masks throughout the evening. Enjoy yourselves, enjoy the company.

**The air fills with the buzz of powwow expectation: Dancers braiding hair and fixing bells atop moccasins. Drum groups testing the timbre of their hide. Spectators laughing.**

**Everyone is excited.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: Are you excited?

CHARLIE MORAN: No.

CHEYENNE BRADY: You're not excited!?

**Except Charlie.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: Remember we talked about healing and expressing our feelings yesterday?

CHARLIE MORAN: But I'm not excited to be here ...

**Singers set their drums on the edge of the circle. Dancers wearing surgical masks over traditional regalia mill about.**

**Cheyenne stops for a quick interview on Facebook live.**

INTERVIEWER: I'm here with Miss Cheyenne Brady, former Miss Indian World. She'll be explaining more what the powwow's about ...

CHARLIE MORAN: Take it away anytime you're ready, Shiloh. We're gonna invite all our dancers, come into the arena...

**As the sun sets and temperature drops, Charlie says the word.**

CHARLIE MORAN: Here we go. Hopefully everybody signed up for the census ...

**All of the dancers dance into the arena in a socially distanced clockwise procession.**

**After grand entry: intertribal social dances. Then: contest time.**

**Men's traditional dancers with feather bustles on their backs, move like warriors stalking enemy and prey.**

**Women's traditional dancers, some wearing fully beaded capes, bounce to the rhythm, stately as queens.**

**Jingle dress dancers glide around the circle, the tin cones on their dresses, syncopated with the drum.**

**Grass dancers hop and slide across the circle, like reservation b-boys.**

**Men's fancy dancers bounce and twirl.**

**Women's fancy dancers, their shawls draped over their shoulders, float on their toes like ballerinas.**

**For a moment, it's like there is no pandemic.**

**The Census Powwow—Cheyenne's plan—it rocks.**

CHARLIE MORAN: Are you guys enjoying this? Are you guys having a good time tonight? Yeah. Let me hear your horns, you guys. Let the people around the world hear your horns!

**The grounds are full of Indians.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: Oh my god, this is beautiful, though ...

CHARLIE MORAN: Again, if you haven't done your census or completed your census yet, come on over this way ...

**Throughout the evening, Cheyenne registers people at census dot gov.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: Did you do your census yet? No? Okay, Tavares can help you ...

**Sometimes while bouncing her seventeen-month-old Taivyn on her knee.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: What happened? What happened? Look, they're dancing ...

**All the dancers have to fill out a questionnaire before they can compete.**

**And many spectators complete their censuses as well.**

**The numbers climb.**

**Then, late in the evening –**

CHARLIE MORAN: Cheyenne is looking for street clothes contestants ...

**Charlie announces a special competition for spectators in street clothes.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: Yes! Street contest. Get out here.

**It's been four years since I competed at a powwow, so I decide to get out there and give it my all.**

CHARLIE MORAN: Here we go. Good luck kids. Get after it!

**Dancing low and fierce. Feet, head, shoulders, cheeks rocking to the song.**

**They say men's traditional dancers tell stories with their movements. But I think my dance—like this whole powwow—it's more of a statement: whether or not we Indians get counted, we count.**

CHARLIE MORAN: Ho! Yeah that's good. Stay where you're at.

**I stop with the song, sweating and sucking air. The judges start picking winners.**

**Their verdict on me –**

CHARLIE MORAN: Julian!

**First place.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: Alright, how do you feel? Now I get to interview you for once.

JULIAN BRAVE NOISECAT: I feel good. That's the first time I've danced in –

CHEYENNE BRADY: That's really good, because you got to take part too.

JULIAN BRAVE NOISECAT: I know, it was awesome. I haven't powwowed in a long time.

**The next morning, as we all recover from our first and only powwow hangover of 2020, I catch up with Cheyenne.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: I'm still tired from the powwow yesterday. Um, the powwow went really good. I am really satisfied and really thankful with how everything turned out.

**The powwow: a success. But the census: well.**

**I've got some hard questions.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: I would say we got at least, at minimum, another 30 at the powwow um, I think it went really well.

JULIAN BRAVE NOISECAT: So let's say it was 50 signups. Do you think 50 signups was worth it for a \$15,000 budget?

CHEYENNE BRADY: Hmm.

**The powwow was wonderful in many ways. It's just that driving up the response rate didn't appear to be one of them.**

JULIAN BRAVE NOISECAT: So back in March, you said you wouldn't accept anything less than an 80 or 90% response rate.

CHEYENNE BRADY: Hey, did I say that? Can I take that back now? Just kidding.

JULIAN BRAVE NOISECAT: You're at a small fraction of that.

CHEYENNE BRADY: Yeah, like um, a quarter of that or a third. Well --

JULIAN BRAVE NOISECAT: Do you think that you have failed or the tribe has failed?

CHEYENNE BRADY: No, I don't think the tribe has failed at all. I don't think that I have failed. I definitely wish our numbers were higher. That's for sure.

**After the powwow, Cheyenne had been checking the census's website. And the response rate hadn't moved.**

**By now, she had started to believe that she had a more accurate count than census dot gov.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: I would think that we're at least 30%. At least 30%. And right now it's showing we're like 20 to 23%, but I just don't think that's accurate.

**She'd been hearing strange things from family and friends about the enumerators on Fort Berthold.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: They did their census at one of our outreach events, but the enumerators came to their homes and told them that the census bureau had no information on them and then they're also being really heavy handed with people who are, um, adamantly saying like, 'No, I completed it. I went to that website already.' It sounds like the enumerators are just like, 'Well, my boss is saying I have to do this.' And one even told them, 'People can go to jail if you don't do this.' And so I'm wondering how many people that's happening to.

**With Cheyenne and hundreds of others like her across the country confused and in disarray, the Trump Administration keeps trying to push up the deadline.**

**Congress and the courts push back, but for most reservations, it's too little, too late.**

**The Indians would go uncouncted, as we always have.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: Hi guys. So it is October 5th and I have some really cool news. I just got off of a call with another tribal specialist. Our actual count right now is 91.96%, which is amazing. That means we have just over 8% of our population left to be counted.

I feel like, um, now I feel like that almost sense of relief like uh, okay. We did do a decent job. Like our community does know that the census is happening. Yeah, and so there's my update today. My voice is probably a little more exciting ...

JULIAN BRAVE NOISECAT: So, how did you, how did you learn about the, um, the response rate? And it's different than what was on the census website?

CHEYENNE BRADY: Oh my God. Yeah. Way different, which is exciting. And I'm super pumped up about it.

**Another census worker had reached out to Cheyenne.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: So first she told me the response rate which was like twenty three something still. And I was like, 'I really don't think that's reflective of what it actually is.'

**The census worker then pulled up a report, one that wasn't on census dot gov or made available to Cheyenne.**

**The report showed that the enumerators had almost finished counting all the remaining households on Fort Berthold.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: And then I was like, wait wait wait wait, hold up.

**They'd done it by knocking on doors, by talking to neighbors and landlords and by other means, like estimating how many people lived in each home based on the car out front.**

**The enumerators brought the count right up to the finish line. But they wouldn't have been able to do it without all the groundwork Cheyenne had laid.**

**And she had been left out of the loop. All this time, all she could see was the self-response rate on the census's website, but that didn't seem to reflect the work she'd been doing: all those events, all that marketing, all that self-counting.**

**Still, in the moment, she was relieved.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: It's crazy to think that we're almost all counted. Super confident that at some point this month we'll get to a hundred percent.

JULIAN BRAVE NOISECAT: Yeah, that's crazy. I think I owe you an apology for --

CHEYENNE BRADY: Those harsh questions last time? Just kidding.

JULIAN BRAVE NOISECAT: Yeah. I mean, how does it, how does it feel to be, I mean, you, you went on this crazy quest to count, everyone on the Mandan Hidatsa Arikara Nation, and you thought that you were 70% plus behind, and then it turns out that you, you did it.

CHEYENNE BRADY: So weird. Either way. We're still losing to standing rock. They're at like ninety nine point seven eight. But we're a very close second.

JULIAN BRAVE NOISECAT: Oh, I should have asked about that ...

**On October 13th, with less than three weeks left before the deadline, the Supreme Court ruled that the Trump administration could stop the count two days later.**

**By then, according to the bureau's calculation, Fort Berthold was 99.95 percent counted.**

JULIAN BRAVE NOISECAT: Who has more expected count? The Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation or the Standing Rock Sioux tribe?

CHEYENNE BRADY: Ooh. Okay. Also let's note that this is probably, we don't know if this is accurate, but, standing rock 99.91. Fort Berthold 99.95. That's funny.

JULIAN BRAVE NOISECAT: So you might not have, you might not have gotten a hundred percent, but you might have beat standing rock, actually?

CHEYENNE BRADY: Possibly, but we don't know just kidding.

JULIAN BRAVE NOISECAT: So given that the count is over and was ended early by the Supreme court and the Trump administration. Does that mean that you are going to be, you're done at 99.95%? Like, is there no way to get a hundred percent?

CHEYENNE BRADY: That is a great question because I have no idea. Let me go see if you can still self respond. I wonder if they took the website down. Ooh, yup. The website is down. Like if I were to go ask like, say my grandma hadn't completed it, although she has, and I was like here, log onto here really fast. Um, they can't, they can't. So the 'my 2020 census dot gov' website is down now.

**I, well, let's just say that I already knew that.**

JULIAN BRAVE NOISECAT: Can I admit, admit something?

CHEYENNE BRADY: You didn't do your census?

JULIAN BRAVE NOISECAT: I, uh, I left it to the last minute. And so I had to mail in my census.

CHEYENNE BRADY: Oooooo!

**I knew better than anyone how important it was to get counted—to stand up and say 'I count.'**

**But when it was time, like so many Indians across the country, I didn't.**

**I can't fully say why.**

**There are so many other ways to be seen—with family, in community, on the dance floor—that just feel so much more important. So I put it off. And then, they moved the deadline.**

CHEYENNE BRADY: What if it won't count? Hopefully! I mean that's like so --

JULIAN BRAVE NOISECAT: I mean, I am quite embarrassed. Um, I, you know, I hear, I was like, not only reporting this story, but also like asking you some really hard questions about like –

CHEYENNE BRADY: Yeah. You were nailing me to the wall.

JULIAN BRAVE NOISECAT: Are people gonna fill out the census? And it turned out I was one of the people not filling out my census.

CHEYENNE BRADY: You were being the hard-to-count hard-to-count population this whole time.

**The 2020 census is widely considered to have been the most challenging census in modern history.**

**The Bureau might not know how big the undercount is in Indian Country until 2022.**

**Until then, we won't know just how many Indians stood up this time around, like Cheyenne, and how many may have vanished beneath the system, like me.**

**[CREDITS AT 01:01:51]**

**GLYNN WASHINGTON: A big, big thank you to everyone on the Fort Berthold Reservation especially Cheyenne Brady and her family: Novi Runs Above. Holy Rope and Tayvin. Poncho, Tookie, Uncle Thomas and Grandma Florence.**

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**The original score for this story was by Cheflee and Pat Mesiti-Miller. This story was produced and reported by Julian Brave NoiseCat and John Fecile. It was written by Julian Brave NoiseCat. Look for his book "We Survived the Night." Coming soon.**

**[PODCAST SUBSCRIPTION INFO AND SHOW CREDITS]**