

# 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

2010

**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.

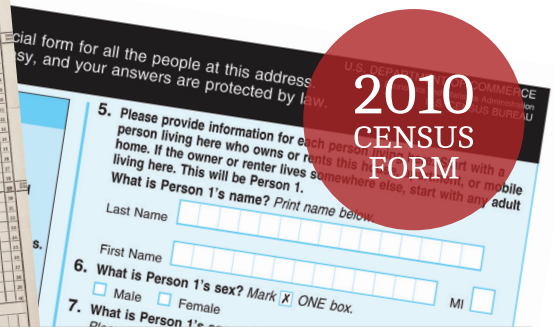
**10**  
 QUESTIONS

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.

1940  
 CENSUS  
 FORM

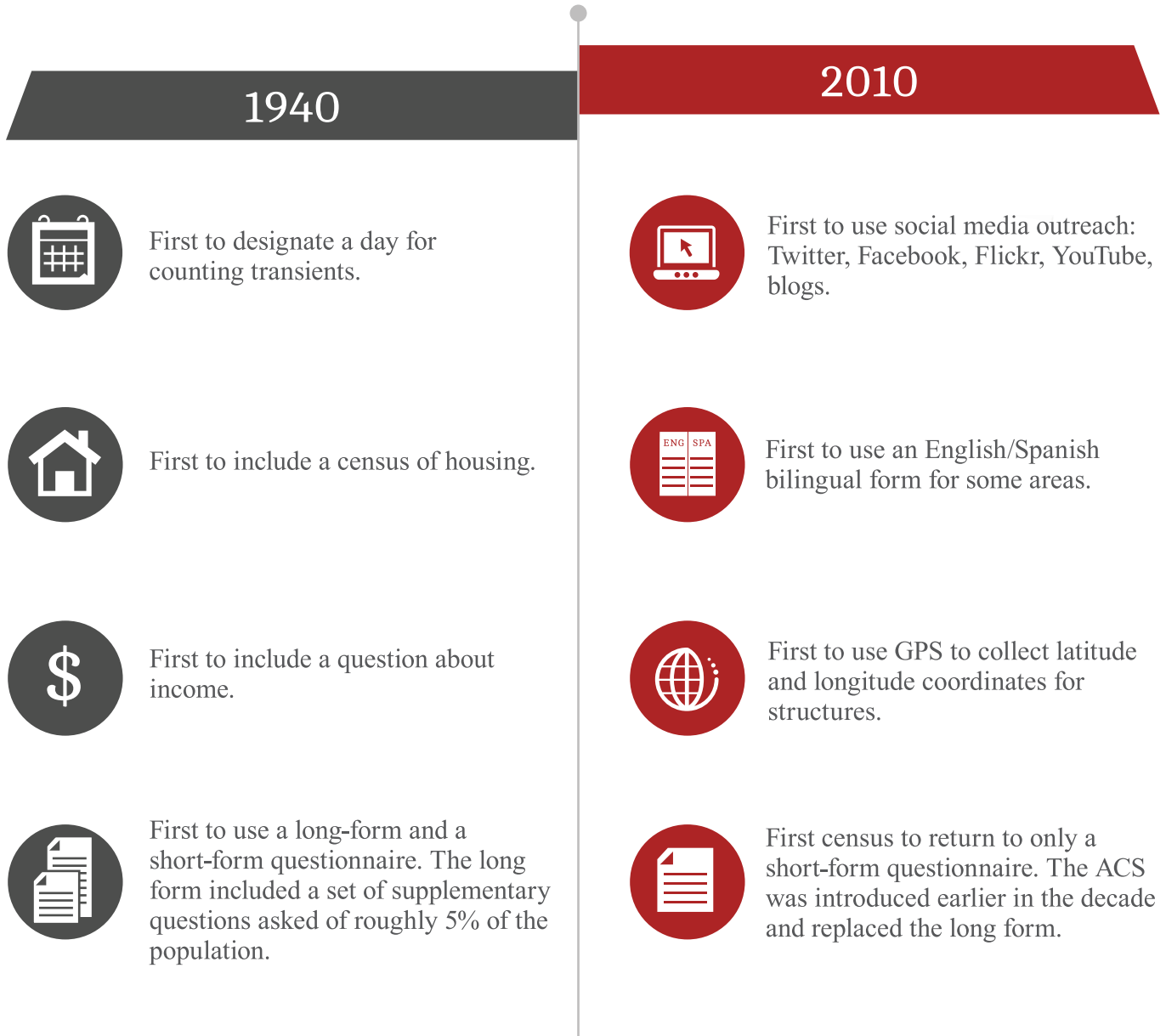


2010  
 CENSUS  
 FORM



# CENSUS FIRSTS

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



# CONTACTING HOUSING UNITS

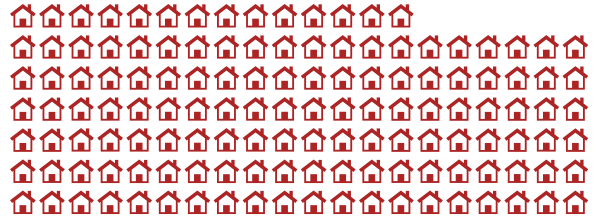
How we contact people has changed.

1940

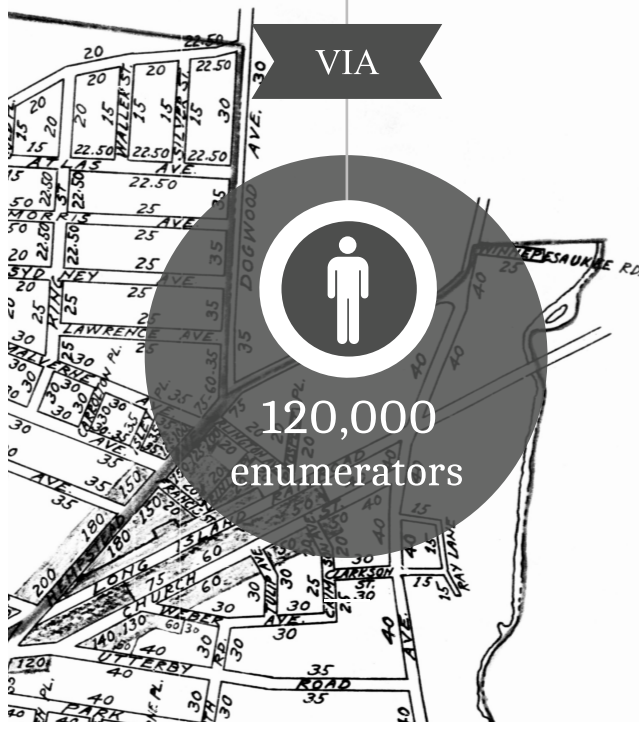


**37.2 million**  
HOUSING UNITS CONTACTED

2010

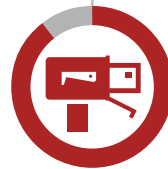


**134.4 million**  
HOUSING UNITS CONTACTED



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

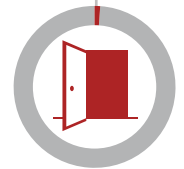
VIA



**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.

# 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.

ACCURACY  
of  
CARD PUNCH CLERKS:

98%



## 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.

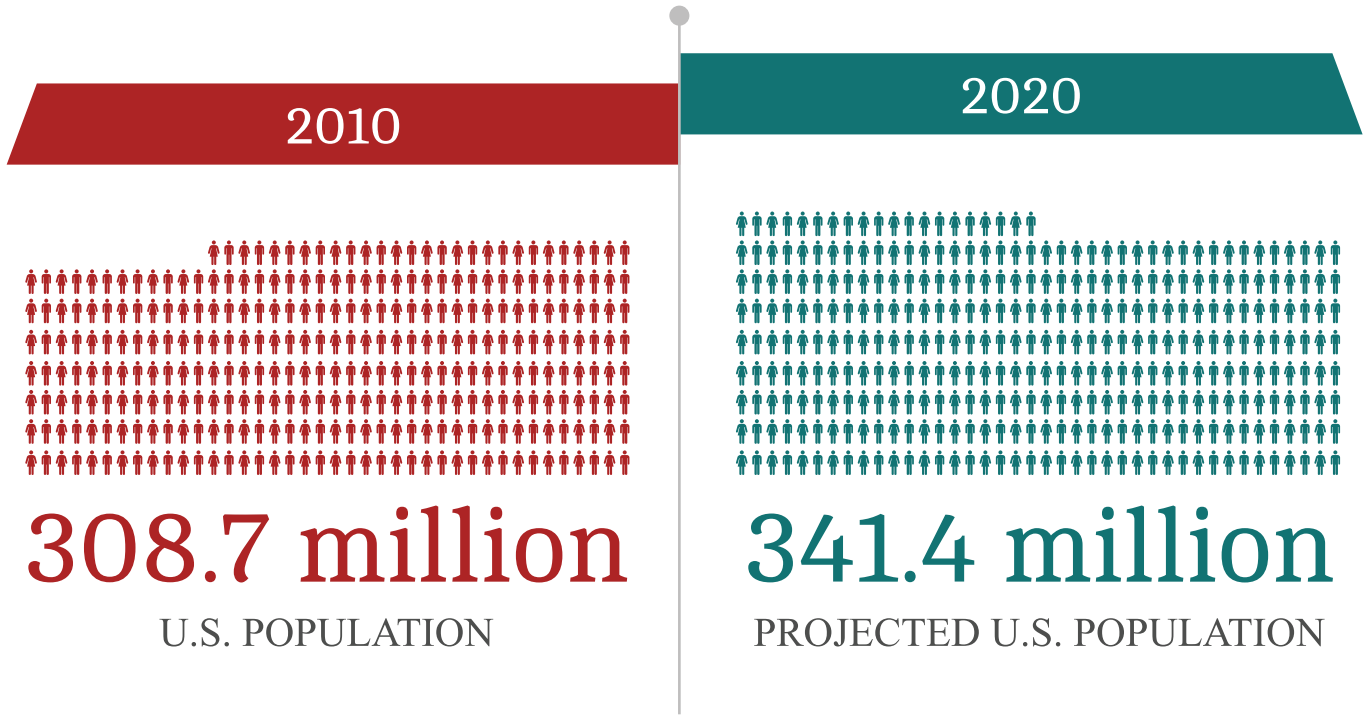


## Results were made available online

through interactive tools at the [census.gov](http://census.gov) website.

# 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.



## 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.