

The History of the Census

The census of the United States is described in article I, section 2 of our Constitution. It requests a current count of our residents every ten years, and the information is used to determine how many representatives each state will have in the House of Representatives. The first census was taken in 1790 under the Secretary of State, Thomas Jefferson. The count, which was conducted by U.S. Marshals on horse-back, resulted in a total 3.9 million residents. Since then, the census is conducted every ten years, generally on April 1st on the years that end in zero. In 1840 the Census Act authorized establishing a centralized Census Office during each enumeration. Then, in 1902, the Census Office became a permanent organization within the Department of Interior. In 1903, the office was renamed the Bureau of the Census and moved to the new Department of Commerce and Labor.

Besides providing the base to determine state representation in Congress, census data are used in many other ways. Since 1975, it has been the Census Bureau's responsibility to present data for smaller, sparsely populated areas. This information is necessary to redesign a state's legislation and districts. Other important applications of the data include the distribution of more than \$400 billion in federal funds for government programs such as Medicaid; planning for the correct placement of schools, roads, and other public services; to help construct more houses, to provide neighborhood information to residents who might require it; and to identify the tendencies that can help to predict the future needs of a community. Much of the geographical census data is available for states, counties, cities, towns, zip codes, zones, census blocks, and much more.

How We Do It

The process of completing a decennial census is a monumental project. For Census 2000, hundreds of thousands of people were hired to assist in counting the population. New homes are being built constantly, and some older homes no longer exist, and it is essential to identify an address for each person so that

everyone will receive a census questionnaire. Some people are not comfortable providing personal information to the government. Sometimes the census forms get lost, or people forget to complete them. Nevertheless, each decennial census has improved in its accuracy. In Census 2000, the Census Bureau hired more than 500,000 people to visit the homes of people who did not return their questionnaire. Census 2000 turned out to be most accurate in the history of the United States, and counted more minorities than any previous census.

Census 2010

In order to complete a successful census in the 2010 more than 1.4 million temporary workers will be hired. The 2010 Census will have one of the shortest questionnaires in the history of the United States. The form will be so simple that it will take only about ten minutes to complete, and all the personal information will be protected by law and kept completely confidential.

For more information please visit the official Census Bureau website:

<http://www.census.gov>

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