Ethnic and Cultural Mapping in the United States

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"Maps persuade as much as they describe."

Starting Points:

- This lecture will focus on ethnicity and culture, particularly in cities, to provide context for ancestral research. Religion will be used as an example of culture.
- Ethnic and race maps emerge from different motives: enumeration (census), reform (settlement houses and health boards), and risk or commerce (insurers and banks).
- Scale matters.
- Categories matter. "Nationality," "race," and "foreign-born" are not the terms we would use to describe people today but historical censuses did.
- Consider the audience of the map when analyzing it and the motivations of the map's creator and/or publisher.

Learning Objectives

- Identify major 19th century map genres that depict ethnicity and culture, internal U.S. migrations, and religious maps.
- Locate digital maps for a city of interest.
- Read maps critically for scale, symbols/colors, bias, and purpose.
- Understand context of migration and residential choices of ancestors.

Migration Patterns and Settlement – U.S. Census Statistical Reports

Since its inception in 1790, the decennial federal census has always been a document colored by the politics of the decade. Questions are added, deleted, and adapted to collect data to answer questions important to the federal government. Following the Civil War, the growth of "scientific mapping"—the collection of data for the purpose of tracking trends in population, society, and the economy, analysis of that data, serving it up visually in tables, charts, and maps to communicate findings, and then using the information to craft federal programs to satisfy identified problems or needs in the United States.

Following the completion of the decennial census in 1870, 1880, 1890, and 1900, the U.S. Census Bureau created reports to Congress to inform them of the census results in the aggregate. These publications are summaries of the population schedules, agricultural, and industrial schedules that you may be familiar with from your own research. Although the 1890 Census was mostly destroyed, the compilation of statistics had already taken place and was published. Luckily, these volumes have been digitized. The 1850 and 1860 statistical summaries exist but have not been published digitally yet.

Statistical atlas of the United States based on the results of the ninth census 1870 with contributions from many eminent men of science and several departments of the government Comp. under the authority of Congress by Francis A. Walker, M. A., superintendent of the ninth census ...(New York: J.Bien, 1874)
https://www.loc.gov/item/05019329/

Scribner's Statistical Atlas of the United States, Showing by graphic methods their present condition, their political, social and industrial development. Fletcher W. Hewes and Henry Gannett (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1883). It contains maps of the location of foreign-born populations by ethnic group for 1880 census year.
https://www.loc.gov/item/a40001834/

Statistical atlas of the United States, based upon the results of the eleventh census by Henry Gannett. (Washington Government Printing Office, 1898)
https://www.loc.gov/item/07019233/

Proportion of the Foreign Born to the Aggregate Population: 1890
Library of Congress
https://www.loc.gov/resource/g3701gm.gct00010/?sp=31&r=-0.097,-0.278,1.198,0.67,0

David Rumsey Map Collection https://www.davidrumsey.com/ Also has digitized statistical atlases of the 11th (1890) and 12th (1900) decennial censuses.]

Urban Cultural Mapping – Sample Projects

Geographical Information System (GIS) projects display historical data in an interactive way. These are a few city examples:

Atlascope Boston, https://www.atlascope.org/ is a collection that contains 101 historical atlases pertaining to Boston and its outlying suburbs as far as Salem.

The Greater Philadelphia GeoHistory Network,
https://www.philageohistory.org/geohistory/
A helpful website to use in conjunction with this one is the Historical Society of Pennsylvania's *Philadelphia Neighborhood History*
https://hsp.libguides.com/c.php?g=1174260

Social Reform, Sanitary Commissions, and Settlement House Cartography: Three Examples

During the late, 19th century, city ward boundaries become an analytic frame for "nationality maps." Chicago and New York City become hubs for reform-driven research due to the widespread poverty among immigrant groups.

Chicago, 1895: Hull-House Maps and Papers. Maps were created by volunteers. Blocks were color-coded by "nationalities" and wages in the Near West Side of the city. Papers: https://ia600509.us.archive.org/18/items/hullhousemapspap00newy/hullhousemapspap00newy.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Maps: https://dcc.newberry.org/?p=17805
New York Lower East Side Tenement House Committee [1895]
http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.gmd/g3804n.ct001463r

San Francisco Board of Supervisors, "The Official Map of Chinatown in San Francisco, July 1885.
https://www.davidrumsey.com/luna/servlet/workspace/handleMediaPlayer?qvq=&trs=&mi=&lunaMediaId=RUMSEY~8~1~241649~5512689&widgetFormat=simple

Residential Safety Maps

A government program designed to help homeowners retain their homes in the Depression became exploited as an obstacle to Blacks and other non-Whites to obtain

home loans and later even insurance. The **Home Owner's Loan Corporation (HOLC)** was a federal program that operated in the 1930s and 1940s that was used to evaluate neighborhoods for the percentage of people of color who lived there (Black, Hispanic, Asian, Jews, and Southern Europeans) and the probability that home loans would be paid back. The system favored Whites over most other groups. Under this system, non-Whites were often denied loans. The insurance industry also followed suit and used similar analysis on whether to insure residential and business properties. HOLC created maps, known as "Residential Safety Maps," later known as "Redlining maps" that graded neighborhoods by color. Red-shaded areas were graded as "Hazardous" while neighborhoods where whites predominated were often colored green or blue and deemed "best" or "desirable." These government maps starkly illustrated how Black Americans were restricted to certain parts of major cities.

The University of Richmond, Virginia hosts "Mapping Inequality, Redlining in New Deal America" https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/introduction is a collection of maps and transcription of evaluation forms created by the HOLC between 1935 and 1940.

Using Religious Maps to Trace Family History:

- **Locate ancestors' congregations.** The geography of denominations narrows your search because people tended to settle among those of like faith and language.
- **Explain migration decisions.** Church networks helped ease transitions of groups from rural areas into urban areas and vice versa.
- **Settlement patterns and community support.** Ethnic-specific institutions such as fraternal and social organizations or schools could have a religious connection where additional records could be found.
- **Unusual migration pattern through missionary activities.** Religious maps can show predominant faiths that could give context to religious conversions and intermarriages between faiths.
- **Finding records using religious demographic data.** Often secular civil records lagged religious record-keeping. For example, understanding that a particular county was predominantly Baptist could give you a clue where to look for records.
- **Understand context and add color to family narratives.** Consider what the spiritual environment was like of your ancestors. Were they mainstream or outliers in their town? Was your ancestor a preacher who moved frequently and established churches in each of the various counties he lived in or was assigned to a new frontier location? This type of inquiry merges geography and biography.
- **Combine maps with DNA data.** Ethnicity information from DNA tests could provide a clue for past migrations. For example, Ashkenazi Jewish DNA or Mormon pioneer DNA matches could allow for backward tracing and reveal

migration corridors. Quakers that are found in North Carolina could have traveled a route from Pennsylvania southward.

Religious maps will not give you names or dates of ancestors, but they will provide a compass to help find them.

Major Religious Movements of the 19th and 20th Centuries in America

- **Second Great Awakening.** Protestant revivalism around 1790 – 1840 that increased church membership and led to new denominations formed in the U.S. such as the Adventists, Latter-day Saint (Mormon) movement. Methodists and Baptists spread along the frontier both in the west and the south.

- **African-American Christianity**, both free and enslaved, formed their own congregations and denominations during the Second Great Awakening. This movement accelerated after the Civil War. Following Emancipation, Black churches became stabilizing community institutions. The African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church was founded in 1816.

- **The Great Migration.** Between 1910 – 1970 millions of African-Americans left the south and moved both north and west, carrying their traditions and churches with them. About 6 million Black Southerners relocated during this time period. See the Great Migration Project at the University of Washington: https://depts.washington.edu/moving1/black_migration.shtml Major cities such as Detroit, Chicago, and Los Angeles were dramatically affected by this massive 20th century migration.

- **Catholic Immigration.** Large-scale immigration took place during the 19th and early 20th centuries pushed initially by Irish and German Catholics fleeing Europe in the mid-19th century. Between 1880 – 1920, Italian Polish, and Eastern European Catholics built thousands of parishes in every major American city and created ethnic Catholic neighborhoods particularly along the East Coast, Midwest, and some major western cities along the Pacific Coast. By 1910, Catholics became the largest single denomination in the U.S. A state-by-state migration history between 1850 and 2022 is found here: https://depts.washington.edu/moving1/migrationhistory-states.shtml

- **Mormon Migration**. Beginning in the mid-19th century, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints undertook a mass migration along a

westward trek from the Midwest to Utah to escape persecution. About 70,000 migrated between 1846 and 1869 following the Mormon Trail to the Salt Lake Valley. Today, Utah still has the highest concentration of Latter-day Saints in the U.S.

- **Jewish Immigration and Community Formation.** During the 18th century and well into the 19th century there were only a few thousand Jews in America. In 1880, that number had grown to about 300,000. Between 1880 and 1924, an enormous influx of Eastern European Jews arrived, fleeing pograms and persecution. By 1930 there were over 4 million Jews living in the U.S. These immigrants settled primarily in urban areas such as New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston, and Los Angeles building synagogues, schools and social networks. Following World War II, the second generation moved out of large cities and into suburbs spreading Judaism outside of large cities. See History of Jews in the United States: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Jews_in_the_United_States

- **Orthodox Christian Immigration.** Christians from the Eastern Orthodox traditions (Greece, Russia, Syrians, Armenians, and others) were a smaller group but established numerous communities in New England and along the Pacific Coast. Between 1880 and 1920, they also were fleeing persecution and civil strife in their countries. Greek Orthodox churches can be found through inland California, particularly in the gold producing regions because of availability of employment in mining. Los Angeles became a hub of Armenian culture.

- **Spread of Evangelical and Pentecostal Movements during the 20th Century.** White Southerners brought evangelical Christianity during the Depression into the western United States as they sought work in agriculture, dam building, and the logging industries. World War II brought additional employment opportunities and attracted millions from the Dust Bowl and South. Sunbelt cities of Los Angeles, Dallas, Atlanta, and Phoenix became fertile ground for large megachurches and revivals.

- **Mid-to-Late 20th Century Diversification.** Following changes to immigration laws, migration from Latin America and Asia brought new faiths as well as new forms of Christianity such as the Korean Protestant churches, particularly to the western United States. Muslim communities sprouted in the upper Midwest and New Jersey. Pluralism in the American religious landscape became increasingly evident in Pew Research surveys by region. (See bibliography for Pew references).

Top Five Map Choices to Locate Historical Places of Worship

- **Fire Insurance Maps (Next week with Michael Strauss!)**

- **County Atlases**
- **Historical USGS Topographic Maps**
- **Panoramic or Bird's-Eye View Maps**
- **Civil War Maps** (churches often stood in for hospitals and places of respite for troops from both sides. War cartographers were careful to note their locations).

Conclusion and Discussion

Read maps critically (a thread throughout today's lecture).

• Notice terminology drift over time: "race," "nationality," "colored," "foreign-born." In the census, who is being counted? Who is not being counted?

• Consider the purpose of the map: reform persuasion vs. neutral description; state power vs. social advocacy or simple enumeration and description of patterns.

• Scale bias: ward/sanitary districts hide block-level diversity; house-by-house surveys may spotlight only "problem" blocks.

• To flesh out the 1890 Census material, consult other sources such as: city directories, church registers, newspapers.

Reflections

Consider your own family's past. What religions did your ancestors practice, and where did they live? Do you notice any patterns? Did they migrate to join a community of the same faith or settle in a region because their religion was welcomed there?

If you ancestors were immigrants, can you identify any "push/pull factors" that caused them to move such as escaping religious discrimination, seeking religious freedom, or pursuing missionary or utopian goals? A push factor is something that causes a migrant to move involuntarily like a war or passage of a discriminatory law. A pull factor is something that caused a migrant to move voluntarily such as seeking better employment or educational opportunities.

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