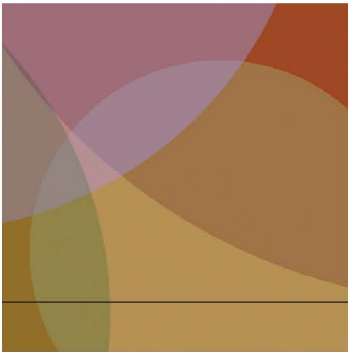




## Chapter 8

## Language



## Chapter 8

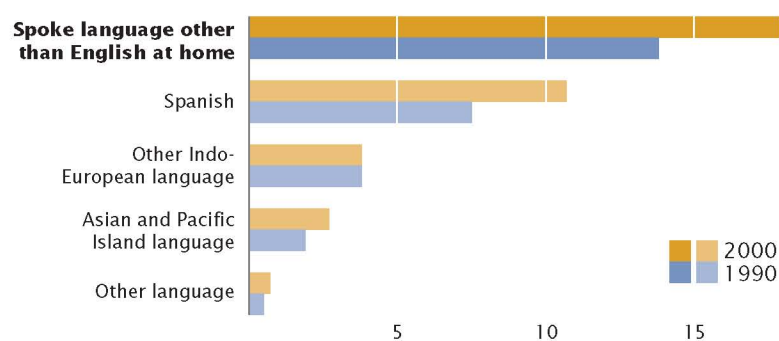
# Language

The languages spoken in the United States today reflect the diversity of the country's population. In Census 2000, as in the two previous censuses, the U.S. Census Bureau asked people aged 5 and older if they spoke a language other than English at home. Among the 262.4 million people aged 5 and older, 47.0 million (18 percent) spoke a language other than English at home. The maps in this chapter demonstrate the geographic patterns of language use in the United States. Many of the map patterns seen in this chapter echo patterns seen in other chapters' maps, particularly those showing distributions of the foreign-born population or of ancestries.

### The History of Census Bureau Data on Language

Various questions pertaining to language were asked in the censuses from 1890 to 1970, including a question on "mother tongue" (the language spoken in the person's home when he or she was a child). Census 2000 asked respondents whether they spoke a language other than English at home. Those who

Figure 8-1.  
**Percent of Population 5 and Older Who Spoke a Language Other Than English at Home by Language Group, 1990 and 2000**



responded "yes" to this question were asked what language they spoke. The responses created about 380 categories of single languages or language families.

People who indicated that they spoke another language at home were also asked to indicate how well they spoke English. Respondents who said they spoke English "very well" were considered to have no difficulty with English. The remaining respondents who reported they spoke English "well," "not well," or "not at all" are shown together as those who spoke English less than "very well."

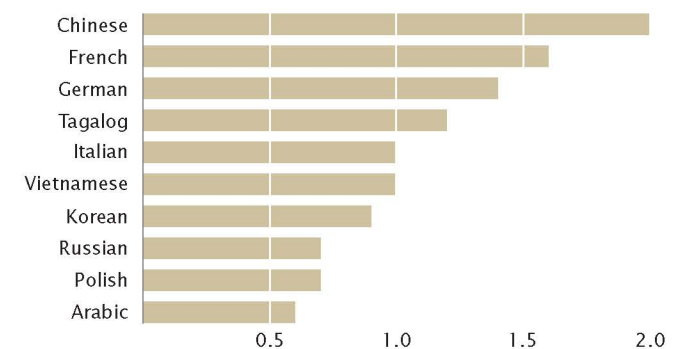
### Non-English-Language Speakers

The number and percentage of people in the United States who spoke a language other than English at home increased between 1980 and 2000. In 2000, 18 percent of the total population aged 5 and older, or 47.0 million people, reported they spoke a language other than English at home. These figures were up from 14 percent (31.8 million) in 1990 and 11 percent (23.1 million) in 1980. The number of people who spoke a language other than English at home grew by 38 percent in the 1980s and by 47 percent in the 1990s.

### Historical Patterns of Language Use

The number and types of languages spoken in the United States have changed over time, reflecting shifts in the countries sending immigrants to the United States. In the nineteenth century, most immigrants to the United States came from Northern and Western Europe. As the main sources of immigration shifted to Southern and Eastern Europe at the turn of the twentieth century, the number of people who spoke Italian, Yiddish, and Polish

Figure 8-2.  
**Speakers (millions) of Languages Most Frequently Spoken at Home, Other Than English and Spanish, 2000**



increased. Recent language patterns reflect the fact that most new immigrants to the United States now hail from Latin America and Asia.

After English (215.4 million speakers) and Spanish (28.1 million speakers), Chinese was the language most commonly spoken at home in 2000 (2.0 million), followed by French (1.6 million) and German (1.4 million) (Figure 8-2).

Spanish speakers grew by about 60 percent between 1990 and 2000 (Figure 8-1), and Spanish continued to be the non-English language most frequently spoken at home in the United States. Chinese jumped from the fifth to the second-most widely spoken non-English language, as the number of Chinese speakers rose from 1.2 to 2.0 million people. The number of Vietnamese speakers doubled over the decade, from about 507,000 speakers to just over 1 million speakers.

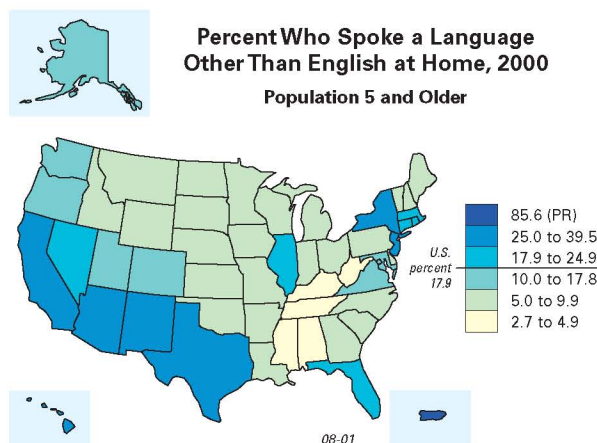
Of the 20 non-English languages most frequently spoken at home, the largest proportional increase was for Russian, whose speakers nearly tripled from

242,000 to 706,000. The second-largest percentage increase was for French Creole speakers (the language group that includes Haitian Creoles), whose numbers more than doubled from 188,000 to 453,000.

### State-Level Language Patterns in 2000

In seven states, more than one-quarter of the population aged 5 and older spoke a language other than English at home in 2000 (map 08-01). California had the largest percentage of non-English-language speakers (39 percent), followed by New Mexico (37 percent), Texas (31 percent), New York (28 percent), Hawaii (27 percent), and Arizona and New Jersey (each about 26 percent). The five states where less than 5 percent of the population 5 and older spoke a language other than English at home were all in the South—Tennessee (4.8 percent), Alabama and Kentucky (each 3.9 percent), Mississippi (3.6 percent), and West Virginia (2.7 percent).

During the 1990s, California surpassed New Mexico as the state with the largest proportion of non-English-language speakers. In New Mexico, the proportion increased from 36 to 37 percent; in California, it rose from 31 to 39 percent.



The number of non-English-language speakers at least doubled in six states from 1990 to 2000. The largest percentage increase occurred in Nevada, where the number increased by 193 percent. (Nevada also had the highest rate of population increase [66 percent] during the decade.) Georgia's non-English-language-speaking residents increased by 164 percent, followed by North Carolina (151 percent), Utah (110 percent), Arkansas (104 percent), and Oregon (103 percent). The percentage increases between Arkansas

and Utah and between Arkansas and Oregon were not statistically different from one another.

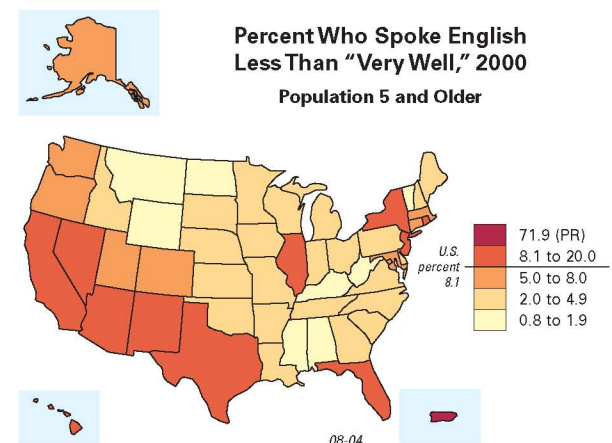
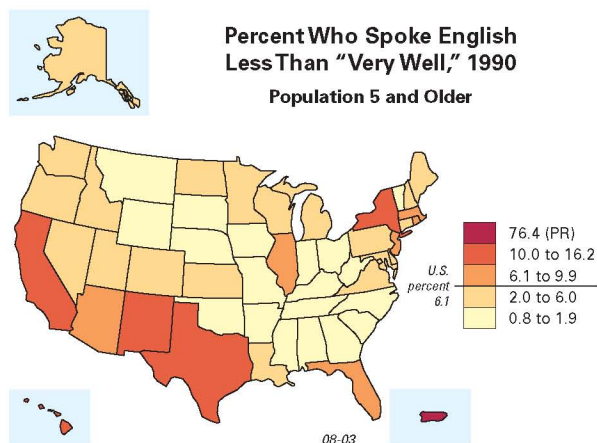
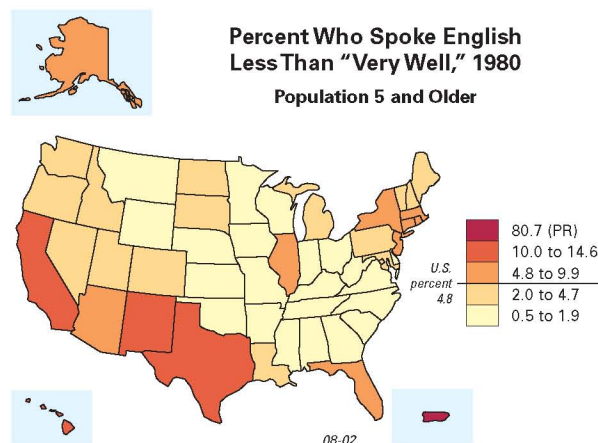
Between 1990 and 2000, the number of people speaking a language other than English decreased in three states. North Dakota had the largest decrease (19 percent), followed by Maine (11 percent) and Louisiana (2 percent). These three states also had low rates of population growth from 1990 to 2000.

In 2000, most people who spoke a language other than English at home reported they spoke English "very well" (55 percent, or 25.6 million people). When they are combined with those who spoke only English at home, 92 percent of the population aged 5 and older had no difficulty speaking English.

The proportion of the population aged 5 and older who spoke English less than "very well" grew from 4.8 percent in 1980 to 6.1 percent in 1990, and to 8.1 percent in 2000 (maps 08-02 through 08-04).

### Linguistically Isolated Households

A linguistically isolated household is defined as one in which no person aged 14 and older speaks only English at home or speaks another language at home and speaks English "very well." In 2000, 4.4 million



households, with 11.9 million people, were linguistically isolated. The corresponding numbers were lower in 1990, when 2.9 million households with 7.7 million people were linguistically isolated.

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

For a majority of counties in 2000, the prevalent language spoken at home, excluding English, was Spanish (map 08-06). Exceptions included parts of Louisiana, where the prevalent language for parishes in the southern half of the state was French (including Patois and Cajun). French was also the prevalent non-English language for most counties in northern New England. German was the prevalent non-English language spoken at home for a band of counties in the Dakotas and other parts of the Midwest, while Navajo was the prevalent non-English language for several counties in northeast Arizona. After excluding both English and Spanish, the language most commonly spoken at home in 2000 for many counties was German (map 08-21), including counties in nearly

every state. Many similarities in patterns exist between those displayed in language prevalence maps and map 09-04 (prevalent ancestry) at the start of the ancestry chapter.

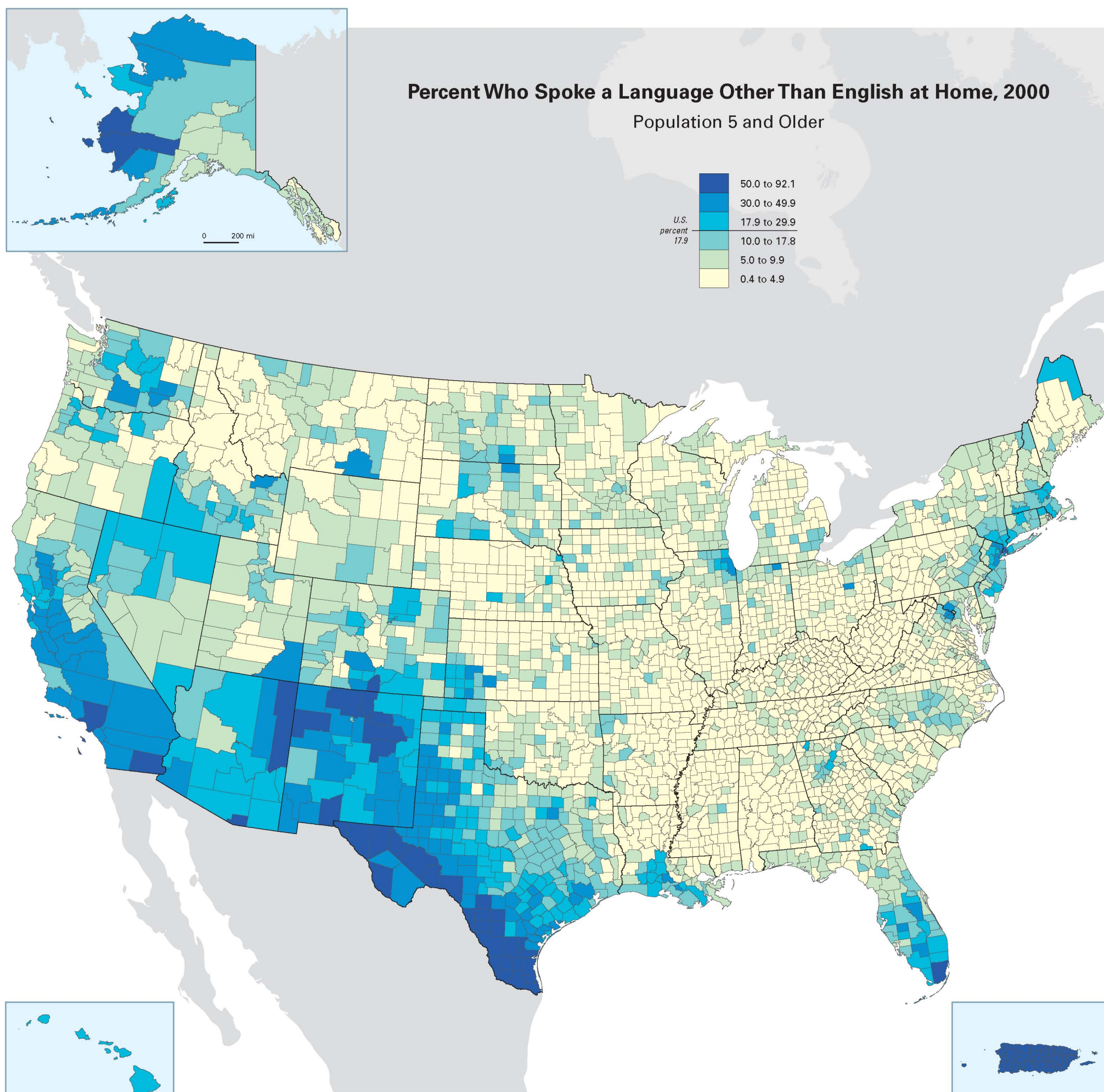
Native North American languages are prominent in the two maps on prevalent language by county (maps 08-06 and 08-21). Maps 08-30 and 08-31 focus on the American Indian and Alaska Native population in more detail. The percentage of AIAN populations speaking a native North American language at home varied widely, with high figures for some reservations and cities in the southwest and lower percentages for many of the other large reservations and cities.

Map 08-34 shows the geographic distribution of the 8.1 percent of the total population who reported speaking English less than “very well” in 2000. The ability to speak English for the school-aged population is explored in maps 08-11 through 08-20, which show the distribution in the largest cities of the population 5 to 17 years old who spoke English less than “very well” (6.6 percent). Similarities exist between the

patterns shown on these maps, map 08-07 on linguistically isolated households, and earlier maps on the percent foreign born in the chapter on the foreign-born population.

The relationship between nativity and the tendency to speak Spanish at home in 2000 is revealed in maps 08-09 and 08-10. In 2000, 6.4 percent of natives and 43.4 percent of foreign-born people reported speaking Spanish at home. Counties with high percentages of natives speaking Spanish at home often also had high percentages of their foreign-born populations speaking Spanish at home.

A diverse group of languages is spoken in the United States, as shown in this chapter’s state-, county-, and census tract-level maps. From Navajo and other native North American languages spoken on the largest American Indian and Alaska Native reservations to English-speaking ability among the school-aged population in our largest cities, the maps in this chapter illustrate the linguistic diversity in the United States.



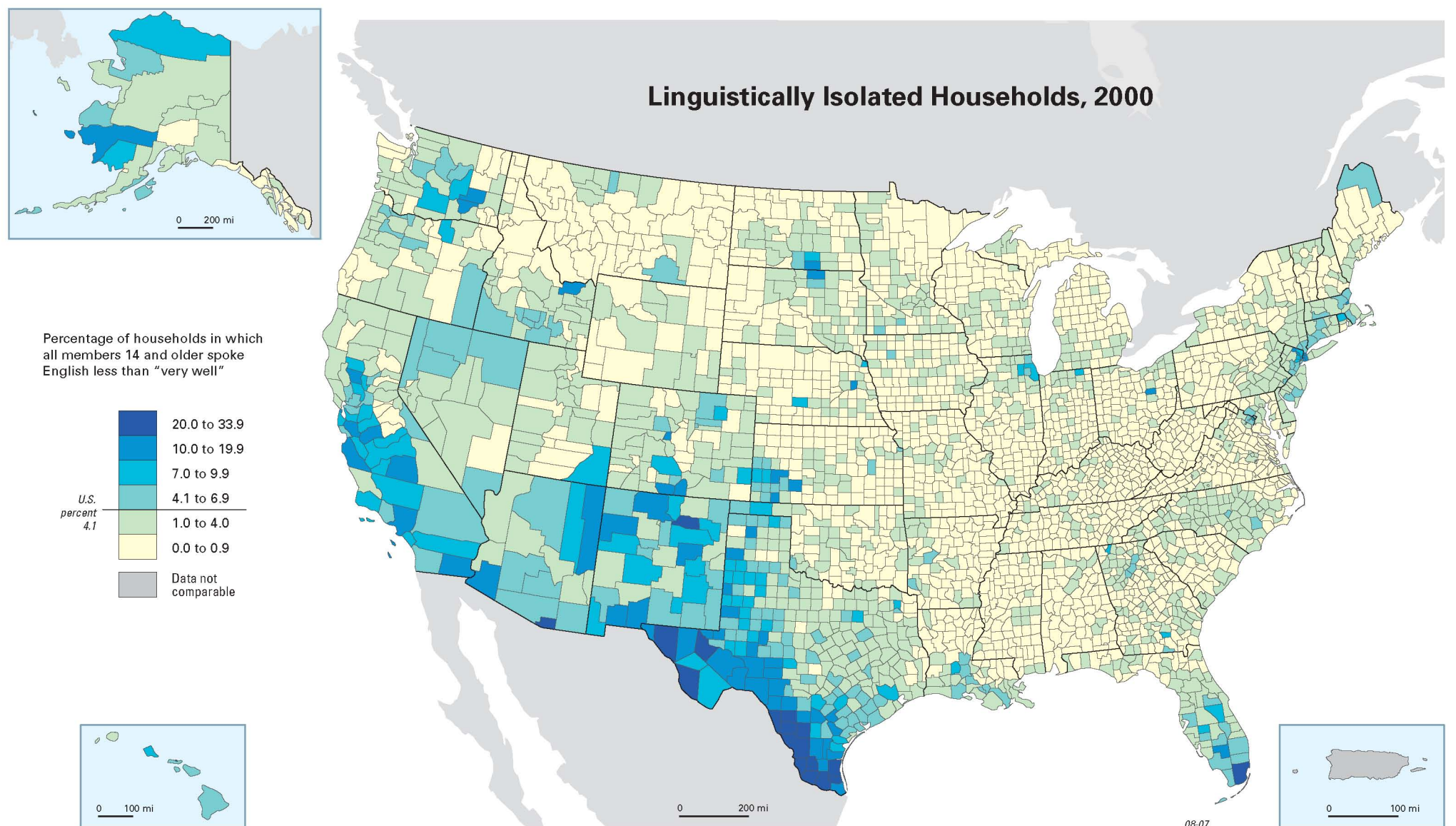
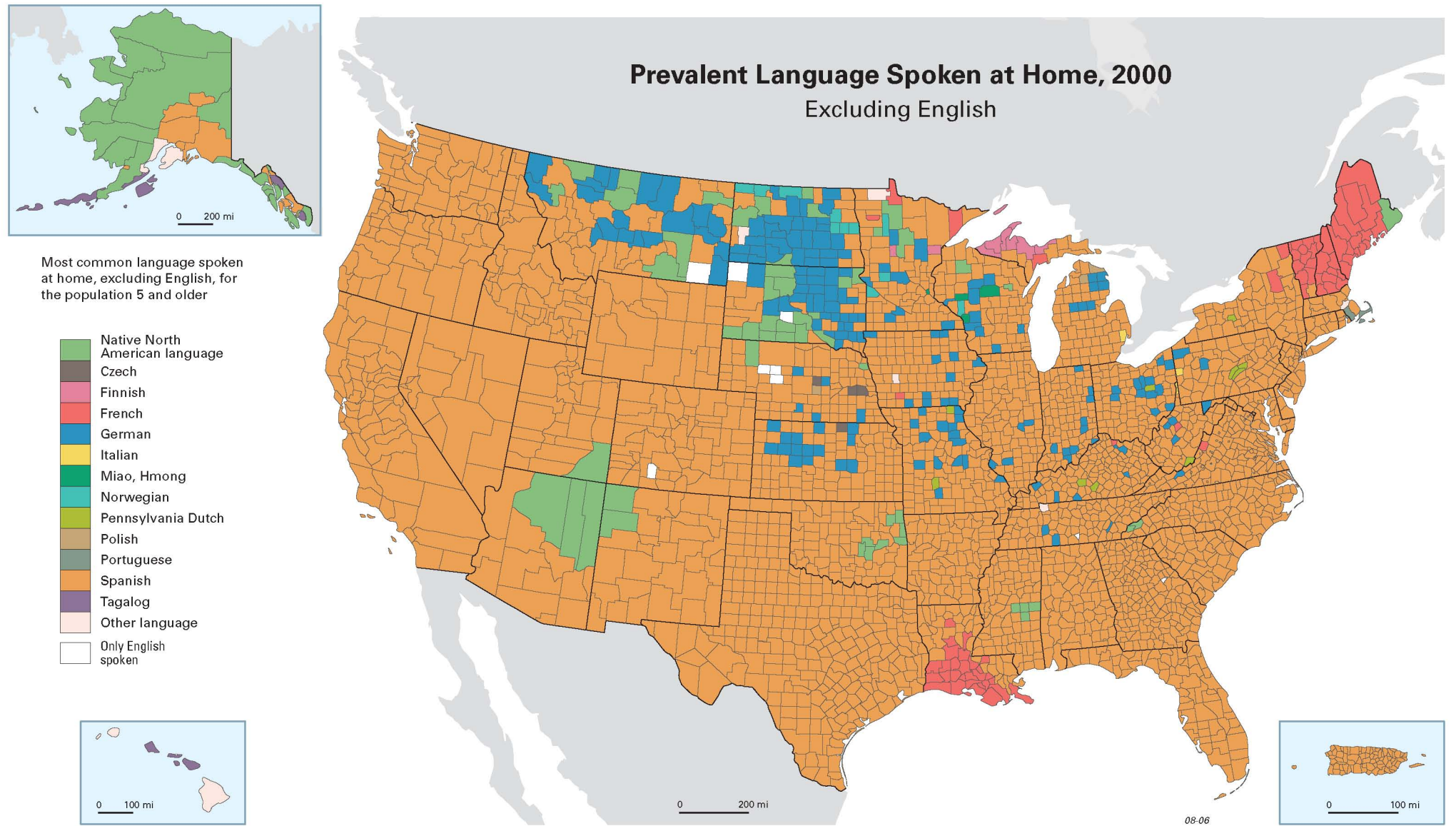
In 2000, many of the counties with a large percentage of their population speaking a language other than English at home stretched along the border with Mexico from the Gulf of Mexico to the Pacific Ocean. Many of these counties also had a large percentage of their population born outside the United States.

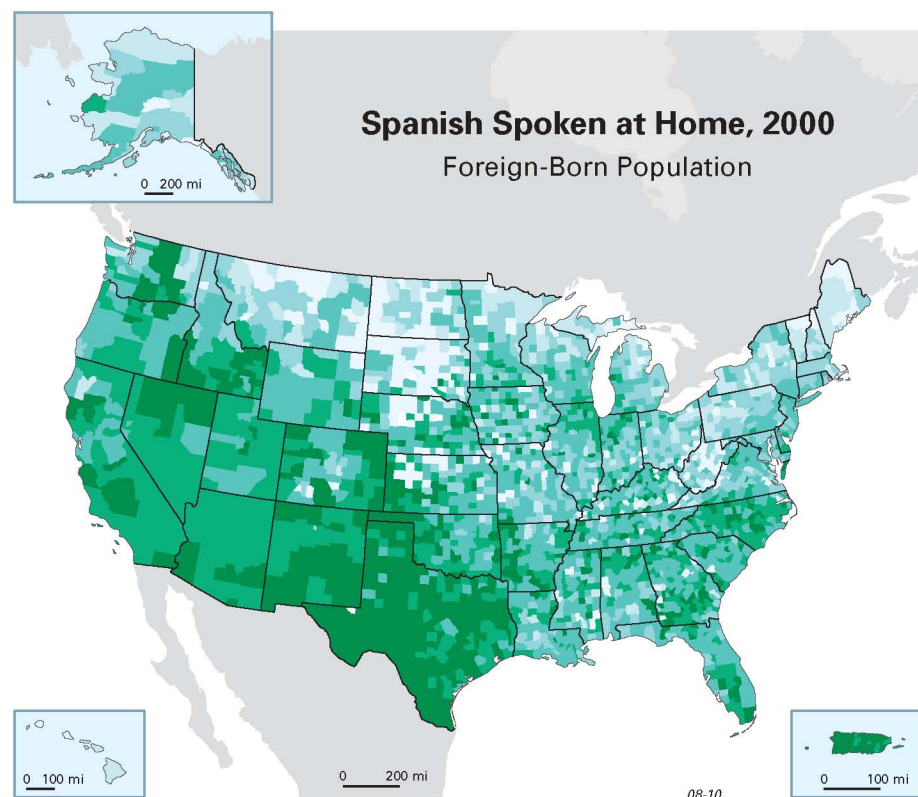
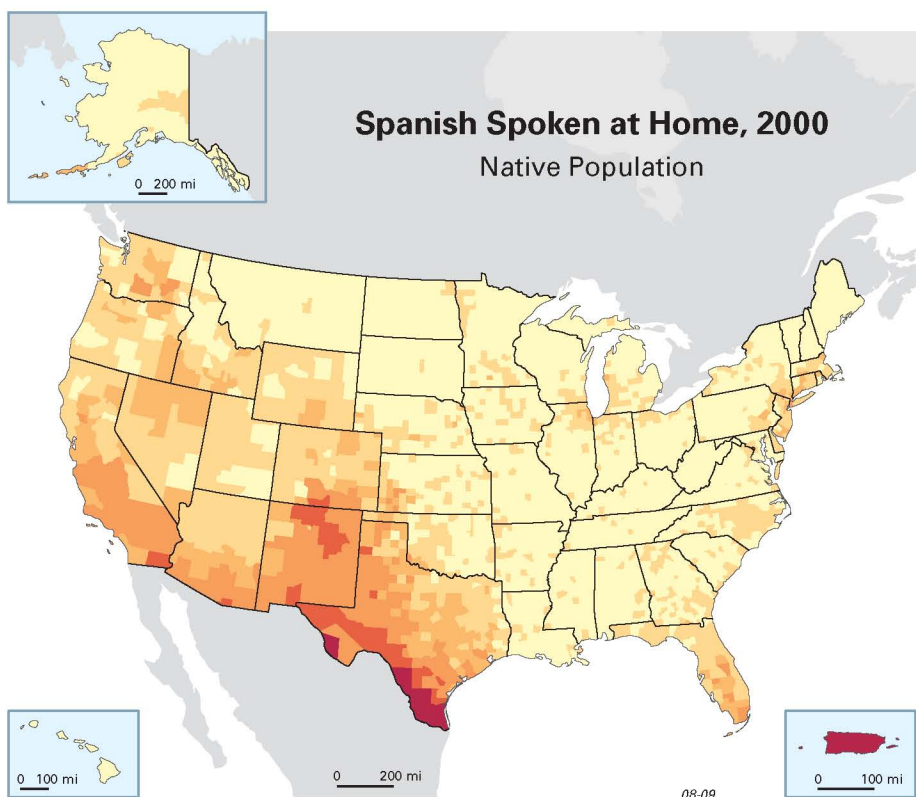
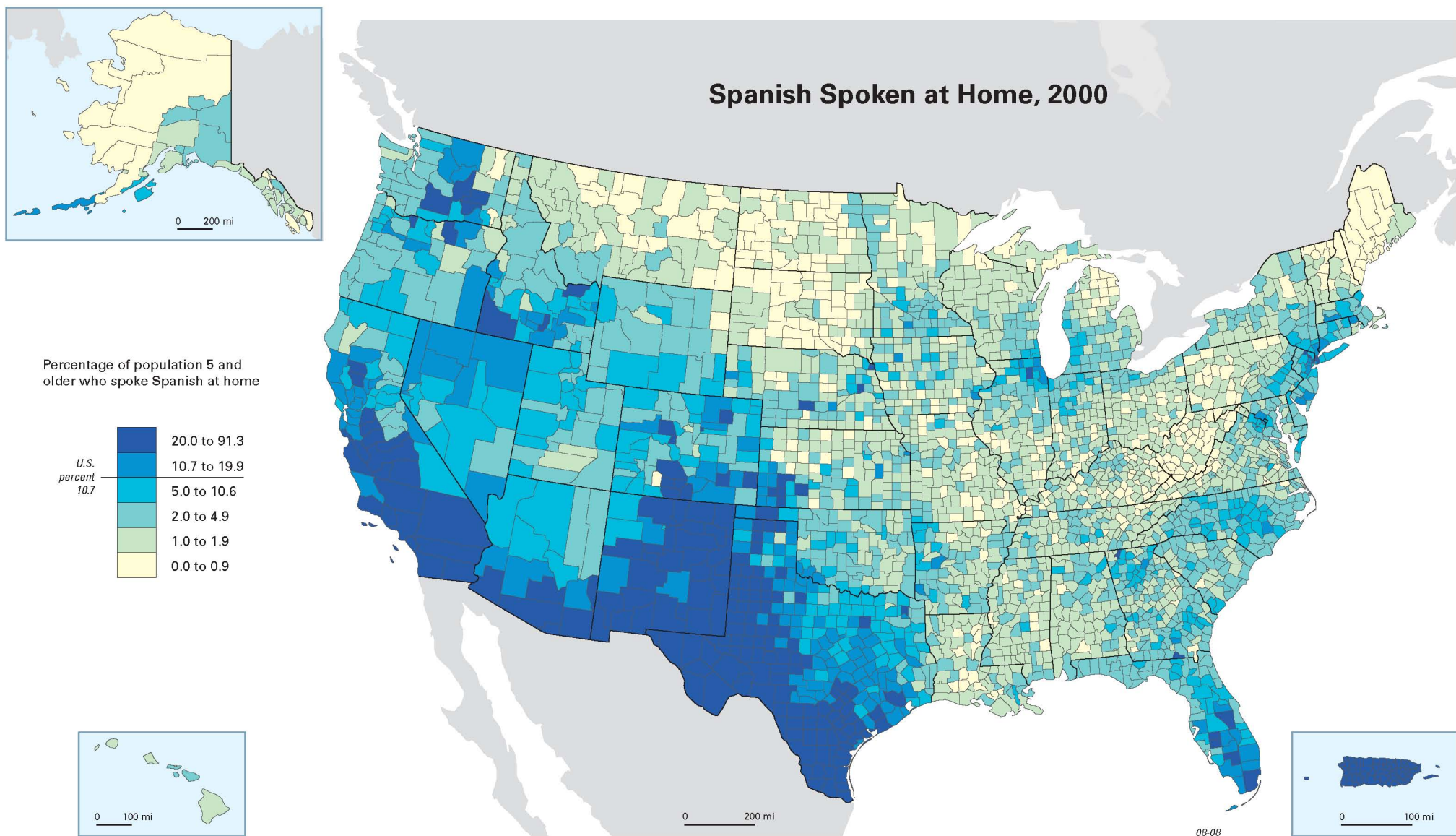
Outside the southwestern and western parts of the country, other areas—also with sizable foreign-born

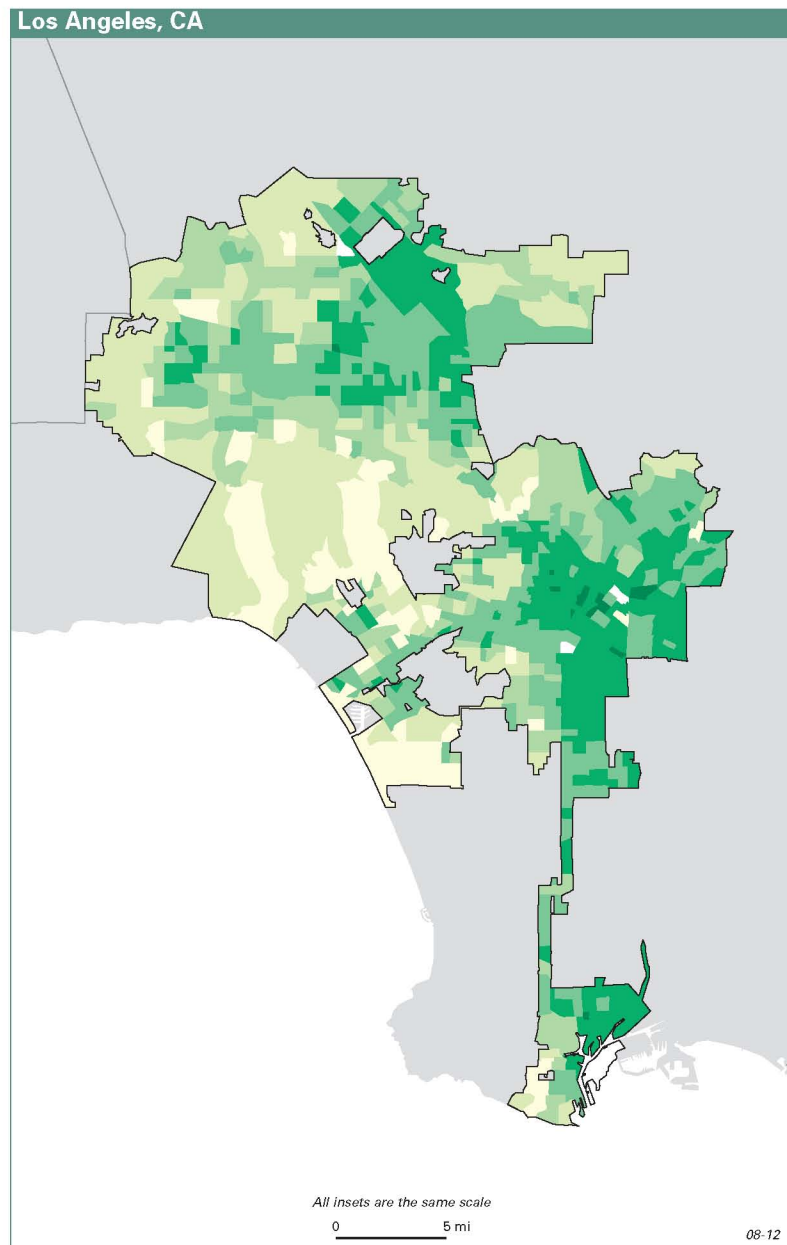
populations in 2000—had high proportions speaking a language other than English at home. These areas included counties in south Florida, the Boston to Washington metropolitan corridor, metropolitan Atlanta, and metropolitan Chicago.

Not all of the darker-shaded counties in the above map had large numbers of foreign-born residents. Some counties in Alaska, the rural Midwest, and the West

contained sizable American Indian and Alaska Native communities. Navajo speakers in the Navajo Nation Indian Reservation, spanning counties in Arizona and New Mexico, accounted for a large proportion of the population in those counties that spoke a language other than English at home. Several sparsely populated counties in North Dakota and South Dakota had high percentages of the native population that spoke German at home in 2000.

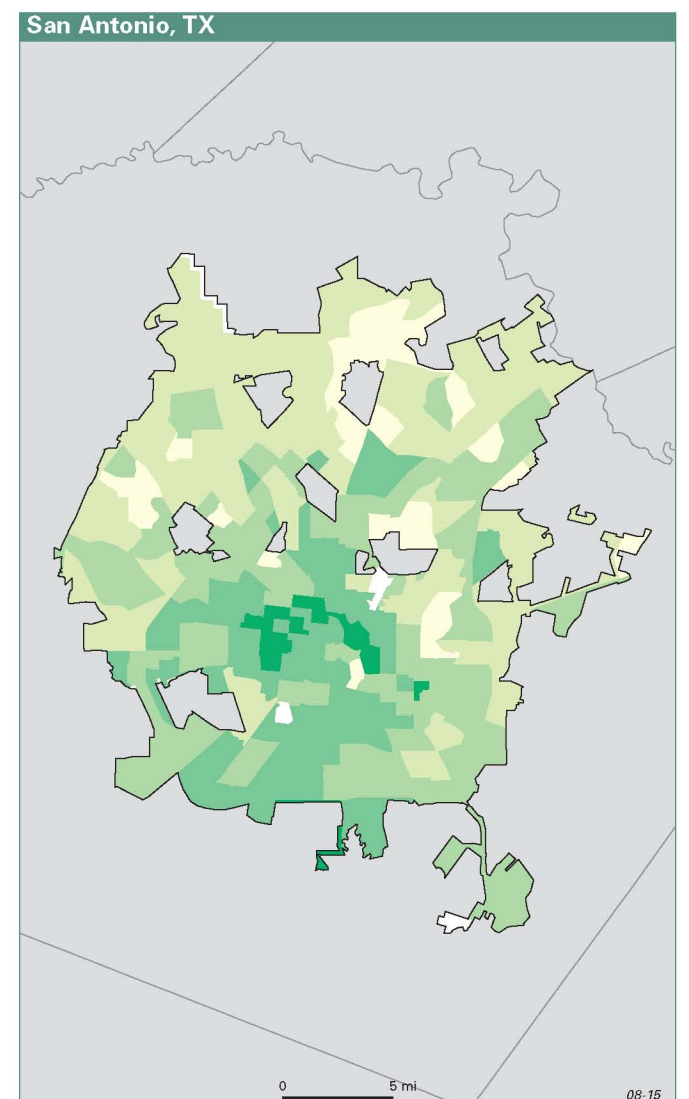
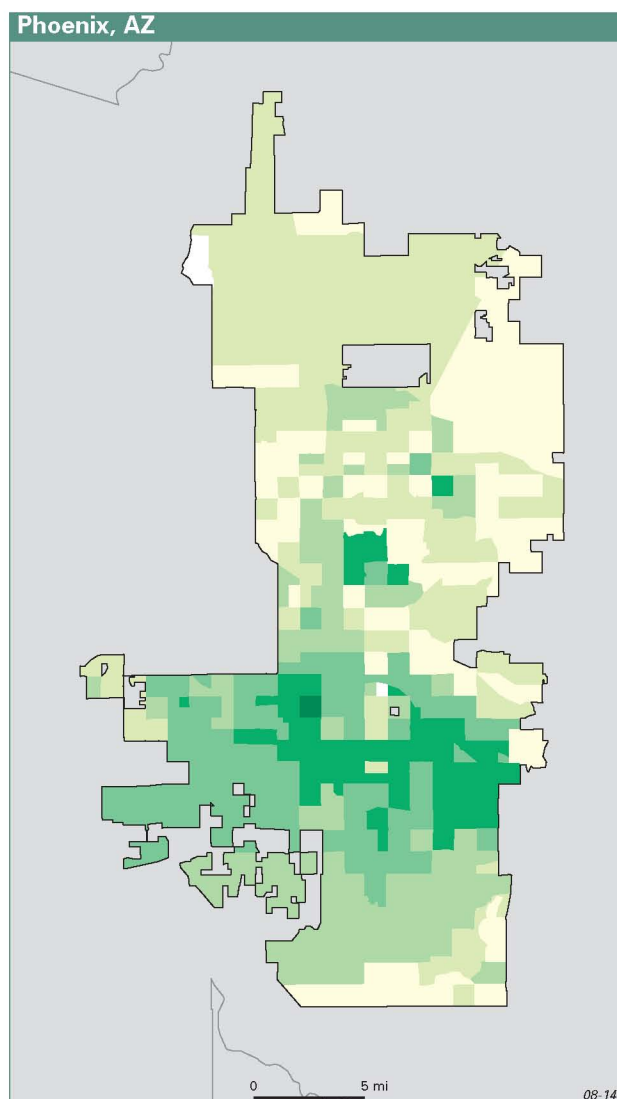
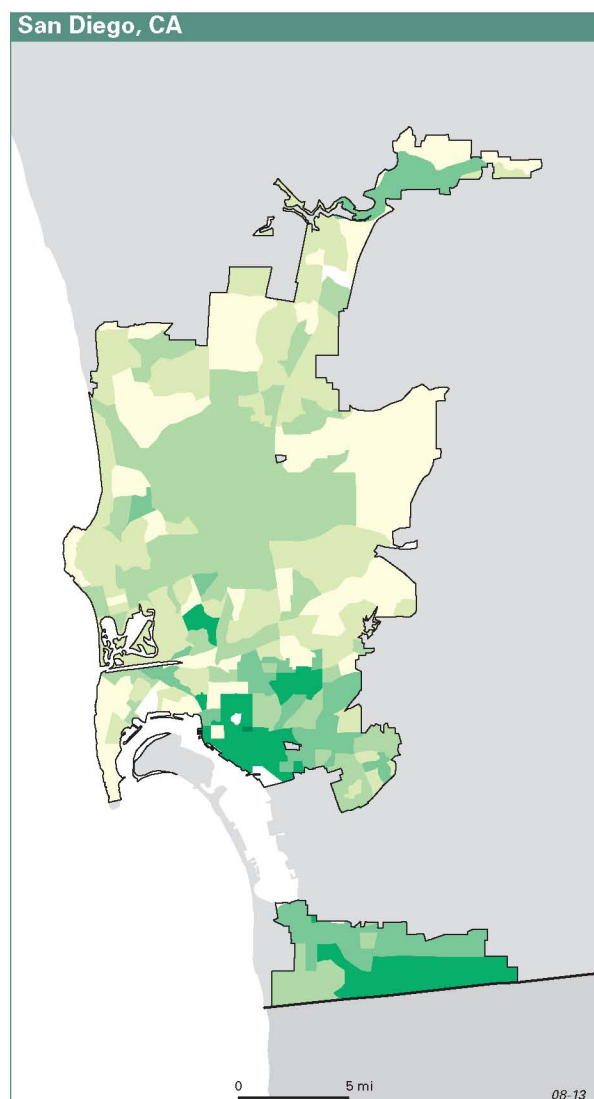
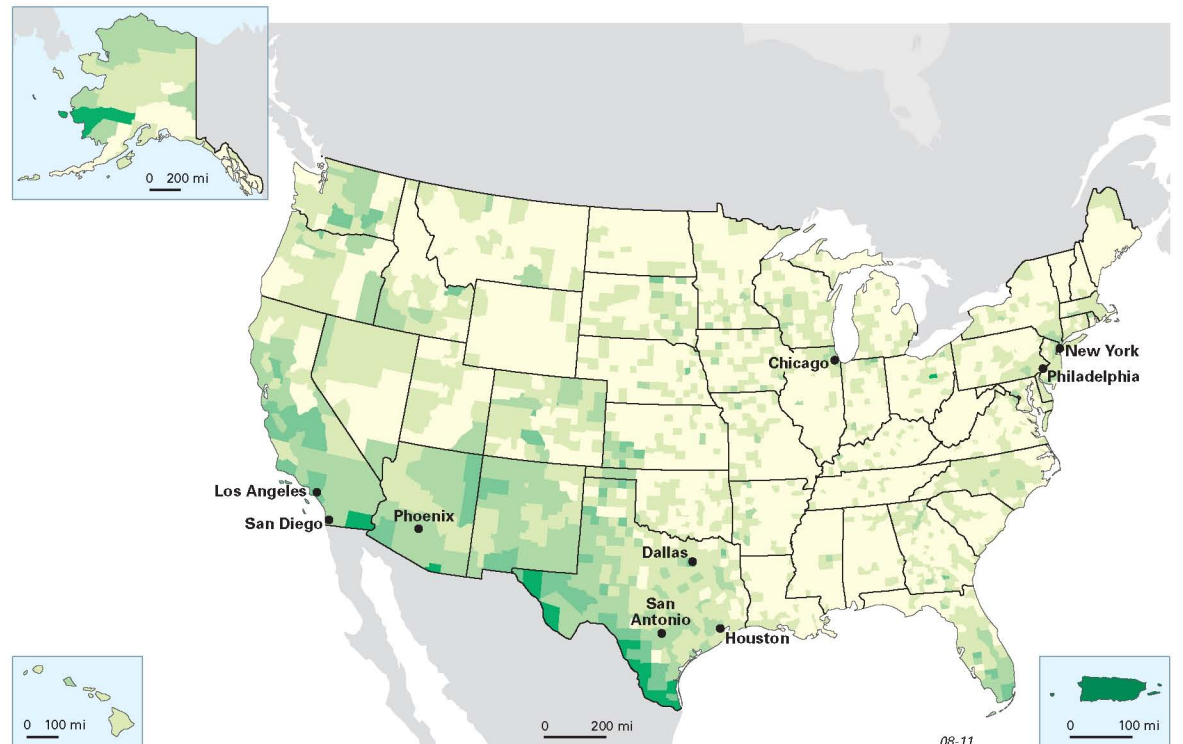
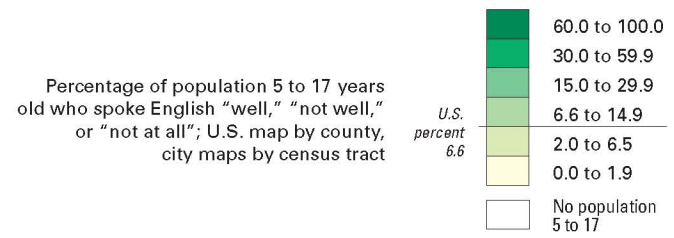






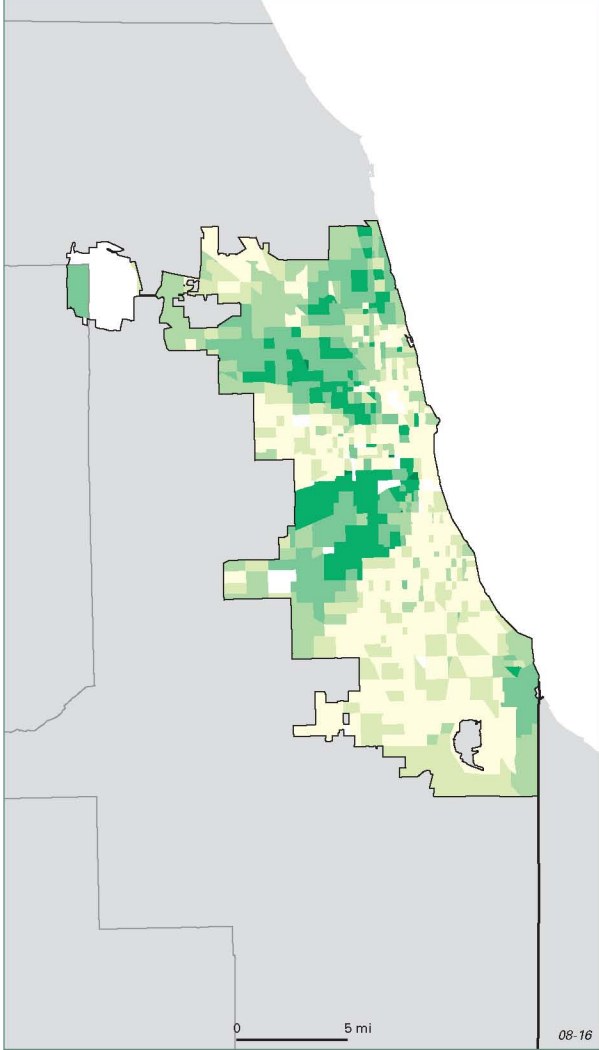
**Spoke English Less Than "Very Well," 2000**

**School-Age Population  
Largest Cities**

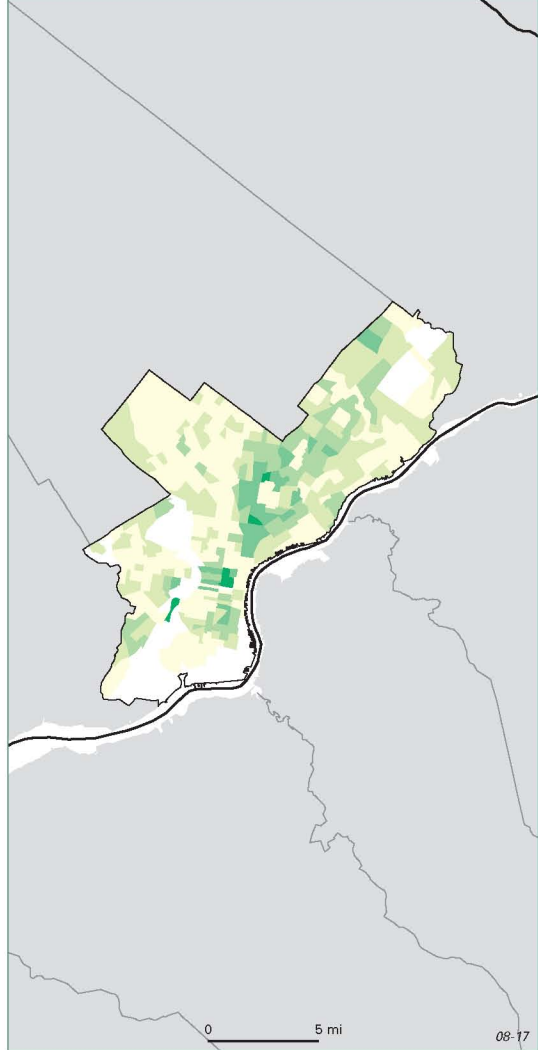




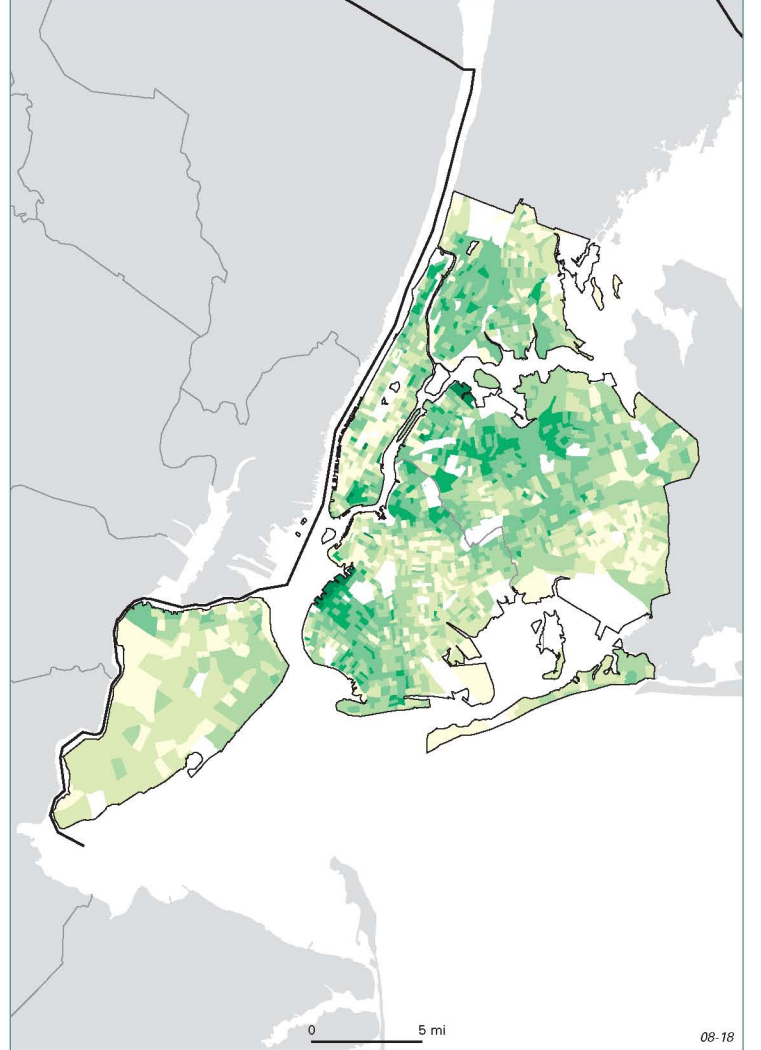
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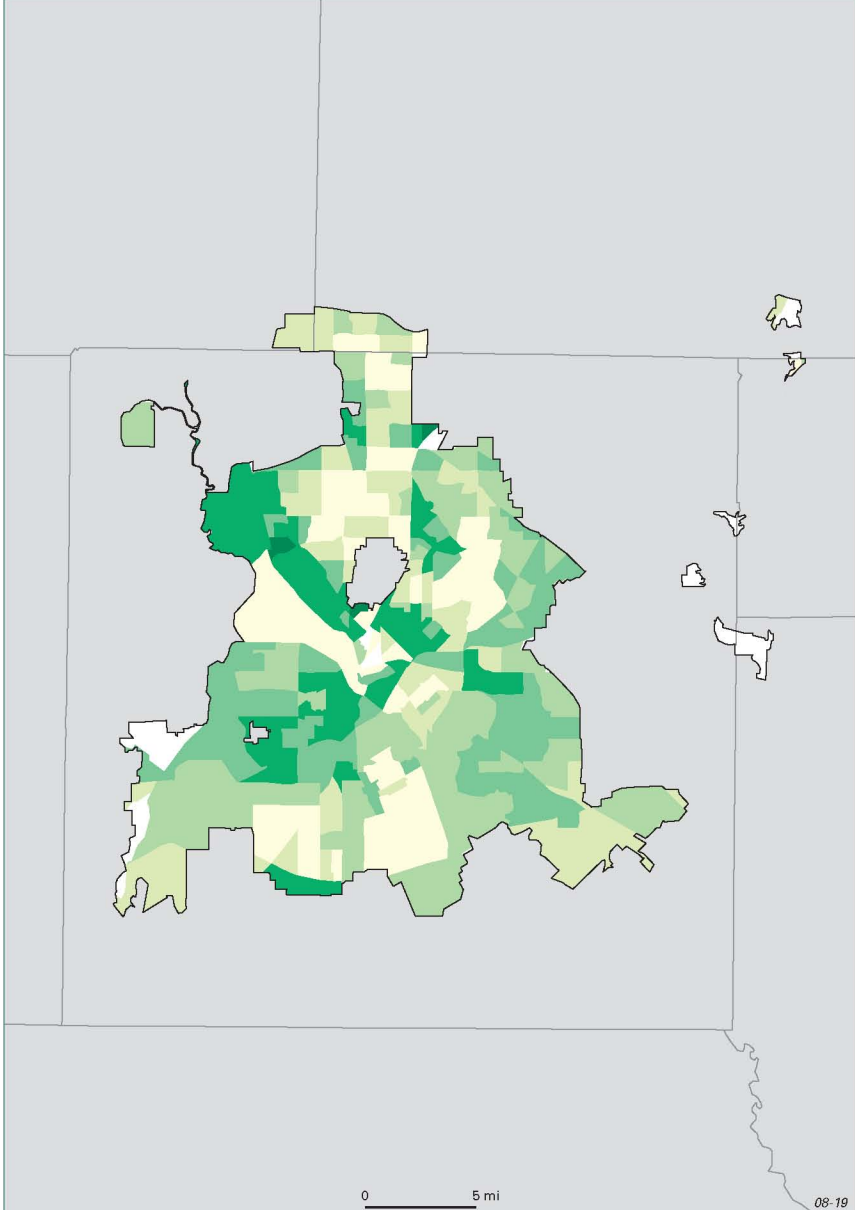
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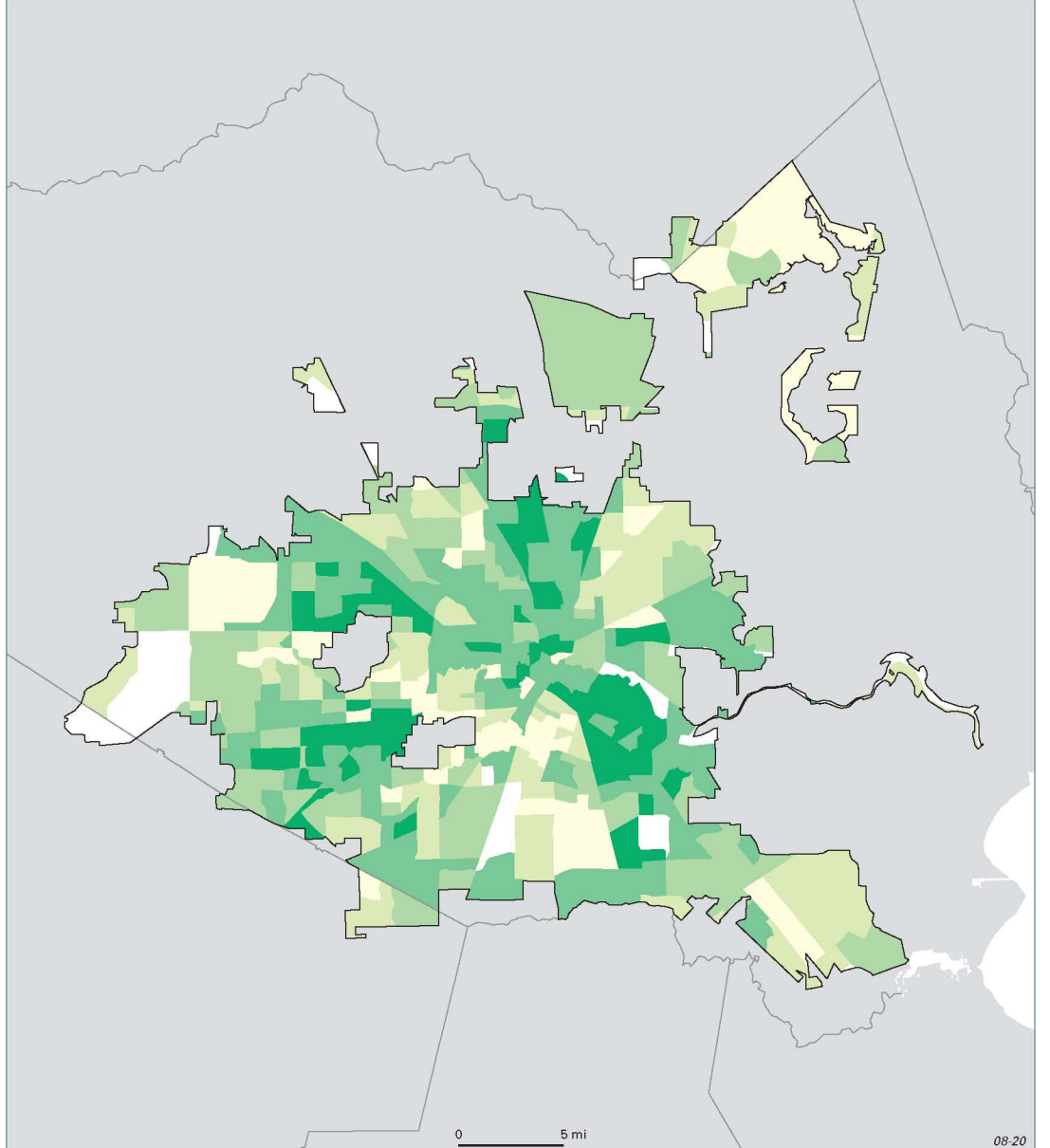
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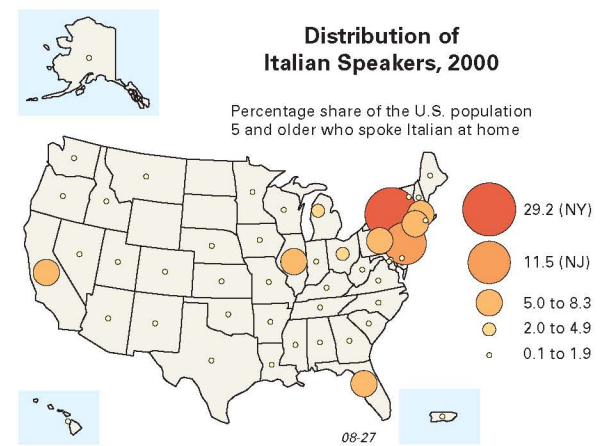
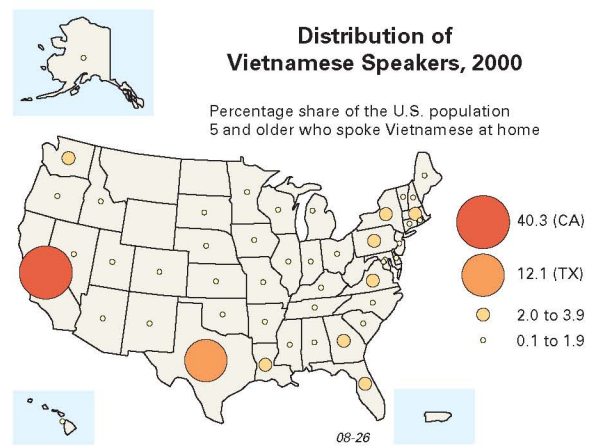
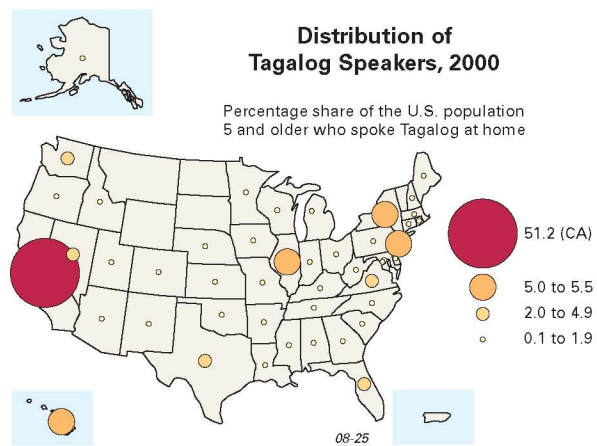
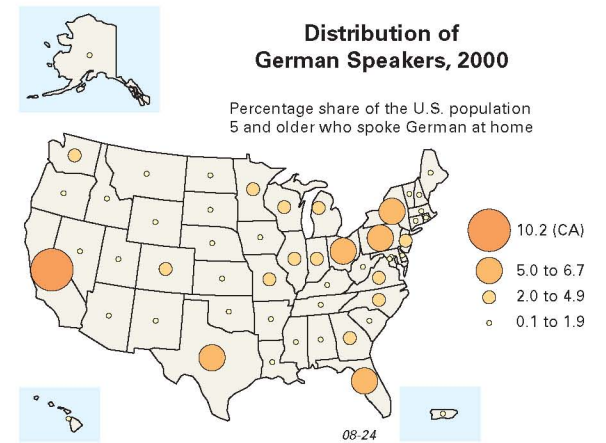
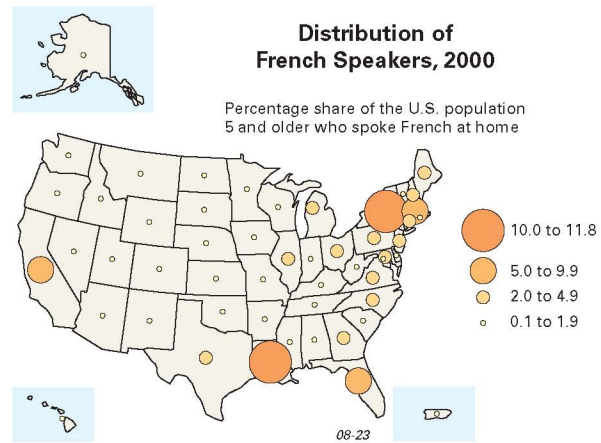
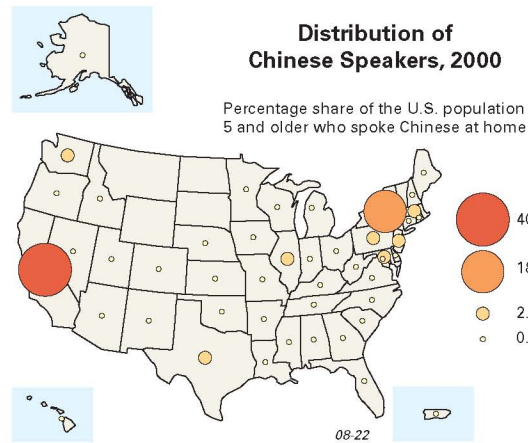
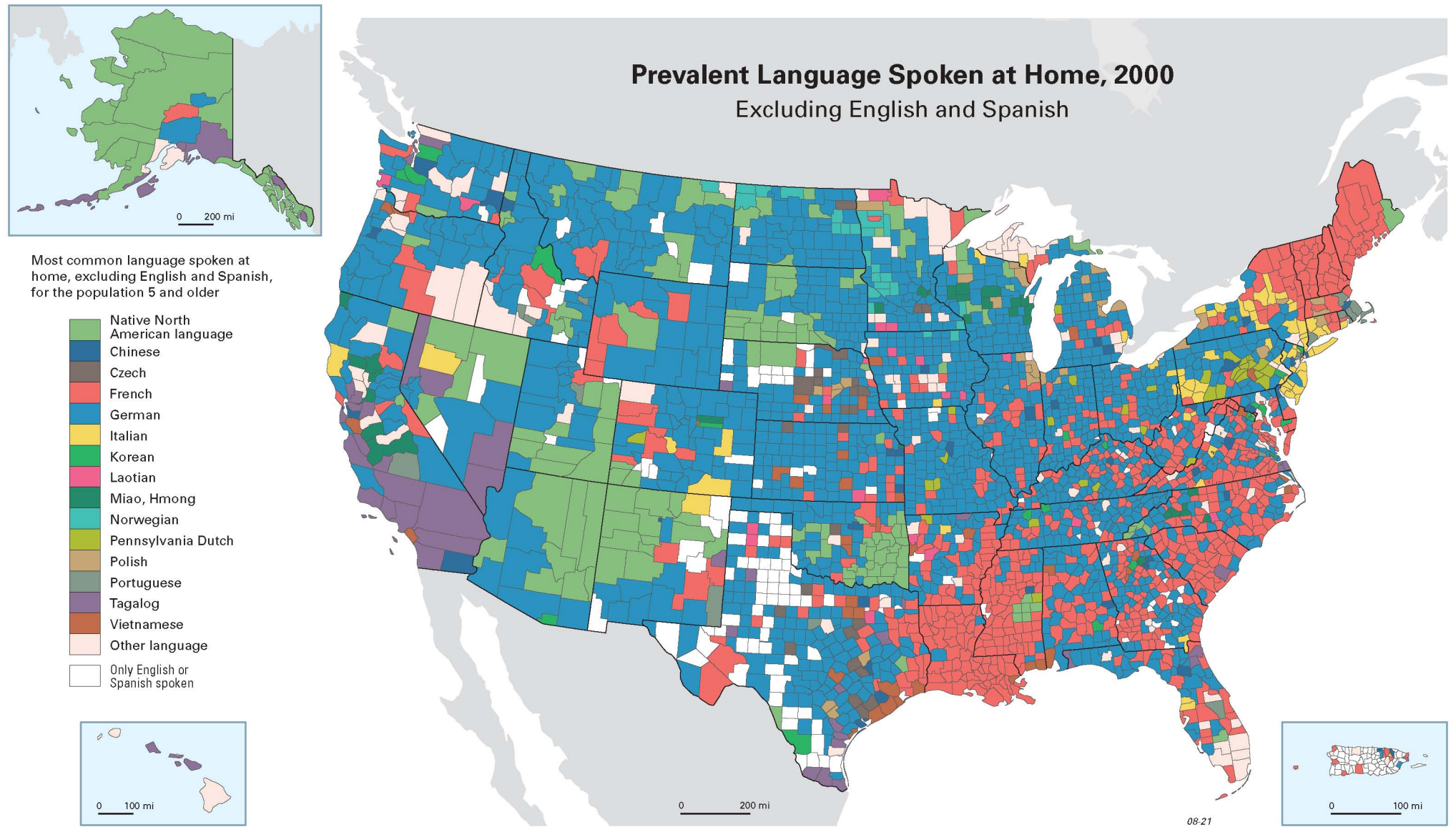


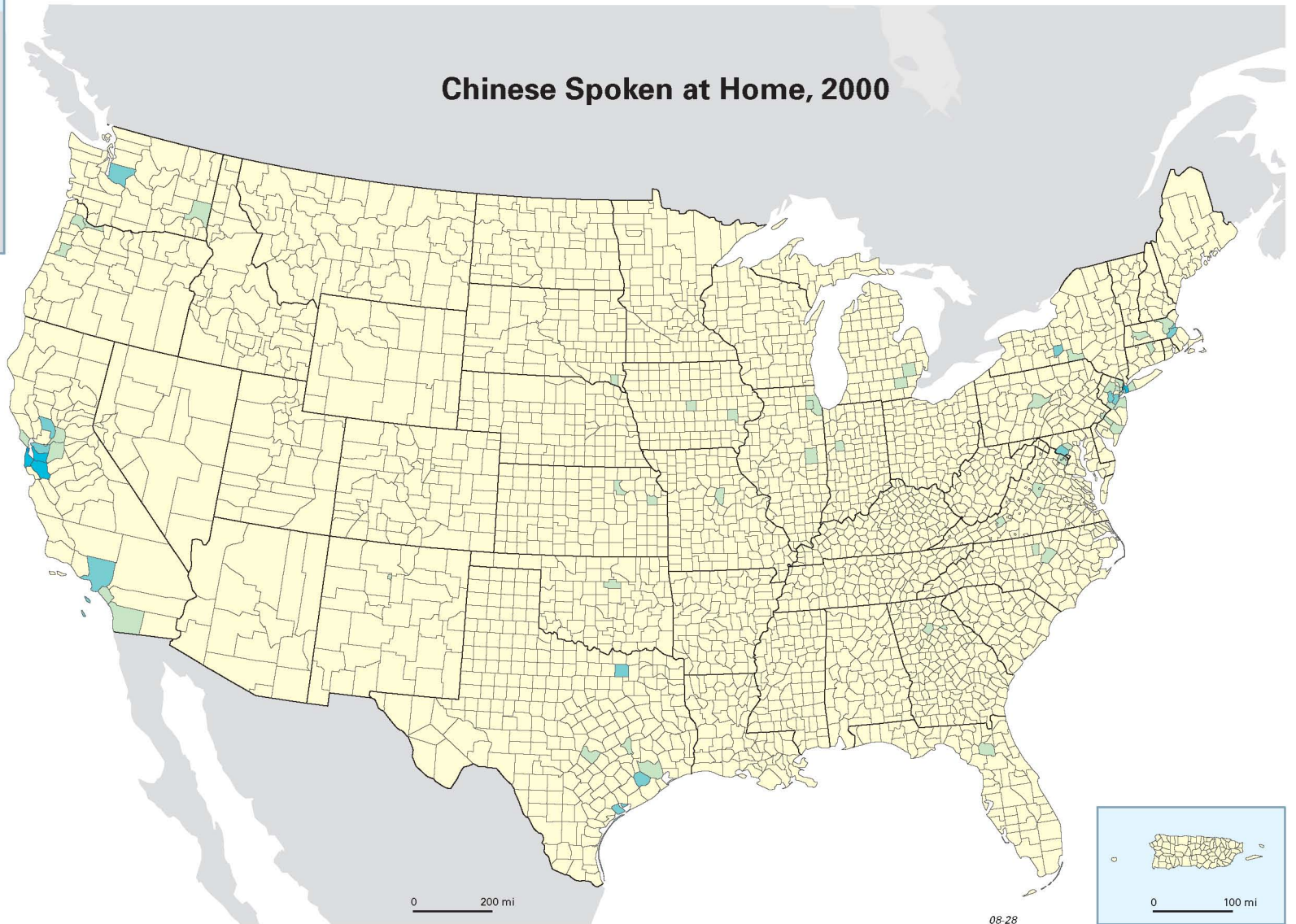
Dallas, TX



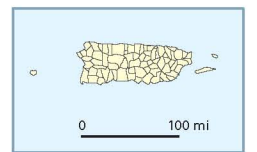
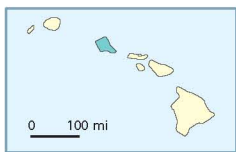
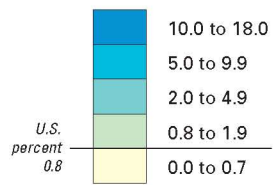
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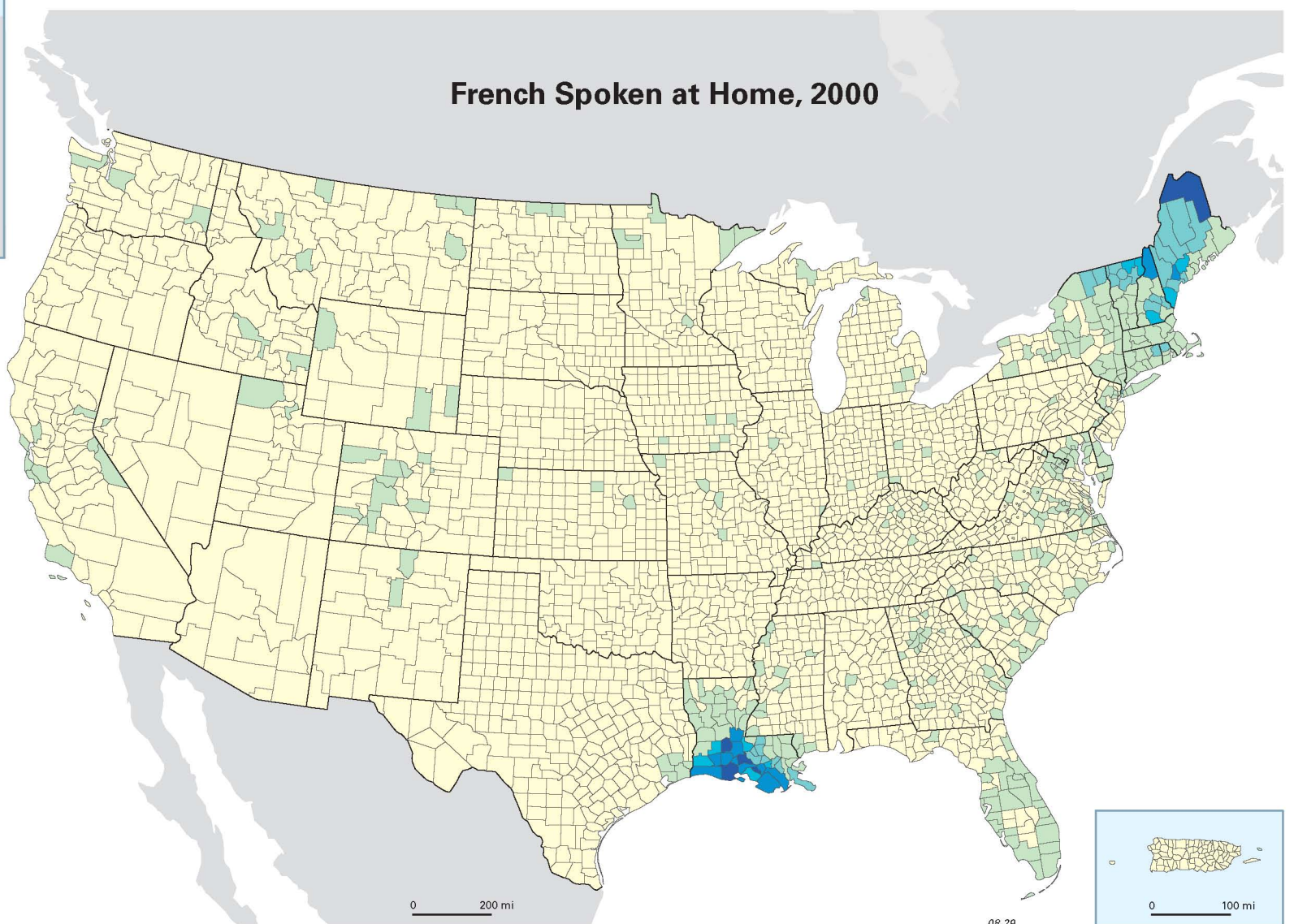
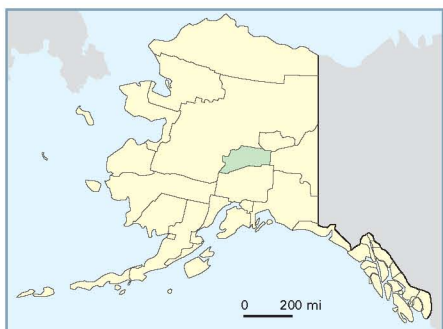




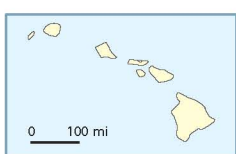
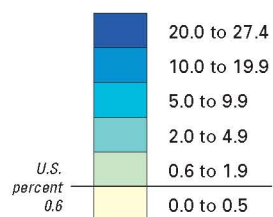
Percentage of population 5 and older who spoke Chinese at home



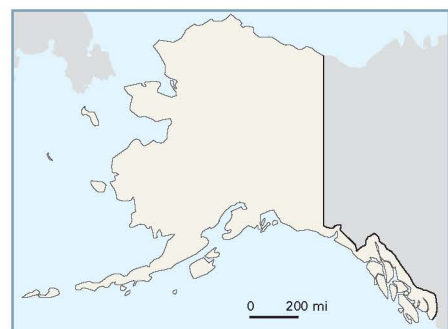
08-28



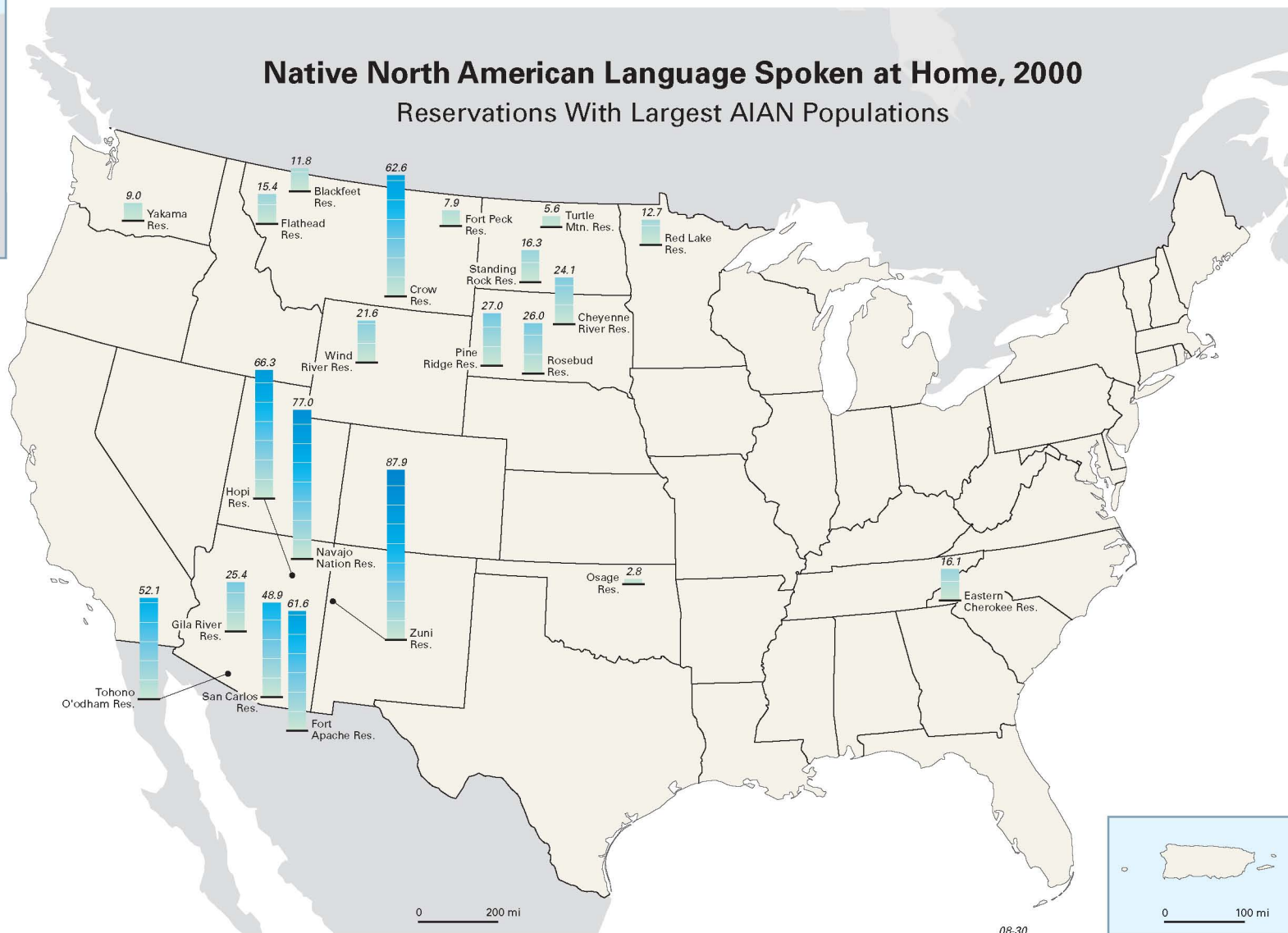
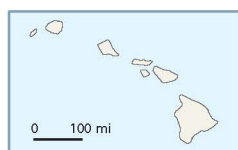
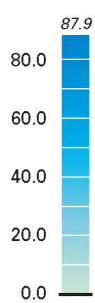
Percentage of population 5 and older who spoke French at home



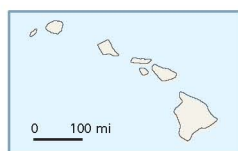
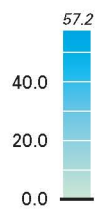
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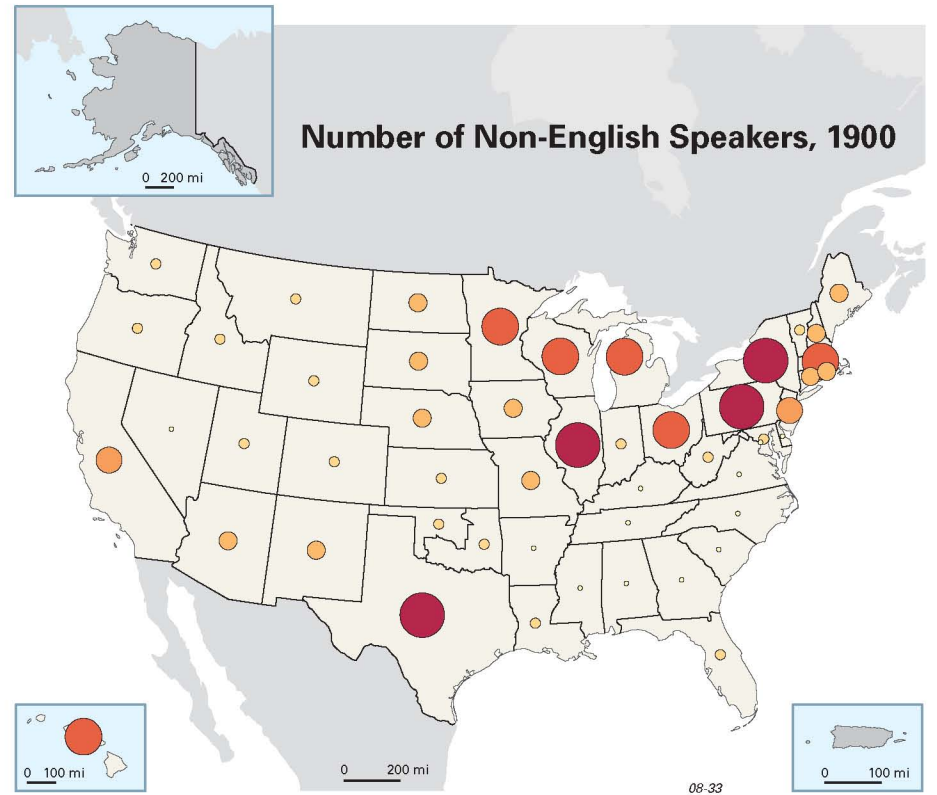
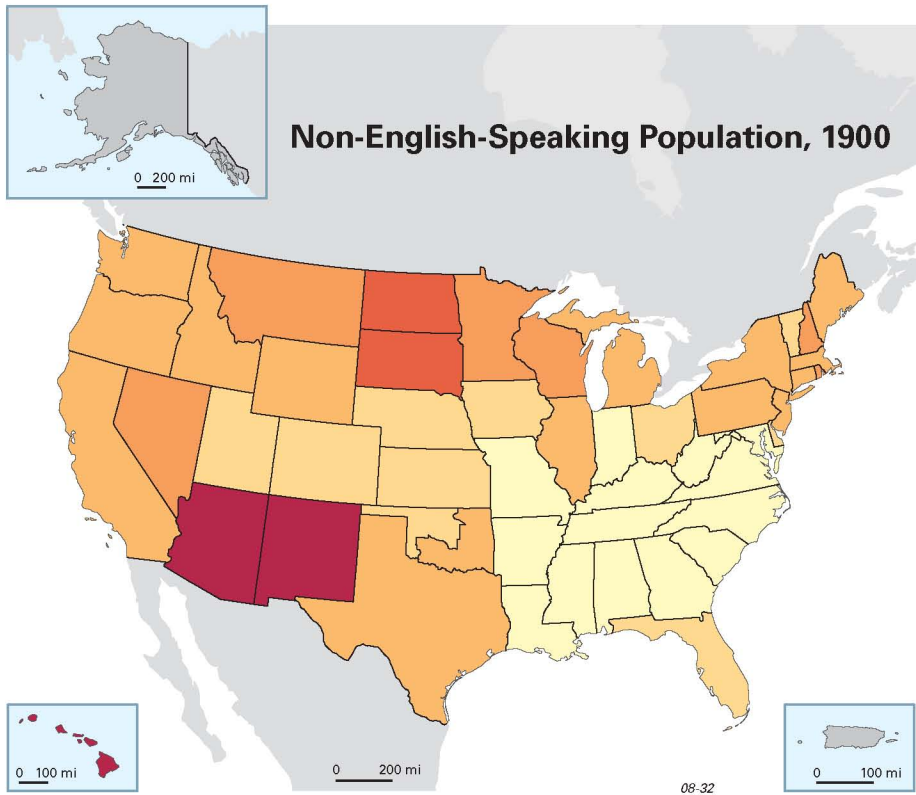


Percentage of American Indians and Alaska Natives 5 and older who spoke a native North American language at home

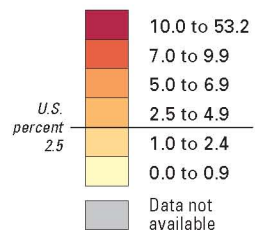


Percentage of American Indians and Alaska Natives 5 and older who spoke a native North American language at home

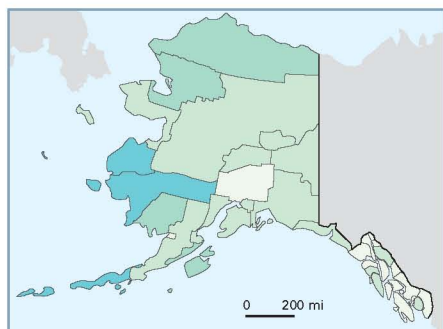
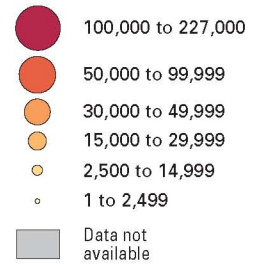




Percentage of population 10 and older unable to speak English well enough to be understood in ordinary conversation



Population 10 and older unable to speak English well enough to be understood in ordinary conversation



Percentage of population 5 and older who spoke English "well," "not well," or "not at all"

