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From the Selected Works of Janice G. Schuster

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Historical Statistics of the United States, Millennial Edition (update of 2007 review)

Janice G. Schuster

ccAdvisor

ccadvisor.org

Historical Statistics of the United States Millennial Edition. Cambridge University Press
<http://hsus.cambridge.org>

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Primary Category

History & Area Studies

Secondary Categories

Business & Economics

Abstract:

Historical Statistics of the United States Millennial Edition is a triumph among statistical sources. The content dates back to 1970, and the database offers searching, saving and downloading capabilities that will satisfy both serious researchers and casual users. The resource is interdisciplinary, containing data on diverse topics such as statistics, history, economics, American Indians, slavery, poverty, race, ethnicity, migration, health, crime, Confederate States of America, Confederacy, and population, among others.

Overview:

The Census Bureau published the last edition of the Historical Statistics of the United States in 1975. When the Census Bureau decided, in the early 1990s, that it would not publish a new edition of Historical Statistics, a team of renowned social scientists came together with Cambridge University Press to create a new edition. More than 200 of the nation's leading economists, historians, political scientists, sociologists, and other scholars contributed to the millennial edition of Historical Statistics. This new edition, available in both print and electronic formats, reflects thirty years of new data and scholarship and contains coverage of topics that were not included or were included only cursorily in the 1975 edition, including American Indians, slavery, poverty, race, and ethnicity. A recognized expert in the field places topics ranging from migration and health to crime and the Confederate States of America in historical context.

The electronic edition has been designed to give users a variety of means to search and navigate the vast amount of data in the Historical Statistics. The fully searchable and downloadable electronic edition allows users to graph individual tables or to combine data from different tables into customized tables. It also allows users to download tables for use in spreadsheets and other applications reflecting their own areas of interest.

User Interface:

Search interface: The database's homepage is straightforward and includes links to About HSUS, Help, FAQ, and a User Guide. There are clear navigation tabs for Contents, Indexes, Search, and Favorites. The system defaults to showing the entries under the Table of Contents tab, including clear links to the parts (Population; Work and Welfare; Economic Structure and Performance; Economic Sectors; Governance and International Relations) and Appendixes (Weights, Measures, and Monetary Values; States and Census Regions; Origin of Historical Statistics of the United States.)

The Indexes tab includes a searchable A-Z index, browseable index terms, and search box. The Search tab includes a general search box, used to search all chapters at once, as well as a search by page number. The Favorites tab shows saved data and includes a link to instructions for saving data.

Searching: The search screen itself is clear, but some of the search instructions are worded unclearly. For example, under the main search box: "Entering two terms will search for both terms, not for either term. To search for one term or the other term, enter an 'or' between the search terms." I had to read it a few times before it was clear to me that the first sentence means that there is an understood Boolean AND, and the second sentence means that, to do a Boolean OR search, one must add the OR. I am sure that my library's patrons will not easily understand the difference. Another example of a poorly worded instruction appears under Search tips: "Require a word to match by placing a + in front of it. Example: +area

+population. Exclude a word match by placing a – in front of it. Example: +area –population.” When I clicked on More Search Tips and read the explanation of a NOT search, I realized that the – indicates a Boolean NOT.

Help Screens: The help screens link to the context-specific portion of “How to Use Historical Statistics of the United States.” For example, when I clicked on a table and then clicked on Help on the top right, it took me to the “Overview of Tables” section of “How to Use HSUS.” The overview included how the tables are organized, the definition of “series,” an explanation of the use of columns within tables, and information about row identifiers. I commend Cambridge for the context-specific help screens.

Results Display: I searched for “Cotton” and clicked on the link for the first table, which displayed nicely. The row headings do not freeze when scrolling down within the table, which makes reading the table a bit difficult after the first screen. I appreciate the Full Documentation on the left side, which includes footnotes, sources and documentation/definitions. At the top of the table are clear links to the various options: Graph, Download in Excel, PDF, Print, Save Data, Email Table, Custom Tables, and View Selected Series.

I tried all the options. The Graph option allows the user to choose which series to include/exclude. When I clicked on Graph Data, a warning appeared: “You have selected series with different units for your graph. You can graph these data, but please create an appropriate label for the axis that has varying units, and click Graph Data to continue.” The system entered “Year” as the label for the X-Axis, and I entered “Test” as the label for the Y-Axis. The resulting graph was in color, labeled at the top with the table name.

The Download in Excel option includes a checkbox to indicate that the table will be imported into a statistical software package, so that the download can be formatted properly. I left that unclicked and downloaded the spreadsheet. Nothing happened on the screen, but I found the file in my downloads folder. It seems like the spreadsheet should open automatically or, at the very least, something should appear directing the user to check the downloads folder. The spreadsheet itself is very nice, with the table name clearly at the top and the column headings clearly marked. A nice addition to the spreadsheet would be to include the documentation, i.e. definitions of the terms used, etc. This was included in the database when I last reviewed it in 2006.

Printing works as expected, defaulting to printing up to the first 30 lines of the table. It is possible to increase the number of lines that are printed, which was not possible in 2006. The directions recommend printing the PDF version if one needs to print the entire table.

In 2006, I reported that the Save Data feature was very useful, allowing me to easily save a table to my Favorites tab and to go back and retrieve the same table in the future without having to re-execute the search. Unfortunately, when I clicked on Save Data for the current review and logged in, I received a “service announcement” that the site was unavailable, so I was not able to test that feature for this review. I received the “service announcement” several times over a few days, so I wonder if there is a bug in the Save Data feature.

The email option worked easily. The test email I sent to myself indicated the name of the table, that it was from Historical Statistics of the United States and that I would have access to the link until “June 30, 2017 23:59 GMT.” It would be an improvement if the time could be indicated in the time zone of the sender, but I am not sure if that is technically feasible. Clicking on the link took me directly to the table.

Historic Content: *Historical Statistics of the United States* has long been the standard source for quantitative indicators of American history. It has not been revised, however, since the Bicentennial Edition, which was published in 1975 and provided data through 1970. The period since then has witnessed an explosion of quantitative scholarship and the general expansion of the government’s statistical record keeping. By one estimate, more than three fourths of the data output of the U.S. government and more than 80 percent of the historical data series generated by scholars have been produced since 1970. No subject area and few data series have remained untouched by this phenomenal growth of the American quantitative record.

The revised, updated, and expanded Millennial Edition contains considerably more information than its immediate predecessor: five volumes rather than two, more than twice as many pages of data and documentation, and a tripling of the number of data series – 37,339 in the new edition. This expansion occurred along several dimensions. Most series from the previous edition were extended by roughly thirty years, and the coverage of most topics was enhanced. More than a dozen new topics were added: American Indians, slavery, outlying areas, poverty, nonprofit organizations, and the Confederate States of America, to list a few examples. Finally, the chapters in the new edition are preceded by essays that introduce the quantitative history of their subject, provide a guide to the sources, and offer expert advice on the reliability of the data and the limits that might be placed on their interpretation.

Critical Evaluation:

Since the Census Bureau’s Historical Statistics of the United States has not been published since 1975, covering data through 1970, Cambridge’s HSUS’s strength is that it provides and organizes statistics from 1970 forward. The data are

probably accessible elsewhere, but HSUS effectively compiles, provides context for and makes them easily downloadable. Its tables are easily navigated and downloaded for multiple uses.

The database's weaknesses include that the search directions are unclear, that it is not clear where an Excel spreadsheet ends up when one clicks on "download in Excel," and that the Save Data function does not appear to work properly.

Competitive Products:

There is no other resource that provides the same data as HSUS.

Purchase Contract:

The licensing agreement is standard. One good feature of the agreement is its clear definitions of terms at the beginning of the agreement. If an institution terminates the license (i.e. no longer pays the annual access fee), a clause allows the licensee to receive the full contents of the database in Word and Excel files, without functionality or programming. The licensing agreement also explicitly allows "the distribution of a copy for teaching purposes to each individual student Authorized User in a class at the Licensee's institution(s)." In addition, a specific clause allows users to incorporate parts of the database into course packs and electronic reserves. In the current climate of concern regarding copyright, these classes are welcome. Interlibrary loan use is prohibited. The agreement is governed by the laws of the state of New York; the general counsel at my institution would require changing that to Rhode Island or deleting it altogether.

ICOLC-standard usage statistics are currently available; Cambridge is investigating the possibility of upgrading to COUNTER usage statistics in the near future (no date available yet).

Pricing:

Pricing is for a one-time purchase of the online edition. There is an annual maintenance fee of \$132 that begins in year 2. The 2017 one-time purchase price for academic institutions is \$9,975, which includes perpetual online access. Government libraries and high schools/individuals pay \$4,095 and \$1,995 respectively, including perpetual online access.

Authentication:

Access is by IP authentication with unlimited simultaneous users. Access via username/password is also available for customers who are unable to provide an IP address/range exclusive to their institution. Users must register and login in order to use the Save Data function (although, as I mention under Critical Evaluation, I was not able to get Save Data to work.)

References:

1. LaGuardia, Cheryl. 2006. "Statistically Speaking." Library Journal 131 (14): 28.

Composite Score 4.25

Content Score	User Interface/Searchability Score	Pricing Score	Purchase/Contract Options Score
5.0	3.0	4.5	4.5
Content Notes	User Interface/Searchability Notes	Pricing Notes	Purchase/Contract Options Notes
The content includes data from 1970 forward. The ability to access the data in one location, with a good search engine and display/download options, is invaluable to researchers.	The searching instructions should be improved. It is not clear if the Save Data function works properly.	The one-time purchase price for the product seems reasonable, and there are flexible options for various types of purchasers.	The licensing agreement could be a model for other vendors. I suggest that Cambridge remove the governing law clause or change it to the purchasing institution's home state.

About the Author:

Janice G. Schuster is Commons Librarian, Research, Education and Collections/Associate Professor at Providence College in Providence, Rhode Island. She is responsible for the library's electronic resources and serials, co-chairs the library's Knowledge Collections group and serves on the library's assessment group. She serves the college in many ways including: *Faculty Senate*: elected at-large senator, appointed secretary for Senate website and listserv, appointed member of the Faculty Status committee and of the ad hoc committee to reevaluate the college's anti-harassment policy; *Common Reading Program*: member of the steering committee, chair of the library resources subcommittee and member of the essay contest subcommittee. She has served for many years as the co-chair of the Electronic Resources Affinity Group of the Higher Education Library and Information Network (HELIN) consortium. She has published on electronic resources, serials, adoption and livable communities. She holds B.A. and M.L.S. degrees from Indiana University (Bloomington)

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