What is the American Community Survey?
The American Community Survey (ACS) is a nationwide survey providing yearly data on social, economic, demographic, and housing characteristics of the U.S. population. Some less populated geographic areas only offer 3- and 5-year population estimates to ensure more reliable results and protect respondent confidentiality. The ACS is designed to replace the Decennial Census 2010 long form, providing information on a yearly basis rather than every ten years. The Census Bureau began full implementation of the ACS in 2006. The ACS includes people living in housing units and group quarters throughout the United States and Puerto Rico. The ACS is the only data set that provides nationally representative, state-level estimates on key variables such as marriage, divorce, and other household characteristics.

What's new in the ACS and what does it offer family scholars?
The new data product releases include a number of changes from previous data releases, including the addition of new questions and changes in existing questions. More specifically, the 2008 ACS included new questions on marital history, health insurance coverage, and disability status. There were also major changes made to existing questions on disability. In addition, the 2010 ACS uses a different weighting scheme than previous waves of data collection. Finally, coupled with the 2010 ACS, the Census Bureau made considerable changes to American FactFinder, an online resource for downloading and manipulating census data.

The ACS provides information regarding recent (in the last 12 months) family events such as changes in marital status (married, widowed, or divorced) and births. In addition, the ACS is able to identify intergenerational households and differentiate between grandparent-headed and three-generation households.

How do I use the ACS data?
The Census Bureau recommends that the ACS be used to estimate distributions (e.g., means or proportions) on sociodemographic characteristics rather than estimating the total population (i.e., frequencies). Therefore, users are encouraged to compare derived measures such as percentages, means, medians, and rates as opposed to estimates of population totals. Additionally, when using these data, researchers should note the margin of error (ME). The New American FactFinder provides ME's representing a 90% confidence interval. Users computing their own estimates need to compute the corresponding ME's.

The ACS provides important documentation for data users by year of collection. This documentation includes but is not limited to information on coding schemes, subject/population definitions, comparison guides, and weighting strategies. The ACS also provides users with helpful User Notes and Errata pages for additional information.

The 2010 ACS and 2009 ACS use different base year population estimates for weighting purposes. Therefore, users should be cautious in making comparisons across waves. For more detailed information, please see the Change in Population Controls document provided on the ACS website.

How can I access data?
For the novice, information can be obtained via the New American FactFinder, a self-service data information tool provided by the U.S. Census Bureau. If more specific information is needed that is unavailable through the New American FactFinder, individuals can also request a Custom Tabulation from the Bureau for a fee.

More advanced researchers can access data files via a File Transfer Protocol (FTP) Site, the Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) Files, and the Minnesota Population Center's Integrated Public Use Microdata Series.

New American FactFinder
In 2011, the U.S. Census Bureau unveiled the New American FactFinder, discontinuing the Legacy American FactFinder in January of 2012. Currently, the New American FactFinder provides the following data:
- *Decennial Census*: data collected every 10 years on household income, education, homeownership, and more for the United States, Puerto Rico, and the Island Areas.
- *American Community Survey (Puerto Rico Community Survey)*: data collected annually that are designed to provide information on communities as they change.
- *Economic Census*: data collected every 5 years that provide information regarding the industry and business classification of the economies (available for the national and local unit of analysis).
- *Annual Economic Surveys*: data collected annually, quarterly, or monthly pertaining to…
  - *Annual Survey Manufactures*
  - *Business Patterns*
  - *Nonemployer Statistics*
- *Population Estimates Program*: data on estimated population totals for the previous year for cities and towns, metropolitan areas, counties, and states.

What can I access from American FactFinder?
ACS data products that are available through the New American FactFinder include detailed tables, data profiles, subject tables, ranking products, comparison profiles, geographic comparison tables, thematic maps, and selected population profiles.

Detailed Tables
Detailed tables provide basic distributions of demographic, social, economic, and housing characteristics. Additional tables offer race/ethnic differences by over 40 key characteristics. To see an example, click here.

Data Profiles
Detailed reports contain estimates for social, economic, housing, and demographic characteristics. Comparison profiles that contrast estimates from previous years and include statistical significance tests for each previous year's estimates compared to the current year are also available. To see an example, click here.

Subject Tables
Each year, there are over 40 topic-specific subject tables released. These tables display distributions for key groups, such as race/ethnic groups or various age groups, which

are relevant to the topic of the specific table. Estimates among groups are given as both whole numbers and percentages. Some tables also contain other measures, such as medians. To see an example, click here.

Ranking Products
American FactFinder also provides ranked results of about 80 measures across states. These rankings are only available for the most current sample year. To see an example, click here.

Comparison Profiles
These reports provide comparisons across different year estimates allowing researchers to examine change in topics of interest over time. To see an example, click here.

Geographic Comparison Tables
These tables contain the same measures that appear in the *Ranking Products*. Additionally, these tables are available as both 1-year and multi-year products and for states and some sub-state entities, such as congressional districts, metropolitan areas, or counties. To see an example, click here.

Thematic Maps
Users can create a thematic map by clicking on the "Create a Map" option on the table view of a data product. These maps visually display the geographic variation of key characteristics (referred to as themes) by mapping values using different shades of color. The New American FactFinder provides a wider variety of thematic maps than the older version of FactFinder by including the custom map option.

Selected Population Profiles
These profiles provide detailed information from the ACS 2010 (1-year and 3-year estimates) and are available from the New American FactFinder. Additional information found in the profiles includes race/ethnicity, sex and age composition, marital status, school enrollment, educational attainment, fertility, and citizenship status.

Where can I learn more about the ACS?
The U.S. Census Bureau has created a series of publications called *The ACS Compass Products*. These publications provide users with direction and guidance in using the ACS data in a user-friendly format. To access the individual handbooks, click here.

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