

The 1940 Census – Census of Population

Narrator: The population of the United States is continually changing in number, location, and composition. In the early days of our country there were only about four million people, mostly an agricultural population scattered along the eastern seaboard. By 1850 the country had spread far to the westward and had a population of 23 million, the great majority of whom lived on farms. In recent years the population has begun to shift to the urban centers. Even since 1930 there have been great changes in the population of the United States and the Bureau of the Census is faced with the task of finding out just exactly how many people there now are in the United States, where they live, how old they are, what their education is, whether or not they have jobs, and what kind of work they do. The schedule has been drawn up to get these facts and supporting data.

Text: In this film it will not be possible to cover all the items in the schedule, but an effort will be made to cover some of the more important ones.

Narrator: If the 1940 census is going to have the value it should, the enumerators will have to get the full record of each person in this nation. This will require great thoroughness and care. If each enumerator missed only eight names in his district, the total effect would be to understate the population of the nation by a million persons, or the entire population of a city the size of Cleveland. The best place to get information about the entire population is the place where the people sleep. In most cases this will be easy, but there will be some places that will be out of the way and hard to find. The enumerator will have to find out about the people who live in each of these places and his job will not be complete until he has done so.

Enumerator: Now, what are the names of the other persons living here with you Mrs. McGee?

Mrs. McGee: Well there's me and my husband, William H.; and our two sons John J. and William H., Jr.; and our boarder Edward Smith who lives with us, but he's in the hospital for awhile.

Enumerator: If this is his home we'll have to count him as one of your household. Is there anyone else who isn't here at the present time?

Mrs. McGee: There's our third son, Thomas H., who's away with the CCC.

Enumerator: He has to go down too. We have to count babies also. Are there any babies here?

Mrs. McGee: No, not anymore.

Narrator: Related members of the household should be listed in order of their ages and those not related should come last. Be sure that you have the information on every man, woman, and child at each address.

The purpose of questions 21 to 25 on the schedule is to determine just what is the employment status of all persons over 14 years of age. The enumerator will have to place every such person in one of two large groups: workers in the labor force and persons not in the labor force. Workers in the labor force will be further classified into the following groups. One: worker in private business or government work. Two: public emergency work, WPA, NYA, CCC, local work relief, and so forth. Three: persons seeking work. Four: persons with a job but temporarily absent from work for specified reasons; these reasons

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are illness, strike or lockout, vacation, bad weather, or a layoff not exceeding four weeks with instructions to return to work on a specific date. If each enumerator incorrectly reported five employed persons as seeking work, the extent of employment in the United States would be understated by more than half a million. Persons not in the labor force will be further divided into the following groups. One: home housekeeper. Two: student. Three: persons unable to work. Four: inmates of prisons, asylums, and so forth. Five: persons not in the labor force for other reasons.

Enumerator: Was your husband at work, for pay or profit, in private or non-emergency government work during the week of March 24 to 30?

Mrs. McGee: That's last week. No, he wasn't working for any private company or the government.

Enumerator: Then was he at work on or assigned to public emergency work last week? Like WPA?

Mrs. McGee: No, he didn't have any of that either.

Enumerator: Was he looking for work?

Mrs. McGee: Yes. He went out every morning.

Narrator: An entry will have to be made in column 26 to indicate the number of hours worked during the week for workers in private work or government work. In column 27 an entry is to be made of the number of weeks of unemployment for workers seeking work and for persons assigned to public emergency work. In questions 28 to 30, the Census Bureau is trying to find out what kind of work each worker does and what type of business or industry he works in. In the case of persons who were at work during the week or who have a job, the occupation and industry in which he is employed is to be entered. In the case of persons looking for work, the last occupation and industry lasting one month or more are to be entered. For unemployed workers without previous experience, the proper entry is "new worker."

Some examples of what will be entered for occupation and industry are: riveter on building construction or tabulating clerk in wholesale produce exchange. In other words, know the specific kind of work and where it is done. These are just two examples of the many kinds of jobs and organizations that will be encountered. But no matter how diverse the jobs may become, they must all be entered in column 30 as one of the five classes of workers. Each worker must be one of the following. One: wage or salary worker in private work. Two: wage or salary worker in government work. Three: employer. Four: working on own account. Five: unpaid family worker. The particular group into which each person on the schedule will go must be carefully considered.

Enumerator: What kind of work did your husband do on his last job?

Mrs. McGee: He was employed as a machine operator in a textile mill.

Narrator: The rest of the line having been completely filled out, enumerator goes on with entries for the next person.

Enumerator: Since you were neither working nor seeking work for pay or profit but devote your time to home housekeeping we'll put you down as "engaged in home housework."

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Narrator: Since the wife is occupied with home housework, no entries need to be made for her in the occupational section.

Enumerator: During the past year, have you received income of 50 dollars or more from sources other than wages or salary?

Mrs. McGee: Yes, the rent I get from our lodger amounts to a great deal more than that.

Narrator: Two of the names on each sheet must be entered in the space provided for supplementary questions which appear at the bottom of every schedule. The names to go in these spaces will be clearly marked in the margins of the main schedule. Care must be observed to ask the supplementary questions only for the member of the household whose name is on the marked line. This may be the husband, wife, daughter, infant, lodger, or any other member of the household. To get the schedule filled out correctly, be sure that you have looked at each column on every line to see if anything should be written in it. Enter the answers to all the questions on the schedule while you are still in the house. And if you have any doubts, ask more questions and make frequent use of the instruction manual.

Enumerator: Well thank you very much Mrs. McGee. That's all the information I'll need.

Mrs. McGee: You're quite welcome.

Narrator: To enumerate and record the required information about every man, woman, and child in the United States is an enormous task. This will require careful and accurate work, first on the part of the 140,000 enumerators, then of the enormous staff who must tabulate and coordinate all these records. Make frequent use of your instruction book and be accurate.