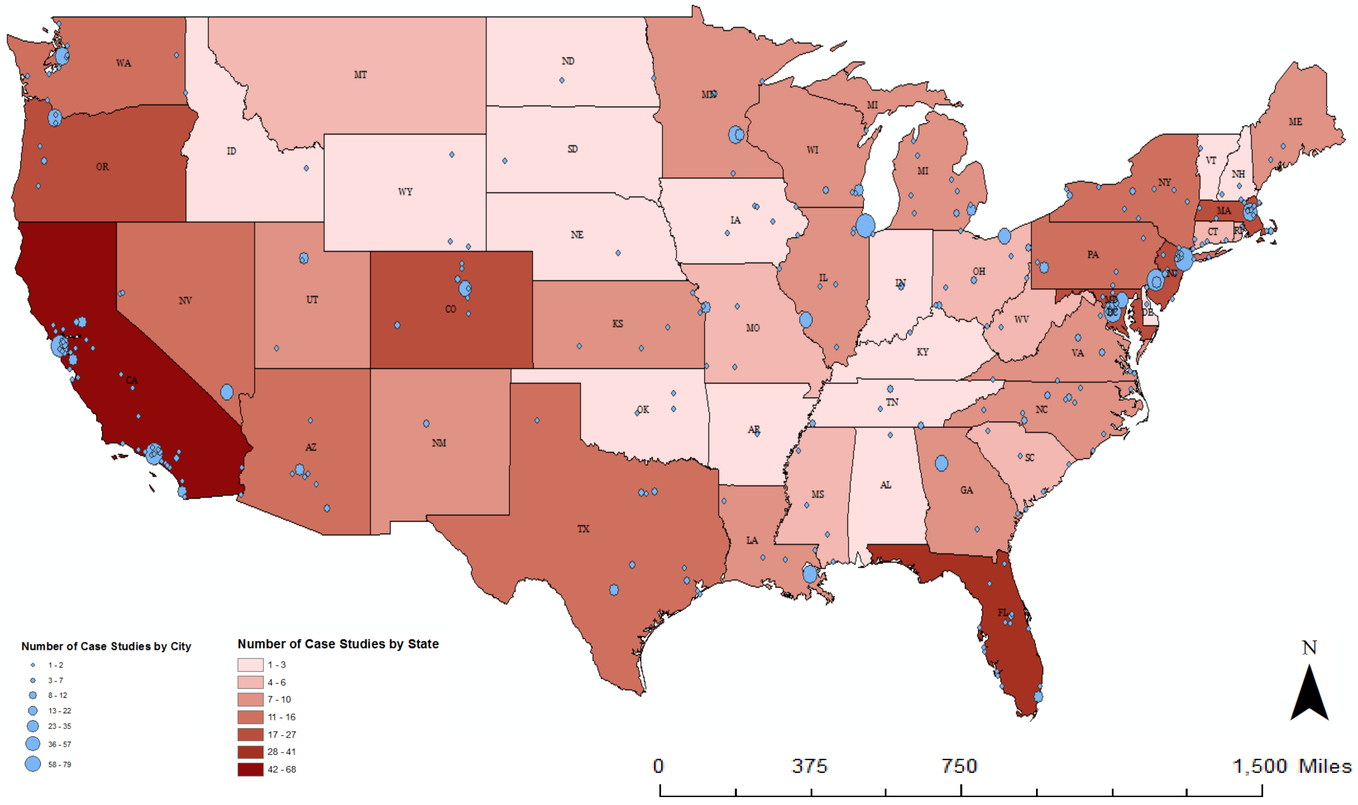
Geographic Distribution of Case Studies in Scholarly and Professional Planning Literature

Map 1. Geographic Distribution of Case Studies by City and State



Introduction

The planning profession has long lionized cities like San Francisco, California; Seattle, Washington; Portland, Oregon; and New York City as paragons for regional and urban planning. Implicitly, these are the touchstones to which all other cities tend to be measured. This professional and scholarly preoccupation with paradigmatic cities can be demonstrated by the frequency with which they appear in the planning literature. This preoccupation with paradigmatic cities is not problematic *per se*, except insofar as the obverse side — inattention — marginalizes other regions of the United States, such as the Midwest and Deep South. This mapping analysis is only a part of a much larger collaborative thesis project that explores the implications of this place-based bias both for the Deep South and professional planning, wherein I will argue that this exclusion, or blind spot, is a form of cultural incompetence and thus is an area for improvement to be addressed by the planning profession at large.

Place-based exclusion of the Deep South in urban planning can be extrapolated by the gaps and omissions visualized in the accompanying maps. In my preliminary research, including a literature review, I discovered the Deep South is, in fact, under-represented in the planning literature. Furthermore, it was discovered that there are two Southern cities that appear disproportionately: Atlanta, Georgia, and New Orleans, Louisiana. We posit that both of these cities can be considered outliers because attention received by New Orleans was precipitated by and predicated upon the disaster and recovery efforts presented by Hurricane Katrina, and Atlanta is, in many ways, only quasi-Southern in its built environment, even though it is one of the country's premiere cities for African-American culture. Atlanta is a large metropolitan area, and can be more justifiably compared to places such as Denver, Colorado, or Dallas, Texas, than it can be likened to other Southern cities. Thus, New Orleans and Atlanta might be considered outliers in that they are not representative of the urban experience in the Deep South as a whole. Likewise, in Mississippi, the majority of case studies were pre-eminently concerned with post-Katrina community planning.

Questions

The primary research question for this mapping analysis is as follows: does a meta-analysis of the American Planning Association's literature, both scholarly and professional, reveal a geographically based coverage bias? I hypothesize that the Deep South and Mid-West are both under-represented as regions in the scholarly and professional planning literature. My focus will be on the Deep South because of the population density of this region, where the Deep South is defined as Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee.

Methodology

Data were collected via a meta-analysis on eleven years of peer-reviewed articles in the *Journal of American Planning Association*, *Planning Magazine* and *The Journal of Planning History* (approximately 350 issues, and over 1,100 articles). *The Journal of Planning History* was selected for the meta-analysis because I theorized that the halcyon period of the South's urban environment is mostly historical, dating to the pre-interstate streetcar era, and would therefore be more likely to appear in a journal devoted to planning history. For the purposes of this meta-analysis, international locations were elided. Data management was conducted according to a coding system inputting a binary or dichotomous data type on which statistical analysis can be performed: "yes/no" for inclusion of Southern locations in the publication. In the coding scheme, 1=yes, and 2=no. The primary research variable of interest is geographic location, measured in terms of city and state. The geographic unit of analysis was set at the national level, though I will be focusing on the regional scale. Secondarily, I'm also particularly interested in metropolitan areas such as Portland, San Francisco, Los Angeles and New York City, as well as states such as Oregon and California that are arguably over-represented in the literature.

First, a city-state address locator was created to geocode the tabular data collected in the Excel worksheets for each meta-analyzed journal. After the worksheets were geocoded with a customized address locator, they were joined to a geographic reference layer (spatially joined to relate the data points to a city point or state centroid points in each state polygon). This not only allowed me to sum the number of studies or articles per city or state, but enabled me to attach demographic data to each city point. For simplicity, Alaska and Hawaii were omitted from the mapping. Because the city was the principal geographic unit of analysis, Maps 2-4 do not visualize the state level data from the meta-analysis. The maps herein were generated by aggregating the data points for all of the meta-analyzed journals. It should be clarified here that "case studies by city" refers to any case studies in which the city or metropolitan area was the geographic unit of interest for the researcher, whereas "case studies by state" refers to case studies in which the state as a whole was the geographic unit of interest for the researcher. Because of the inherent limitations of GIS, the final thesis, projected to be defended in the spring semester of 2013, will include qualitative methods and a more rigorous descriptive and inferential statistical analysis of the data generated from the meta-analysis and thereby a more nuanced view of place-based bias in the literature. For example, he only case studies that focused on Alabama were two scholarly articles about urban renewal and highway building in Huntsville, which were published in *The Journal of Planning History* and authored by an undergraduate at the University of Alabama, Birmingham; effectively, not a single contemporary case study was performed in the professional planning literature that addressed Alabama.

- **Map 1** illustrates the geographic distribution of case studies by city and by state. With a few exceptions in the Midwest, Rust Belt and the Southeastern United States, the distribution of case studies in the scholarly and professional planning literature is delimited to the East and West Coasts.
- **Map 2** illustrates the geographic distribution of case studies by city overlayed against population density by county. While the Midwest and Mountain West are also under-represented in the literature, those regions do not have populations densities comparable to the Deep South.
- **Map 3** illustrates the geographic distribution of case studies by city overlayed against the percent of white population by census tract. At the national scale, case studies tend to be performed in majority white regions.
- **Map 4** illustrates the geographic distribution of case studies by city overlayed against the percent of black population by census tract. As above, case studies tend to be performed in non-black regions.
- **Figure 1.** Depicts percent of case studies in Deep South vs. elsewhere. Statistically, the Deep South is under-represented as a region, comprising only 7% of all case studies, including outliers Atlanta and New Orleans.
- **Figure 2.** Depicts the land area of the states most represented (New York, California, and Oregon) by number of case studies conducted the versus national total land area.
- **Figure 3.** Depicts the number of Deep South metropolitan level case studies by state versus national total.

Conclusion

While I do not purport to explain this regional editorial omission, a task more germane to the techniques and methods of social psychology and media studies, I have essayed to demonstrate its existence using qualitative and quantitative methodologies familiar to professional planners. The myriad causes of this place-based bias cannot be addressed within the scope of this mapping analysis, but it might be conjectured that the state legislative frameworks in the Deep South are influential. For example, Oregon and California receive inordinate coverage for best practices and case studies in part because the state legislatures mandate planning efforts. Moreover, public process in states like Oregon is more rigorous than in most Deep South states and data access is influenced by both public demand and federal and state funding. Planners in Deep South states have fewer resources available in the scholarly and professional literature to inform their professional development. In a needs-based assessment apropos of urban planning, Deep South states would necessitate more coverage, professional attention and funding than they currently receive. Other states and municipalities nationwide with similar government structures and general concerns lack the resources to be effective planners. Ultimately, coverage begets more attention from both the literature and government in an iterative process that is functionally a self-fulfilling prophecy that proliferates both the present urban conditions in the Deep South as well as a persistent cultural incompetency within urban planning literature and practice alike.

As the aforementioned maps reveal, there is a salient place-based bias against the Deep South. Future thesis research will investigate correlations between representation in the scholarly and professional planning literature and various demographic criteria of diversity such as income and educational attainment. Proximity to academic institutions with accredited planning programs will also be used as a predictive variable. The omission of a densely populated region of the country from the scholarly and professional planning literature is a form of cultural incompetency that denies a region representation. Based on the mapping results, I further hypothesize a correlation between the number of case studies and race in a sort of axiomatic summary: "With the exception of Atlanta and New Orleans, the whiter the region, the more likely it is to be studied by scholars and professional planners." A statistical and cartographic analysis of the distribution of case studies along the urban -rural continuum might be advantageous for revealing correlations between representation and the nature of the built environment. The Black Belt region of the Southeastern United States — historically the most impoverished and disenfranchised region — is almost entirely absent from the literature. Because disaggregated data points will produce profoundly different visualizations, future maps will include geographic distributions of case studies per city and state for each journal individually, which will create a very different narrative.

Figure 1. Percent of Case Studies in Deep South

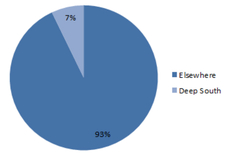


Figure 2. Most Represented States in Case Studies

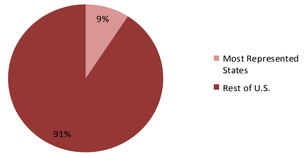
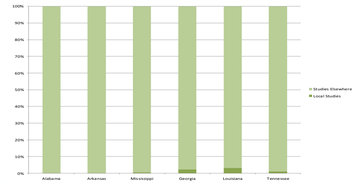
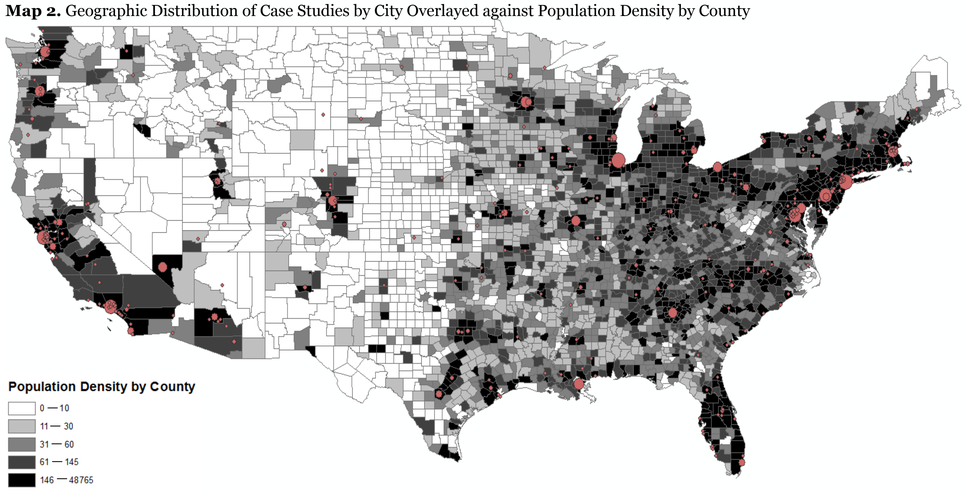


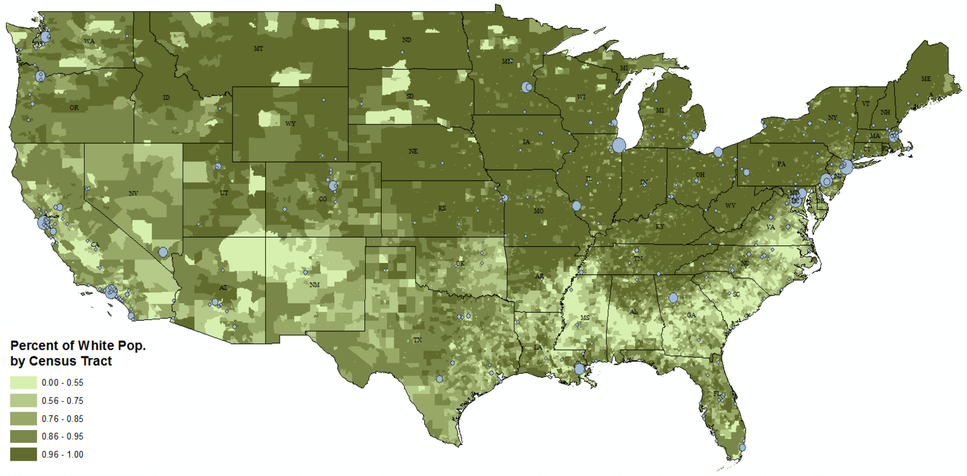
Figure 3. Deep South Case Studies as a Percent of Total



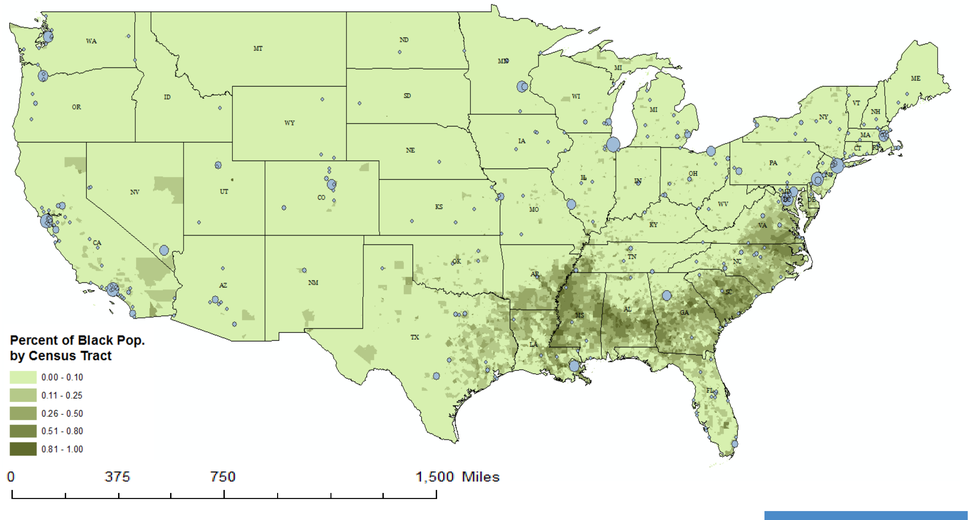
Map 2. Geographic Distribution of Case Studies by City Overlayed against Population Density by County



Map 3. Geographic Distribution of Case Studies by City Overlayed against Percent of White Population by Census Tract



Map 4. Geographic Distribution of Case Studies by City Overlayed against Percent of Black Population by Census Tract



Sources: Demographic Data from the 2010 US Census, 12/2012. Meta-analysis data generated by Amos Wright & Jaclyn DeVore, 10/2012.

Cartographer: Amos Wright, 05 December 2012. Projected Coordinate System: GCS_WGS_1984

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