A SNAPSHOT IN TIME:
HOW THE CENSUS MEASURES AMERICA

Then & Now

The 1940 Census was conducted during a momentous time in our nation's history—as we were recovering from the Great Depression and not long before our entry into World War II. It was notable for many reasons. Take a look at how the Census has changed over time...and how we've taken our snapshots of America.

1940

81
QUESTIONS

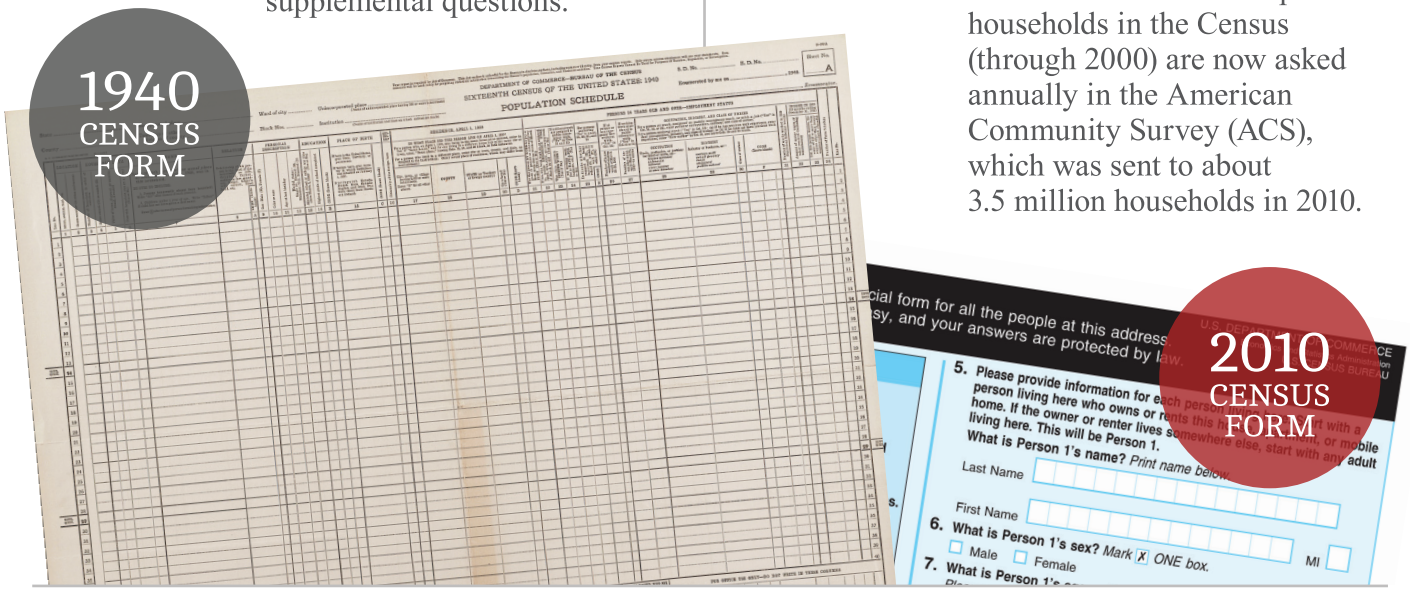
A total of 65 questions were asked on the 1940 Census (34 for the Census of Population and 31 for the Census of Housing). Additionally, 5% of the population was asked 16 supplemental questions.

2010

10
QUESTIONS

In 2010, every household was asked the same ten basic questions.

The more-detailed demographic, housing and economic questions that were asked of a sample of households in the Census (through 2000) are now asked annually in the American Community Survey (ACS), which was sent to about 3.5 million households in 2010.



Sources: 2010 Census, 1940 Census. Some information came from the publication "Procedural History of the 1940 Census" by Robert M. Jenkins.

CENSUS FIRSTS

Both the 1940 Census and the 2010 Census marked important "firsts" in how we take our national snapshot.

1940

- First to designate a day for counting transients.
- First to include a census of housing.
- First to include a question about income.
- First to use a long-form and a short-form questionnaire. The long form included a set of supplementary questions asked of roughly 5% of the population.

2010

- First to use social media outreach: Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, YouTube, blogs.
- First to use an English/Spanish bilingual form for some areas.
- First to use GPS to collect latitude and longitude coordinates for structures.
- First census to return to only a short-form questionnaire. The ACS was introduced earlier in the decade and replaced the long form.

Sources: 2010 Census, 1940 Census. Some information came from the publication "Procedural History of the 1940 Census" by Robert M. Jenkins.

CONTACTING HOUSING UNITS

How we contact people has changed.

1940

37.2 million

HOUSING UNITS CONTACTED

VIA

120,000 enumerators

Enumerators were told to visit every house, building, tent, cabin, hut or other place in which a person might be living.

2010

134.4 million

HOUSING UNITS CONTACTED

VIA

120.9 million mailings

12 million hand-delivered forms

1.5 million direct visits

635,000 enumerators

were hired to count households that did not mail back a questionnaire over the course of six weeks.

Sources: 2010 Census, 1940 Census. Some information came from the publication "Procedural History of the 1940 Census" by Robert M. Jenkins.

PROCESSING RESPONSES & DISSEMINATING RESULTS

How we tabulate and share data has changed.

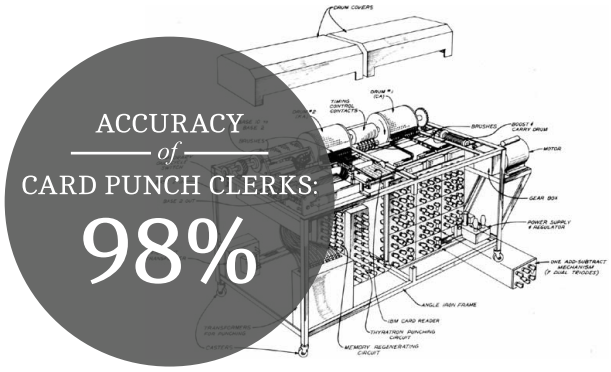
1940

Workers manually entered information

from the 1940 schedule onto 175.6 million punch cards.

Results were tabulated on machines

that evolved from those used during the 1890 Census.



Results were made available

through a series of bulletins and print publications.

2010

In 2010,

optical scanners read handwriting

on forms and converted it to electronic form.

This allowed for faster tabulation of results.

Results were made available online

through interactive tools at the census.gov website.

Sources: 2010 Census, 1940 Census. Some information came from the publication "Procedural History of the 1940 Census" by Robert M. Jenkins.

LOOKING AHEAD TO THE 2020 CENSUS

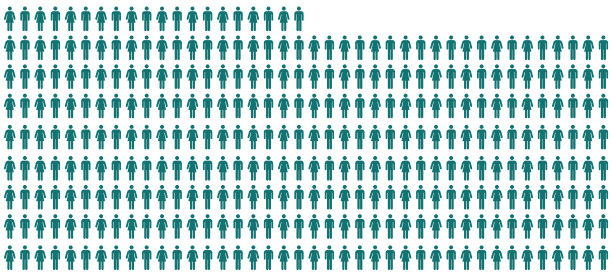
The Census Bureau is planning major innovations in the design of the Census in an effort to manage costs and improve efficiency.

2010

308.7 million

U.S. POPULATION

2020



341.4 million

PROJECTED U.S. POPULATION

Multiple Mode Response Options

The Census Bureau is currently researching how to use the mail, the Internet, face-to-face interviews and other electronic response options that may emerge to improve participation.

Sources: 2010 Census, 1940 Census. Some information came from the publication "Procedural History of the 1940 Census" by Robert M. Jenkins.