



Chapter 9

Ancestry

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## Ancestry

**A**ncestry is a broad concept that can mean different things to different people; it can be described alternately as where a person's ancestors are from, where individuals or their parents were born, or simply how people see themselves ethnically. Some people may have one distinct ancestry, while others are descendants of several ancestry groups, and still others may know only that their ancestors were from a particular region of the world or they may not know their ethnic origins at all. The U.S. Census Bureau defines ancestry as a person's ethnic origin, heritage, descent, or "roots," and it may reflect a person's place of birth, the birthplace of his or her parents or ancestors, or ethnic identities that have evolved within the United States.

### Collecting Data on Ancestry

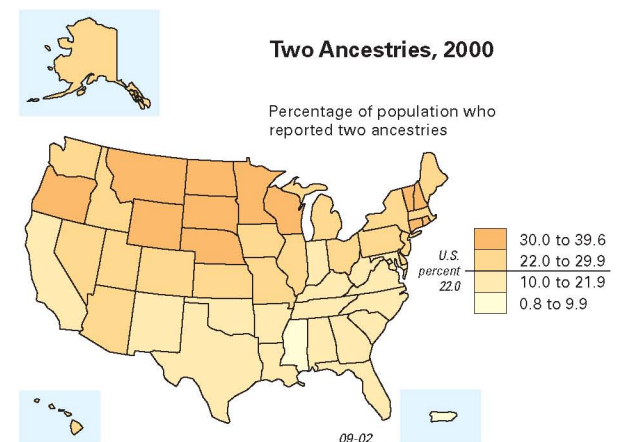
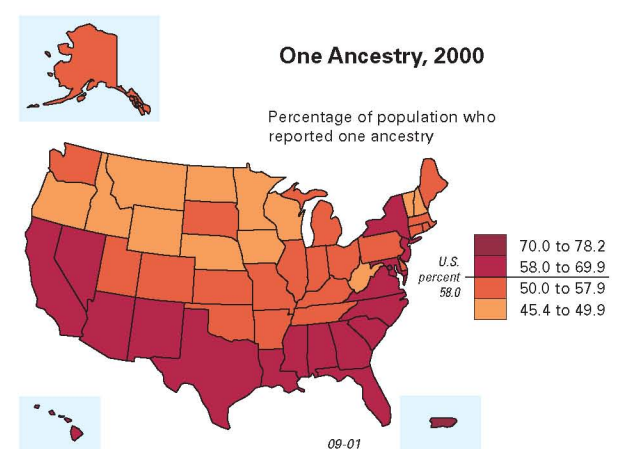
The question about ancestry first appeared on the census form in 1980, replacing a question about where a person's parents were born. The parental birthplace question provided foreign-origin data only for people

having one or both parents born outside the United States. The Census 2000 ancestry question allowed respondents to give one or two attributions of their "ancestry or ethnic origin" and enabled people to identify an ethnic background, such as German, Lebanese, Nigerian, or Portuguese.

Ancestries discussed in this chapter also include the groups covered in the Census 2000 questions on race and Hispanic origin, such as African American, Mexican, American Indian, and Chinese. For these groups, the results from the ancestry question and the race and Hispanic-origin questions differed, and the latter are the official sources of data for race groups and Hispanics. In some cases, the totals reported on the Census 2000 ancestry question were lower than the numbers from the race or Hispanic-origin questions. For instance, nearly 12 million fewer people specified "African American" as their ancestry than gave that response to the race question. One reason for this difference is that some people who reported Black or African American on the race question reported their ancestry more specifically, such as Jamaican, Haitian, or Nigerian, and thus were not counted in the African American ancestry category. Similarly, more than 2 million fewer people reported Mexican ancestry than gave that answer to the Hispanic-origin question. In other cases, the ancestry question produced higher numbers, such as for Dominicans, whose estimated totals were over 100,000 higher from the ancestry question than from the Hispanic-origin question, to which many Dominicans may have reported a general term (such as Hispanic) or checked "other" without writing a detailed response.

### Ancestry Results From Census 2000

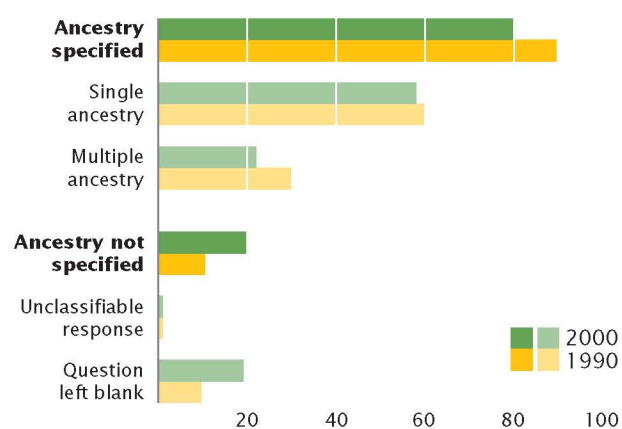
In 2000, about 225 million U.S. residents reported an ancestry, with 163.3 million specifying one



ancestry and 62.0 million providing multiple ancestries. Another 53.7 million did not report any ancestry, while 2.4 million gave an ancestry that was not classifiable.

Nationally, 58 percent of the population specified only one ancestry, 22 percent provided two ancestries, 19 percent did not report any ancestry at all, and 1 percent reported an unclassifiable ancestry such as "mixture" or "adopted" (Figure 9-1).

Figure 9-1.  
**Percent of Population by Response to Ancestry Question, 1990 and 2000**



The percentage of the population reporting either one or two ancestries varied by state (maps 09-01 and 09-02). Many states in New England and the upper Midwest had relatively higher percentages of their populations reporting two ancestries, while a number of states in the South had relatively lower percentages reporting two ancestries.

### Common Ancestries in 2000

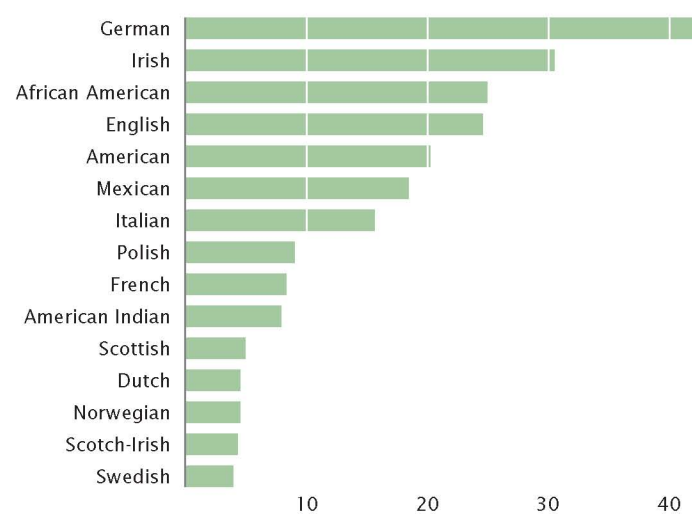
In 2000, 42.8 million people (15 percent of the population) considered themselves to be of German (or part-German) ancestry, the most frequent response to the census question (Figure 9-2). Other ancestries with over 15 million people reported in 2000 were Irish (30.5 million, or 11 percent), African American (24.9 million, or 9 percent), English (24.5 million, or 9 percent), American (20.2 million, or 7 percent), Mexican (18.4 million, or 7 percent), and Italian (15.6 million, or 6 percent).

Other ancestries with 4 million or more people were Polish, French, American Indian, Scottish, Dutch, Norwegian, Scotch-Irish, and Swedish. In total, seven ancestries were reported by more than 15 million people in 2000, 37 ancestries were reported by more than 1 million people, and 92 ancestries were reported by more than 100,000 people.

### Changes Between 1990 and 2000

The three largest ancestries in 1990 were German, Irish, and English. In 2000, those groups still were among the largest European ancestries, but each had decreased in size by at least 8 million and by more than 20 percent. As a proportion of the population, German ancestry decreased from 23 percent in 1990 to 15 percent in 2000, while Irish and English

Figure 9-2.  
**Fifteen Largest Ancestries (millions of people), 2000**



decreased as a proportion of the population from 16 percent to 11 percent and from 13 percent to 9 percent, respectively.

The number of people who reported African American ancestry increased by nearly 1.2 million, or 4.9 percent, between 1990 and 2000, making this group the third-largest ancestry. At the same time, the proportion reporting African American ancestry decreased slightly over the decade, from 9.5 percent to 8.8 percent. The population of many ancestries, such as Mexican, Chinese, Filipino, and Asian Indian, increased during the decade, reflecting sizable immigration, especially from Latin America and Asia. Several small ancestry populations at least doubled, including Brazilian, Pakistani, Albanian, Honduran, and Trinidadian and Tobagonian.

The number who reported American and no other ancestry increased from 12.4 million in 1990 to

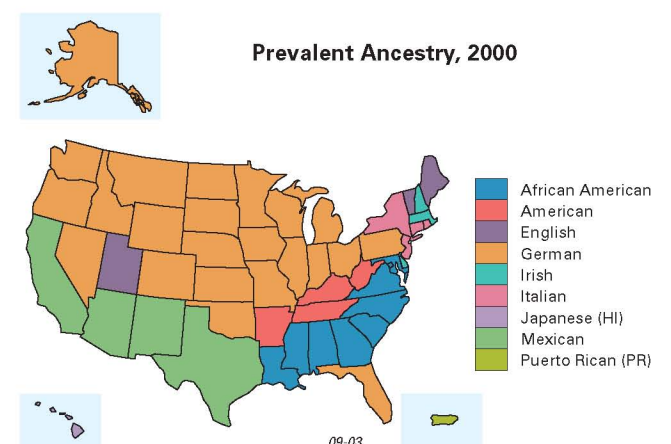
20.2 million in 2000, the largest numerical growth of any group during the 1990s. (American was considered a valid ancestry response when it was the only ancestry provided by a respondent.) This figure represents an increase of 63 percent, as the proportion rose from 5.0 percent to 7.2 percent of the population.

### Regional and State-level Patterns

Among the four U.S. regions, the most common ancestries in 2000 were Irish in the Northeast (16 percent), African American in the South (14 percent), German in the Midwest (27 percent), and Mexican in the West (16 percent).

Eight different ancestries were the most frequently reported in one or more states. German was the most common in 23 states, including every state in the Midwest, the majority of states in the West, and one state in the South (map 09-03). In three of those states, German was reported by more than 40 percent of the population: North Dakota (44 percent), Wisconsin (43 percent), and South Dakota (41 percent).

The other leading ancestries at the state level were African American in eight contiguous states from Louisiana to Maryland and in the District of Columbia



(also notably high at 43 percent); American in Arkansas, Tennessee, Kentucky, and West Virginia; Italian in Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, and Rhode Island; Mexican in the four border states of California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas; English in Maine, Utah, and Vermont; Irish in Delaware, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire; and Japanese in Hawaii.

Many other ancestries were not the largest ancestry in any state but represented more than 10 percent of a state's population, including American Indian in Oklahoma (12 percent) and Alaska (11 percent); Filipino (18 percent) and Hawaiian (16 percent) in Hawaii; French in Maine (14 percent), Vermont (15 percent), and Rhode Island (11 percent); French Canadian in New Hampshire (10 percent); and Norwegian in North Dakota (30 percent), Minnesota (17 percent), South Dakota (15 percent), and Montana (11 percent).

Other ancestries not noted above were among the five largest in a state but represented less than 10 percent of the state's population, including Chinese in Hawaii (8.3 percent), Czech in Nebraska (4.9 percent), Danish in Utah (6.5 percent), Eskimo in Alaska (6.1 percent), Polish in Michigan (8.6 percent), Portuguese in Rhode Island (8.7 percent), Spanish in New Mexico (9.3 percent), and Swedish in Minnesota (9.9 percent).

### **This Chapter's Maps**

The ancestry maps in this chapter echo some of the findings reported in previous chapters concerning the

wide assortment of cultures and ethnicities that exist within the United States. The maps are based on the first and second ancestries reported by respondents in Census 2000.

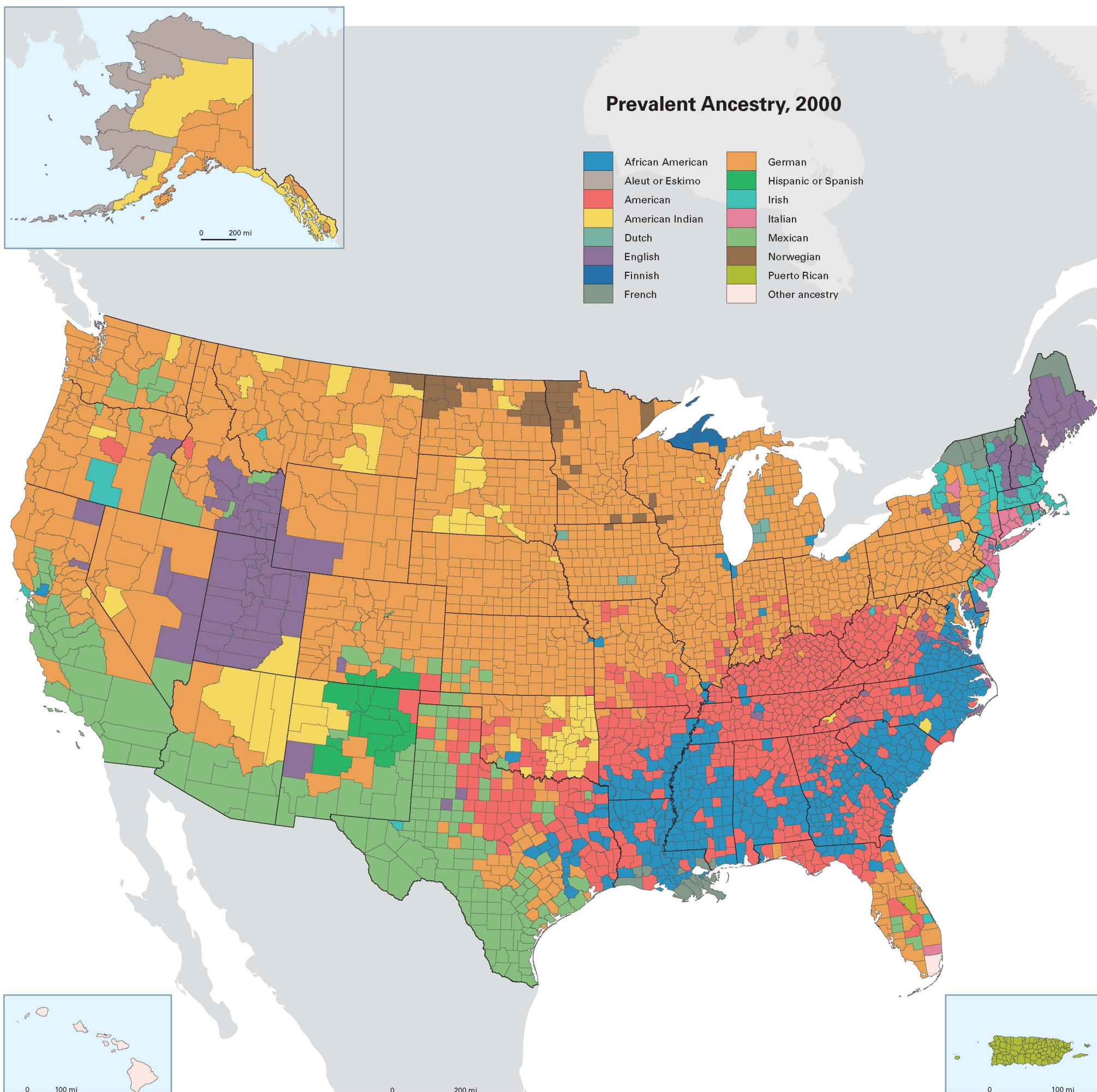
Maps 09-05 through 09-52 contain a series of state-level graduated symbol maps for 48 ancestries reported in Census 2000. The category sizes are roughly consistent across the series, making it possible to compare the sizes of the symbols both within and across maps. The series reveals that some ancestries, such as Irish and German, are present in large numbers in nearly every state, while other ancestries, such as Slovak, are smaller in size and more geographically concentrated.

Maps 09-54 through 09-62 present the most frequently reported ancestry in each census tract for the nation's largest metropolitan areas. In some cases, an ancestry is prevalent in a series of tracts arcing outward from the central city, suggesting a pattern of suburbanization for a particular group. In Chicago, for instance, clusters of tracts with Irish or African American ancestries radiate south of the central city, and in the Boston area, Italian-prevalent census tracts appear in the city of Boston and communities to the north. A similar series (maps 09-64 through 09-72) shows the most commonly reported ancestry for census tracts in cities with populations of 1 million or more.

The geographic patterns of ancestry data show the endurance of the awareness of ancestries even when a group's largest immigration to the United

States occurred many decades ago. This phenomenon is demonstrated by the pairs of county-level maps that present distributions of the largest foreign-born populations, as reported in the 1900 census, alongside their ancestry counterparts from Census 2000 (maps 09-73 through 09-92).

For some ancestries, continuity in geographic distribution from 1900 to 2000 is evident. For instance, in 1900, Norwegians were a large share of the foreign-born population in parts of Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota. One hundred years later, ancestry data from Census 2000 still indicated high percentages of Norwegian ancestry in these states' populations. The geographic distributions of Russian, Polish, and Swedish ancestries in 2000 also mirror their foreign-born distributions in 1900. In some cases, the specific county-by-county foreign-born patterns evident in 1900—with a high share in a particular county and lower shares in its neighboring counties—continued to exist in 2000, despite 100 years of migration and other demographic changes. For instance, Las Animas County in southern Colorado had a large Italian share in its 1900 foreign-born population and in 2000, many of its residents reported Italian ancestry. Ancestry data reveal the country's links to many heritages and illuminate our diverse roots.



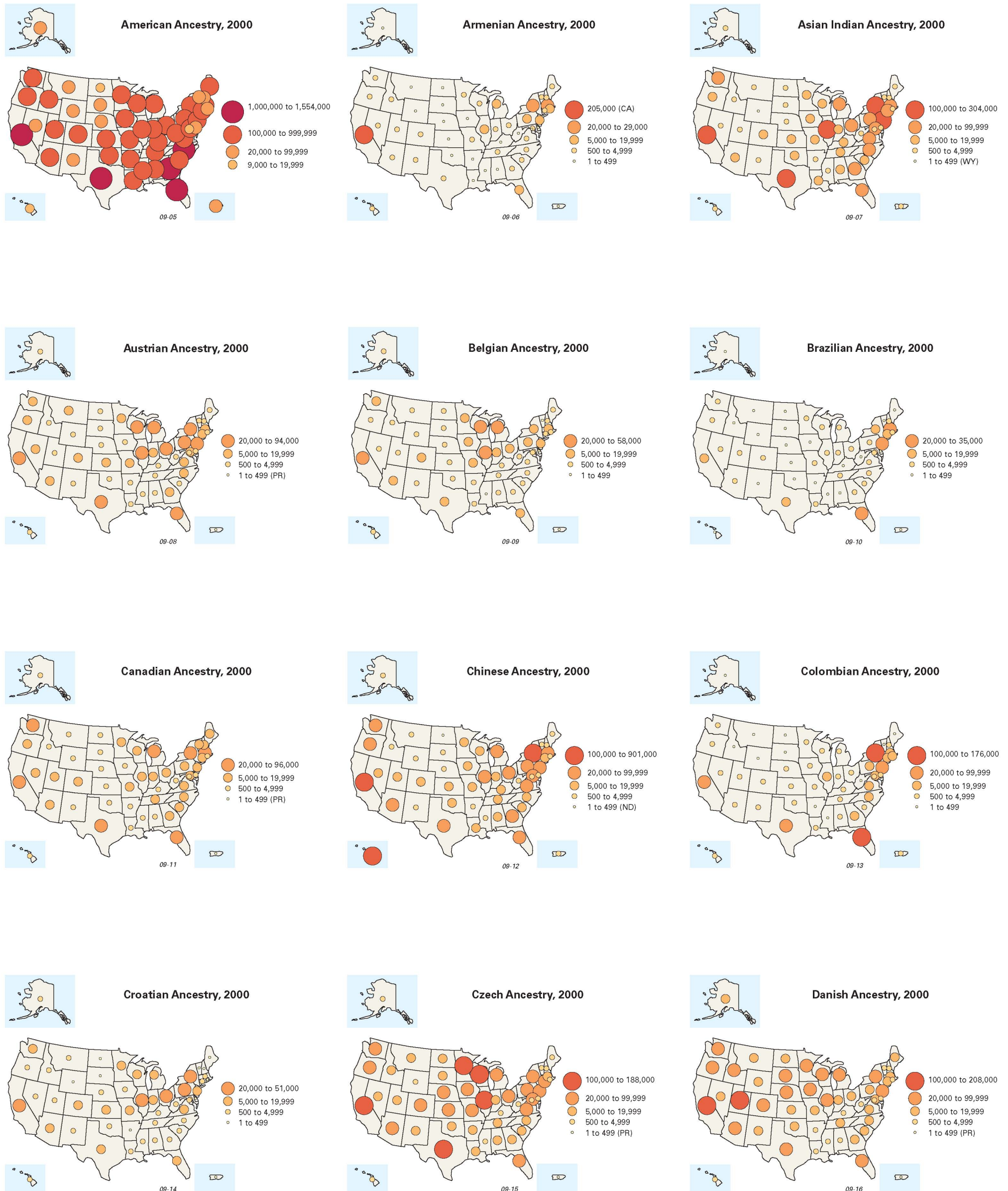
This map classifies counties by the most frequently reported ancestry. In 2000, the ancestries prevalent in counties across the country reflected historical settlement patterns. German was the prevalent ancestry reported in many counties in the northern half of the country, from Pennsylvania to Washington. Mexican was the prevalent ancestry along the southwestern border of the United States, and American and African American

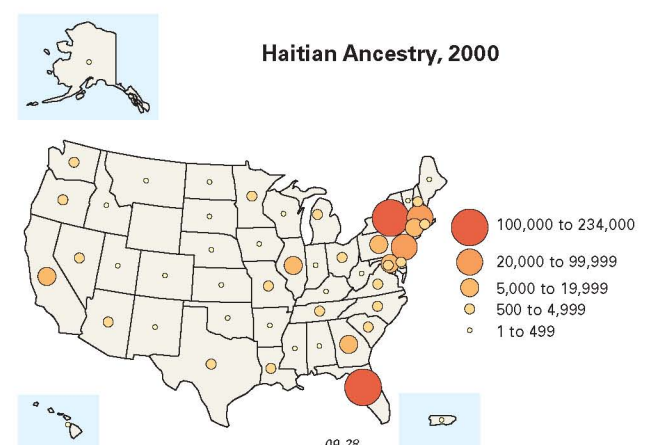
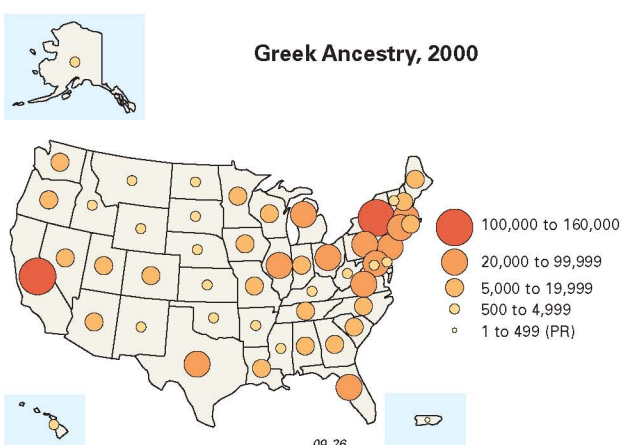
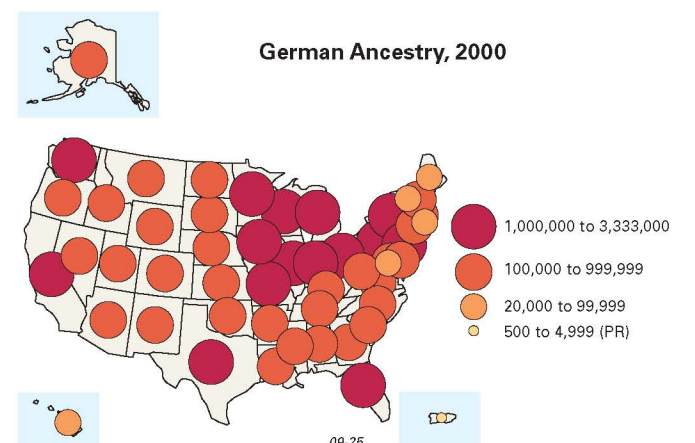
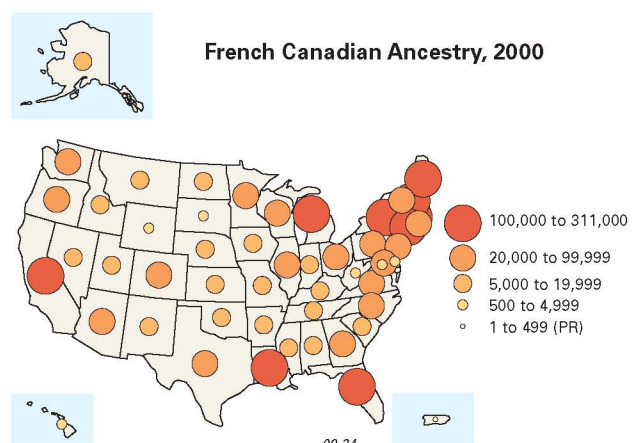
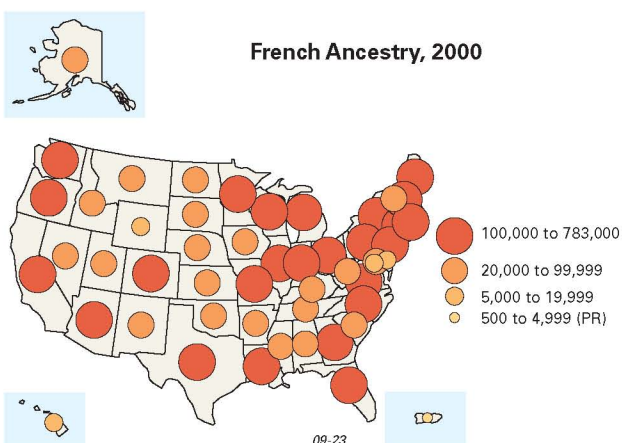
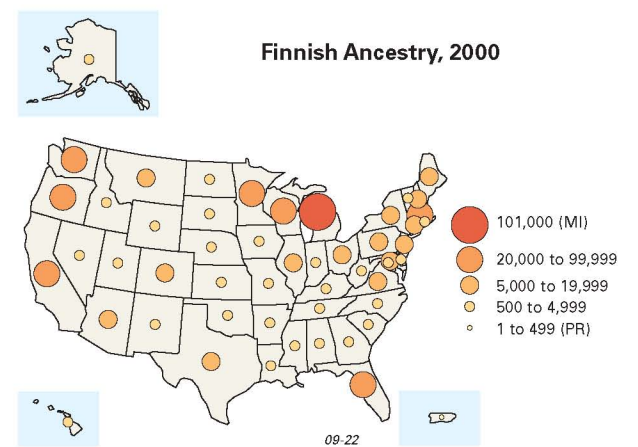
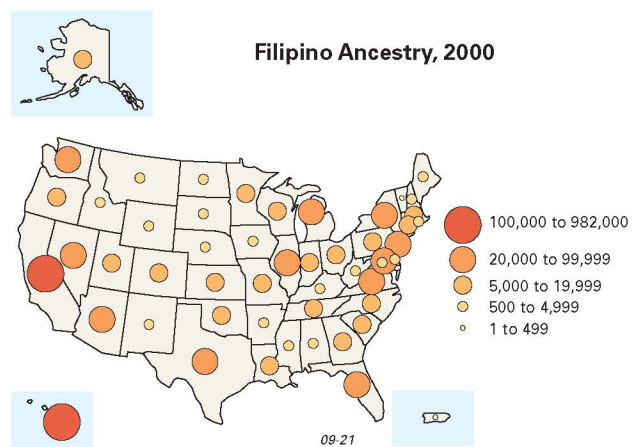
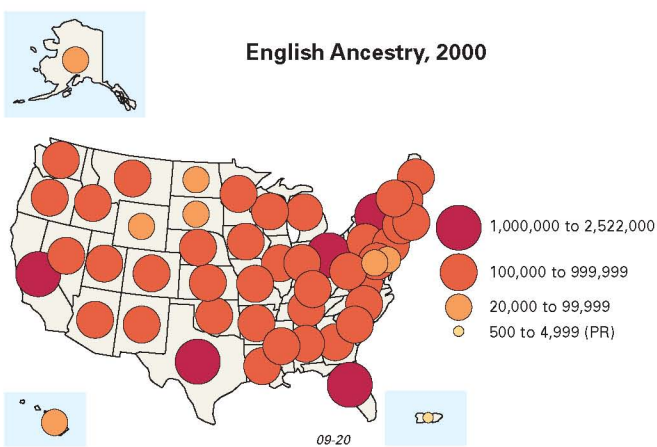
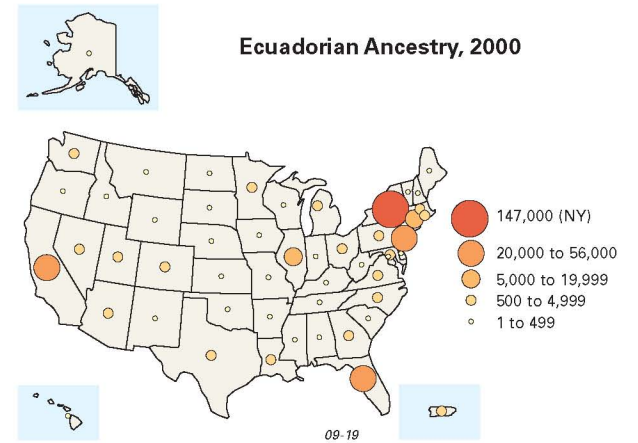
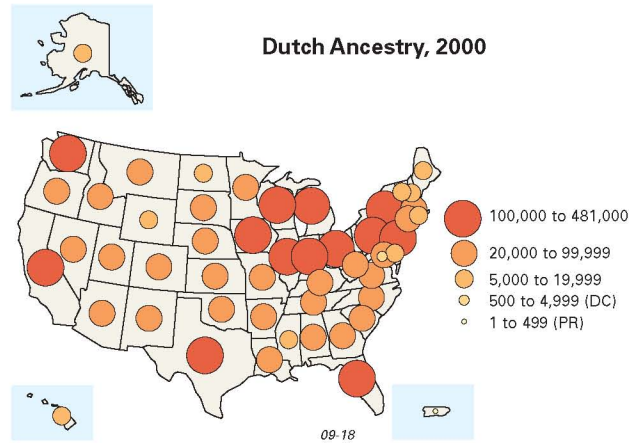
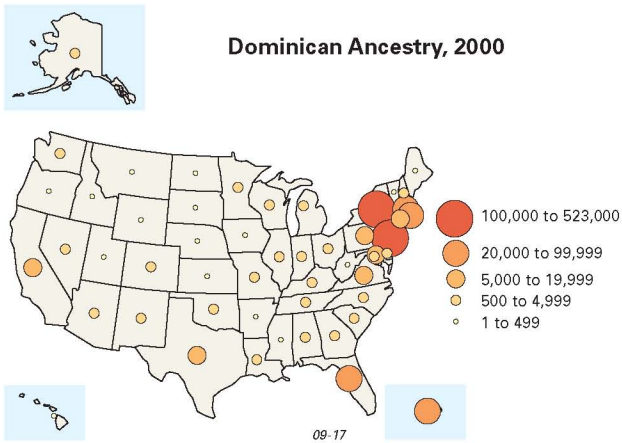
were the most commonly reported ancestries in many southern counties, from Virginia to eastern Texas and Arkansas.

Some ancestries appear primarily in smaller clusters of counties. English was the most common ancestry in many counties in Utah and southern Idaho, for instance, while American Indian ancestry was the most common in parts of Arizona, New Mexico, and eastern

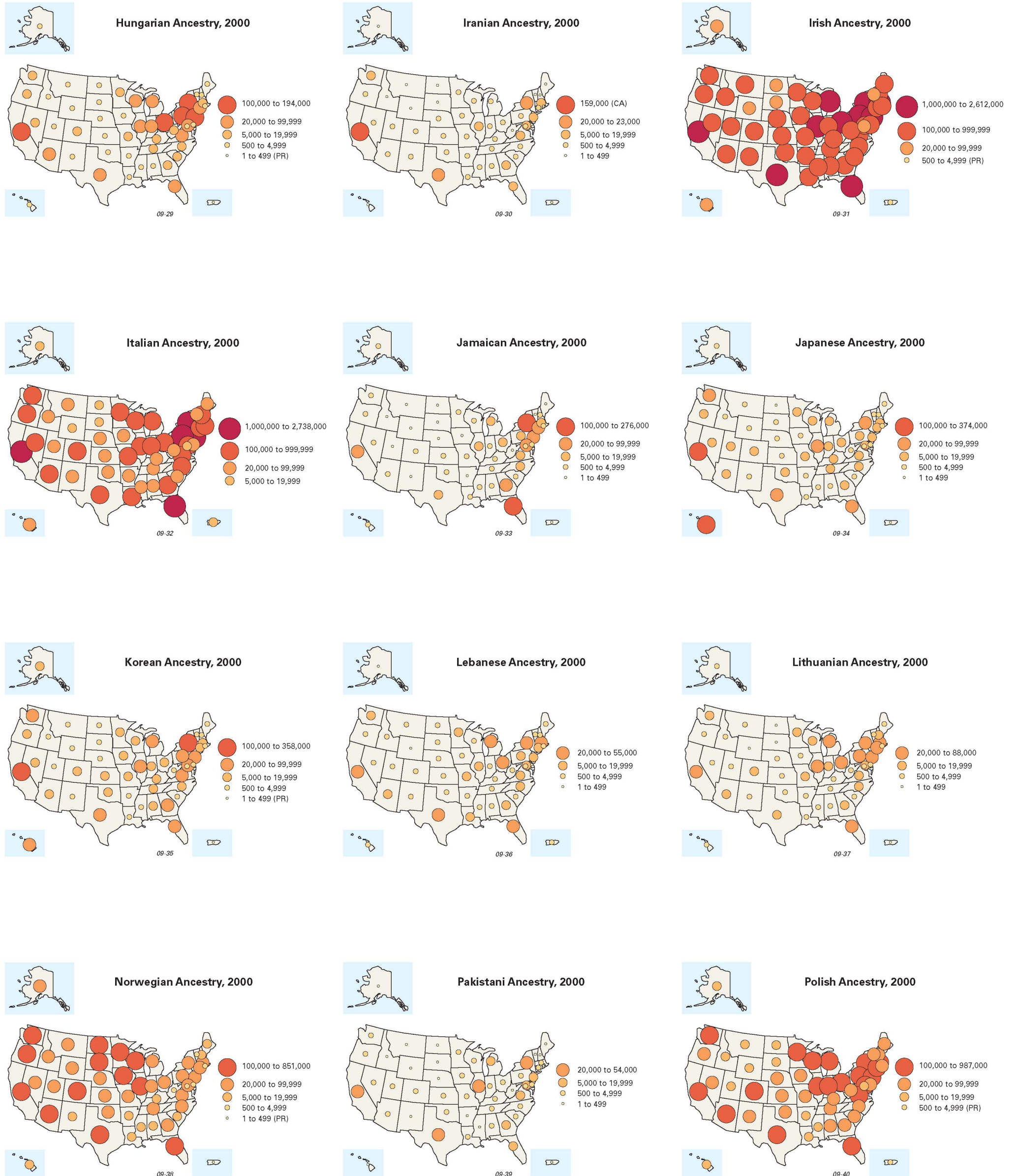
Oklahoma. Irish was prevalent in some counties in Massachusetts, and Italian was the most common ancestry in many counties in Connecticut and New Jersey. Norwegian was common in parts of Minnesota and North Dakota. French was prevalent in several counties of Louisiana, New York, Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont.

SELECTED ANCESTRY GROUPS, 2000

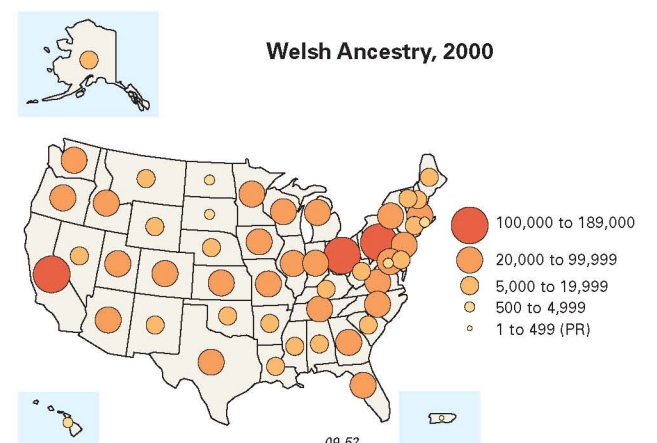
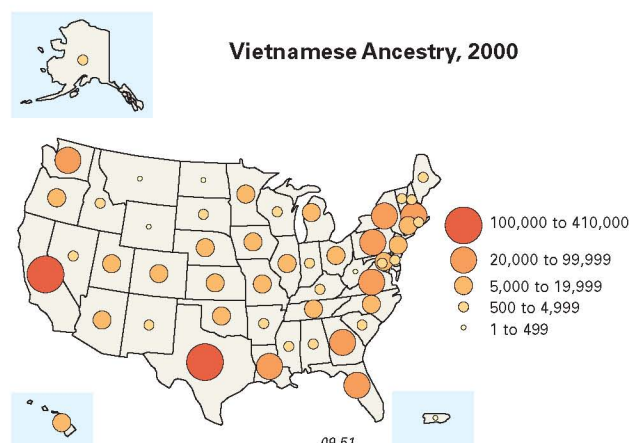
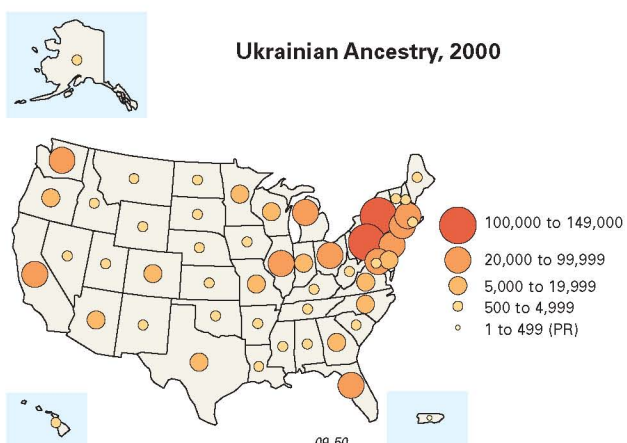
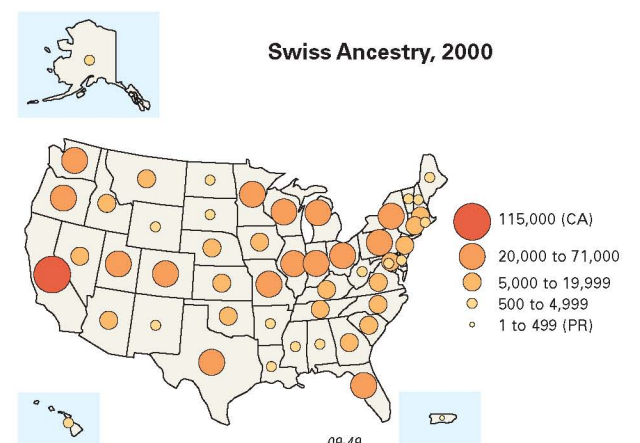
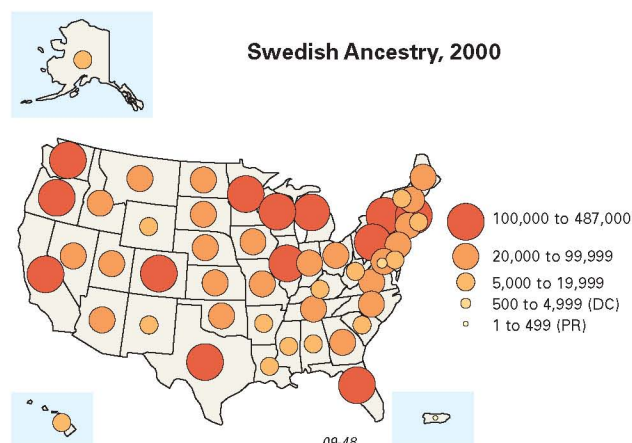
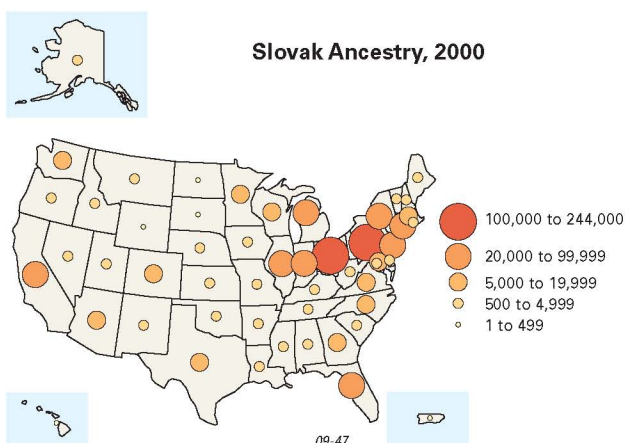
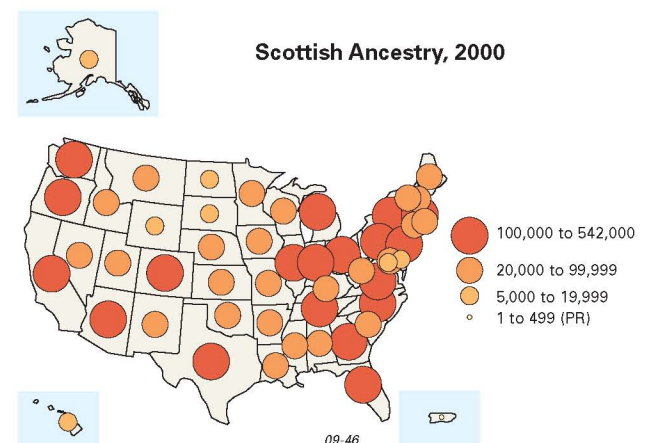
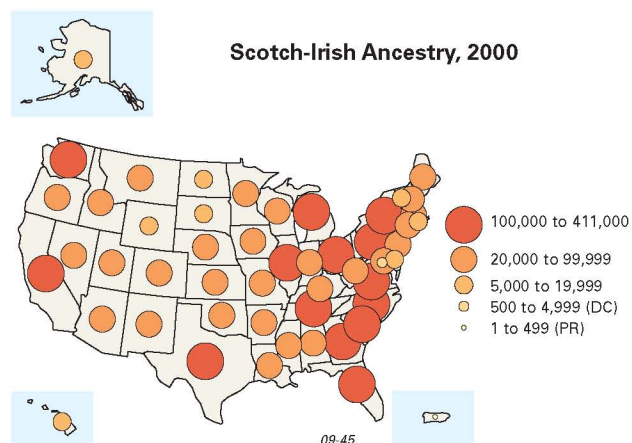
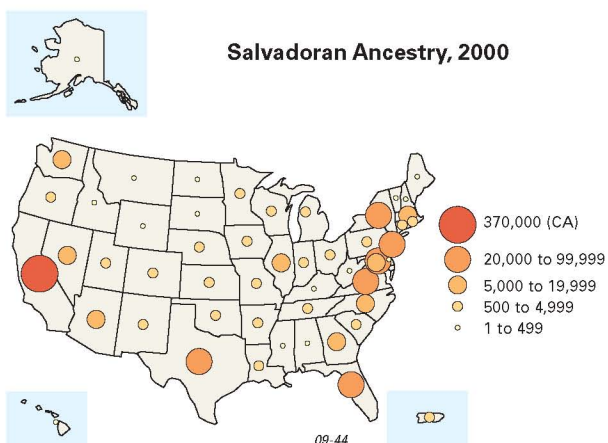
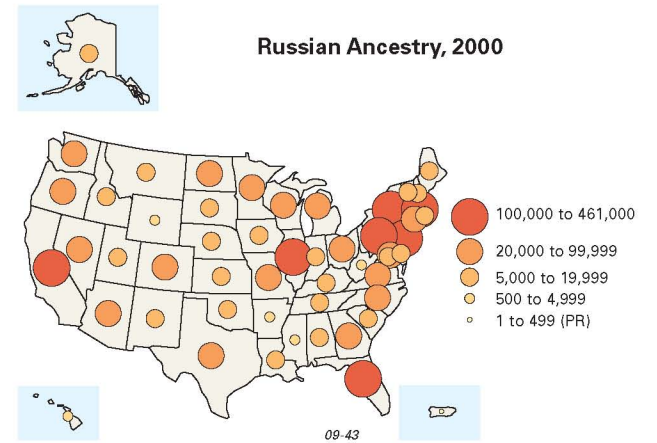
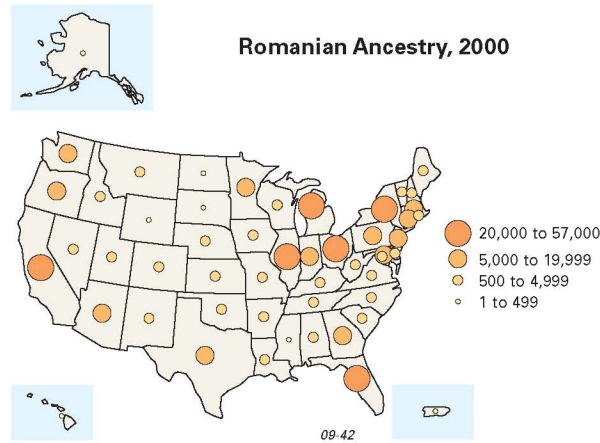
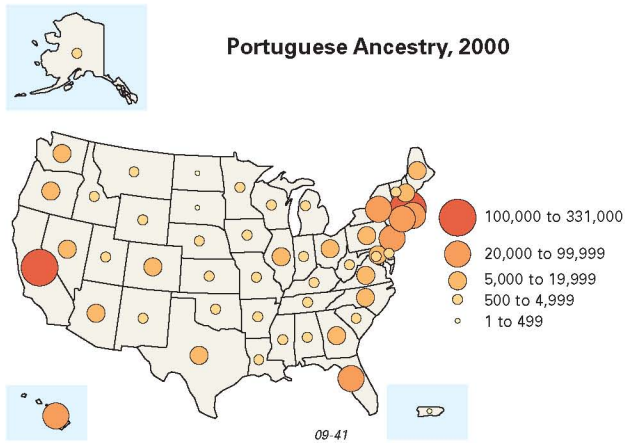


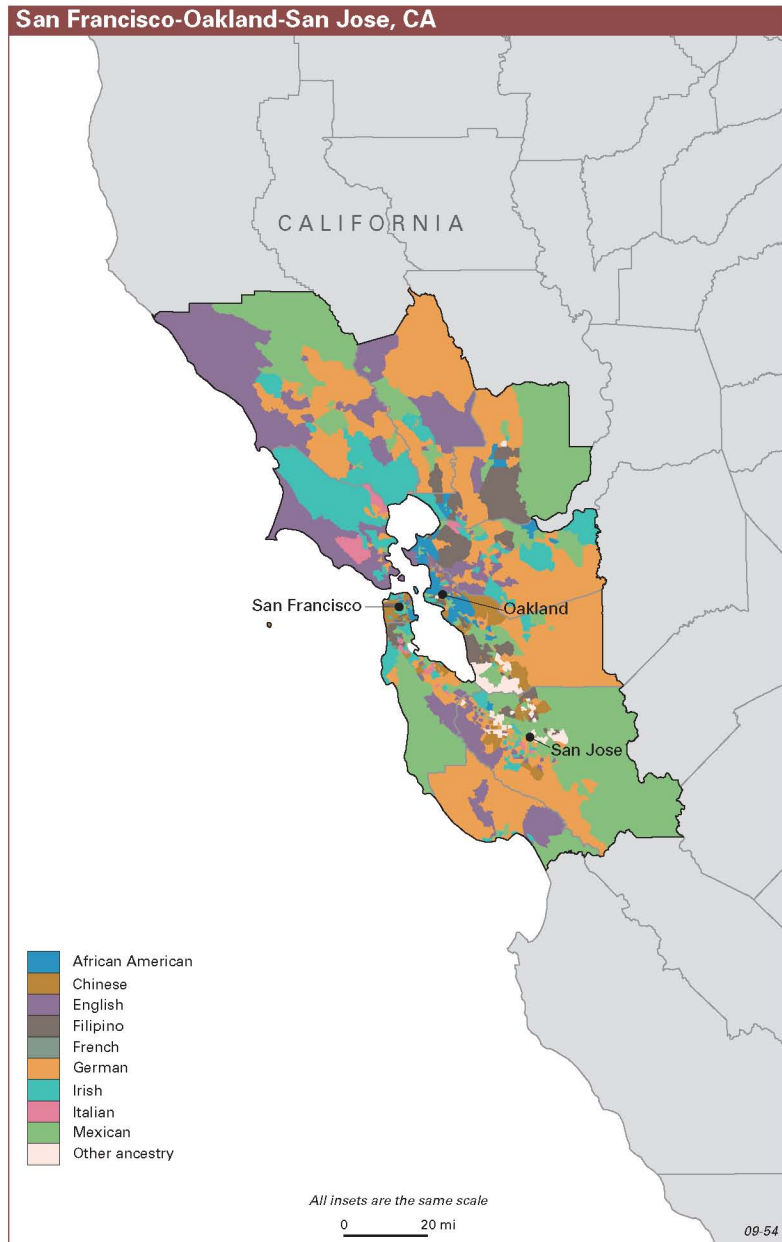


SELECTED ANCESTRY GROUPS, 2000

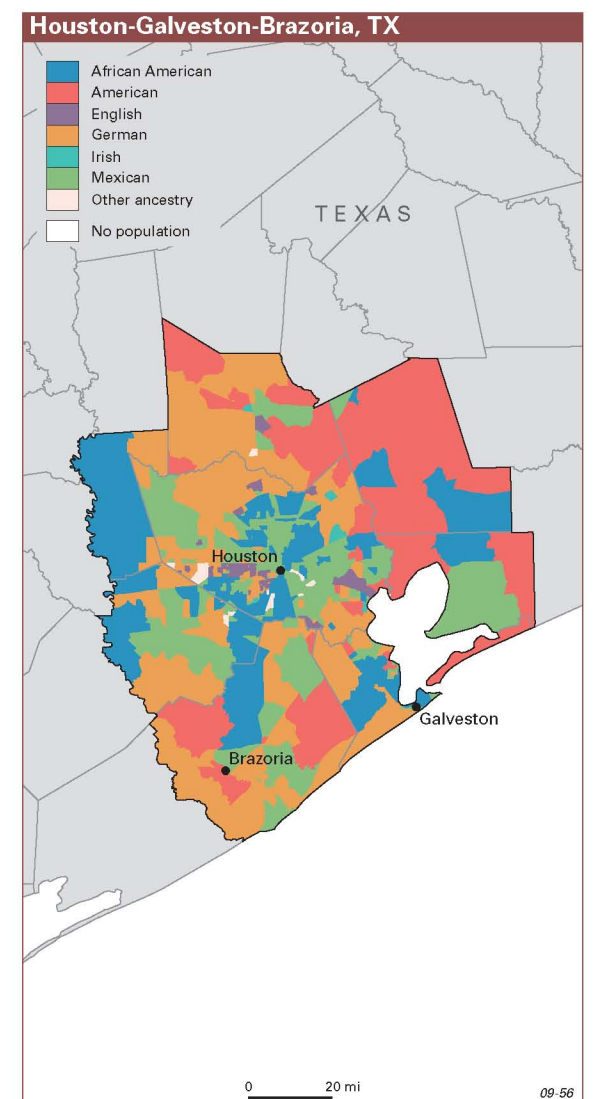
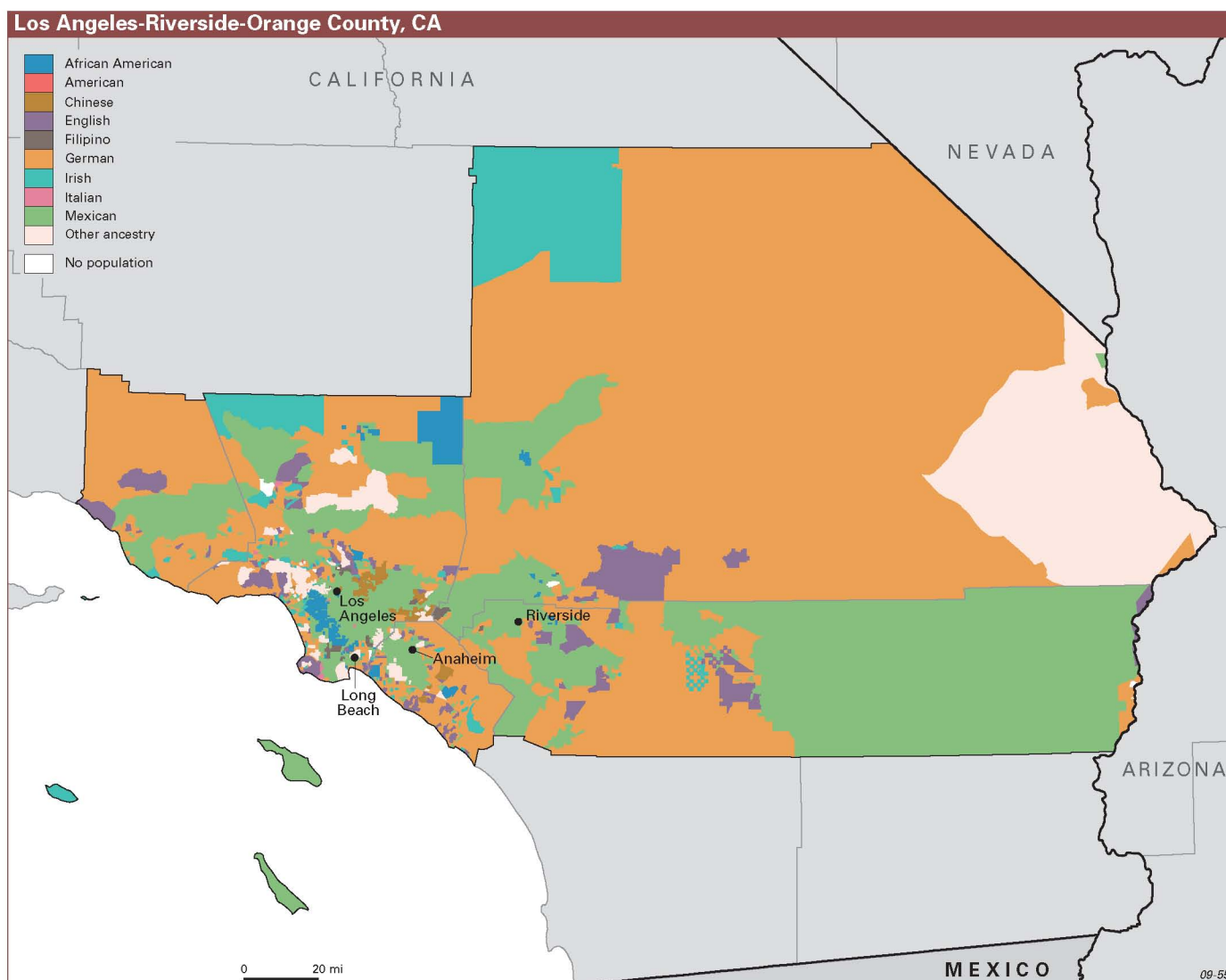
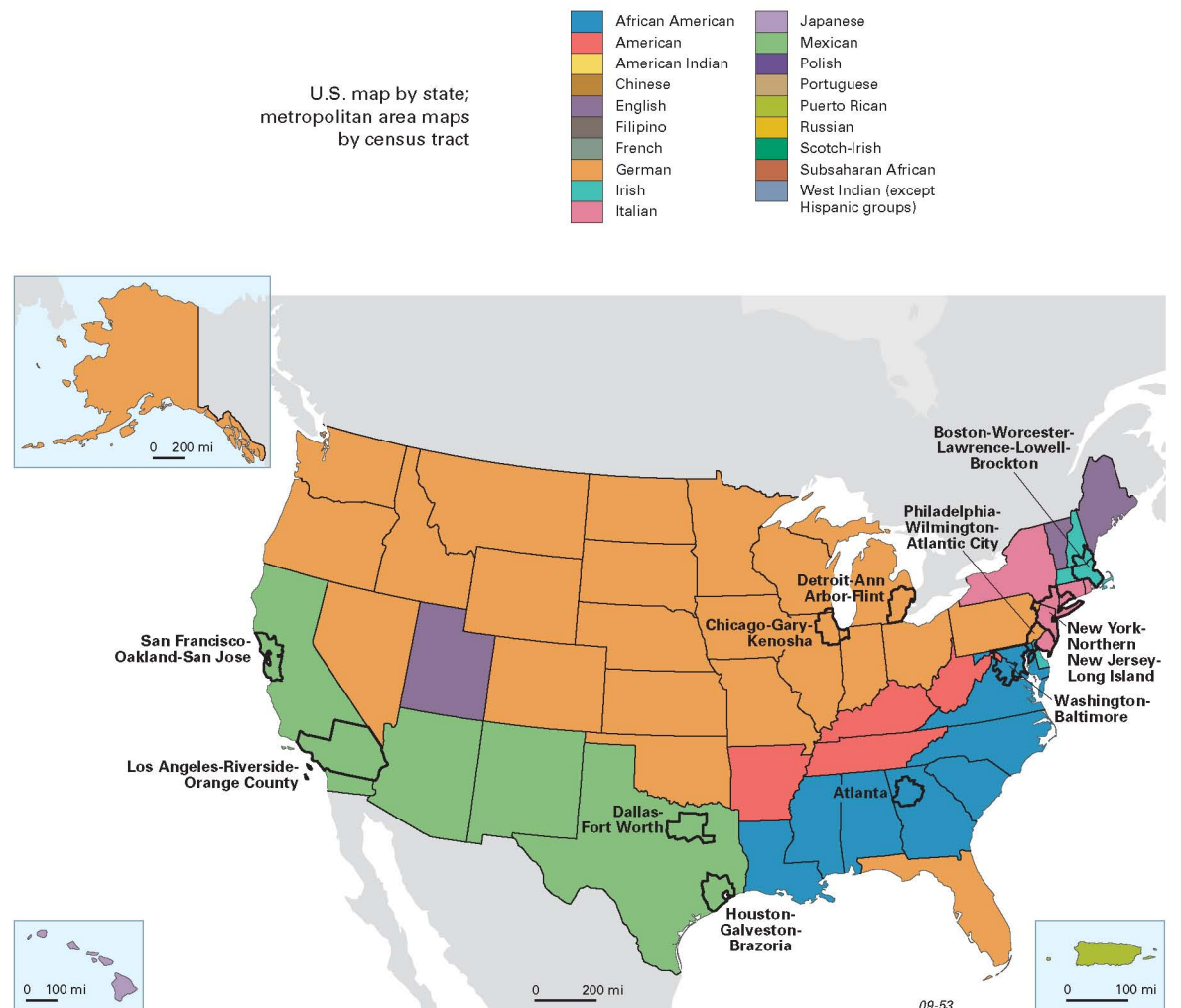


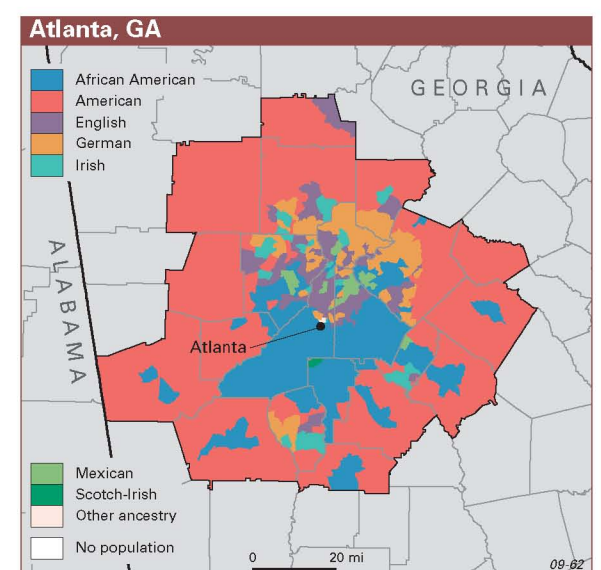
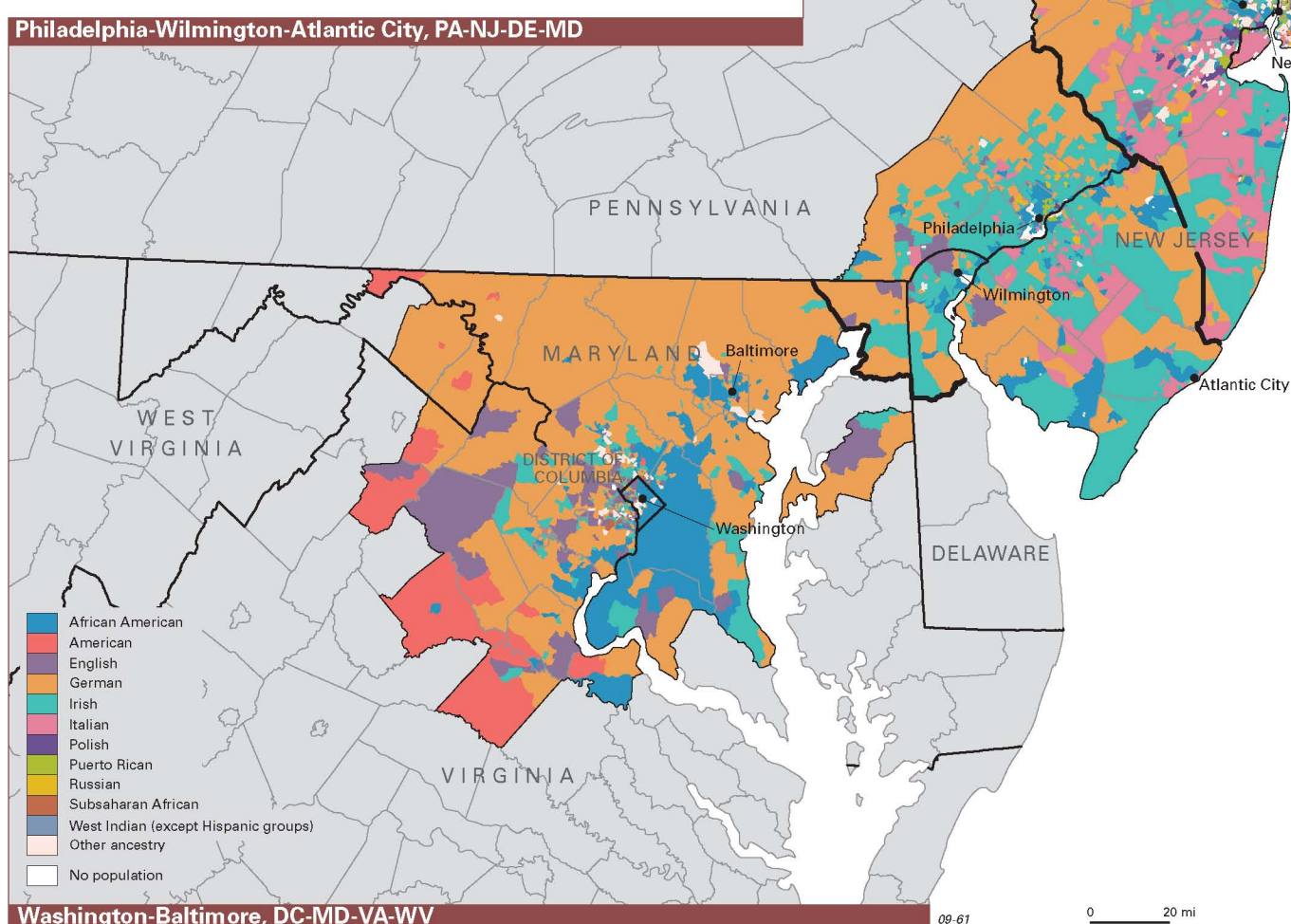
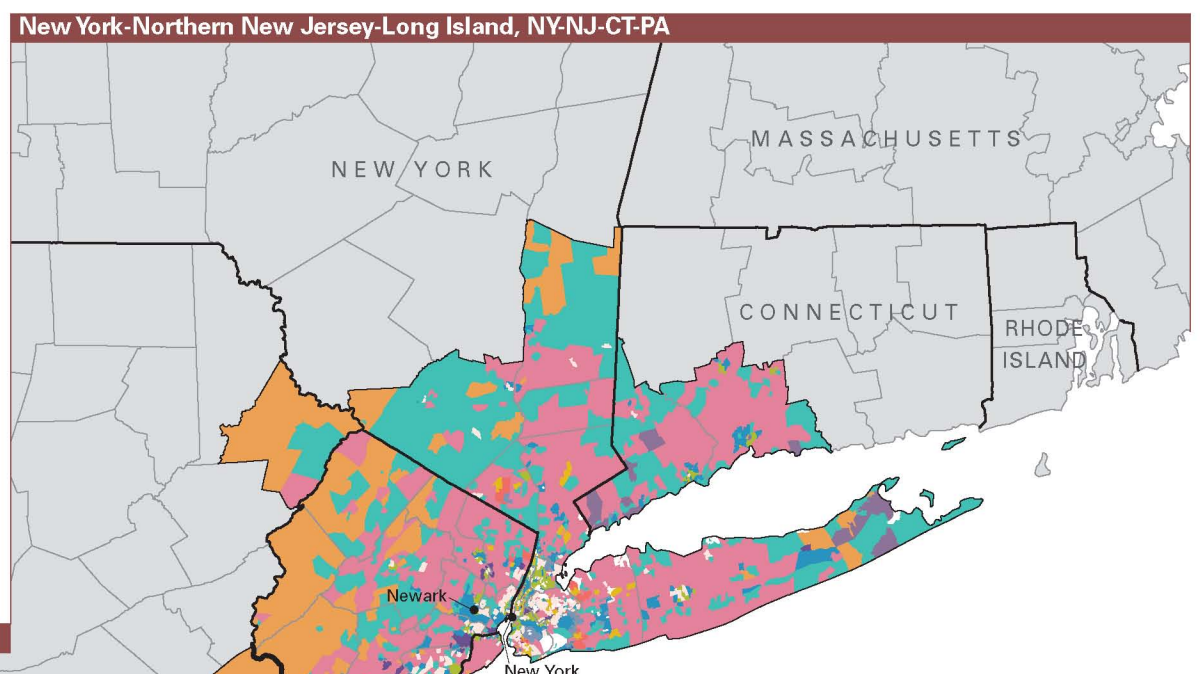
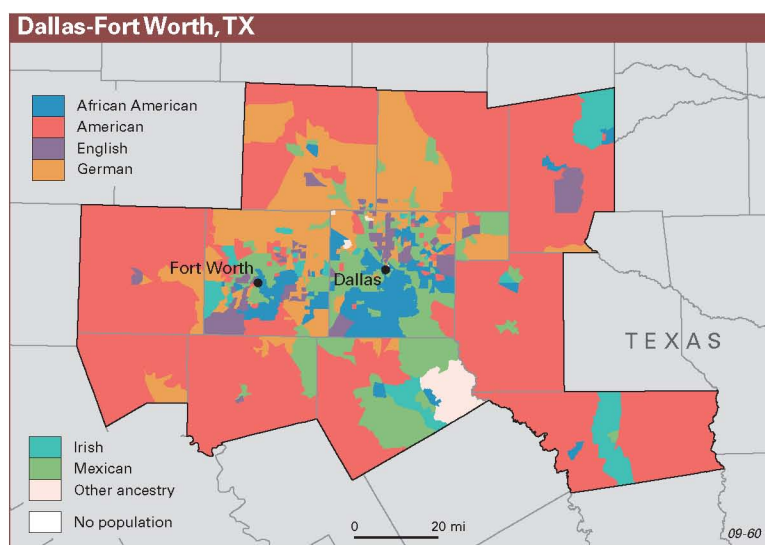
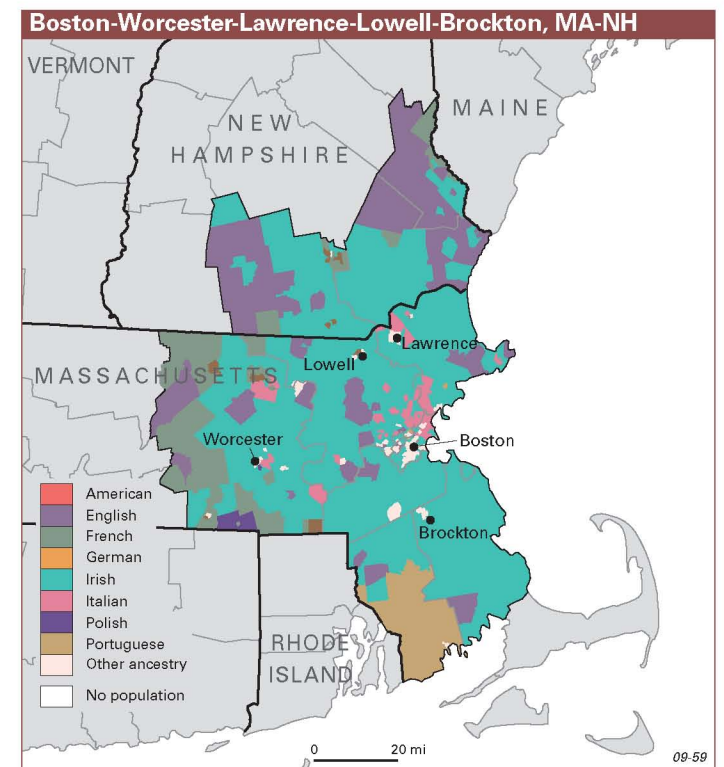
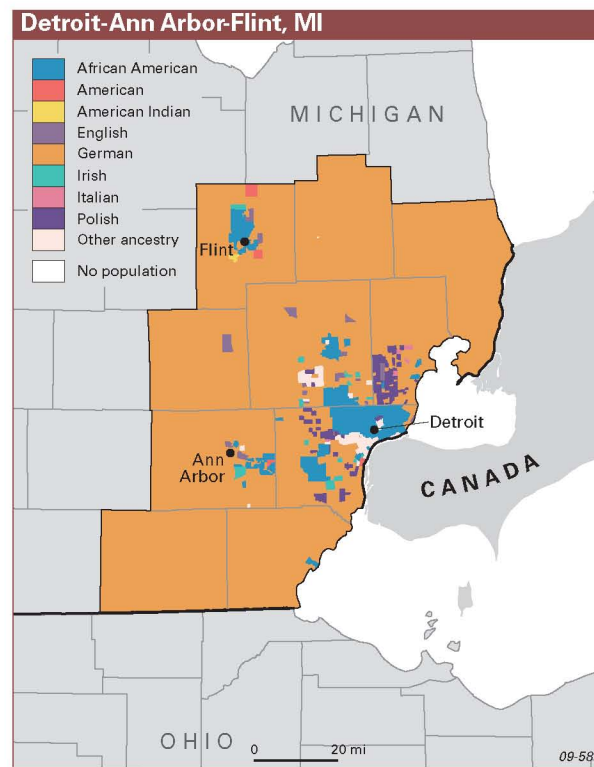
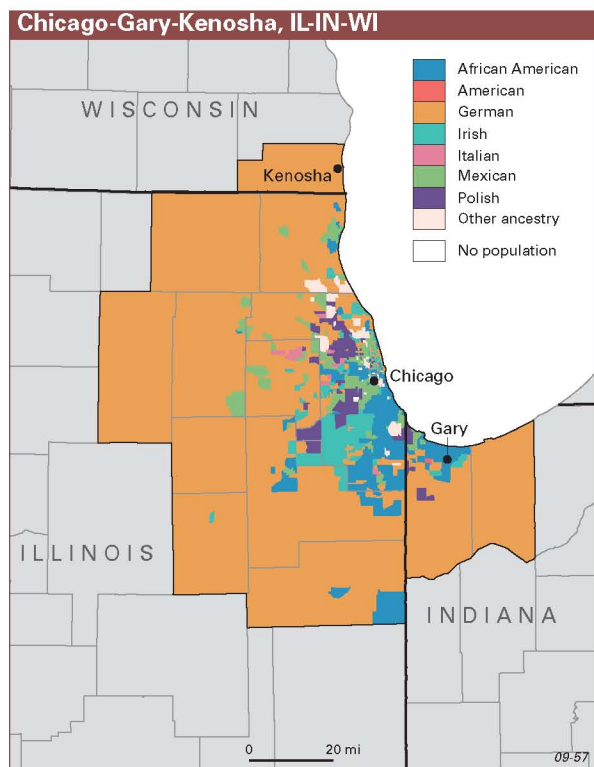




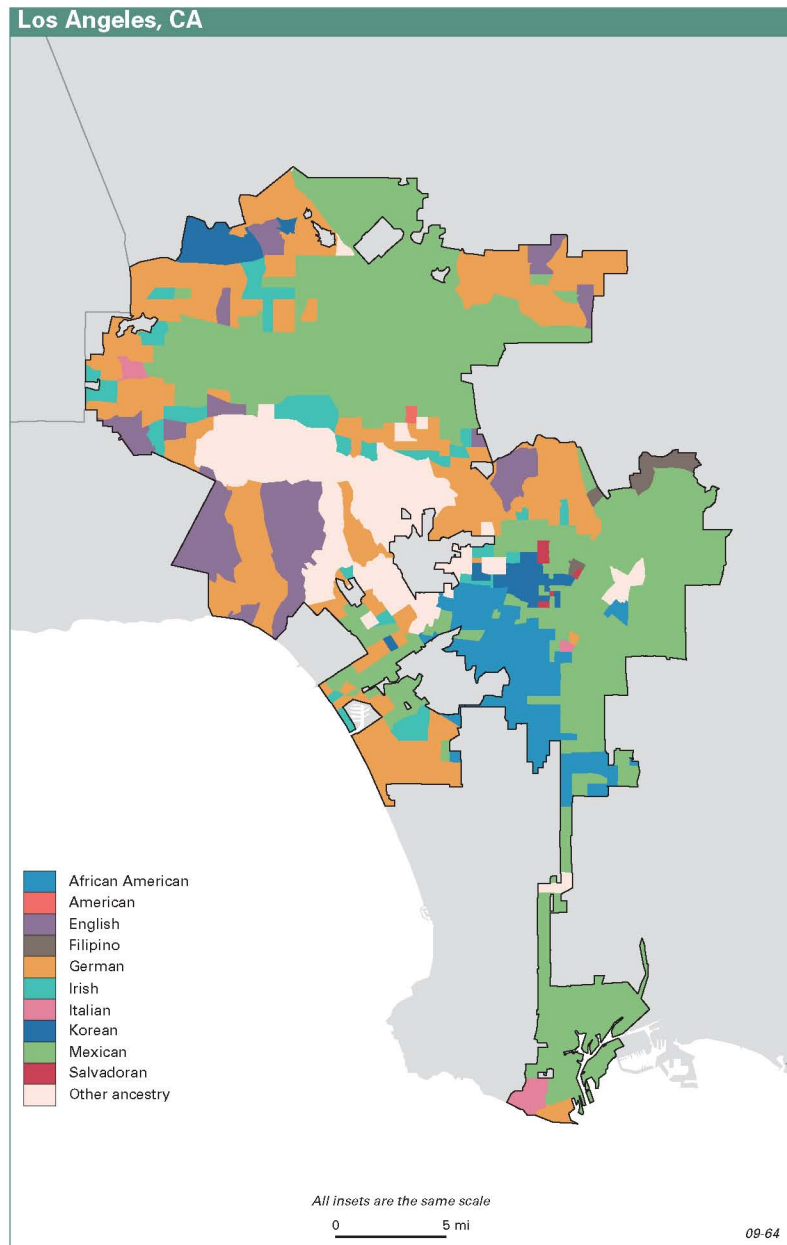


**Prevalent Ancestry, 2000**  
Largest Metropolitan Areas

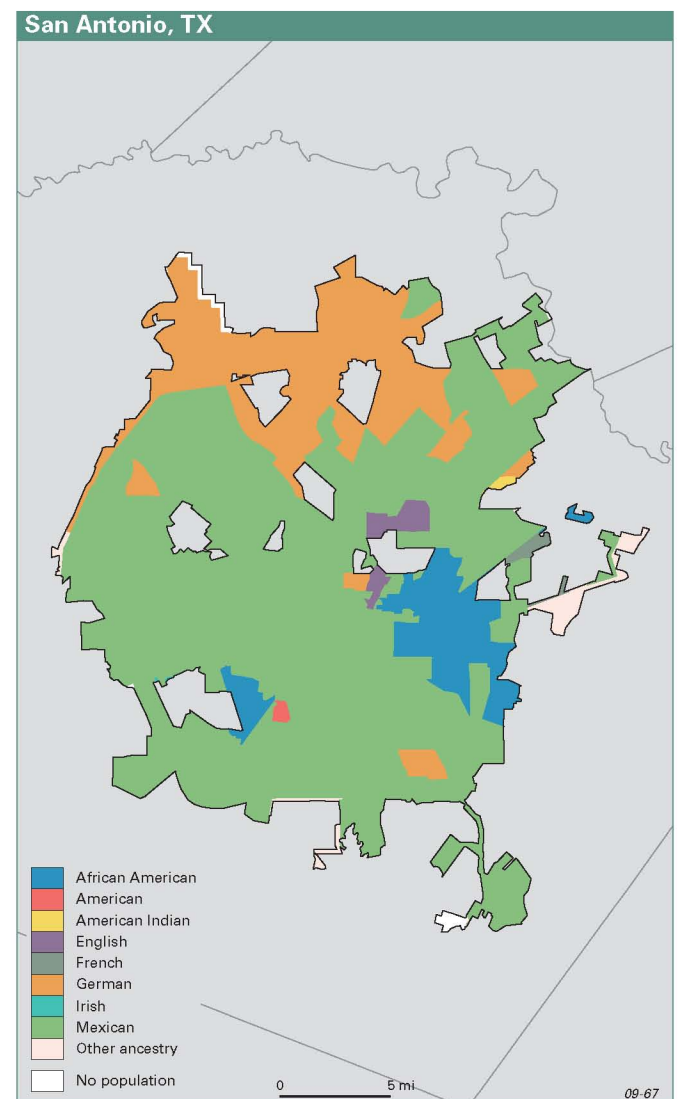
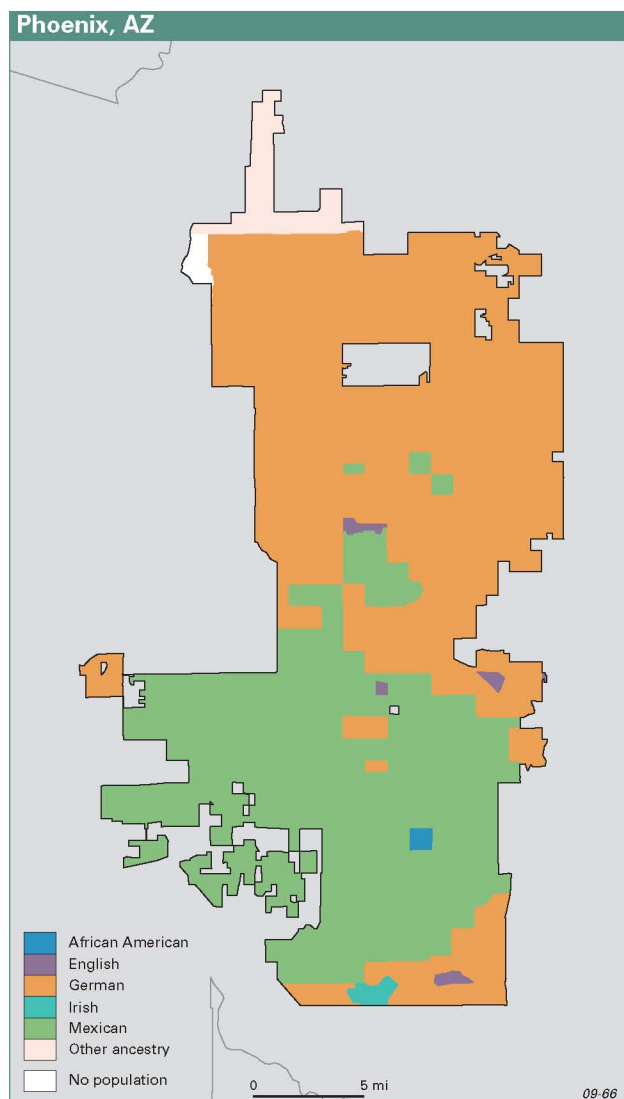
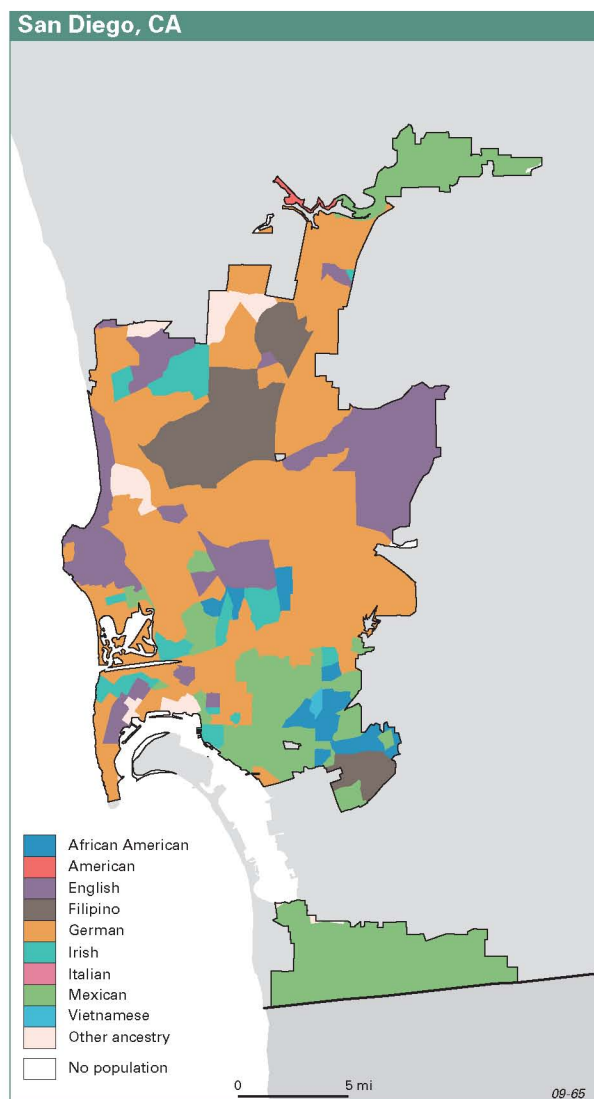
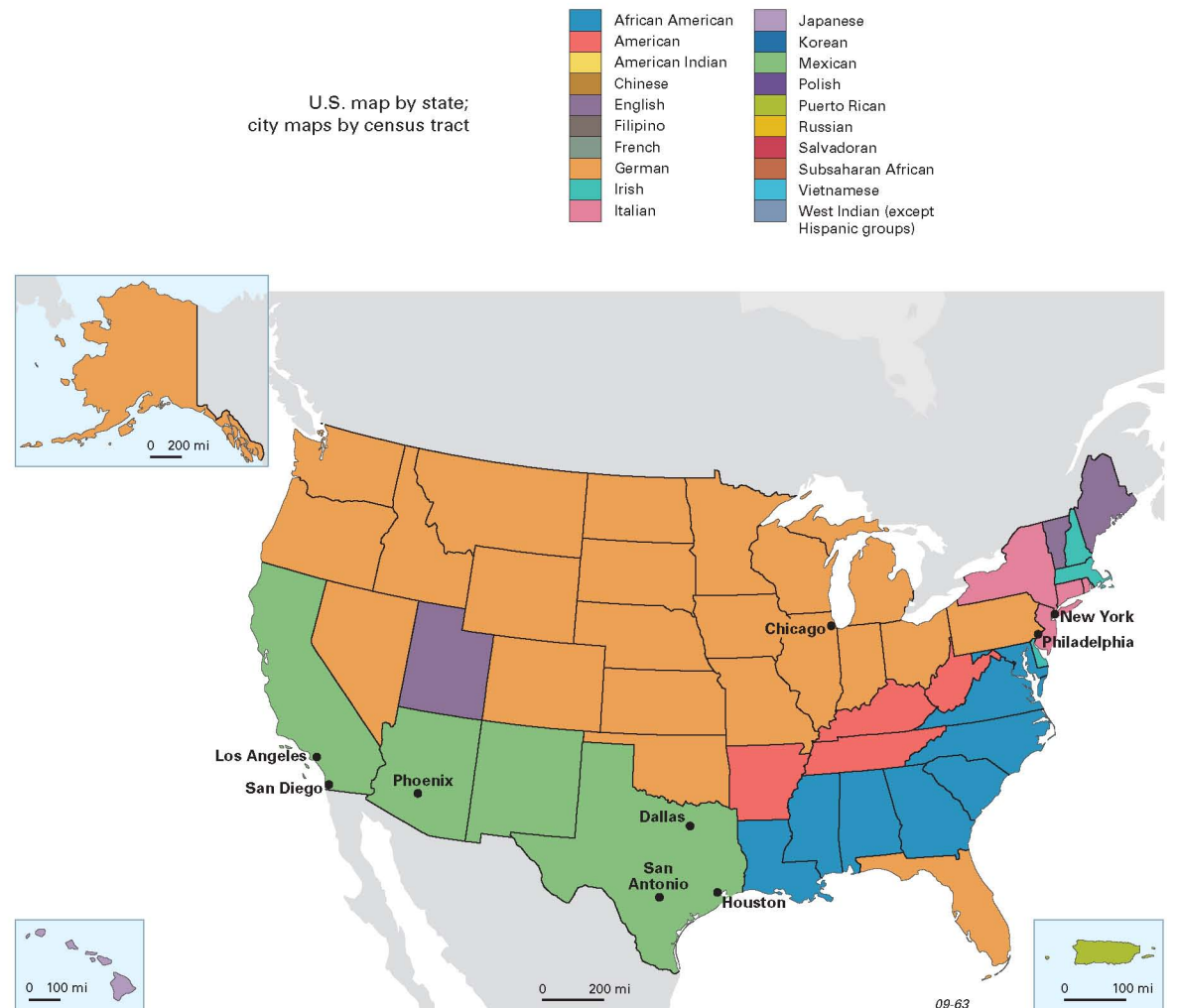


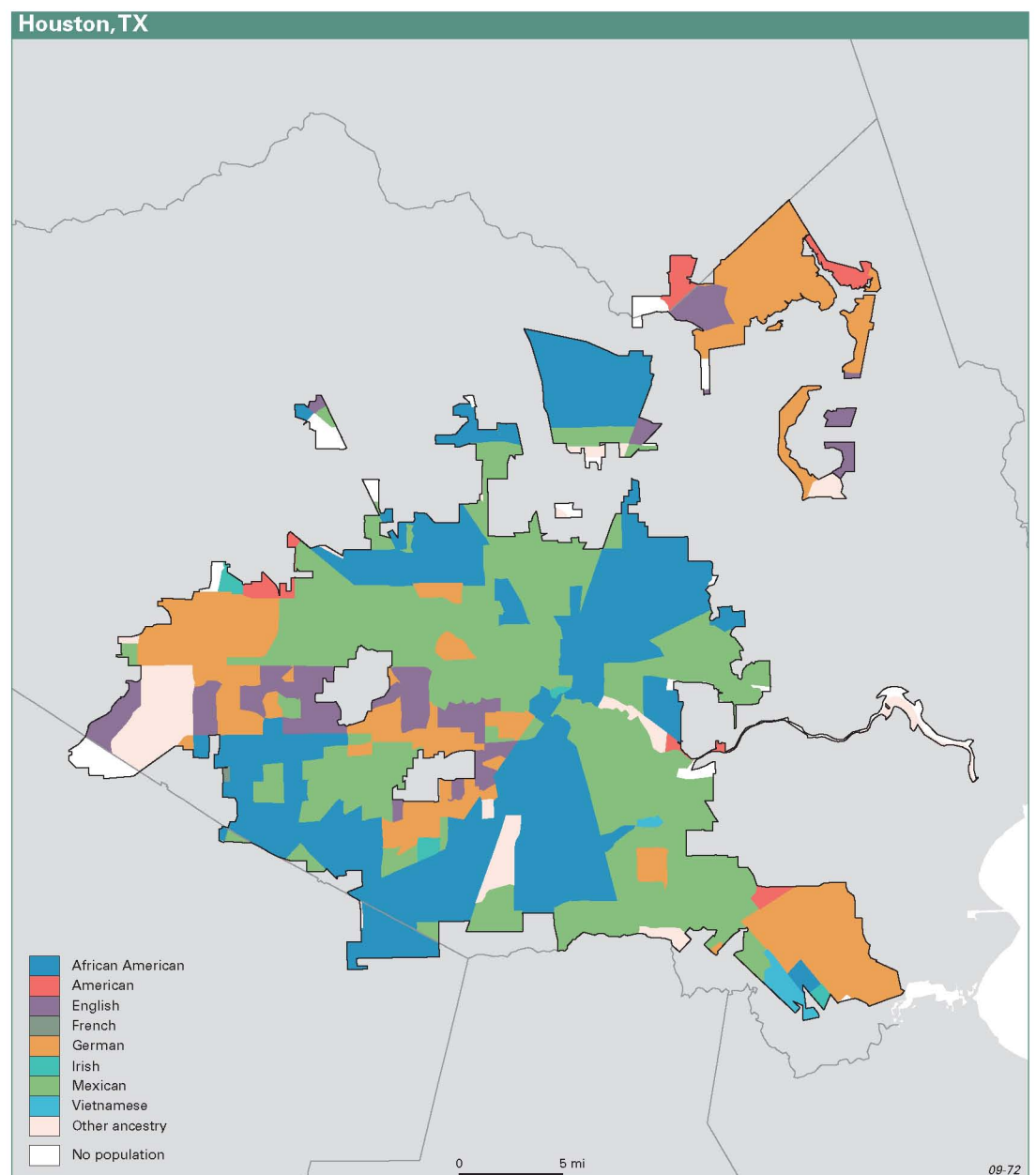
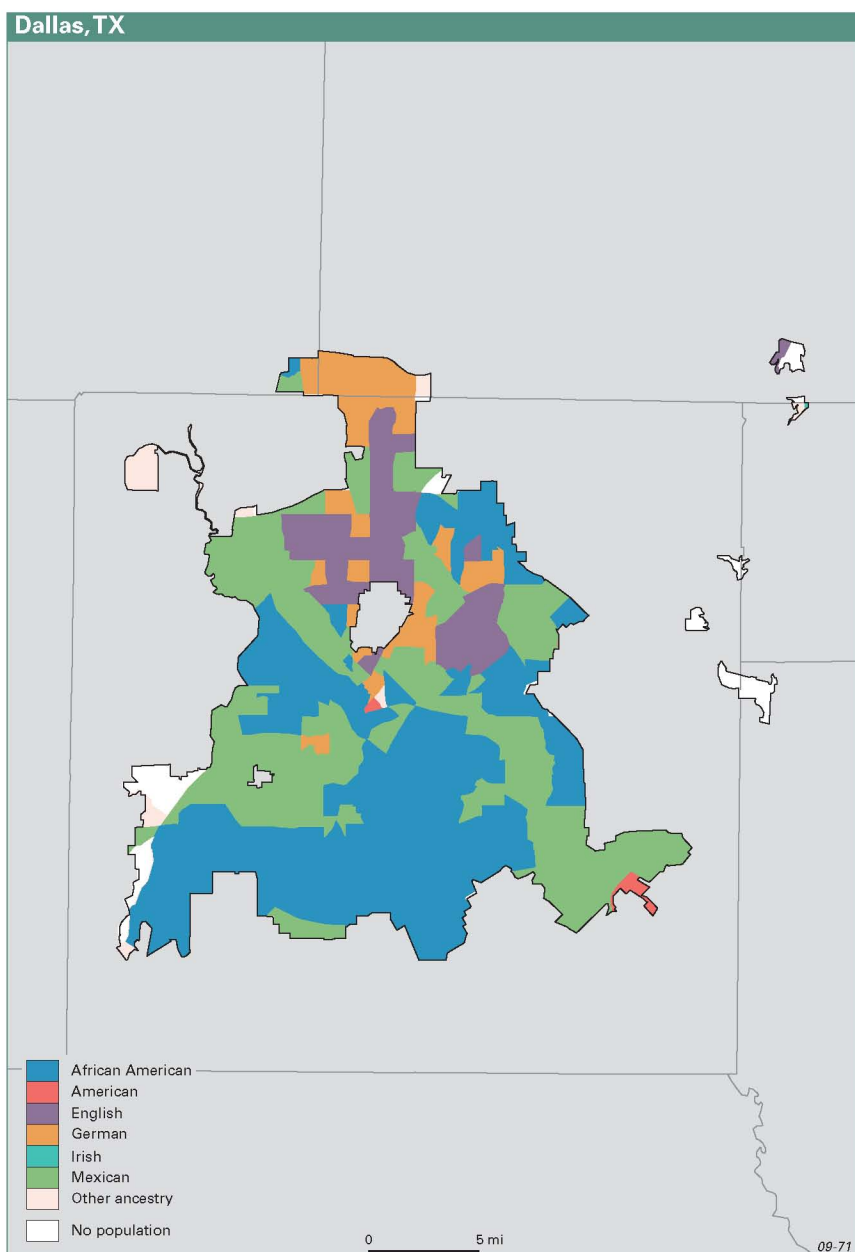
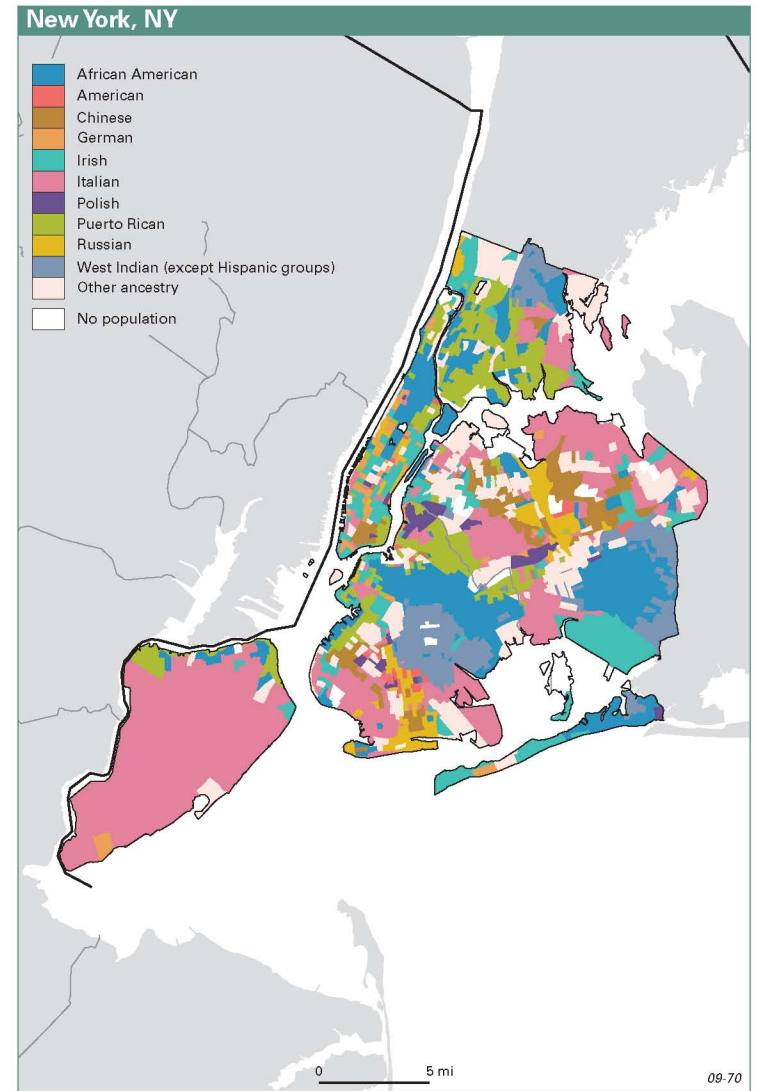
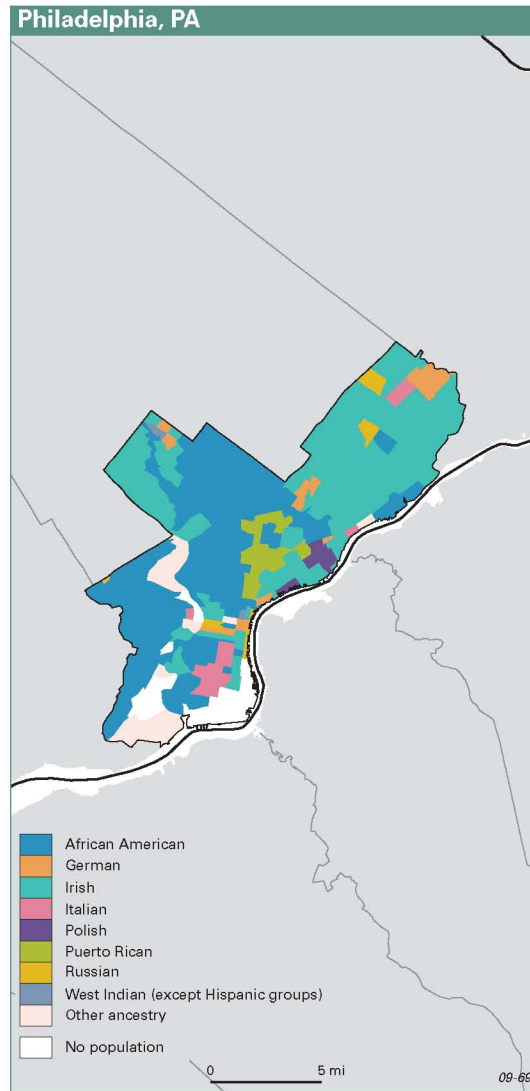
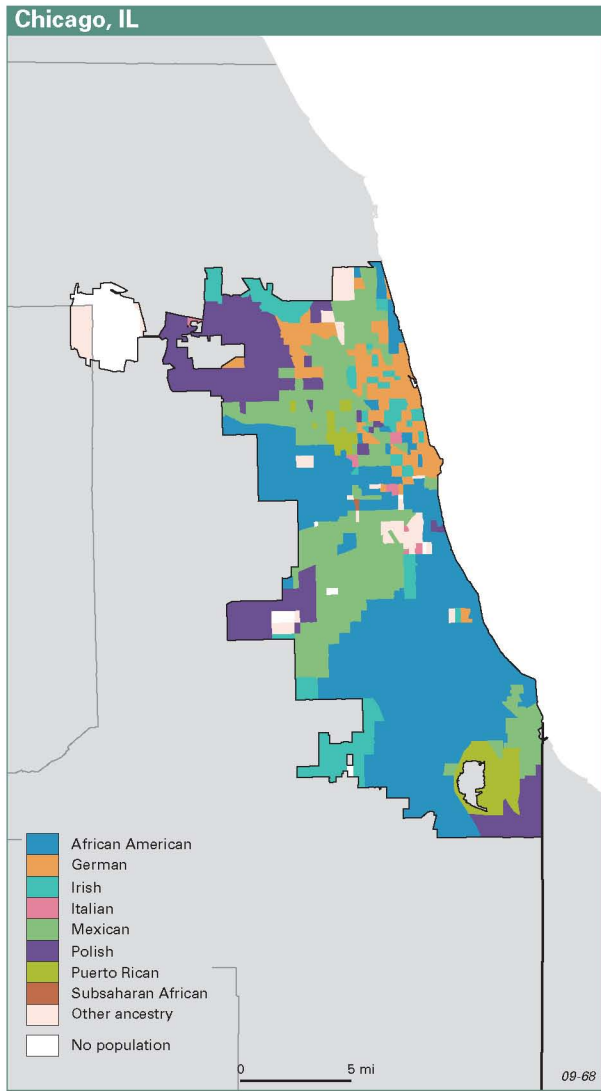


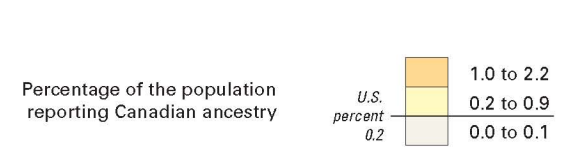
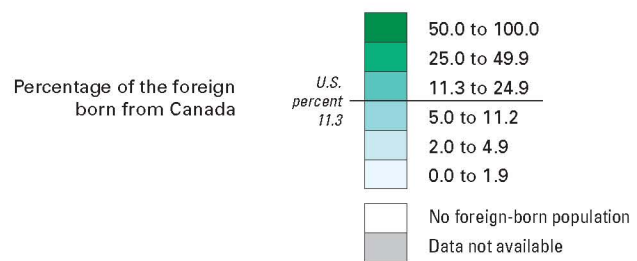
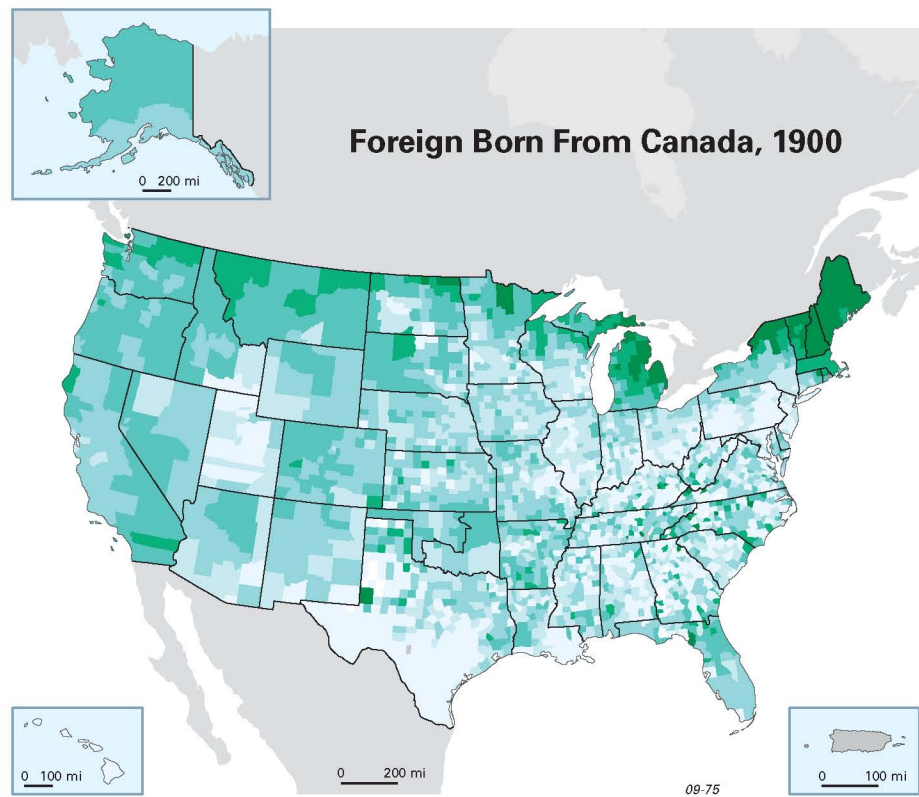
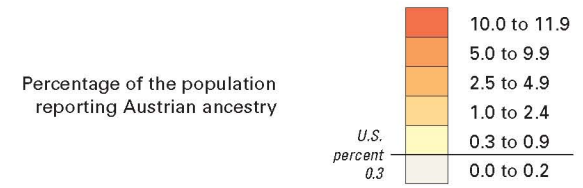
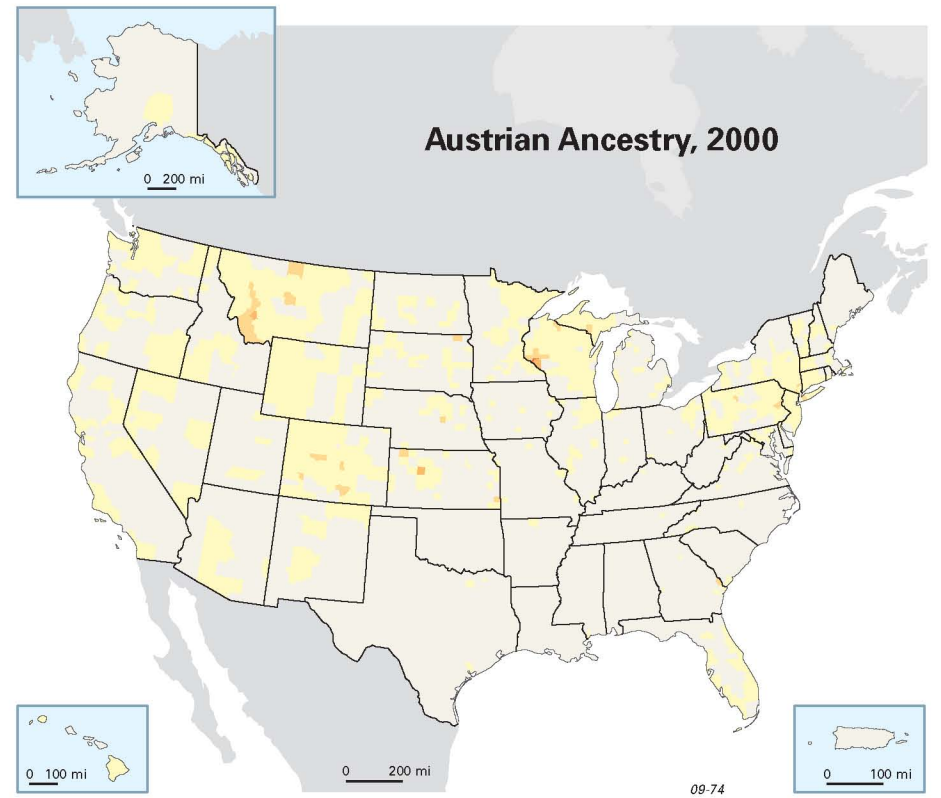
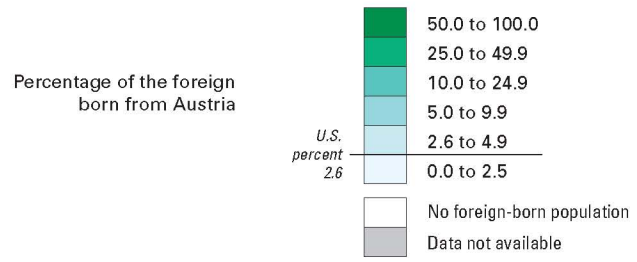
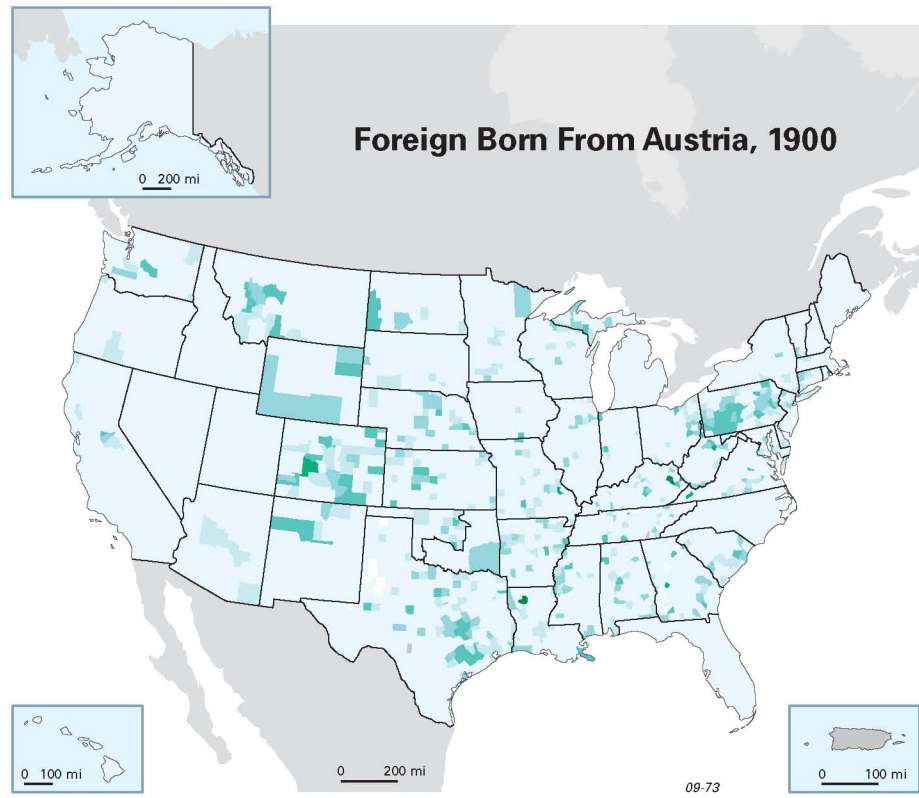
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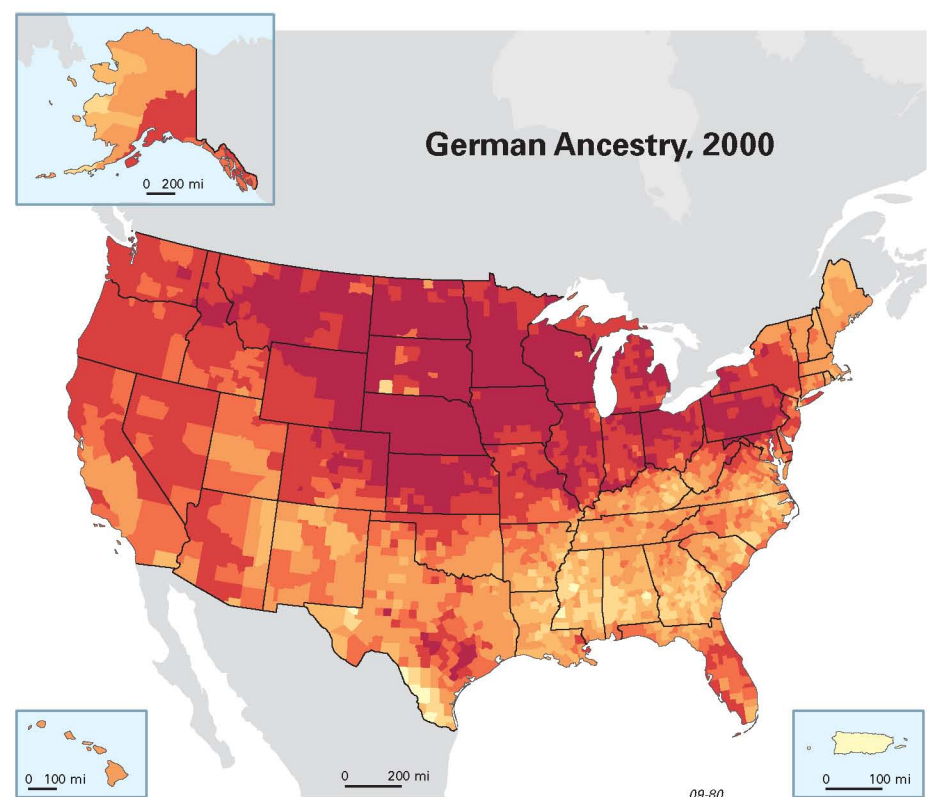
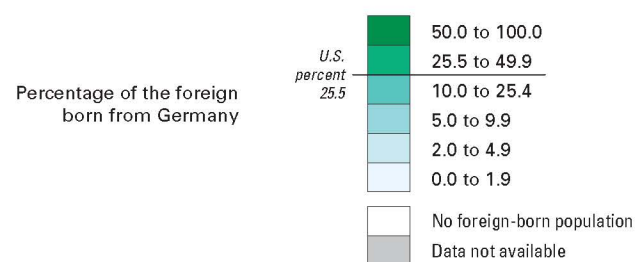
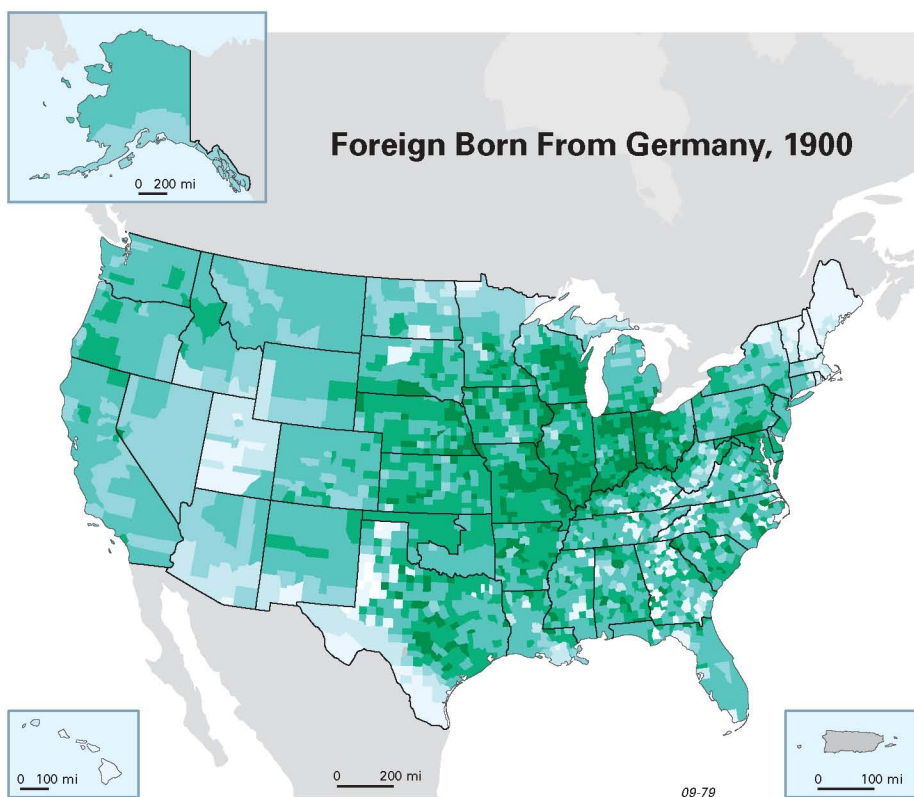
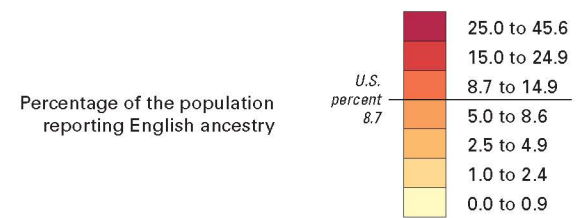
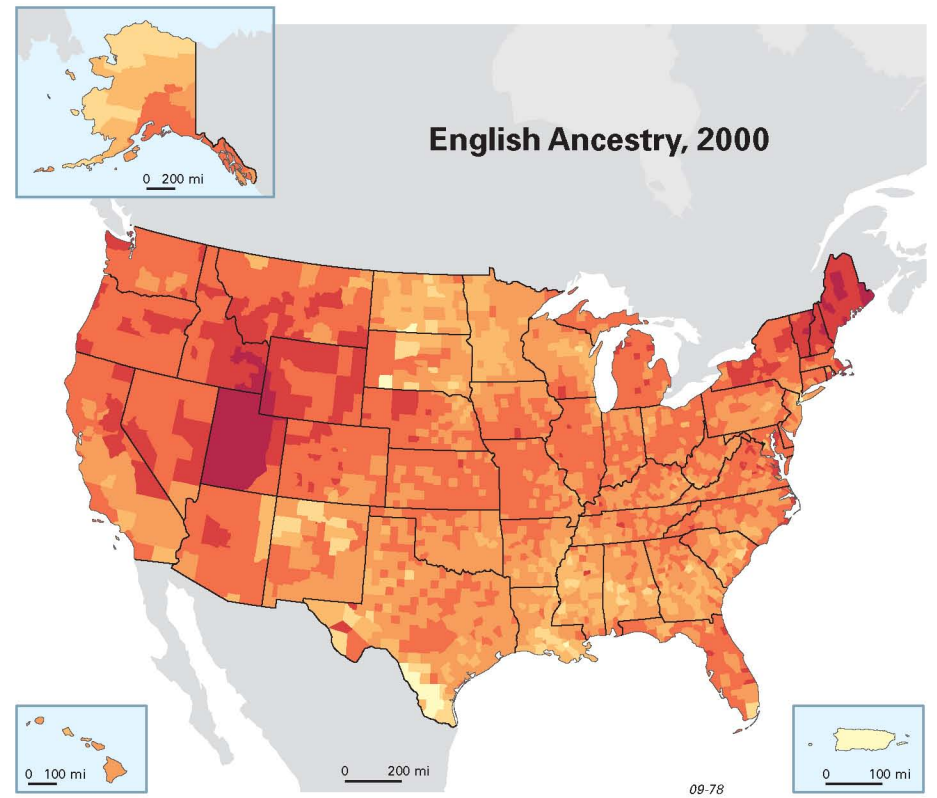
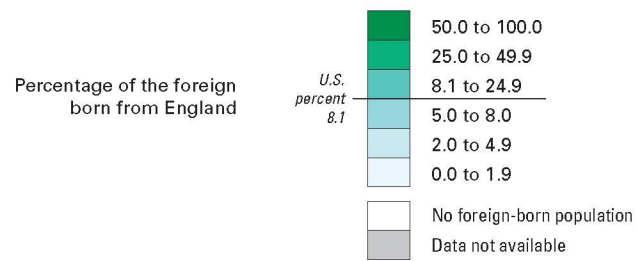
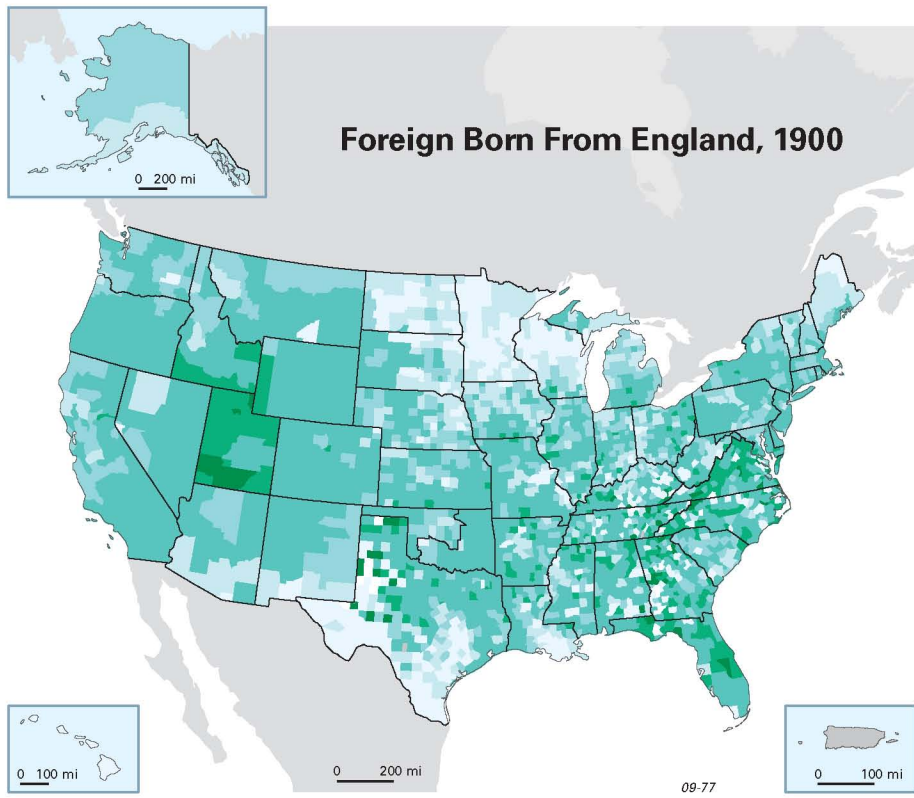


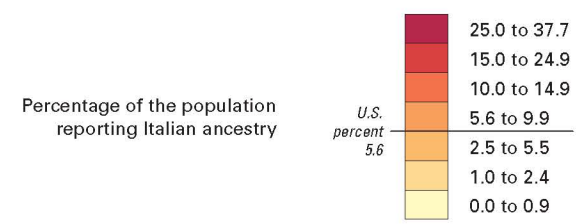
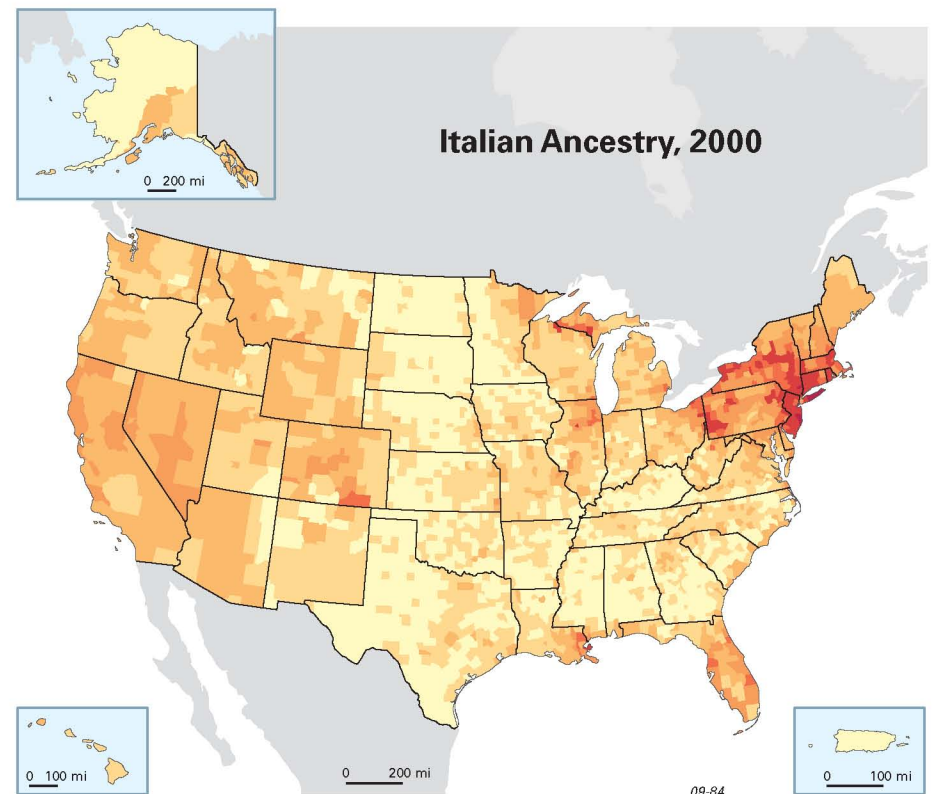
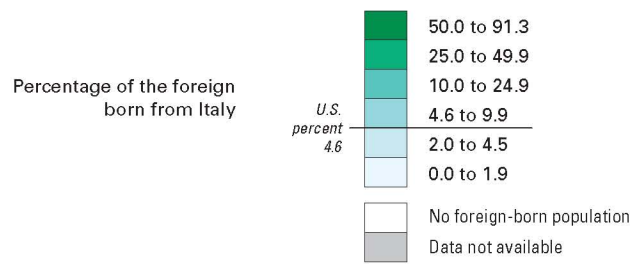
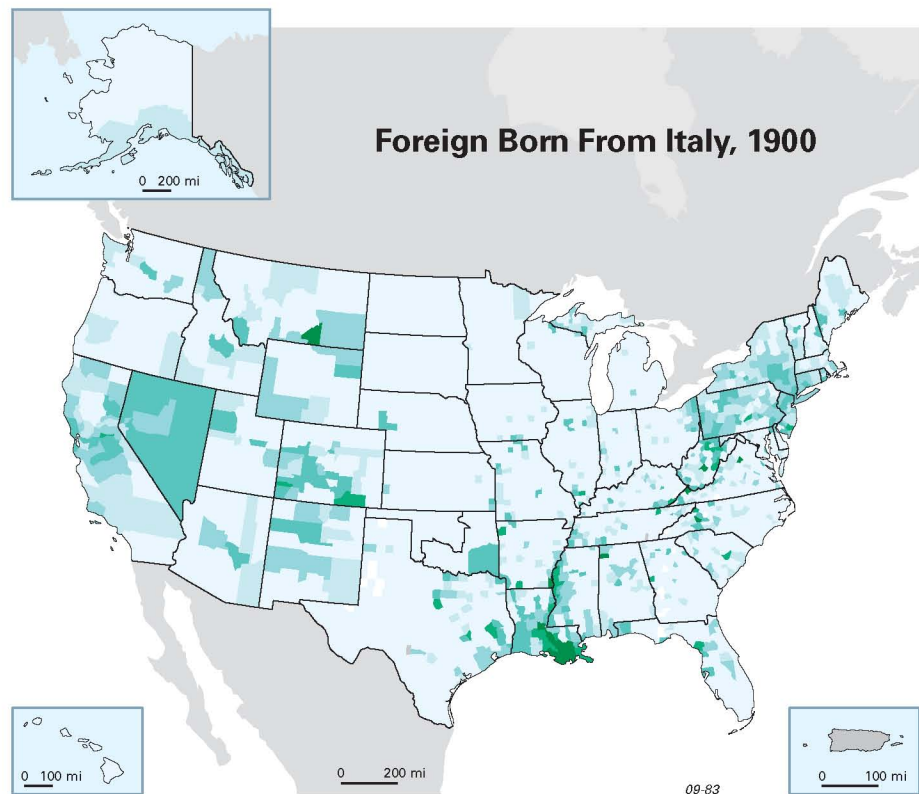
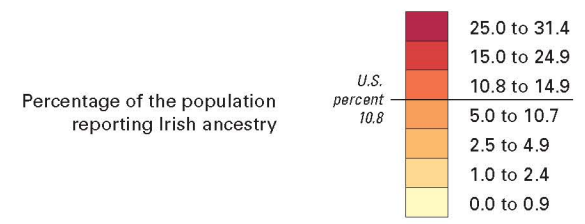
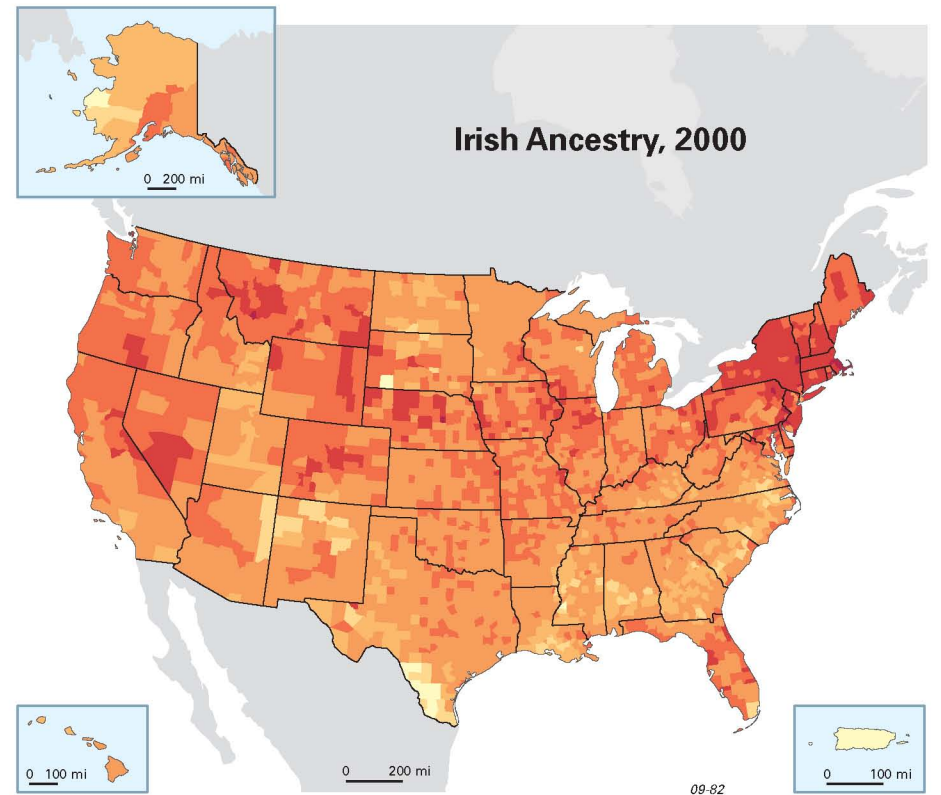
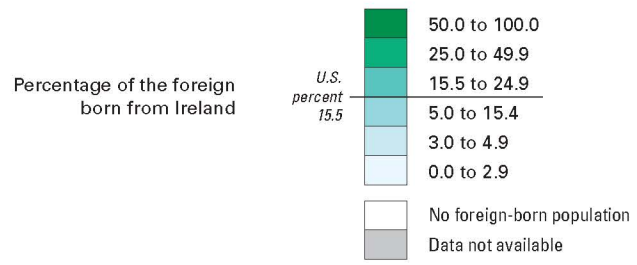
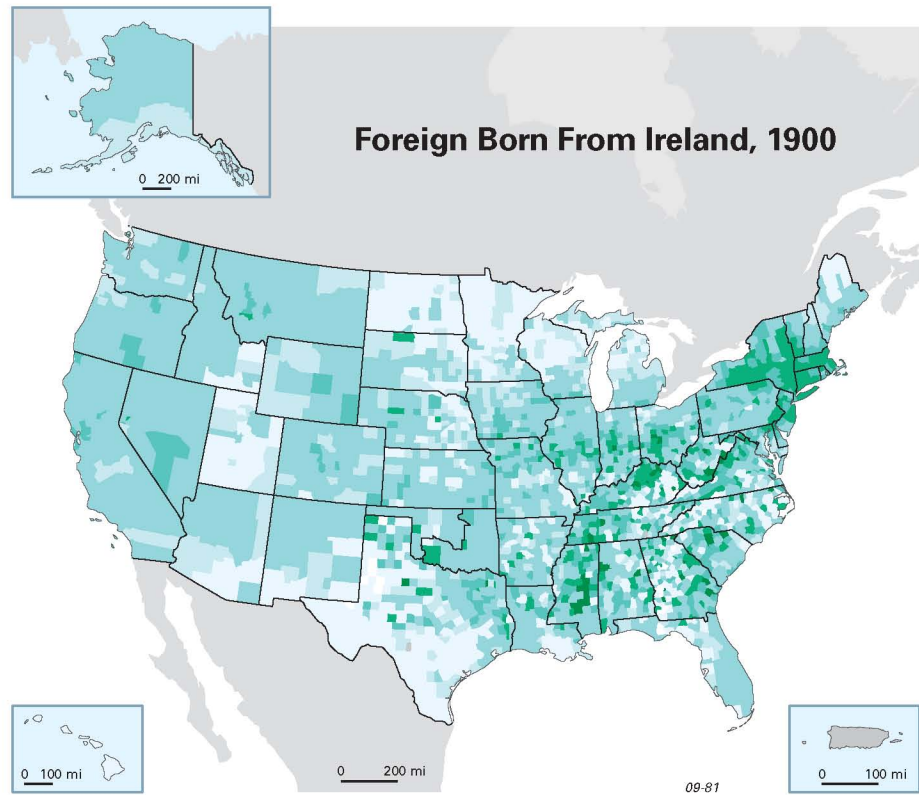
**Prevalent Ancestry, 2000**  
Largest Cities



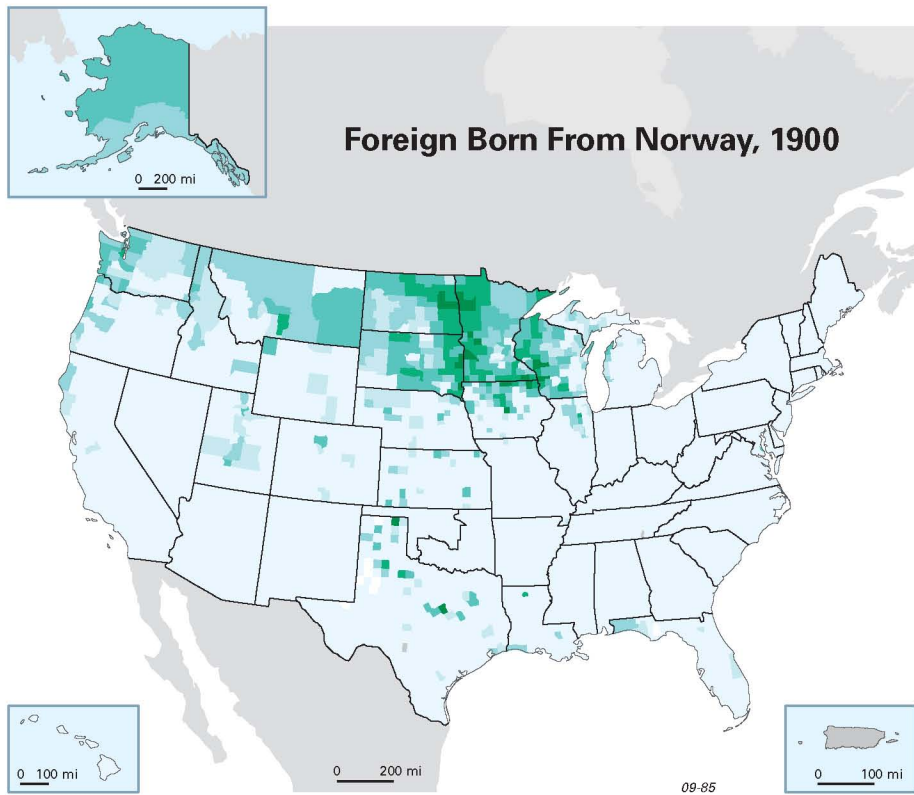




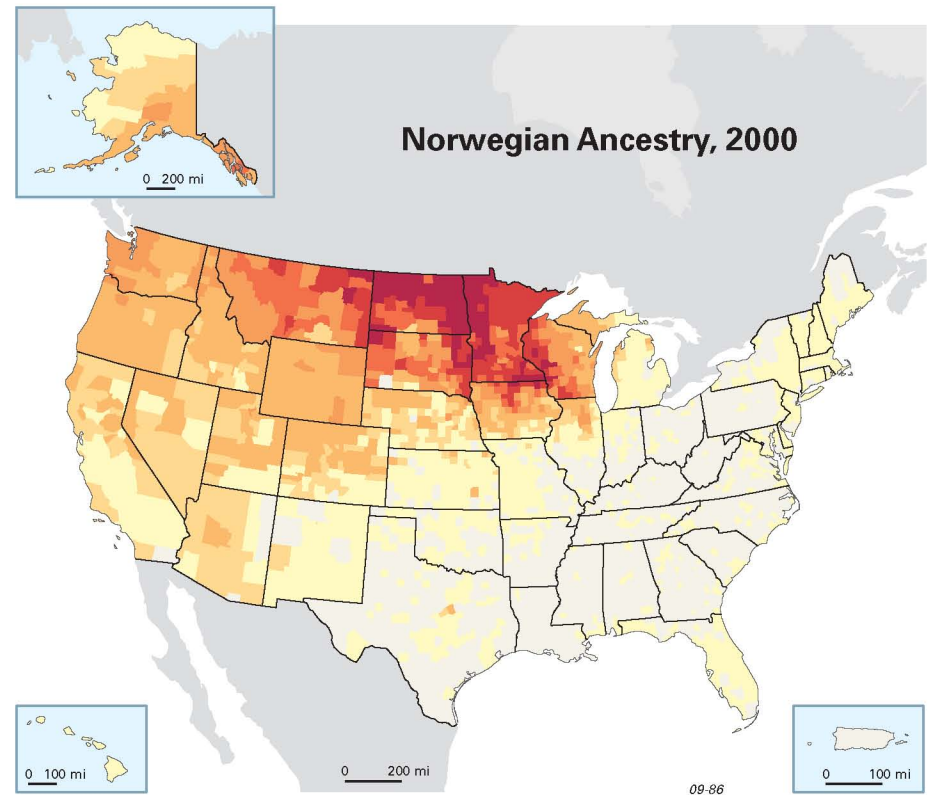
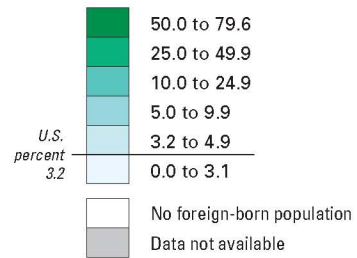




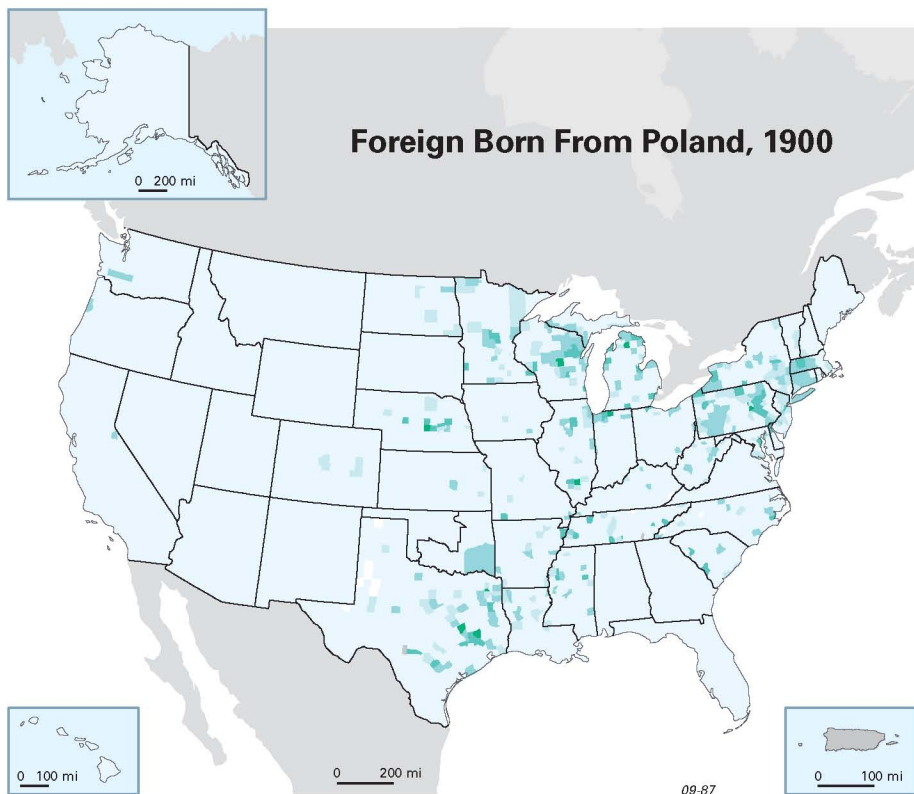
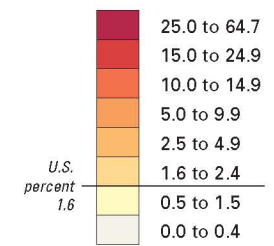




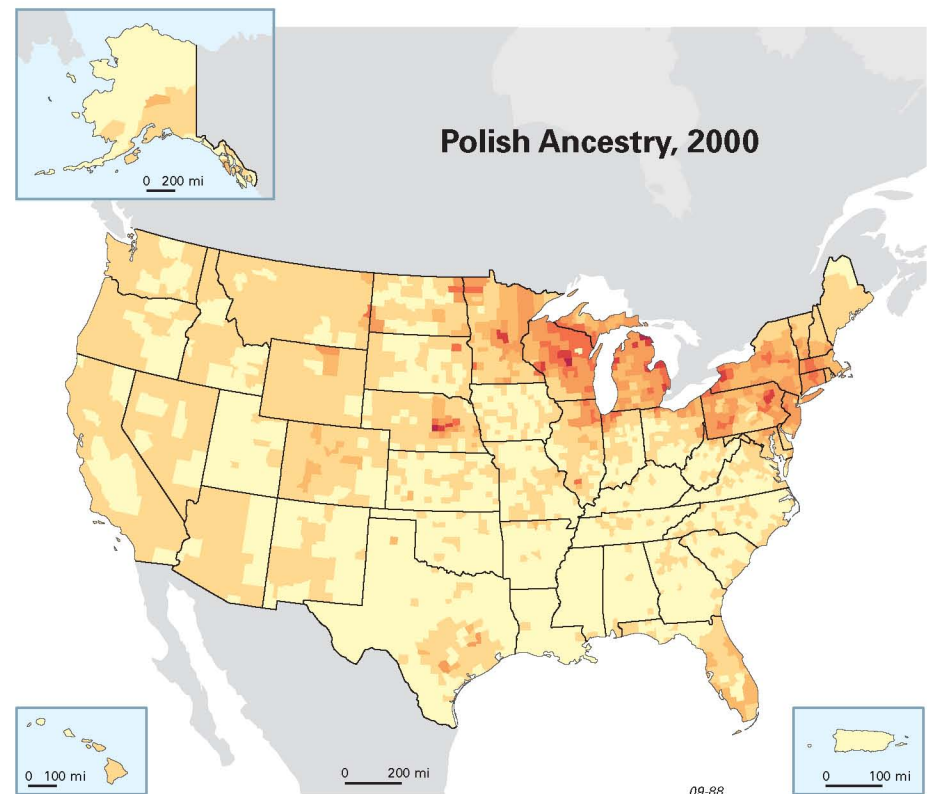
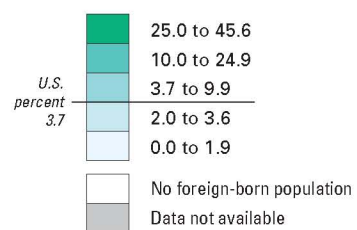
Percentage of the foreign born from Norway



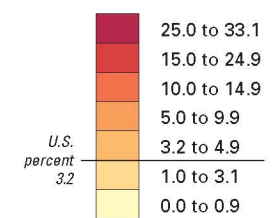
Percentage of the population reporting Norwegian ancestry

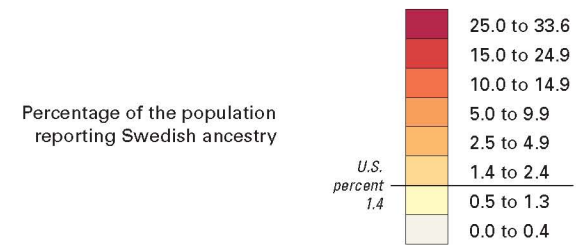
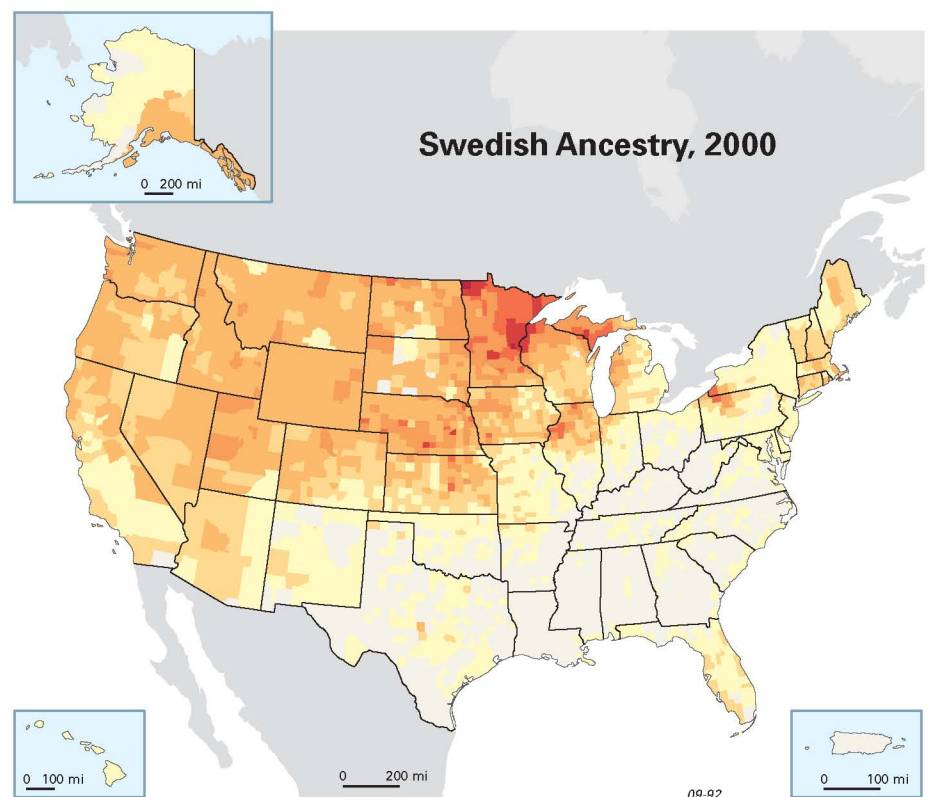
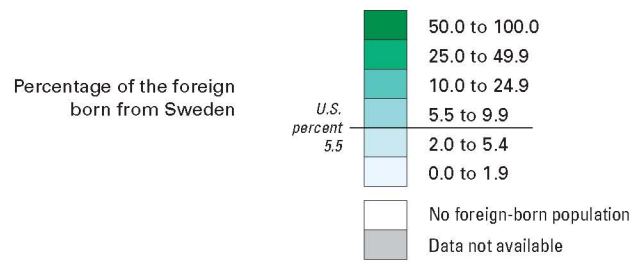
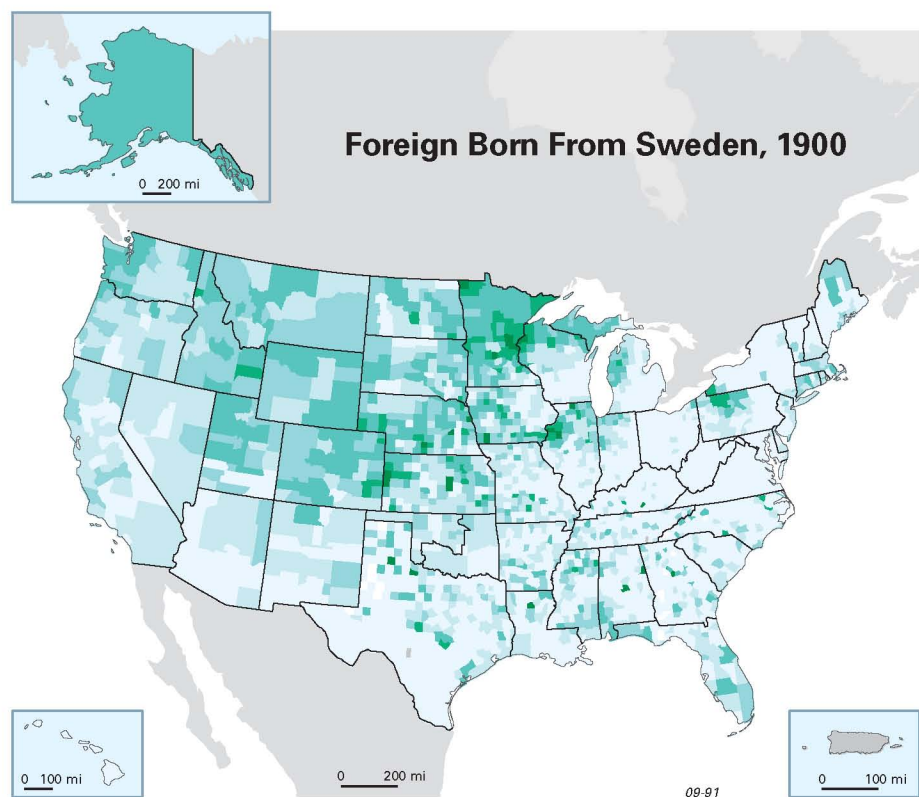
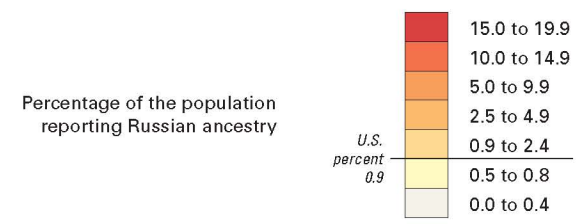
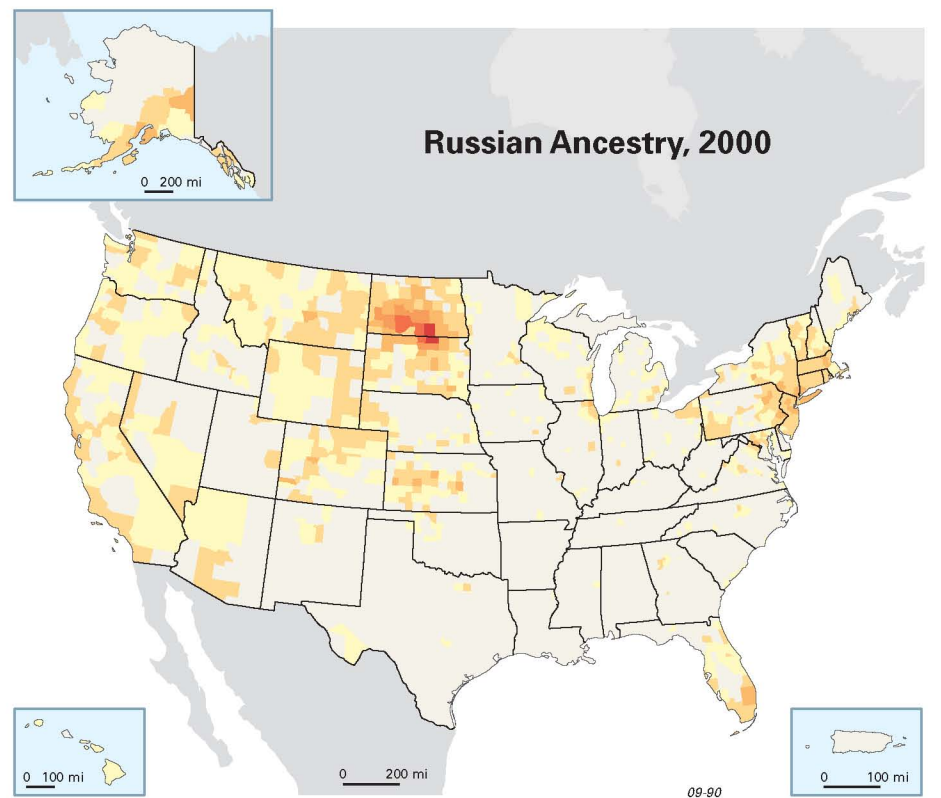
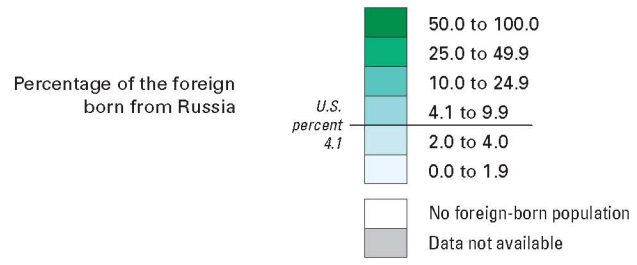
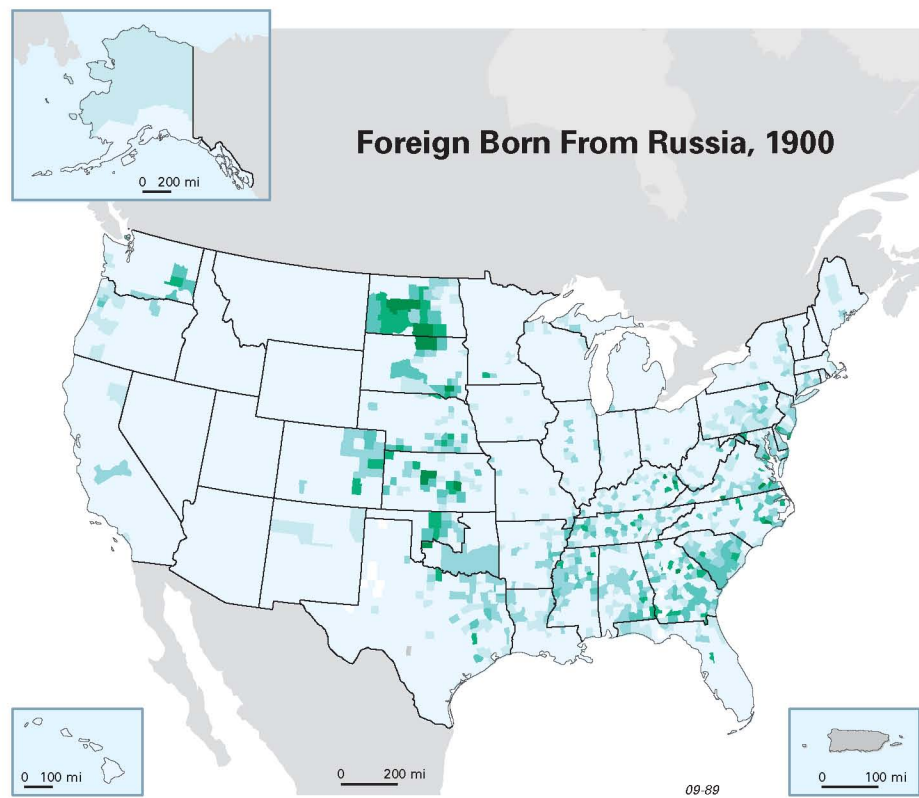


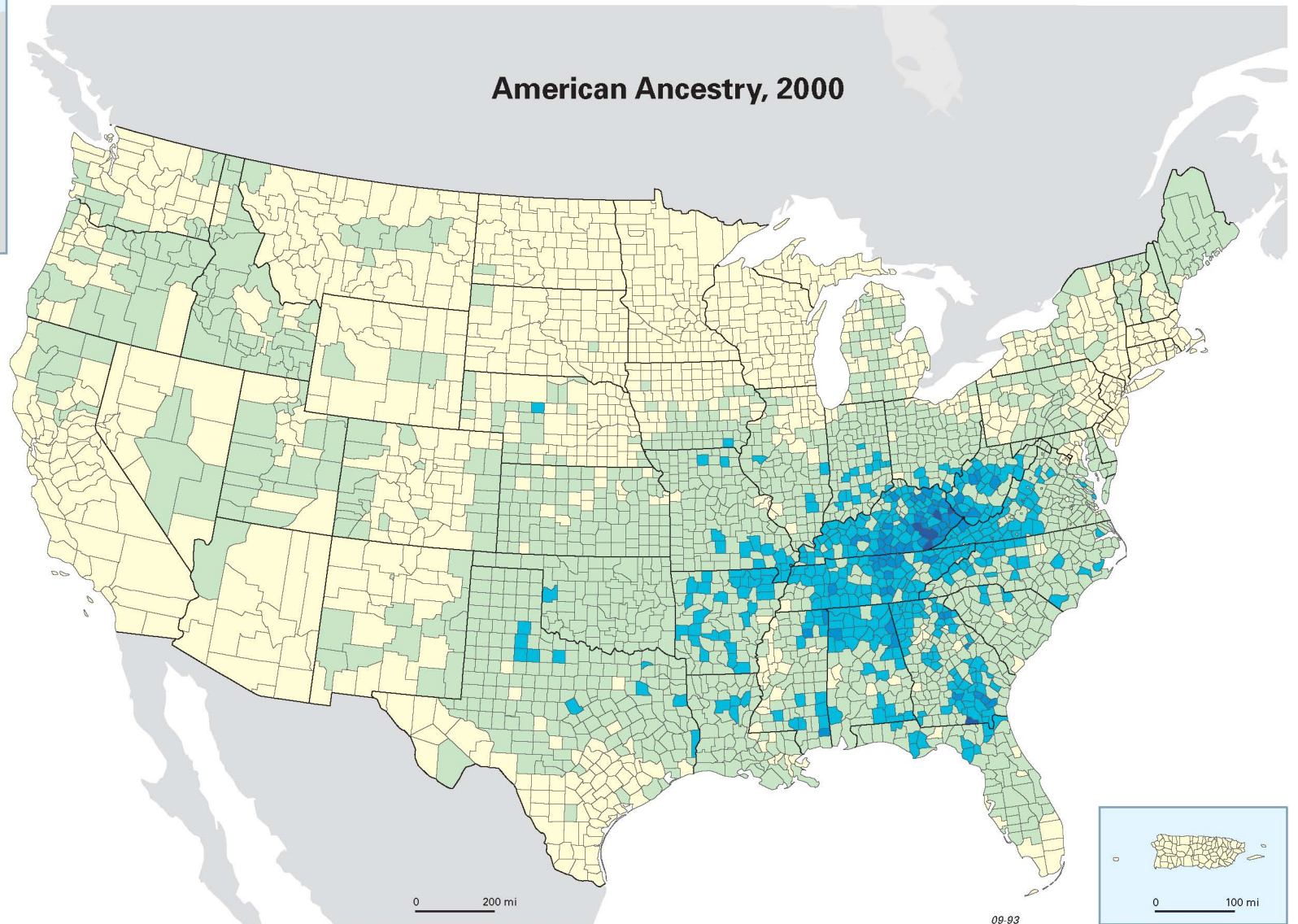
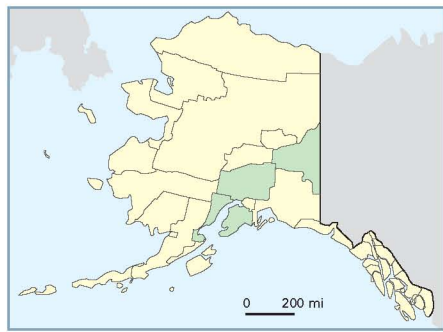
Percentage of the foreign born from Poland



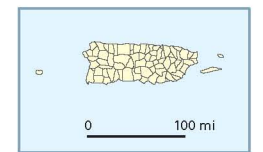
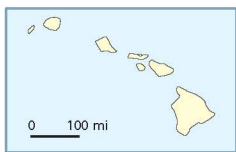
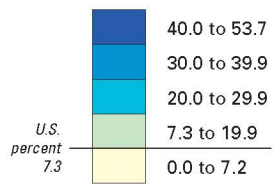
Percentage of the population reporting Polish ancestry



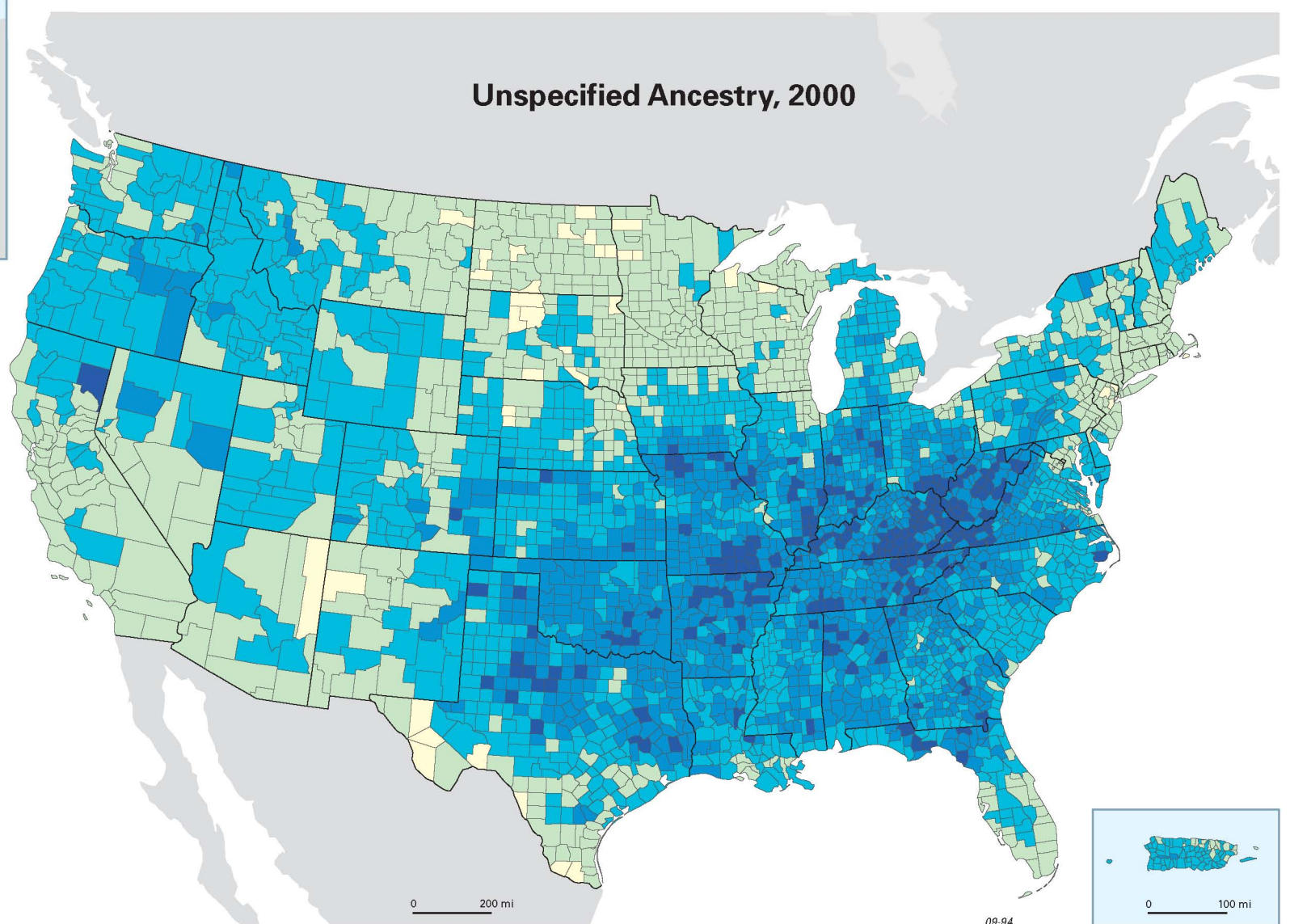
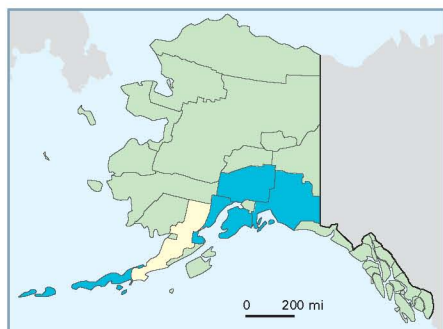




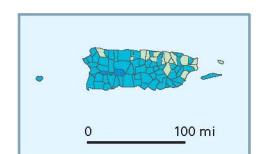
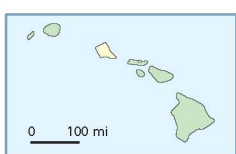
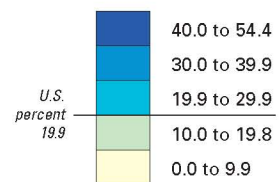
Percentage of the population that reported American as their only ancestry



09-93



Percentage of the population that left the census ancestry question blank or provided an unclassifiable response



09-94

