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Special Edition

Census Historical Highlights: 1790 – 2010

Article I, Section 2 of the Constitution specifies that the number of seats in the U.S. House of Representatives is to be distributed proportionally among the states on the basis of the census to be conducted every 10 years.

The 2010 Census is the 23rd headcount of the population in our nation's history. To highlight the grand tradition of the decennial census, we present a profile of each census starting with the first one in 1790. More information on the 2010 Census can be found at <http://2010.census.gov/2010census/> with more details on census history available at <http://www.census.gov/history/> or in Measuring America: The Decennial Censuses from 1790 to 2000 <http://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/pol02-ma.pdf>.

1790

(See http://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/overview/1790.html for more information)

- Census Day was Aug. 2 (the first Monday of the month).
- Six questions were asked.
- The census was conducted in the 13 original states as well as the districts of Maine, Vermont, Kentucky and the Southwest Territory (Tennessee).
- U.S. marshals, who conducted the census, submitted their results to Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson, nominal director of the census.
- President George Washington delivered the first "State of the Union" address on Jan. 8, 1790.
- Rhode Island entered the Union as the 13th state, May 29, 1790.
- U.S. population: 3.9 million.

1800

(See <http://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/overview/1800.html> for more information)

- Census Day was Aug. 4.
- Secretary of State John Marshall, future chief justice of the United States, reported the 1800 Census results to President John Adams.
- Five most populous cities: New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Boston and Charleston, S.C.
- U.S. population: 5.3 million.

1810

(See <http://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/overview/1810.html> for more information)

- Census Day was Aug. 6.
- Assistant marshals were required to actually visit each household to complete the count, rather than relying on hearsay.
- Marshals, in addition to collecting demographic data, were required to collect data on manufacturing establishments and the types of goods they produced.
- Estimated number of enumerators passed the 1,000 mark.
- U.S. population: 7.2 million.

1820

(See <http://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/overview/1820.html> for more information)

- Census Day was Aug. 7.
- Secretary of State John Q. Adams delivered census results to President James Monroe.
- First census to inquire if respondents were engaged in agriculture, commerce or manufacturing.
- Respondents were asked to identify the number of “foreigners not naturalized” in the household.
- Maine entered the Union as 23rd state, March 15, 1820.
- U.S. population: 9.6 million.

1830

(See <http://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/overview/1830.html> for more information)

- At the recommendation of President John Q. Adams in 1828, Census Day was moved to June 1.

- For the first time, enumerators used uniform printed schedules, as opposed to whatever paper was available. This made for more efficient tabulations of census results.
- For the first time, respondents were asked whether they were blind, or “deaf and dumb.”
- The census counted the population only. The previous two censuses had made unsuccessful attempts to collect additional data on manufacturing and industry.
- Secretary of State Martin Van Buren delivered the census results to President Andrew Jackson.
- U.S. population: 12.9 million.

1840

(See <http://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/overview/1840.html> for more information)

- Census Day was June 1.
- New population inquiries included questions about school attendance, literacy and vocation.
- The Census Act of 1840 authorized establishing a temporary, centralized census office during each enumeration.
- New Orleans was the nation’s third largest city.
- U.S. population: 17.1 million.

1850

(See <http://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/overview/1850.html> for more information)

- Census Day was June 1.
- For the first time, information collected on whether respondents could read or write, as well as on the place of birth of the foreign-born.
- Number of population inquiries grew. Every person’s name was to be listed, not just the head of household. The marshals collected additional “social statistics,” including information on taxes, schools, crime, wages, value of the estate and mortality.
- Census board established and authorized to collect information on mines, agriculture, commerce, manufactures and education.
- California entered the Union as 31st state, Sept. 5, 1850.
- Millard Fillmore was sworn into office as the 13th president, following Zachary Taylor’s death.
- U.S. population: 23.2 million.

1860

(See <http://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/overview/1860.html> for more information)

- Census Day was June 1.
- American Indians living under state and territorial laws as citizens were enumerated.
- Final census with slave schedules.
- Abraham Lincoln elected president, prompting South Carolina to leave the Union on Dec. 20, 1860.
- Number of enumerators: 4,417.
- Brooklyn, N.Y., was nation's third largest city (behind New York and Philadelphia).
- U.S. population: 31.4 million.

1870

(See <http://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/overview/1870.html> for more information)

- Census Day was June 1.
- After the Civil War, questionnaires were reordered and redesigned to account for the end of the "slave questionnaire."
- Information collected on whether a person's parents were foreign-born.
- Gen. Francis Walker, superintendent of the census, introduced examinations to test the qualifications of those applying for positions within the Census Office.
- A rudimentary tallying machine – the Seaton Device – was used to tabulate census data. The machine was invented by Chief Clerk of the Census Charles Seaton.
- U.S. population: 38.6 million.

1880

(See <http://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/overview/1880.html> for more information)

- Census Day was June 1.
- Professional enumerators replaced U.S. marshals as census takers.
- When no one was available at a family's usual residence, the enumerator was directed by law to obtain the required information from a family or person living nearby.
- The act authorizing this census provided for the collection of detailed data on the condition and operation of railroad corporations, incorporated express companies and telegraph companies, and of life, fire and marine insurance companies.
- The Superintendent of Census was required to collect and publish statistics on Alaska's population, industries and resources.
- All untaxed Indians were enumerated.

- Number of enumerators: 31,382.
- U.S. population: 50.2 million.

1890

(See <http://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/overview/1890.html> for more information)

- Because June 1 was a Sunday, Census Day was June 2.
- For the first time, questions included how many living children mothers had, year of immigration to the U.S., citizenship status and ability to speak English.
- Included a greater number of subjects than any previous census and more than would be included in those immediately following. New subjects included ownership and indebtedness of farms and homes; the names, as well as units served in, length of service and residences of surviving Union soldiers and sailors.
- First time “Japanese” was used as a category in the race question.
- Enumerators were given detailed maps to follow for the first time.
- First census to use the Hollerith machine, an electric tabulating system that utilized encoded punch cards. This innovation substantially sped up tabulation of census results. The machine was invented by Herman Hollerith, a former census employee widely regarded as the father of modern automatic computation.
- Idaho and Wyoming admitted to Union as 43rd and 44th states on July 3 and July 10, 1890, respectively.
- U.S. population: 63 million.

1900

(See <http://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/overview/1900.html> for more information)

- Census Day was June 1.
- Census content limited to questions dealing with population, mortality, agriculture and manufacturing.
- Following the completion of the regular census, special census agents authorized to collect statistics relating to incidents of deafness, blindness, insanity and juvenile delinquency, as well as religious bodies.
- Hawaii included in the census for the first time.
- In 1902, the formerly temporary Census Office was made a permanent organization within the Department of the Interior. In 1903, it became the Census Bureau and was transferred to the Department of Commerce and Labor.
- Number of enumerators: 52,871.
- U.S. population: 76.2 million

1910

(See <http://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/overview/1910.html> for more information)

- Census Day changed to April 15, as the Census Bureau director felt many urban dwellers may be away from home on summer vacation in June.
- For the first time, Puerto Rico was included in the decennial census. Its population was 1,118,012.
- At the insistence of President Theodore Roosevelt in 1907, enumerators were hired through the civil service system.
- For the first time, respondents asked about their mother tongue and whether they were a Union or Confederate veteran.
- Vital statistics queries on questionnaire abolished.
- For the first time, enumerators in large cities distributed questionnaires in advance — a day or two prior to Census Day — so people could become familiar with the questions and have time to prepare their answers.
- U.S. population: 92.2 million.

1920

(See <http://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/overview/1920.html> for more information)

- Census Day moved to Jan. 2, at the behest of the Agriculture Department, which felt that in January, harvests would be completed and information about them would still be fresh in farmers' minds. Additionally, it was thought that more people would be home in January than in April.
- This was the first census in which the majority of the population lived in urban areas.
- For the first time, Guam and American Samoa were included in the decennial census.
- "Usual place of abode" became the basis for enumeration, rather than where people worked or might be visiting. People with no regular residence were enumerated where they were when count was taken.
- Four new questions were added: one asking about the year of naturalization and three about the mother tongue.
- Questions deleted included unemployment on Census Day, service in the Union or Confederate army or navy, number of children born and how long a couple had been married.
- For the first time, Los Angeles was among the nation's 10 most populous cities.
- KDKA in Pittsburgh became the first radio station to offer regular broadcasts.
- U.S. population: 106 million.

1930

(See <http://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/overview/1930.html> for more information)

- Census Day moved to April 1, where it remains today.
- For the first time, the U.S. Virgin Islands were included in the decennial census.
- First time respondents were asked about whether their home has a radio.
- With the nation descending into the Great Depression, Census Bureau rushed out unemployment information collected in the census. When the numbers it reported were attacked as being too low, Congress required a special unemployment census for January 1931.
- Number of enumerators: 87,756.
- U.S. population: 123.2 million.

1940

(See <http://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/overview/1940.html> for more information)

- First census to use advanced sampling techniques, including probability sampling. The questions asked of only a sample of the population were part of the first “long form.”
- First census of housing, with numerous questions asked about the characteristics of the housing structure.
- Questions on employment, unemployment, internal migration and income added.
- President Franklin Roosevelt elected to third term as World War II rages in Europe.
- Number of enumerators: 123,069.
- U.S. population: 132.2 million.

1950

(See <http://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/overview/1950.html> for more information)

- First time Americans abroad were enumerated, including members of the armed forces and U.S. government employees living in foreign countries.
- A new survey on residential financing conducted as part of the census.
- For the first time, a computer (UNIVAC I) was used to tabulate census results. It was the first computer designed for civilian use.
- Several procedures were instituted to improve the accuracy and completeness of the census, including setting a specific night to conduct a special enumeration of hotels and places frequented by transients.
- The United Nations entered the Korean War.
- U.S. population: 151.3 million.

1960

(See <http://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/overview/1960.html> for more information)

- First mail-out decennial census; most households were asked to complete the questionnaire and hold it until an enumerator came to pick it up.
- Census conducted in two stages: first, a quick collection of a few data items for every person; second, collection of more detailed economic and social information from a sample of households.
- Questions added on place of work and means of transportation to work.
- Computers processed nearly all data; for the first time, the Census Bureau used the film optical sensing device for input to computers (FOSDIC).
- For the first time, census results were recorded on magnetic tape. The tapes were not produced, however, until long after the data became available in print.
- John F. Kennedy elected president.
- Houston appeared on the list of the 10 most populous cities for the first time.
- U.S. population: 179.3 million.

1970

(See <http://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/overview/1970.html> for more information)

- The Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands first included in the decennial census.
- Number of questions on long-form questionnaire reduced from 66 to 23.
- For the first time, a separate question on Hispanic origin was asked of a 5 percent sample of the population.
- Only five questions were asked of all individuals. Other questions were asked of a 15 percent sample and still others of a five percent sample.
- First census to make available all data products on magnetic tape. Additionally, several Public Use Microdata Sample files were produced.
- U.S. military involvement in Vietnam ended on April 30, 1975.
- Dallas among the nation's 10 most populous cities.
- Number of enumerators: 166,406.
- U.S. population: 203.3 million.

1980

(See <http://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/overview/1980.html> for more information)

- Mail-out/mail-back program expanded, with about 95 percent of the population enumerated in this manner.
- Short form contained seven population and 11 housing questions; the long form contained an additional 26 population and 10 housing questions.
- Question on Hispanic origin asked of everyone for the first time.
- Two small surveys included in the census: Components of Inventory Change Survey and Residential Finance Survey.
- An extensive public service advertising campaign was directed by the Census Publicity Office, which was established in 1978. The Census Bureau secured the free services of the Ad Council.
- “M-Night” (for mission) and “T-Night” (for transient) held to enumerate historically hard-to-count individuals.
- First use of the newly developed State Data Center Program to simplify public access to data available on computer tapes.
- Ronald Reagan elected president.
- Phoenix and San Diego now among the nation’s 10 most populous cities.
- Number of enumerators: 458,523.
- U.S. population: 226.5 million.

1990

(See <http://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/overview/1990.html> for more information)

- Short form asked 13 questions and long form 45 questions.
- Question on congregate housing added, question on disability revised, and questions on presence of air conditioning, the number of bathrooms, and type of heating equipment dropped.
- Promotion activities included complete count committees and Census in Schools program.
- “S-Night,” a one-night sweep of homeless shelters and other areas where the homeless were known to congregate, was conducted.
- First time Census Bureau defined census tracts and census blocks for the entire nation.
- TIGER (Topologically Integrated Geographic Encoding and Referencing), a computerized representation of various map features, introduced.
- Tabulations released on CD-ROM for first time.
- San Antonio among the 10 most populous cities.

- Number of enumerators: 510,200.
- U.S. population: 248.7 million.

2000

(See http://www.census.gov/history/www/through_the_decades/overview/2000.html for more information)

- Short form asked seven questions; the long form asked 52 questions.
- For the first time, respondents could check as many boxes as necessary to identify their race.
- Question on grandparents as caregivers added, while questions on children ever born, source of water, sewage disposal and condo status were dropped. Questions on disability expanded.
- Census Bureau embarks on aggressive paid advertising campaign with Young and Rubicam. This campaign contributed to the rise in the mail-back rate to 67 percent.
- Additional option for answering the census: telephone questionnaire assistance centers taking responses to the short form over the phone in six languages. This was the first census in which such centers operated.
- Internet became the principal dissemination medium for Census 2000 data.
- Optical character scanners used to process returned questionnaires.
- U.S. population: 281.4 million.

2010

(See [2010 Census by the Numbers Facts for Features](#) for more information)

- Census form is one of the shortest in history: just 10 questions that only take about 10 minutes to answer.
- Integrated communications campaign with DraftFCB and many subcontractors to boost public awareness and participation through paid advertising, a Road Tour, Census in Schools, partnership, social media, a NASCAR race car and an interactive 2010 Census Web site. Ads in 28 languages (in contrast to 17 languages in 2000) to reach all segments of the population.
- The “long form” no longer exists, having been converted to an ongoing survey throughout the decade (American Community Survey).
- Questions very basic: asking about topics such as name, age, race, Hispanic origin and homeownership.
- Households in areas with high concentrations of Spanish-speaking residents receive a bilingual (English/Spanish) form.
- Expected U.S. population: around 309 million.

Special Editions of the U.S. Census Bureau's *Facts for Features* are issued to provide background information for lesser-known observances, anniversaries of historic events and other timely topics in the news.

Editor's note: Facts for Features are customarily released about two months before an observance in order to accommodate magazine production timelines. Questions or comments should be directed to the Census Bureau's Public Information Office: telephone: 301-763-3030; fax: 301-763-3762; or e-mail: <pio@census.gov>.