



# THE GREAT DEPRESSION – USING CENSUS DATA TO ADDRESS AN ECONOMIC CRISIS

## Activity Items

The following items are part of this activity and appear at the end of this student version.

- Item 1: Unemployment Census Photo
- Item 2: Map of the United States Showing Geographic Divisions: 1937
- Item 3: Percentage of the Population 15 to 74 Years of Age in Enumerative Check Areas Unemployed (Including Emergency Workers) and Partly Unemployed, by Sex, for Geographic Divisions: 1937

## Student Learning Objectives

- I will be able to analyze map data on U.S. unemployment in 1937 and explain the value of collecting such data during the Great Depression (between decennial census years).
- I will be able to formulate a position on the New Deal and support it with specific data.

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

## Introduction

As part of the 1930 decennial census, near the start of the Great Depression, people were asked about their employment status. If they weren't working on the workday before the count, they answered additional questions on their ability to work, the status of their job search, the duration of their past employment, and the reason for their unemployment.

But legislators and decision-makers needed more data, delivered more often, to understand the depth of the economic crisis and to support the implementation of the New Deal. So in 1937, before the 1940 decennial census, the U.S. Census Bureau conducted two unemployment censuses. The first was a voluntary self-selected census sent to every residential address in the United States. The second was called the Enumerative Check Census and was delivered to approximately 510,000 households, marking the first attempt to estimate unemployment nationwide by surveying random samples of the population. Interestingly, the Census Bureau randomly chose areas canvassed by postal route (excluding those in business areas); however, this method excluded the 18 percent of people who did not live on a postal route, so it was not as accurate as was hoped. (See **Item 1: Unemployment Census Photo** for context.)

Although the voluntary census was delivered to every residence, the resulting rate of unemployment was underreported. The Enumerative Check Census actually found a more accurate rate of unemployment for the nation.

The first decennial census to use statistical sampling was in 1940. The method made it possible to ask additional detailed questions of the population without significantly increasing the cost or respondent burden. Enumerators (Census Bureau workers) that year asked a random sample (about 5 percent) of the population a set of questions separate from those in the decennial census questionnaire. The Census Bureau then used the sample to estimate demographic data for the nation.

Sampling was a fixture of the decennial censuses through the end of the 20th century, with a certain percentage of the population required to fill out longer questionnaires with more detailed questions. Now the Census Bureau conducts its American Community Survey every month to gather this type of information.

1. At the time of the 1930 Census, considering the widespread impact of the stock market crash of 1929 and the onset of the Great Depression, why might people have been reluctant to provide information on their employment status in a census questionnaire conducted in person by an enumerator?
2. What were advantages and disadvantages of collecting data on unemployment in 1937, between the decennial censuses of 1930 and 1940?
3. What were the advantages and disadvantages of asking a random sample of the population questions in addition to those in the decennial census questionnaire?
4. Looking at **Item 2: Map of the United States Showing Geographic Divisions: 1937** and **Item 3: Percentage of the Population 15 to 74 Years of Age in Enumerative Check Areas Unemployed (Including Emergency Workers) and Partly Unemployed, by Sex, for Geographic Divisions: 1937**, what region(s) of the country had the highest percentages of total unemployment for both men and women?



Item 1: Unemployment Census Photo

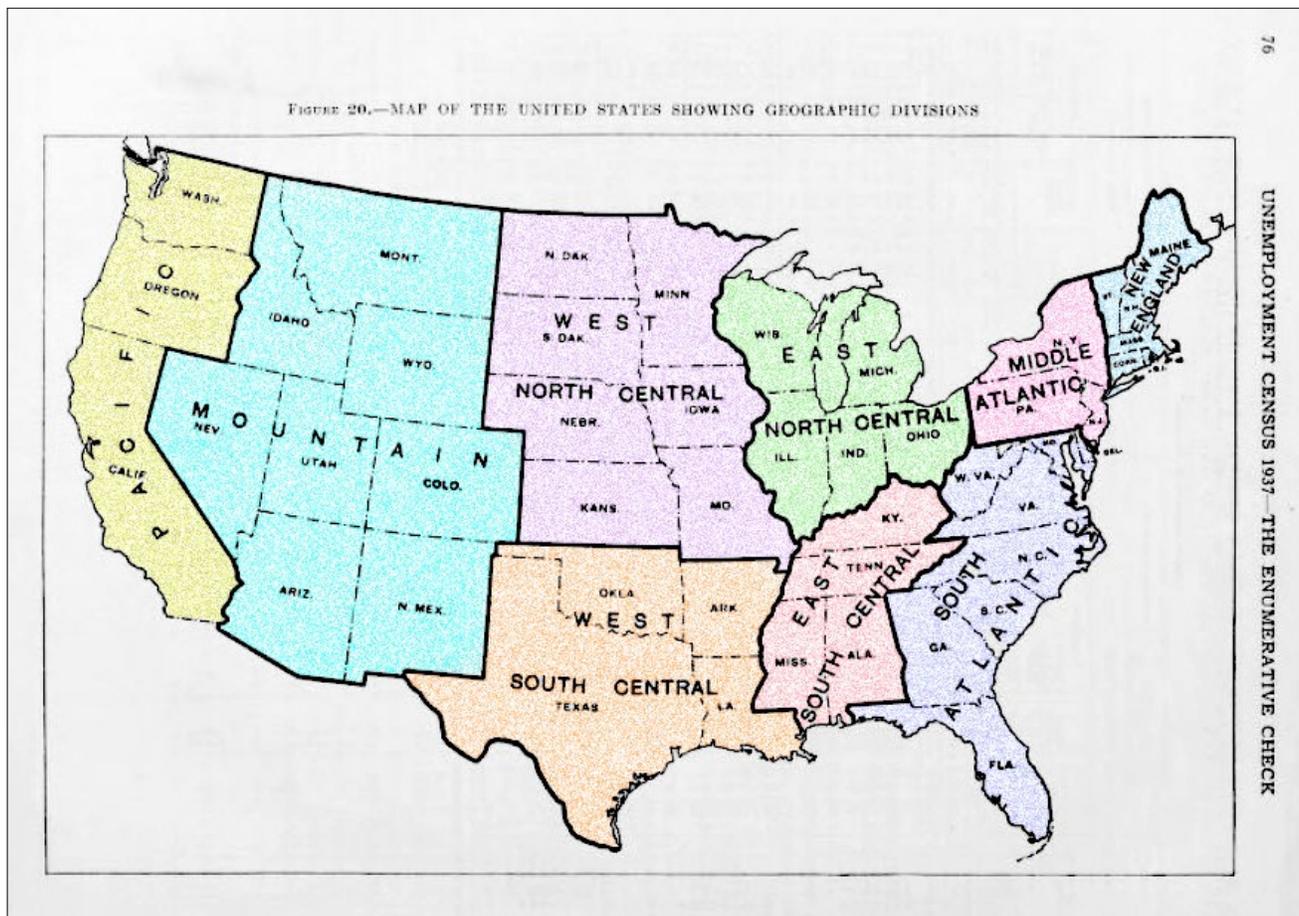


Census Bureau Director William L. Austin and Unemployment Census Director John D. Biggers supervise the receipt and check-in of questionnaires from the 1937 unemployment census, November 24, 1937.

[www.census.gov/history/www/sights\\_sounds/photos/1930\\_photos.php#](http://www.census.gov/history/www/sights_sounds/photos/1930_photos.php#)

*Click on the link above to see the photo gallery online.*

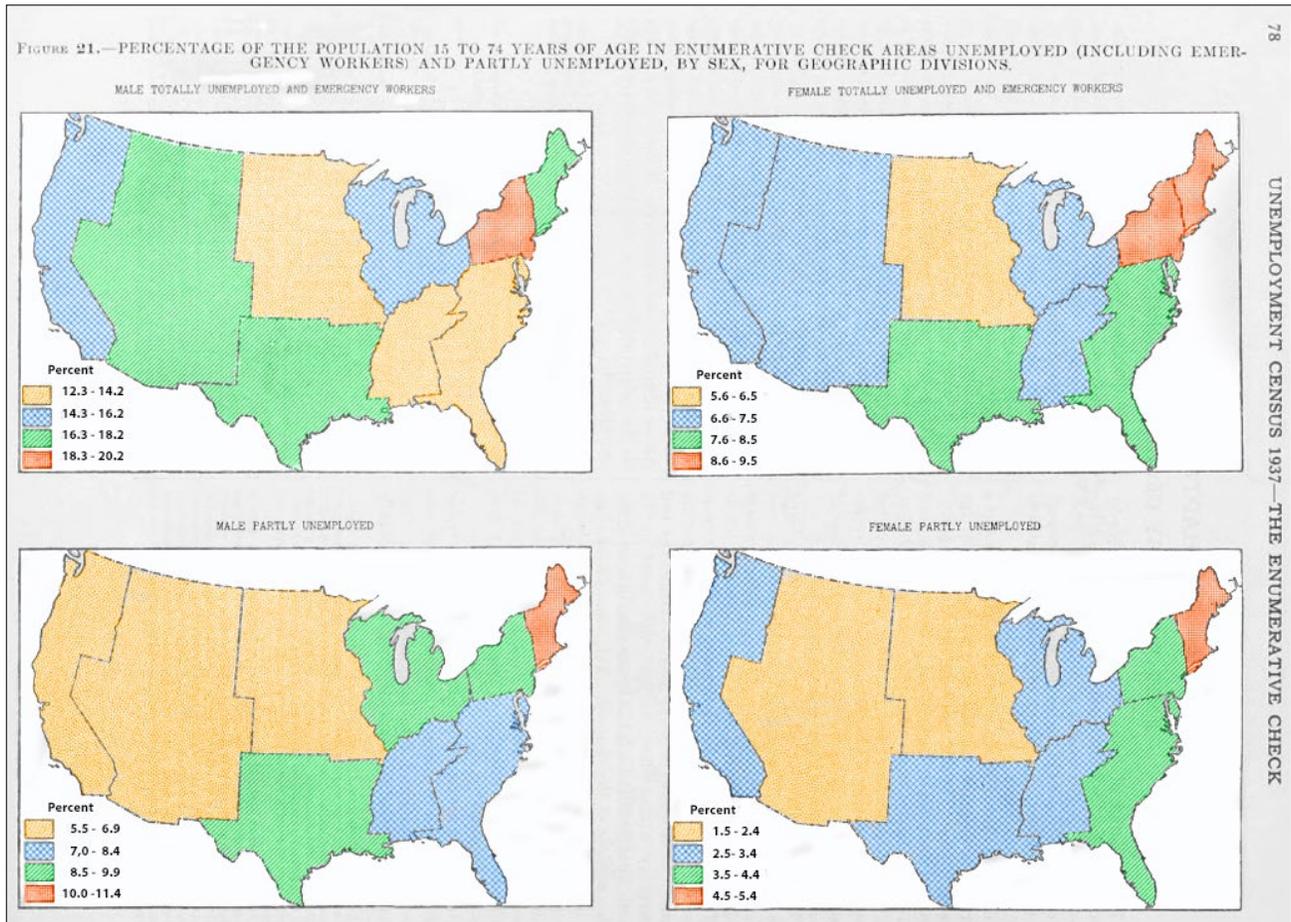
Item 2: Map of the United States Showing Geographic Divisions: 1937



[archive.org/stream/censusofpartiale04bigg#page/76/mode/2up](https://archive.org/stream/censusofpartiale04bigg#page/76/mode/2up)

Click on the link above to see the original map.

Item 3: Percentage of the Population 15 to 74 Years of Age in Enumerative Check Areas Unemployed (Including Emergency Workers) and Partly Unemployed, by Sex, for Geographic Divisions: 1937



[archive.org/stream/censusofpartiale04bigg#biggpage/78/mode/2up](https://archive.org/stream/censusofpartiale04bigg#biggpage/78/mode/2up)

Click on the link above to see the original maps.