

# 1790

Census Day was August 2, 1790.

## Authorizing Legislation

The first census began more than a year after the inauguration of President Washington and shortly before the second session of the first Congress ended. Congress assigned responsibility for the 1790 census to the marshals of the U.S. judicial districts under an act which, with minor modifications and extensions, governed census taking through 1840. The law required that every household be visited, that completed census schedules be posted in "two of the most public places within [each jurisdiction], there to remain for the inspection of all concerned..." and that "the aggregate amount of each description of persons" for every district be transmitted to the president.

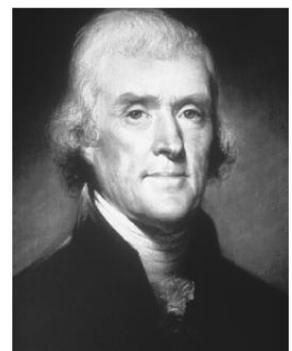


*George Washington was President of the United States on Census Day, August 2, 1790.*

## Enumeration

The six inquiries in 1790 called for the name of the head of the family and the number of persons in each household of the following descriptions:

- Free White males of 16 years and upward (to assess the country's industrial and military potential)
- Free White males under 16 years
- Free White females
- All other free persons
- Slaves



*Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson was nominal supervisor of the census on Census Day, August 2, 1790.*

Under the general direction of Thomas Jefferson, the Secretary of State, marshals took the census in the original 13 States, plus the districts of Kentucky, Maine, and Vermont, and the Southwest Territory (Tennessee).

Both George Washington and Thomas Jefferson expressed skepticism over the final count, expecting a number that exceeded the 3.9 million inhabitants counted in the census.