Chapter 3
Understanding the Map Patterns

This chapter first explains the approach used in developing the text interpretations of the distributions. It presents their emphases and limitations and stresses their focus on specific places. The main purpose of the interpretations is to explain, at least to some extent, how and why the distributions developed as they did. Secondly, there is a discussion of how the numbers and proportions of ethnic populations in different places can relate to other aspects of life in those places.

Text Interpretation of the Maps

Organization of Chapters

The various ethnic populations are treated in terms of the appropriate world region of origin. A chapter on the earliest or Native Americans follows the three introductory chapters. Then, because descendants of people from Europe constitute by far the largest body of Americans, the chapters dealing with populations of European origin come next. These are followed by discussions of immigrants from the Middle East, the earliest of whom were part of the flow from the Mediterranean world. The text then proceeds through Africa, the origin of most American blacks, to Middle and South America and Asia, regions of especially large numbers of immigrants since 1965.

At the beginning of each chapter is a short section providing background. Because most ethnic populations are either immigrants or the descendants of immigrants, these sections normally describe both general conditions that led several ethnic groups to come to America and the types of people who immigrated. Those circumstances and characteristics have usually influenced the work experiences and types of settlements made in this country.

The treatment of each ethnic population begins with a table of 1980 summary statistics, designed to provide comparisons of sizes of the population and highlight special ethnic concentrations. Only counties with at least 100 members of an ethnic population are shown in the table of percentages.

The first paragraphs of the text accompanying each map are often introductory in that some identify subgroups within the population represented on the map. Then, the interpretations focus on the origins and early growth of settlements in those places where each ethnic population was particularly strong in 1980. In the process, both general statements and some details of settlement in particular places are presented.

The length of each section of text is somewhat proportionate to the size of the ethnic population, but the presence of subgroups requires additional explanation. Where small sections of the text are based substantially on specific sources, references are provided at the beginning of those sections. Any population statistics presented without reference have been taken from the U.S. census for the year indicated.

General Perspective

Each distribution is the cumulative result of so many past decisions and actions that no complete explanation is possible. Many choices regarding marriage, migration, and children were made generations ago and lie hidden forever. Nevertheless, historical knowledge of the general processes of settlement and migration, as well as some details regarding a few specific local areas, permit a partial understanding of the distributions.

America's ethnic diversity is primarily due to the fact that so many different peoples who arrived in this land decided to remain here. Yet, for millions of people, the initial experience here was not a planned, permanent move. Many envisioned only a temporary migration in order to earn more money than was possible at home. Perhaps a third or more of transatlantic migrants did return home, and some people came to America fairly regularly for seasonal work. But some of the returnees ultimately came back to America, and many people who originally expected to stay but a short while did after all make new homes here. Hundreds of thousands of others, especially since World War II, were refugees rather than immigrants; they fled for their own survival and rarely had much choice of destination.

For the sake of simplicity, the text refers to all the people who arrived from outside the country as immigrants, although in the early period many had not severed ties with their communities in other countries and had no intention of immigrating. In addition, in this book the most commonly used names of ethnic groups have been used rather than a term that may be preferred by many members of an ethnic group. For example, people who have sometimes described themselves as Nikkei and Filipinos are referred to here as Japanese and Filipinos, and the Dakota Indians are called the Sioux.

All the ethnic populations in 1980 include a variety of people, ranging across most social classes. There are recent immigrants and those whose families have lived here for generations. In addition, the social fabric together in uneven ways. Even among those whose family history has involved little or no such intermarriage, some hold to the attitudes and religion and customs associated with their ethnic heritage whereas others long ago dropped most of these.

Ethnic populations are not separate entities within American society. Nearly all of the people represented on the maps, except possibly the most recent immigrants, consider themselves Americans. In work, schools, and neighborhood life, most interact daily with members of other groups and with people who have no professed ethnic identity. Ethnicity is but one dimension of people's lives.

A Focus on Places

The interpretations accompanying each map are concerned primarily with those aspects of ethnic group life that relate to the distributions. Many topics that have been the subject of
much research in history and the social sciences are only addressed to an understanding of the distribution patterns. Thus, the text does not deal with the relatively few early arriving or especially distinguished members of an ethnic population, nor does it recount the contributions of ethnic groups to American life. There is little discussion of cultural and social assimilation, political power, religion, psychological aspects of ethnicity, and socioeconomic status changes. Interrelationships between ethnic groups and the treatment of less powerful groups by others in control are mentioned only when these affected the distribution. And no attempt has been made to portray the poverty, abominable living and working conditions, and sufferings of many immigrants, blacks, and American Indians as they were establishing themselves in the society and economy of America. These terribly important aspects of ethnic community life in America have been covered in numerous other sources.

Most research regarding ethnic populations has not been concerned specifically with the details of ethnic settlement patterns. Rather, such topics have usually been covered as part of a larger historical study. The map interpretations are based essentially on many secondary sources and represent a synthesis of findings by historians, geographers, sociologists, and others that relate to the locations of settlements and the cultural and economic histories of specific places.

Compared to most social science research on ethnic groups, the maps and interpretations reflect a greater concern for smaller places and nonmetropolitan areas. This is to be expected, of course, considering the atlas’s focus on national patterns rather than cities with especially large ethnic concentrations. However, because ethnic settlements within counties have almost always been in specific towns, cities, or other places, details of such places are often included in the discussions of settlement origins and evolution.

In the summary statistics for each ethnic population, leading counties are indicated. Because most people are more aware of city than county names, the largest town or city in a county is often included. This has been done when the city name is different from that of the county and when the county name is not itself widely used, but towns of under 1,000 population are not listed. Mention of such an urban place is made only for ease of recognition and does not imply any concentration of the ethnic population in that place.

Uneven Coverage of Counties

With over 3,100 counties in America and a wide dispersal of many ethnic populations, no text discussion of a map pattern can be comprehensive. Generally the text focuses on the counties and regions where each ethnic population represents a high proportion of total county population relative to other counties in which the group is located. Such counties have been identified on the maps by distinctive colors and, in many cases, by county names. These counties are especially significant in the distribution because they are often recognized as distinctive ethnic concentrations by both local people and far-flung members of the ethnic group. Where possible, the processes of migration and settlement that led to several of those concentrations are presented in the text.

In contrast, map interpretations do not treat most of the counties where absolute numbers of the ethnic group are greatest. To do so would have resulted in too many repetitive discussions, covering New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and other very large metropolitan centers. Also, some ethnic groups have been studied much more than others. Where the early histories of many different places were readily available and some important settlements could not be mentioned, selection was done so as to achieve some regional and state balance within the text as a whole. In this way even less populated or less ethnically varied states and regions could occasionally be included.

Despite these objectives, the choice of places for discussion has been frequently limited by the fragmentary nature of historical knowledge about those concentrations. Some historian or geographer may have examined a particular group in one area or a few areas, but even local areas of relative concentration have been studied unevenly by scholars concerned with that group. Most information available on specific settlements relates to the origins, early organizational leaders, and initial growth. This is useful material, but developments during later years, especially since World War II, are too seldom the subject of research. Especially uncommon are local histories that cover more recent comings and goings of ordinary people and their families, who constitute the majority of ethnic populations.

Processes of Initial Ethnic Settlement

In the past, immigrants were thought to have chosen a particular region of settlement primarily because of similarities between its physical environment and that of the birthplace they had just left. However, more detailed research based on the motivations actually expressed by immigrants has shown that such environmental emigration were almost always less important than the derived opportunities for purchasing land or earning money. The location of the early settlements was a function of several factors, but the need to work was central.

The locations of ethnic settlements have been the result of many factors, which have varied in importance over time and for different groups. In the cases of American Indians, blacks, and other racial minorities, many of the locations reflect decisions made by white people at a time when minorities usually could not move to the area where they wished to live. In other cases, ethnic concentrations have developed in less accessible areas because people preferred to be isolated from others who were not members of the group.

The locations of some immigrant settlements were decided by employers, who specifically recruited some employees, or by state immigration agents who tried to entice people to a particular state. Particularly during the 19th century when farmland was available, many immigrants were influenced in their choice of destination by newspaper articles extolling the environmental qualities of a particular state or region. Also, railroad companies and steamship lines had representatives in Europe, and railroad promotion naturally extended the advantages of settling along a particular company’s routes. The major port of arrival for an immigrant group sometimes developed a large concentration of that ethnic group, and patterns of transportation available for internal migration have been of some importance. Also in the 20th century, enlistment in the armed forces or marriage to military personnel has affected the distributions of some Asian populations, Puerto Ricans, and blacks.

Frequently, ethnic communities have developed in certain locations because of small, almost random or accidental decisions made by one or a few people for reasons not known today. However, everyone was dependent on money, and people were most apt to go where they thought there would be adequate work.

Early Work Opportunities

The location of employment opportunities was the most important factor in the location of urban ethnic settlements. American employers played a role in a collective sense in that they controlled access to most work opportunities. Over most of the last century and a half certain types of jobs were considered most suitable for certain ethnic groups, and members of nonwhite and more accessible immigrant groups were not generally hired for better jobs. Within this system of occupations, sometimes stratified by ethnicity, only some types of places were apt to provide the work that members of different groups could realistically take.

Details of how any particular connection between a potential employee and an employer first developed still are not known today. However, if the initial work experience was satisfactory to both or if no alternative was available, that work usually attracted other members of the ethnic group and an ethnic community was born. Women and children were obviously necessary parts of ethnic communities, but
because men often arrived first or played the major role in locational decisions, it is the occupations of the men that have been stressed in the interpretations.

In rural areas work opportunities have been more dispersed geographically until the 20th century. The specific locations of ethnic settlements were a function of — that is, were variously determined by — people’s perceptions of areas, recommendations by trusted associates, land prices, initial experiences in the area, and small incidents that at the time seemed inconsequential. In general, European immigrants who wished to farm usually chose the cheapest good land that they could find. In the 19th century Americans and Europeans pushed aside the Indians and steadily moved westward, opening up new and cheaper land for farm settlement. Land prices tended to be higher in the more accessible lands to the east. Those immigrant groups that arrived earlier settled more to the east, while the later arrivals were forced to take more distant and often inferior land farther west.

Immigrants who looked for work other than farming or who arrived after most farmland had been taken usually were drawn toward cities. The jobs they took were, in a general sense, a function of the labor needs of the American economy at the time of the immigrant group’s arrival. Relatively few immigrants could use the skills they had learned earlier, but some were recruited by industrial employers for their particular skills. In the period after about 1860, America needed construction laborers and factory workers during those decades of tremendous urban and industrial expansion, although in some areas farm workers were also sought. During the initial months and early years many unskilled immigrants moved frequently around the country as members of labor gangs or as peddlers.

Within a few years most immigrants learned about more stable jobs and began to settle down in occupational niches. Particular connections between employers and employees were often established almost accidentally. After a few years of employment the early immigrants had often sent enough letters home that the particular town or city became well-known in the old country. Friends and relatives came, took similar jobs, and the ethnic settlement was born.

Chain Migration. Strangers to America, especially those who spoke no English, were naturally much more likely to migrate to a place where they knew someone who could at least get them started than they were to strike out completely on their own. Most industrial jobs went to people who knew someone already working for the company. When a foreman gave word that more jobs would be available, workers would often be able to get their friends, usually from the same ethnic group, into the jobs.

Personal connections, often formed within religious communities, have so influenced the choice of destinations by migrants that, over years and even decades, people from the same villages and districts have often migrated to a few very specific places in America. This process is called chain migration. Its importance is indicated by the fact that, of European and Syrian immigrants arriving in 1908 and 1909, 95 percent reported that they were headed to a place at which there were relatives or friends (Imm. Com. 1911a). Because so many immigrants chose their initial destination based on these contacts, chain migration has been the most influential process in transplanting and perpetuating local identities and communities in parts of America. Unless there is evidence to the contrary, chain migration can generally be considered the major factor in the early growth of a local ethnic community.

Those relatively few pioneering individuals who either led group migrations or began chain migrations were the prime agents in the settlement of most localities. Although no records of most such decisions were ever made, those that have been discovered and accepted by scholars have usually been considered especially valuable due to the direct, concrete nature of the explanation they provide.

Later Elaboration of the Early Distribution

The later growth, stability, or decline of an ethnic population in an area has been a function of several factors, which are difficult to distinguish except by local historical study. Fertility, mortality, extent of intermarriage with people outside the ethnic group, and attitudes toward ethnic identities may all be significant. However, migration in and out of the community is usually the most important factor and the one that usually exerts its effects on the community most rapidly. Since the relative importance of these factors in the size of any particular community is usually unknown, migration has generally been assumed to be the dominant factor.

General Migration Patterns. Within the United States migration has been a possibility for nearly all people and most other race groups during most of the last hundred years. Although many people do not seriously consider migrating, those individuals and families that do so presumably weigh the positive and negative factors of both their present location and their possible destination and consider the varied costs involved in the move (Lee 1966). People tend to migrate more frequently to places where they had no friends or relatives, although factors and environmental amenities such as climate are also important (Long and Hansen 1979).

In the 20th century the American population as a whole has redistributed itself substantially, and these net flows are important parts of the explanation of the 1980 distribution of ethnic groups. There has been a net migration from rural areas to towns and cities during most of this century, and now most people live in and near large cities. Also, people who once lived in the older central parts of cities have usually moved outward to suburban areas, which frequently have been political boundaries between counties and sometimes in a different county. Metropolitan areas (groups of counties tied together by intensely interwoven commuting patterns) have become home to three-quarters of the American population.

The regional shift from the East toward the West has continued for more than two centuries. California has been by far the most important destination since the gold rush began in 1848, and in 1980 there were substantially more people in California than in all the other western states combined. Washington, Colorado, Arizona, and Oregon had the next largest populations. Also, many of the states of the central west have been home to a large net migration into the peninsula of Florida, which had previously been little settled by white people, and into Texas, which grew especially after 1970. In the decade of the 1970s, the three states of California, Florida, and Texas accounted for 42 percent of the entire population growth of the United States.

The net lifetime migration of whites indicates the relative shifts of that population in recent decades. Because 83 percent of Americans are included in this group, the patterns can be used as the basis for comparison with selected Hispanic origin and nonwhite populations. Maps for those groups are included in the appropriate chapters.

Net migrations such as these have affected virtually all ethnic populations to some degree. It could be expected that in 1980 most ethnic populations had large numbers in the major metropolitan areas of the western states, especially California, and also in Florida and Texas. Those metropolitan areas have been found so attractive by so many migrants from older settled states that it is unusual when an ethnic population has few members in Los Angeles and other southern California counties, San Francisco and the Bay Area, Phoenix, Denver, Dallas, Houston, and the Florida east coast between Miami and West Palm Beach.

The widespread dispersal of ethnic populations attests to the freedom (and sometimes desire) of many people to live in places where there will be no established ethnic community to shelter or constrain them. Americans who chose destinations for reasons of relatives to help or provide support can be presumably less apt to choose a destination because it was already an ethnic settlement. Such pioneer migrants followed no one and were thus freer to consider more destinations. Chain migration has resulted in the development of some
larger ethnic populations in those places that had few members of the ethnic group 50 years ago, but the cumulative effect of the process has been, of course, much less in such dispersed places. Also, perhaps the majority of American migrants became part of a chain migration that was not based primarily on contacts within one ethnic group. All such migrations have tended to reduce the distinctiveness of ethnic settlement patterns.

**Persistence of Ethnic Distributions.** Nevertheless, some factors have tended to make ethnic distribution patterns resistant to erosion, despite the generally high level of mobility in America. First, many people do not move out of their local area: in 1980 over two-thirds of U.S.-born people were living in the state of their birth. Also, most migrants during the last few decades have chosen destinations because they knew people there. About two-thirds of all migrants had personal contacts (friends or relatives or both) at the place which became their destination (Lansing and Mueller 1967). Also, more than half considered only one destination when deciding whether or not to move.

Because migrants tend to follow already established networks of personal contact, chain migration has remained important. To the extent that people’s families and good friends are part of an ethnic social network, the process has tended to reinforce the patterns of ethnic settlement previously developed. In addition, about one-quarter of migrations within the U.S. represent returns to places where people had lived earlier (DeVanzo and Morrison 1982). The net effect has been to preserve the older ethnic distribution pattern more than might otherwise be expected.

What appears to be an inconsistency between high rates of mobility and the geographical persistence of ethnic communities is not really so. Many individuals leave an area, often for other settlements chosen through ethnic communications networks. Some people return home later, and the community is replenished by new in-migrants, many of whom came from other settlements of the same ethnic group. Individuals and families may move in and out, but the ethnic population as a whole, its institutions, and the community are much more geographically stable than the individuals who are but small parts of them. Thus, there can be community persistence in the face of individual mobility (Thernstrom 1973; Morrison and Wheeler 1980).

Nevertheless, population turnover and mixing, especially in the 20th century, have reduced the proportional strength of specific ancestry populations in most places. The Swedes in Isanti County, Minnesota, are an example. In 1900 Swedish-born people constituted 52 percent of the county’s total population and were ten times the size of the German-born population. In 1980, although the area centering on Isanti and Chisago counties recorded nearly the highest percentages of Swedish ancestry in America, the Swedish-ancestry population was only 10 percent larger than the numbers of German ancestry and represented less than 20 percent of the total county population.

People in ethnic communities often have strong ties to local places, as well as a desire to increase or maintain the proportions of the ethnic group in that place. In cities, millions of people have been wrenched by watching their neighborhood destroyed, either through urban renewal or the arrival of a different ethnic group. Although the relationship between the degree of ethnic group concentration and ethnic life is complex, places often seem to be very important to the functioning of viable ethnic communities. These feelings would seem to make ethnic geographic distributions more stable than they would otherwise be.

To the extent that members of ethnic communities have migrated at a lower rate than others, the geographical persistence of ethnic populations in major settlements has been enhanced. During the first decades of farm settlement in the Midwest and Great Plains both Americans and immigrants were highly migratory, moving in and out of farm areas frequently (Curti 1959; Thernstrom 1973). However, a common religious identity soon aided the ethnic clustering that seemed to promote greater stability (Conzen 1980b). German farmers in rural colonies became less mobile than those who settled outside these ethnic communities. In Holland (Ottawa County), Michigan, in the late 19th century the Dutch were
just over half as likely to move away as the non-Dutch (Kirk and Kirk 1974). Between 1880 and 1900 the out-migration rate for Swedes from Kandiyohi County, Minnesota, was substantially lower than for people born in America or Ireland, although in the early 20th century this differential had disappeared (Royston 1977).

Farmland ownership may have been a key to preserving an ethnic community's territorial base in rural areas. For example, French Canadians and Swedes in two areas of Kansas were no less likely than nonwhites to migrate out of their communities, but they increased their ownership over local farmland during their first half-century of settlement (McQuillan 1978). Some people in rural ethnic communities of the Great Plains refused until well into the 20th century to sell their land to anyone who was not a member of the same ethnic group.

More recently, homeownership rates among Slavic immigrants were sometimes twice as high as among U.S.-born men (Bodnar 1976a), and homeowners have been less likely to migrate than renters. And in the late 1960s, Rhode Island people of Italian ancestry had much lower rates of migration out of the state than did the Irish, but Protestants were more migratory than Catholics in general and Jews were the most likely to have departed (Kobrin and Goldscheider 1978).

Thus, although migration has tended to weaken and blur older ethnic distributions somewhat, there have been some characteristics of ethnic communities that have made them relatively resistant.

When the 1980 data indicate a significant settlement of an ethnic group in the same place where an earlier settlement was known to have developed, a continuous occupation of that place by the group is assumed. Only the tracing of individuals or families through time can demonstrate such a continuity. There are undoubtedly some cases in which these two requirements are met, but the process of identifying the people identifying in 1980 with a particular race, origin, or ancestry who had family or friendship connections to those who developed the ethnic concentration in their county is probably known for very few counties. However, it seems unlikely that the historical and 1980 distributions of so many ethnic populations could be so similar without a continuous occupation by at least some people.

The Meaning of Ethnicity in Different Places

In addition to the historical geographic development of ethnic identity, ethnicity is the subject of the text interpretation. The size and percentage of an ethnic population in a county may sometimes suggest other characteristics of the area or the ethnic population itself. It is understandable to attempt to interpret the maps in this way, but such generalizations should be made with caution.

At the scale of the maps in this atlas, geographical or place-specific differences in the strength and meaning of ethnicity are often important but complex. In general they are a function of the varying proportion and numbers of an ethnic population in different places, the occupational characteristics of the population, and the varied occupational structure of those places. For example, among blacks, the likelihood of employment in a white-collar occupation in 1970 varied considerably from one metropolitan area to another, both between southern and northern cities and within each region (Foosett and Swicegood 1982). At the same time the socioeconomic status of people of Mexican origin varied considerably from the poverty of rural Texas and southern New Mexico through metropolitan areas in Texas and California to areas of highest status in suburban Chicago, Detroit, and New York (Bowdell and Jones 1980).

However, the socioeconomic positions and political strength of an ethnic population in an area cannot be inferred directly from the size or relative proportion of that population in the area. Geographic concentration does not necessarily reflect either high or low economic status. In farm areas some concentrations have been associated with prosperous ethnic communities that have been able to maintain or increase ownership of local farmland. At the other extreme there may be concentrations of unemployed mine or farm workers, lacking property and perhaps having to migrate in search of jobs. Ethnic political power may be based on relatively high numbers or proportions, but groups have varied greatly in the extent to which they have capitalized on demographic strength. Most ethnic populations have been too small in numbers and political clout to affect the change. Others have been poorly organized or outmaneuvered by other means or more.

In cities large ethnic populations have also had divergent economic experiences. Very large concentrations of any particular group were often associated historically with menial, unskilled, and poorly paid jobs or particular niches in the occupational structure of a city or region. The ethnic population has often continued to be associated with relatively low-status jobs compared to the members of the group who have left that area. Usually there have been a wide range of opportunities and higher status outside the region of initial settlement and concentration.

However, in some cases an ethnic population was able to improve its status by taking advantage of its large numbers. There is a history of ethnic concentration and growth in the city and the neighborhoods in which the ethnic group has grown. This can be explained by a process of intra-ethnic cooperation and mutual aid that has increased the number of people who live in the neighborhood and have been able to achieve higher status outside the region of initial settlement and concentration.

Geographical concentration is not necessary to sustain ethnic social networks. Because it is often hidden from public view, ethnicity among middle-class people in dispersed residences may be unrecognized. Ethnicity is more a private and family matter and its social functions usually take place on weekends. People who are not very close friends
usually see only the public and work-related aspects of others' lives. Suburban residents may be closely involved with an ethnic community and willing to drive some distance to reach community functions.

In the suburbs of the West one might imagine ethnicity among whites to be of especially little importance, but this may not be the case. For example, in metropolitan San Francisco, the Danish-ancestry population participates fully in the economic, recreational, and public aspects of life and their residences are widely dispersed. However, Danes find much emotional satisfaction in maintaining social ties with other Danes, facilitated through a series of voluntary associations (Chrisman 1981). And in Los Angeles a similarly strong community has long existed for Lithuanian refugees and their families, most of whom socialize primarily with other Lithuanians and retain a clear sense of their special heritage (Bauskauskas 1985). People who are not Danish or Lithuanian are rarely aware of the importance of these identities.

Thus, a large ethnic population in a county or group of counties probably indicates a more active ethnic community than in other places where the numbers are much smaller, but the meaning of ethnicity in different types of places is not well enough understood to justify many assumptions.