

## INTRODUCTION

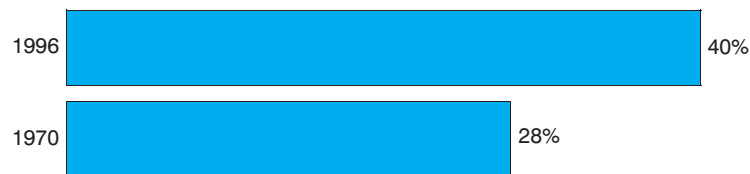
Many changes in marital status and living arrangements have occurred over the last few decades. Noteworthy have been the continuing trends toward postponement of first marriage and higher levels of divorce. These and other marital status changes, particularly in the family formation ages, have re-shaped the living arrangements of children and adults since the 1970's—fewer children now live with two parents and more adults live alone. This report is based on the March 1996 Current Population Survey and provides estimates for the resident population, excluding military in barracks and people in institutions.

## MARITAL STATUS

### Declining proportions of adults are married

Although the number of currently married people has grown 23 percent since 1970 (from 95 million in 1970 to 116 million in 1996), the number of unmarried adults has grown significantly faster, doubling from 38 million to 77 million (Table A). These increases resulted in a decline in the proportion of adults age 18 and over who are married, from 72 percent in 1970 to 60 percent in 1996.

Figure 1.  
Unmarried Adults as a Percent of All Adults: 1970 and 1996



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

Changes in the proportion of the population currently married have implications for fertility trends, and care and support systems for children and the elderly, as well as for changes in living patterns discussed later in this report.

Declines in the proportion of adults currently married have occurred for Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics,<sup>1</sup> but the changes have been most pronounced for Blacks. In 1996, 63 percent of White adults were currently married, down from 73 percent in 1970. Similarly, the proportion of Hispanics who were currently married declined from 72 percent to 58 percent between 1970 and 1996. Among Black adults, 42 percent were currently married in 1996, a considerable decrease from 64 percent in 1970.

<sup>1</sup>Hispanics may be of any race.

### Divorced population growing fastest

The currently divorced population is the fastest growing marital status category. The number of divorced people has more than quadrupled, from 4.3 million in 1970 to 18.3 million in 1996. They represented 10 percent of adults age 18 and over in 1996, up from 3 percent in 1970.

### Never-married adults more than doubled since 1970

In 1996, 44.9 million adults age 18 and older had never been married, more than twice the number in 1970 (21.4 million). Never-married adults accounted for 23 percent of all adults, and made up the largest share (59 percent) of the unmarried population in 1996, followed by those who were divorced (24 percent) and those who were widowed (18 percent).

Sharp increases in the proportion never married have been primarily seen among men and women in their late twenties and early thirties (Table B). Between 1970 and 1996, the proportion of 25- to 29-year-olds who had never married more than tripled for women from 11 percent to 38

Table A.  
Marital Status of People 18 Years and Over:  
1970 and 1996

(Numbers in thousands)

Marital status	1996	1970
Total, 18 years and over	193,166	132,507
Percent who are:		
Married	60.3	71.7
Unmarried	39.7	28.3
Never married	23.3	16.2
Widowed	7.0	8.9
Divorced	9.5	3.2

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

Table B.  
Percent Never Married: 1970 and 1996

Age	1996	1970
Women:		
20 to 24 years .....	68.5	35.8
25 to 29 years .....	37.6	10.5
30 to 34 years .....	20.5	6.2
35 to 39 years .....	13.1	5.4
40 to 44 years .....	9.7	4.9
Men:		
20 to 24 years .....	81.0	54.7
25 to 29 years .....	52.0	19.1
30 to 34 years .....	29.6	9.4
35 to 39 years .....	20.8	7.2
40 to 44 years .....	14.2	6.3

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

percent and more than doubled for men, from 19 percent to 52 percent. Among 30- to 34-year-olds, the proportions never married tripled from 6 percent to 21 percent for women and from 9 percent to 30 percent for men.

The proportion never-married has increased for Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics. Among Whites, the proportion increased from 16 to 21 percent between 1970 and 1996. Thirty-nine percent of Black adults in 1996 had never been married, up from 21 percent in 1970. For Hispanics, the proportion rose from 19 to 30 percent during this period.

### Postponement of marriage continues

The median age at first marriage has been rising since the mid-1950s and has increased quite rapidly during the past two decades (Figure 2). In the twenty years spanning 1955 to 1975, the estimated median age at first marriage increased about 1 full year (from 22.6 years to 23.5 years for men and from 20.2 to 21.1 for women). Since 1975, the median age has increased more than 3 full years for men and women, climbing to 27.1 years for men and 24.8 years for women in 1996.

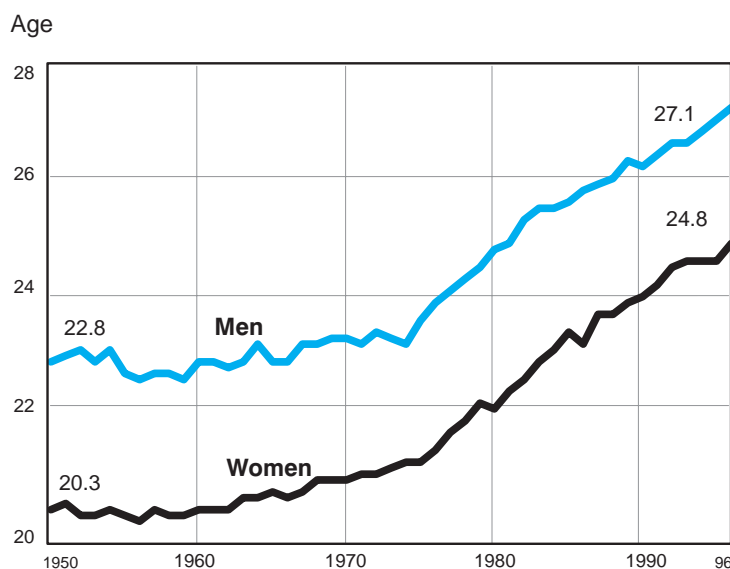
**Marital Status Defined.** Marital status, as shown in this report, reflects the person's status as of the survey date. For example, the category "divorced" represents only those currently divorced and not remarried. It is not a count of divorces that occurred in 1996, nor a count of all people who have ever divorced in their lifetime.<sup>2</sup> The category "married" includes adults who live with their spouse and who live apart due to marital discord or for any other reason (separated). "Unmarried" includes those who have never married or are currently divorced or widowed.

**Median Age at First Marriage Defined.** These estimates are calculated indirectly by estimating the proportion of young people who will ever marry during their lifetime, calculating one-half of this proportion, and determining the current age of people at this half-way mark by oscillatory interpolation.<sup>3</sup> It does not represent the actual median age of the population who married during the calendar year.

## LIVING ARRANGEMENTS OF CHILDREN

Children under age 18 are considerably more likely to be living with only one parent today than two decades ago. As marital circumstances of the adult population have changed, so have the living arrangements of children. The rise in divorce and delay in first marriage among adults are two of the major factors contributing to the growing proportion of children living with one parent. These living arrangements are depicted as of the survey date and are not intended to represent life-long experience.

Figure 2.  
Median Age at First Marriage, by Gender: 1950 to 1996



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

<sup>2</sup>For estimates of people ever divorced, see Norton, Arthur J., and Louisa F. Miller (1992) *Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage in the 1990's*, U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P23-180, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 1992.

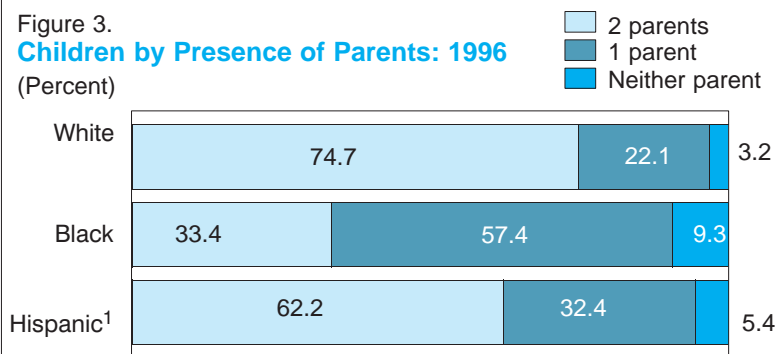
<sup>3</sup>For a complete description of the calculation of median age at first marriage, see U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The Methods and Materials of Demography*, by Henry S. Shryock, Jacob S. Siegel, and Associates, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 1971.

Table C.  
**Children by Presence of Parents: 1970 and 1996**  
(Numbers in thousands)

Living arrangements	1996	1970
Children under 18 years .....	70,908	69,162
Percent living with:		
Two parents .....	68.0	85.2
One parent .....	27.9	11.9
Mother only .....	24.0	10.8
Father only .....	3.9	1.1
Neither parent .....	4.1	2.9

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

Figure 3.  
**Children by Presence of Parents: 1996**  
(Percent)



<sup>1</sup>Hispanics may be of any race.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

**Only 7 of 10 children live with two parents**

The proportion of children under 18 years living with two parents has declined from 85 percent to 68 percent between 1970 and 1996 (Table C). (These parents may be the child's biological, step, or adoptive parents.) The proportion living with one parent has grown from 12 percent to 28 percent. About 4 percent lived with neither parent in 1996.

The majority (86 percent) of single-parent children live with their mother, but an increasing proportion live with their father. In 1996, 14 percent lived only with their father, up from 9 percent in 1970.

White children are less likely to be living with one parent than are Black children or children of Hispanic origin—22 percent for White children, 57 percent for Black children, and 32 percent for Hispanic children in 1996 (Figure 3).

A child in a single-parent situation in 1996 was as likely to be living with a parent who had never been married (36 percent) as with a parent who was divorced (37 percent). Another 23 percent lived with a parent who was separated or living apart from their spouse for some other reason, and 4 percent lived with a widowed parent. Changes in these distributions are important to track as the likelihood of being awarded financial assistance from absent parents is strongly affected by the marital status of the parent with whom the child lives. About three-fourths of divorced mothers are awarded child support payments, compared with only about one-fourth of never-married mothers.<sup>4</sup>

**1.4 million grandchildren live only with their grandparents**

In 1996, there were 4.1 million grandchildren under 18 years old

<sup>4</sup>For information on child support, see Lester, Gordon H., *Child Support for Custodial Mothers and Fathers: 1991*, U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Reports, Series P60-187, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 1995.

living in the home of their grandparent(s), of which 1.4 million had no parent present. These 4.1 million grandchildren represented 6 percent of all children under 18, up from 3 percent of all children in 1970. These estimates include only those situations where a grandparent was designated as the householder; it does not include grandparents living in a home maintained by the child's parent(s).

Of the children living with grandparents in 1996, 12 percent also had both parents living with them, 48 percent had only their mother present, 5 percent had only their father present, and 35 percent had neither parent present in the grandparents' home (Table D).

Black children are more likely to live in their grandparents' home than White children or children of Hispanic origin—13 percent of Black children compared with 4 percent for Whites and 7 percent for Hispanics in 1996.

**LIVING ARRANGEMENTS OF ADULTS**

Changes in the marital circumstances of the adult population greatly affect the way people live. Eighty percent of all adults age 18 years and over lived with one or more family members, be they a spouse, child, parent, or other relative, while 13 percent lived alone, and 8 percent lived with nonrelatives only (Table E).

**Fewer young adults maintain family households of their own**

One of the most striking changes in the living arrangements of young adults (18 to 34 years old) has been the decline of those maintaining family households of their own (as householder or as spouse of the householder). Between 1970 and 1996, the proportion of 18- to 24-year-olds maintaining a family household dropped from 38 percent to 20 percent. Similarly, the proportion for adults aged 25 to 34 also decreased from 83 percent to 61 percent.

Table D.  
**Living Arrangements of Children Under 18 Years: March 1996**  
 (Numbers in thousands)

Characteristics of children	Age						
	Under 18 years	Under 1 year	1 and 2 years	3 to 5 years	Under 6 years	6 to 11 years	12 to 17 years
<b>LIVING ARRANGEMENTS OF CHILDREN</b>							
Total children	70,908	3,909	8,028	12,429	24,366	23,725	22,817
Living with:							
Two parents	48,224	2,723	5,437	8,504	16,664	16,243	15,316
One parent	19,752	1,060	2,304	3,512	6,876	6,489	6,387
Mother only	16,993	862	1,958	3,104	5,924	5,647	5,422
Father only	2,759	198	346	408	952	842	965
Other relative(s)	2,137	87	233	322	642	729	767
Nonrelative(s) only	795	39	54	91	184	264	347
<b>LIVING ARRANGEMENTS OF GRANDCHILDREN<sup>1</sup></b>							
Total grandchildren	4,060	476	811	812	2,099	1,211	751
Living with:							
Both parents present	467	78	94	119	291	123	53
Mother only present	1,943	312	483	409	1,204	510	228
Father only present	220	28	55	59	142	54	23
Neither parent present	1,431	58	179	225	462	523	446
<b>MARITAL STATUS OF PARENT</b>							
Living with mother only	16,993	862	1,958	3,104	5,924	5,647	5,422
Married, spouse absent	3,927	113	375	750	1,238	1,390	1,299
Separated	3,238	84	296	613	993	1,168	1,078
Widowed	662	6	19	54	79	188	396
Divorced	6,039	84	277	783	1,144	2,265	2,630
Never married	6,365	659	1,287	1,518	3,463	1,804	1,098
Living with father only	2,759	198	346	408	952	842	965
Married, spouse absent	526	15	49	71	135	183	207
Separated	368	13	28	55	96	134	138
Widowed	120	—	13	3	16	26	78
Divorced	1,276	33	78	151	262	449	565
Never married	837	150	206	182	538	183	115

— Represents zero or rounds to zero.

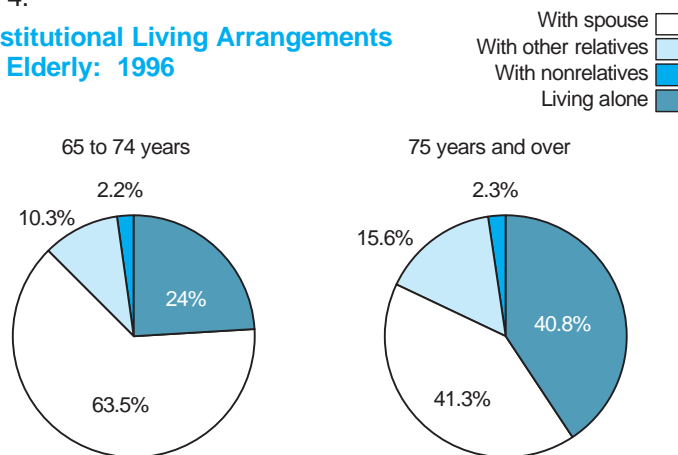
<sup>1</sup>Grandchildren are only those living in the grandparent's home. Excludes grandchildren with grandparents living in the home of the child's parent(s).

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

More young adults are living at home with their parents. The most notable increase in this living arrangement for adults age 18 to 24 years occurred during the 1980s, while little or no change occurred during the 1970s and thus far in the 1990s. Between 1970 and 1980, the proportion of 18- to 24-year-olds living in their parents' home was constant (47 percent in 1970 and 48 percent in 1980). However, this proportion rose to 53 percent by 1990. In 1996, the proportion living in their parents' home remained at 53 percent and numbered 13.3 million young adults 18 to 24 years old.

Among young adults age 25 to 34, a similar pattern exists. The proportion who lived with their

Figure 4.  
**Noninstitutional Living Arrangements of the Elderly: 1996**



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

Table E.  
**Living Arrangements of Adults 18 Years  
 and Over: 1996**  
 (Numbers in thousands)

Living arrangements	Number	Percent
Total, 18 years and over	193,166	100.0
Living with a relative	153,903	79.7
Family householder	69,530	36.0
Spouse of householder	53,543	27.7
Child of householder	21,990	11.4
Others, living with relatives	8,840	4.6
Not living with a relative	39,264	20.3
Householder living alone	24,890	12.9
Householder with nonrelatives present	5,124	2.7
Others, living with nonrelatives	9,251	4.8

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

parents was 8 percent in 1970, 9 percent in 1980, and 12 percent in both 1990 and 1996.

Increases in these proportions occurred for both men and women, but for all years, men were more likely to live "at home" than women (3.2 million men and 1.8 million women 25 to 34 years old in 1996).

The majority of young adults aged 18 to 34 who lived with their parents had never married (93 percent). Only 7 percent of those who lived with their parents also had children of their own living with them in their parents' home.

#### **Unmarried-couple households increase seven-fold since 1970**

The number of unmarried-couple households (couples of the opposite sex) has grown seven-fold since 1970—from 523,000 in 1970 to 4 million in 1996. Today there are 7 unmarried-couple households for every 100 married-couple households, compared with 1 for every 100 in 1970.

The majority of adults in unmarried-couple households are under 35, and the majority have never been married. By age, 62 percent of adults in unmarried-couple households are under 35 years old, 33 percent are 35 to 64 years old, and 5 percent are 65 years and over. By marital status, 57 percent have never married, 32 percent are divorced, 7 percent are separated or living apart from their spouse for some other reason, and 5 percent are widowed.

Although the unmarried-couple household figure is intended mainly to identify cohabiting couples,

and presumably does in most cases, it also may include those with a roomer, boarder, or employee living in the household. The estimate, in turn, misses other cohabiting couples in households where more than two adults are present.

#### **1 in 8 adults lives alone**

The population living alone in 1996 (24.9 million) represented about 1 in every 8 adults age 18 and over. While women accounted for a larger share of this population in 1996 (6 of 10), the number of men living alone has increased at a faster pace since 1970. Between 1970 and 1996, the number of women living alone doubled from 7.3 million to 14.6 million, while the number of men living alone tripled, rising from 3.5 million to 10.3 million.

Living alone is more common among the older population, especially for women. For example, among adults age 75 and older, the proportion living alone in 1996 was 53 percent for women and 21 percent for men, compared with only 6 percent of women and 9 percent of men under 45 years of age.

#### **Elderly men are more likely to live with their spouses**

In 1996, there were 31.7 million persons age 65 and older. This estimate excludes the institutionalized population, such as those living in nursing homes or other places providing care or custody. Among the 18.3 million persons age 65 to 74, the majority (63 percent) were married and living with their spouses, 24 percent lived

alone, and 10 percent lived with other relatives (Table F). After age 75, widowhood becomes more common, resulting in a very different pattern of living arrangements compared with the younger cohort (Figure 4). People age 75 and over (13.4 million) were as likely to live alone as to live with their spouses (41 percent each), while the remaining 16 percent lived with other relatives.

Longevity is a major factor affecting the gender difference in elderly living arrangements. Women, on average, live longer than men and, therefore, account for the majority of the elderly population (18.4 million women versus 13.3 million men in 1996). Thus, women are more likely to live alone (41 percent versus 17 percent for men), while men are more likely to live with their spouses (73 percent versus 41 percent for women).

#### **Source of Data**

Most estimates in this report come from data obtained in March 1996 from the Current Population Survey (CPS). Some estimates are based on data obtained from the CPS in earlier years and from decennial censuses. The Bureau of the Census conducts the CPS every month, although this report uses only data from the March survey.

#### **Accuracy of the Estimates**

The data in the detailed tables are from the March 1996 Current Population Survey. All survey data are subject to sampling variability as well as survey design flaws, respondent classification errors, and data processing mistakes. The Census Bureau has taken steps to minimize errors. However, because of methodological differences, use caution when comparing these data with data from other sources. For information on the source of the data, the accuracy of the estimates, the use of standard errors, and the computation of standard errors for estimates, see the section on "Source and Accuracy" on the Internet (<http://www.bls.census.gov/cps/ads/1996/ssracc.htm>). For

Table F.  
**Marital Status and Living Arrangements of Adults 18 Years Old and Over: March 1996**  
 (Numbers in thousands)

Characteristics of adults	Age						
	18 years and over	18 to 24 years	25 to 34 years	35 to 44 years	45 to 64 years	65 to 74 years	75 years over
<b>MARITAL STATUS</b>							
Males	92,741	12,402	20,390	21,273	25,416	8,213	5,048
Married, spouse present	54,659	1,469	10,046	14,084	19,360	6,310	3,390
Married, spouse absent	2,958	169	783	847	844	184	131
Unmarried	35,124	10,764	9,562	6,342	5,212	1,718	1,525
Never married	24,893	10,651	8,222	3,746	1,748	359	167
Widowed	2,476	—	44	66	423	788	1,156
Divorced	7,755	114	1,297	2,531	3,040	571	203
Females	100,425	12,441	20,528	21,805	27,252	10,057	8,341
Married, spouse present	54,626	2,428	11,842	14,595	18,336	5,290	2,135
Married, spouse absent	4,196	374	1,065	1,233	1,150	224	150
Unmarried	41,603	9,639	7,621	5,978	7,768	4,543	6,056
Never married	20,023	9,370	5,865	2,496	1,537	384	370
Widowed	11,070	11	84	279	2,089	3,301	5,306
Divorced	10,511	258	1,673	3,203	4,141	858	379
<b>LIVING ARRANGEMENTS</b>							
Males	92,741	12,402	20,390	21,273	25,416	8,213	5,048
Living with relative(s)	74,047	9,952	14,853	17,299	21,342	6,763	3,839
Family householder	47,382	1,403	8,516	12,049	16,854	5,652	2,907
Spouse of householder	9,667	277	2,066	2,773	3,148	840	564
Child of householder	12,924	7,327	3,213	1,715	649	9	11
Other, living with relatives	4,074	945	1,058	762	691	262	357
Not living with relatives	18,694	2,450	5,537	3,974	4,074	1,450	1,209
Nonfamily householder	13,341	1,149	3,374	2,981	3,389	1,328	1,119
Living alone	10,283	569	2,250	2,318	2,839	1,240	1,067
Sharing home with nonrelative(s)	3,058	580	1,124	663	550	88	52
Other, not living with relatives	5,353	1,301	2,163	993	685	122	90
Females	100,425	12,441	20,528	21,805	27,252	10,057	8,341
Living with relative(s)	79,855	10,067	17,126	19,406	22,753	6,727	3,775
Family householder	22,147	1,548	5,211	6,455	6,188	1,688	1,058
Spouse of householder	43,876	1,686	9,242	11,634	15,101	4,468	1,745
Child of householder	9,066	5,955	1,810	783	456	41	23
Other, living with relatives	4,766	878	863	534	1,008	530	949
Not living with relatives	20,570	2,374	3,402	2,399	4,499	3,330	4,566
Nonfamily householder	16,672	1,098	2,124	1,742	3,976	3,240	4,493
Living alone	14,607	493	1,487	1,485	3,608	3,137	4,398
Sharing home with nonrelative(s)	2,065	605	637	257	368	103	95
Other, not living with relatives	3,898	1,276	1,278	657	523	90	73

—Represents zero or rounds to zero.  
 Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

additional information, contact Andrew Zbikowski, Demographic Statistical Methods Division, on 301-457-4214 or via Internet E-mail (andrew.a.zbikowski@cmail.census.gov).

### More Information

A detailed package of tables on marital status and living arrangements is available in electronic form on the Internet at the Census Bureau's World-Wide Web site (<http://www.census.gov>). Once on the site, click on "Subjects A-Z", then click on "M" for Marital Status. Select *Marital Status and Living Arrangements: March 1996* from the listings.

A paper version of these tables, along with related historical tables,

is available as PPL-67 for \$28.50. To receive a paper copy, send your request for "PPL-67, Marital Status and Living Arrangements: March 1996," along with a check or money order in the amount of \$28.50 payable to **Commerce-Census-88-00-9010**, to U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, P.O. Box 277943, Atlanta, GA 30384-7943, or call our Statistical Information Office on 301-457-2422. A copy of these tabulations will be made available to any existing CPR P20 subscriber without charge, provided that the request is made within 3 months of the issue date of this report. Contact our Statistical Information Office on 301-457-2422.

### Contacts

Statistical Information Staff  
 pop@census.gov  
 301-457-2422  
 Fertility and Family Statistics Branch  
 Terry A. Lugaila  
 tlugaila@census.gov  
 301-457-2416

### User Comments

The Census Bureau welcomes the comments and advice of users of its data and reports. If you have any suggestions or comments, please write to:

Chief, Population Division  
 U.S. Bureau of the Census  
 Washington, DC 20233

or send E-mail to:  
 pop@census.gov