



Review: *Social Explorer*

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SUMMARY

Abstract

The *Social Explorer* database was launched in 2003 by Oxford University Press, and contains the entire U.S. census history as well as numerous other demographic and environmental study reports, as well as mapping tools. The website seamlessly integrates spatial and numeric data through an easy-to-use interface and makes working with socio-demographic data simple even for a novice user.

Sources

Sources for this review include information publicly posted or obtained directly from the publisher, data collected by CRL staff and members, and examination of the digital collection when possible. Other sources are noted where cited.

ANALYSIS

Collection Content

Social Explorer provides access to over 200 years of historical census data for the United States, as well as data on religious affiliation. Decennial census data at the county level is available from 1790 through 2000, and at the census tract level from 1940 through 2000. The American Community Survey (ACS), a yearly survey that records information previously obtained through the long form of the census, is available for the period 2005–09. Five-year and three-year estimates in addition to the ACS annual estimates are also accessible. County-level data for religious congregations and memberships can be obtained for 1980 through 2000.

Other sources of demographic data

While the census data is available from several other sources, including freely available on the census website (www.census.gov), the ability to create maps as well as statistical reports about religion in the U.S. for small geographic areas is unique. Also, the inclusion of historical data back to 1790 is an important advantage of *Social Explorer*.

Advanced researchers may need microdata available from the Bureau of the Census or the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR). Also, some geographies other than county, state, and tract in print reports for the older decennial censuses or in the National Historical GIS (www.nhgis.org) are not available in *Social Explorer* -- such as the Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas for 1960 or places for 1980. In addition, *Social Explorer* does not include the non-decennial (intercensal) data from 1790 to 1945, generally known as the Dubester set (referencing a guide issued by the Library of Congress).

Appendix I of this review contains a comprehensive list of the various U.S. census publications held by CRL, representing the range of titles available in microform from original source material. This tabular data in print or facsimile format has the advantage for advanced scholars of providing a sense of structure of the data, as well as what information has and has not been recorded.

Delivery

Technical platform & interface

In addition to providing online access for almost 200 years' worth of census data, *Social Explorer's* great strength is as a visualization tool. It provides two valuable features: a robust, easy-to-use mapping tool, and the availability of detailed documentation along with a data dictionary. Interactive thematic maps based on available census geographies can be generated without any prior experience with GIS software. Users can download generated maps in Microsoft PowerPoint or JPEG image format, and view associated data in report form and save in Microsoft Excel or CSV formats. In addition to a few pre-made reports, custom tables can also be generated separately and downloaded. Guidance is provided on how to easily import *Social Explorer* data into statistical software programs, including SAS, SPSS, or STATA syntax files. The Data Dictionary and the documentation offer more information on variables, including definitions, data sources, and how variables were derived. The site also provides an animated training guide for new users.

The statistical reports interface looks almost exactly like the U.S. Census Bureau's [American FactFinder](#) site familiar to anyone who has used the Bureau's current data. The mapping interface is much easier to use than the thematic map feature on the Census Bureau's website, containing drop-down lists for the data set to be mapped, the general topic, and the detailed topic. For example, the user could choose the 1940 Census County and Census Tract data, housing topics, and then map the percentage of renter-occupied housing by county. Furthermore, once the map is displayed, it can be

zoomed in to a particular geographic area and saved with one click. The user can then zoom to a different geographical area or create a map of renter-occupied housing in 1950 for the same area. An entire series of maps can then be “played” within *Social Explorer* or exported as a PowerPoint slideshow.

One caution: the interface works best for users who are already familiar with the Decennial Census, particularly when using the older data or tracking trends over time. For example, different questions were asked over the years about transportation to work, so looking at trends in public transportation is not as easy as it appears at first. Geography can also be a complex issue when using census data. Many maps in *Social Explorer* can be drawn at the tract level, but tracts were created over several decennial censuses, beginning with the largest cities in 1910 but not completed until 1990. Users looking for neighborhood racial composition in Little Rock, Arkansas, during 1950 would be disappointed, and if they were unfamiliar with the development of census geographies they would not know why this data is unavailable. This of course represents a limitation of the original data rather than *Social Explorer*’s product, but a link to further explanation would be helpful.

DETAILS

Sources

Sources for details about this digital collection include information publicly posted by the digital publisher. Other information obtained directly from the publisher at the time of writing is highlighted in blue. Any other source is specifically noted where cited.

Collection content

Subjects covered	Entire U.S. census history (1790–2000), the American Community Survey (ACS), the Religious Congregations and Membership Study (RCMS), and carbon emissions data
Geographic coverage	United States
Chronological coverage	1790–2000
Major languages	English
Content types	Monographs and serials
Source formats	N/A
Total titles	N/A
Total pages	N/A
Digital collection launch date	2003
Update frequency	2–4 times/year
Collection ongoing (y/n)	Y
Completion date	N/A
Available supplements	N/A

Metadata

MARC records available (y/n)	N
Creator of MARC records	N
Structural metadata exposed anywhere?	N
Subject authorities used	N
Name authorities used	N

Technical platform

Browser compatibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IE8/Windows • IE7/Windows • IE6/Windows (version 6.0.2900.2180 or higher) • Firefox 3/Windows • Firefox 2/Windows • Firefox 1/Windows • Firefox 2/Macintosh • Firefox 1/Windows • Safari 3/Macintosh • Safari 2/Macintosh
Authentication options	IP/cookie storage
Archiving solution – master files	N/A
Archiving solution – derivative files	N/A
Availability in web discovery tools (y/n)	N
Open url target (y/n)	Y
Federated searching, z39.50 (y/n)	N
Local host option (y/n)	N
Usage statistics (y/n)	Y

Interface tools

	MAPS	REPORTS
Page images (y/n)	Y	Y
Color images (y/n and approx %)	Y (100%)	N
Search full text (y/n)	N/A	Y
Advanced search (fielded) (y/n)	N/A	N
Search within results (y/n)	N/A	N
Limit results by dates and/or document types (y/n)	N/A	N (results can be refined with limited, pre-set options)
Display highlighted search terms (y/n)	N/A	Y
Display snippet -- search term in context (y/n)	N/A	Y
Relevance sorting (y/n)	N/A	N
Save searches (y/n)	N/A	N
Download PDF (y/n)	N/A	N (reports can be downloaded as Excel or CSV data files)
Download HTML (y/n)	N/A	N
Print page (y/n)	N/A	N (there is no dedicated print option within the interface, but reports are printable via browser printing)
Print full document (y/n)	N/A	N
Export citations (y/n)	N/A	N
Annotation tools (y/n)	N/A	N
Cross-product searching (y/n)	N/A	Y (searches are carried out across both maps and reports database, and within all document types within each database)
ILL (y/n)	N/A	N
Restrictions on use	Non-subscriber terms of use: http://www.socialexplorer.com/pub/aboutus/Terms_of_use.aspx Subscriber terms of use: http://www.socialexplorer.com/pub/aboutus/Terms_Members_Current.aspx	

Provider

Publisher / Distributor	Oxford University Press
Address	Oxford University Press 198 Madison Avenue New York, NY 10016
url ; contact email	http://www.oup.com :: oxfordonline@oup.com
Related product(s)	N/A
CRL Profile of Publisher	N/A

Terms

TERMS	OPTIONS	NOTES
Subscription option (y/n)	N/A	
Purchase option (y/n)	N/A	
Multiple year payments option (y/n)	N/A	
Hosting charges (y/n)	N/A	
List of purchasers available (y/n and url)	N/A	
Sample license available (y/n and url)	N/A	
MARC records purchase fee (y/n)	N/A	
Price tier basis	Special pricing is available for library consortia	

USE CASES

Social Explorer would be a good way to get undergraduates to use current census data in their research, since they can easily create a variety of maps and tables, then save them in formats that can be incorporated in papers and presentations.

Also, the state, county, and tract data that makes up the core content of *Social Explorer* could meet the needs of a wide variety of researchers. Scholars who want to manipulate census data but do not need microdata files, or geographies other than county, state, and tract for the older censuses, could find the ability to create and download reports from a broad time span of data useful. But someone working on a scholarly book or dissertation would likely not rely on *Social Explorer* as the only source of census information.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I: CENTER FOR RESEARCH LIBRARIES HOLDINGS OF U.S. CENSUS FACSIMILE DOCUMENTS

U.S. Federal Population Decennial Census Schedules, 1790–1930. (U.S. National Archives)

CRL's holdings are comprised of the U.S. National Archives microfilm editions of these original censuses, a "census substitute" for 1890, and soundex indices for some of the population schedules. The soundex filing system is a phonetic code used to file together similar sounding surnames with variant spellings.

<http://catalog.crl.edu/search~S1/Y?searchtype=Y&searcharg=U.S.+Census+Office&words=U.S.&words=Census&words=Office>

GUIDES: *Federal population censuses, 1790-1890; a catalog of microfilm copies of the schedules; 1900 federal population census; a catalog of microfilm copies of the schedules; 1910 federal population census; a catalog of microfilm copies of the schedules; 1920 federal population census; National Archives microfilm.*

U.S. Bureau of the Census. Non-decennial Census Publications, 1790–1945. (Greenwood Press)

This microfiche collection reprints reports relating to specific censuses and all statistical publications issued by the Bureau of the Census, except for those relating to decennial censuses.

GUIDES: U.S. Library of Congress. Census Library Project. *Catalog of United States census publications, 1790-1945*. Z7554.U5U62 [Commonly cited as "Dubester."] *United States census publications, 1820-1945 (exclusive of decennial census publications)*. [Checklist from the publisher.]

CRL holds pt.1 [1820–1945] (5,924 microfiches). Request reports by the item number from Dubester. <http://catalog.crl.edu/record=b2708572~S1>

U.S. Nonpopulation Censuses, 1820, 1840–1880.

CRL has over 700 reels of nonpopulation censuses schedules compiled with federal decennial population censuses. No extant schedules appear to exist for 1890; schedules for post-1900 were destroyed after the statistical data was extracted.

- **Agricultural and Manufacturing Census Records of Fifteen Southern States for the Years 1850, 1860, 1870, and 1880.** (University of North Carolina Library) 262 reels. Despite the title, only twelve states are represented: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia.

- **U.S. Census Office. Agricultural Schedules, Pennsylvania Federal Decennial Censuses, 1850–80.** (U.S. National Archives T1128) 62 reels.
- **U.S. Bureau of the Census. Federal Mortality Census Schedules, 1850–80, and Related Indexes, in the Custody of the Daughters of the American Revolution.** (U.S. National Archives T655) 30 reels. Covers Colorado, the District of Columbia, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, and Tennessee.
- **U.S. Census Office. 4th Census, 1820. Records of the 1820 Census of Manufactures.** (U.S. National Archives M279) 27 reels. Includes manufactures schedules for the following states: Alabama, Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Vermont, and Virginia.
- **Census of Manufactures (1850). Pennsylvania. Manufactures Schedules, Pennsylvania, Federal Decennial Censuses, 1850–80 [i.e., 1850–60].** (U.S. National Archives T1157) 9 reels.
- **U.S. Census Office. Nonpopulation Census Schedules, 1850–80, Illinois.** (U.S. National Archives T1133) 64 reels.
Not all schedules are complete for each census year.
- **Seventh-tenth United States Census Schedules, 1850–80: Virginia.** (U.S. National Archives T1132) 34 reels.