
POPULATION AND SOCIAL GEOGRAPHY

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Illinois often is perceived as divided into two fundamental regions: the six-county Chicago metropolitan area and the remaining 96-county "downstate" region. The latter is predominantly agricultural but spotted with an irregular geometry of cities and industrial clusters. Although more extensive than the Chicago metropolitan area, the downstate region accounts for only one-third of the state's population. Nevertheless, it is impossible to subdivide the state into two regions with a better balance of area and population without fragmenting the Chicago area. This initial dichotomy, however, may be a gross oversimplification.

While the Chicago metropolitan area dominates the state's population numbers, an examination of Illinois' population distribution shows three urban concentrations:

1. Metropolitan Chicago with extensions to the west to Rockford and south to Kankakee;
2. Metro East, the Illinois portion of the St. Louis metropolitan area; and
3. an interrupted zone from Champaign-Urbana to the Quad Cities that also includes Peoria, Bloomington-Normal, Springfield, and Decatur (Figure 5-1).

This suggests a Von Thünen-like economic pattern. With reference to goods and services, the centers of distribution at the northeast and southwest ends of the state may be too distant to fully serve the more sparsely-settled and areally-extensive intermediate territory. Thus, a zone of secondary centers trending northwest-southeast, and occupying a spatially-central position between the two larger nodes, has developed. This intervening urban corridor provides a tolerable location for the distribution of goods when the locations of the two primary nodes are beyond economically viable distances.

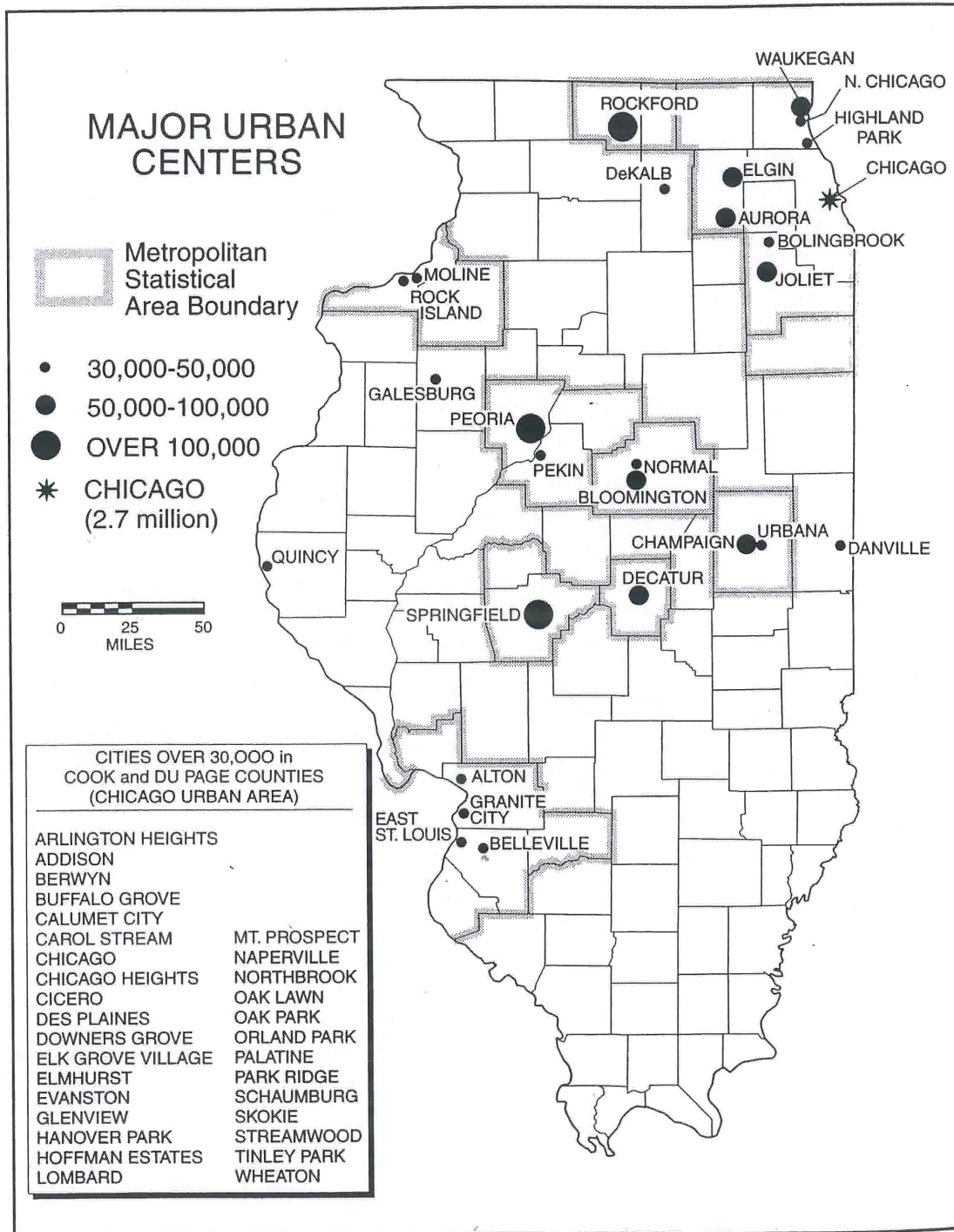


FIGURE 5-1. Major urban centers and metropolitan statistical areas.

TABLE 5-1. Populations of Illinois and Neighboring States

State	1990 Population (in thousands)	Percent change 1970-80	Percent change 1980-90	Area (mi. ²)	Percent urban	Nonmetropolitan population (in thousands)
Illinois	11,431	2.8	0.0	55,930	84.6	1981
Michigan	9,295	4.3	0.4	57,019	70.5	1850
Indiana	5,544	5.7	1.0	36,185	64.9	1748
Kentucky	3,685	13.7	0.7	29,863	51.8	1971
Missouri	5,117	5.1	4.1	69,138	68.7	1730
Iowa	2,777	3.1	-4.7	56,032	60.6	1554
Wisconsin	4,892	6.5	4.0	54,705	65.7	1593

Trends are commonly cyclical, often with numerous positive and negative swings and this is reflected in Illinois' population. During the 1970s, the state's population increased steadily and by approximately 300,000 or 2.8 percent. The 1980s experienced the beginning of an economic slowdown in the Midwest, with population decreasing in Illinois until 1986 when it reached a low of less than 11.4 million. Subsequently an economic recovery spread to the Midwest and the state's population again increased and reached a level in April 1990, when the census was taken, of nearly 5,000 more people than in 1980. Illinois thus escaped the distinction of having lost population from one decennial census to the next. In this regard it is fortunate that the official headcounts are not conducted every five years. In sum, over the interval between 1970 and 1990, the population of the state was generally stable with periods of only modest growth.

In this chapter we will highlight demographic differences within the state by county-level examinations of the principal dimensions of the population. Before we begin the discussion of internal patterns, a short overview of the contrasts between Illinois and its neighboring states is presented. This provides a basis for analysis of Illinois that follows.

COMPARISONS WITH NEIGHBORING STATES

With Chicago dominating its urban structure, Illinois is clearly unique in the Midwest. In contrast to its neighboring states, Illinois has the highest percentage of its population in urban areas (Table 5-1). On the other hand, the nonmetropolitan populations of Illinois and neighboring states are remarkably similar. The Von Thünen model would suggest that the rural population density should decline with increasing distance from the dominant regional market, Chicago. While this is true in Illinois and Iowa, the nonmetropolitan population of Kentucky approximates that of Illinois even though Kentucky has a much smaller area (Table 5-1).

The general population growth in the Midwest also is rather similar from state to state. The decennial data indicate modest but declining population increases over the last 20 years (Table 5-1). Additionally, each of the states had a higher growth rate in the 1970s than in the 1980s; Iowa even registered a loss in the 1980s. None of the states kept pace with the national average, an increase of 9.8 percent in the 1980s.



FIGURE 5-2. Both old and new skyscrapers in Chicago are testimony to the city's continuing dominance of the population and economic structure of Illinois. (Courtesy Illinois Office of Tourism.)

TABLE 5-2. Population Characteristics of Illinois and Neighboring States

State	Median Age	Age 65+	Age <18	Percent Latino	Percent Foreign Born	Percent w/Bachelor Degree	Percent Capita Income	Percent Families Below Poverty Line
Illinois	32.8	14.2	23.7	7.9	8.3	21.0	15,201	9.0
Michigan	32.6	12.7	25.2	2.2	3.8	17.4	14,154	10.2
Indiana	32.8	13.0	25.5	1.8	1.7	15.6	13,149	7.9
Kentucky	33.0	12.9	25.4	0.6	1.2	13.6	11,153	16.0
Missouri	33.5	14.8	24.7	1.2	1.6	17.8	12,989	10.1
Iowa	34.0	15.7	25.5	1.2	1.6	16.9	12,422	8.4
Wisconsin	32.9	14.1	25.1	1.9	2.5	17.7	13,276	7.6

Considering the two decades, 1970-1990, most adjacent states registered a higher rate of population growth than Illinois, despite the latter's balanced economy and greater foreign immigration. Even Michigan, with its problems in the automobile sector, has outperformed Illinois in population growth. Kentucky benefitted in the 1970s from movement of industrial capacity to the South and in that decade had the highest population growth of all adjacent states; its rate of growth slowed drastically in the 1980s, however. Wisconsin and Missouri both have been able to register steady growth over the 1970-1990 period, again outpacing Illinois.

The declining population in Iowa also is reflected in other demographic statistics. For example, Iowa has the highest median age and the highest percentage of people over the age of 65 (Table 5-2), indicating that the young in significant numbers have moved from the state. Illinois, conversely, has the lowest percentage of people under 18. The declining birth rates and professional orientation of its population have led Illinois to an age profile that is not high at either end, i.e., neither young nor old.

The professional orientation of the state's population is revealed in two indicators. Among the states under consideration here, in 1990 Illinois had the highest percentage of its population over age 25 with a bachelor's degree and the highest per capita income (Table 5-2). Michigan is second highest in per capita income.

Illinois holds the median position amongst its neighbors in percentage of households below the poverty line. Iowa, Wisconsin, and Indiana have lower poverty rates, but in Missouri, Michigan, and Kentucky they are higher. With 16.0 percent of its families below the poverty line, Kentucky is substantially higher in that regard than Illinois which has only 9.0 percent.

Among midwestern states, Illinois also is distinguished by its immigrant population. In 1990 Illinois had over twice the percentage of foreign born than Michigan, its closet rival, and more than three times the Latino percentage (Table 5-2). Illinois also has 14.2 percent of its population who speak a language other than English. Most neighboring states are closer to 5 percent except Kentucky, which registers the lowest (2.5 percent) of any state in the Union.

BASIC POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHY

Since the mid-1880s Cook County has had the largest population in Illinois. It surged in population in the 1920s and until the 1970s contained more than one-half of the state's inhabitants. Metropolitan Chicago's population decentralization, which began at the turn of the century, eventually reached beyond Cook County. Currently many of Cook County's close-in suburbs also are declining in population. In the 1980s Cook County's population dropped by approximately 150,000 while adjacent DuPage increased by almost 125,000. In 1990 Cook County accounted for only 45 percent of the state's population. While all of the suburban Chicago counties registered major population gains from 1970-1990, many rural and even some metropolitan counties in the downstate areas lost population (Figure 5-3). Among the metropolitan counties, Kankakee in the northeast and St. Clair and Madison in the southwest had a net loss of inhabitants. Also, Rock Island, Henry, Peoria, and Macon counties in the central to northwest urban corridor all experienced a loss of population between 1970 and 1990.

The age profile of the population also exhibits an irregular pattern. The percentage of Illinois' population over 65 years of age in 1990 was 14.2 percent and growing. On a county basis, however, it varied from a high of 21.7 percent in southern rural Hamilton County to a low of only 8.4 percent in Lake County, in the very northeastern corner of the state. Several counties have values over 19 percent (Figure 5-4). These are predominantly rural counties in western and southeastern Illinois where there are low percentages of people in the child-rearing age categories. The largest proportion of senior citizens, in fact, is in the southeastern part of the state.

The greatest concentration of counties with a low percentage of senior citizens is in the suburban Chicago area. The movement of young families to the urban fringe in search of affordable housing has resulted in a relative decrease in the older segments of the population profile. In addition to Lake County, the following counties have less than 10 percent of their population over 65: DuPage, Kane, Kendall, McHenry, and Will. Outside of the Chicago suburban area, only in Champaign County does the population over 65 account for less than 10 percent of the total.

Counties with small percentages of senior citizens might be expected to have large proportions of their population under 18 years of age, and indeed this is true in Illinois (Figure 5-5). However, there are also a number of counties with high percentages of young people (under 18) that are not particularly low in their percentage of senior citizens. These include non-suburban counties such as Alexander, Pulaski, and Effingham. Alexander and Pulaski are in the far southern portion of the state where family incomes are lower than the state average and the family size tends to be larger than the state average. These counties are characterized by both relatively high birth rates and an elderly population that has been unable or unwilling to migrate elsewhere.

HISTORIC POPULATION DEVELOPMENT

The earliest European occupation of what came to be Illinois was in the southwest at Kaskaskia, and early settlers in the American period also gathered in the same general area. Pioneer hunters from the Upland South moved along the watercourses and regarded the open prairie with suspicion. When Illinois became a territory in 1809 and a state in 1818, there was only scant settlement in the central and northern areas (Figure 5-6). Most of the

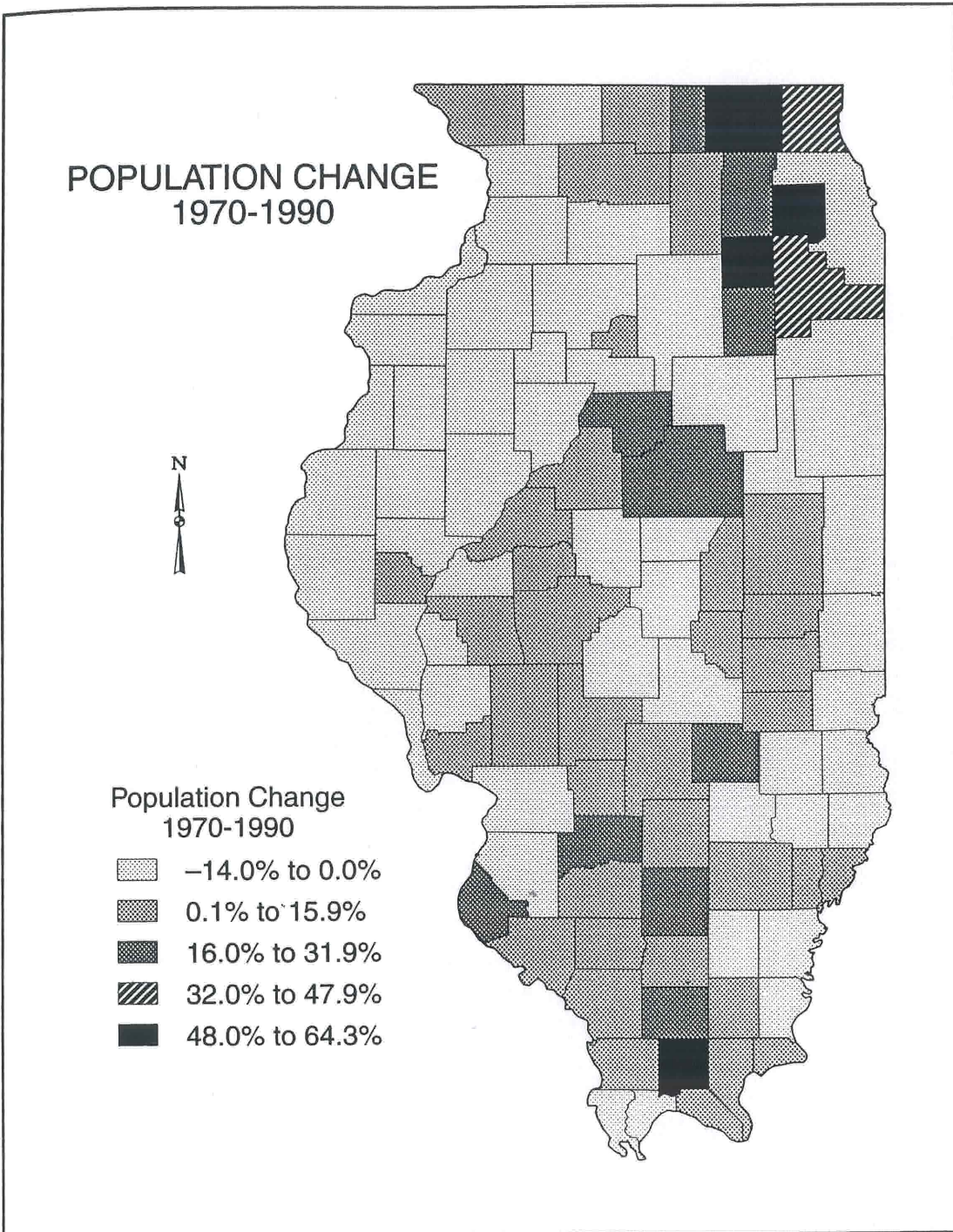


FIGURE 5-3. Population change, 1970-1990.

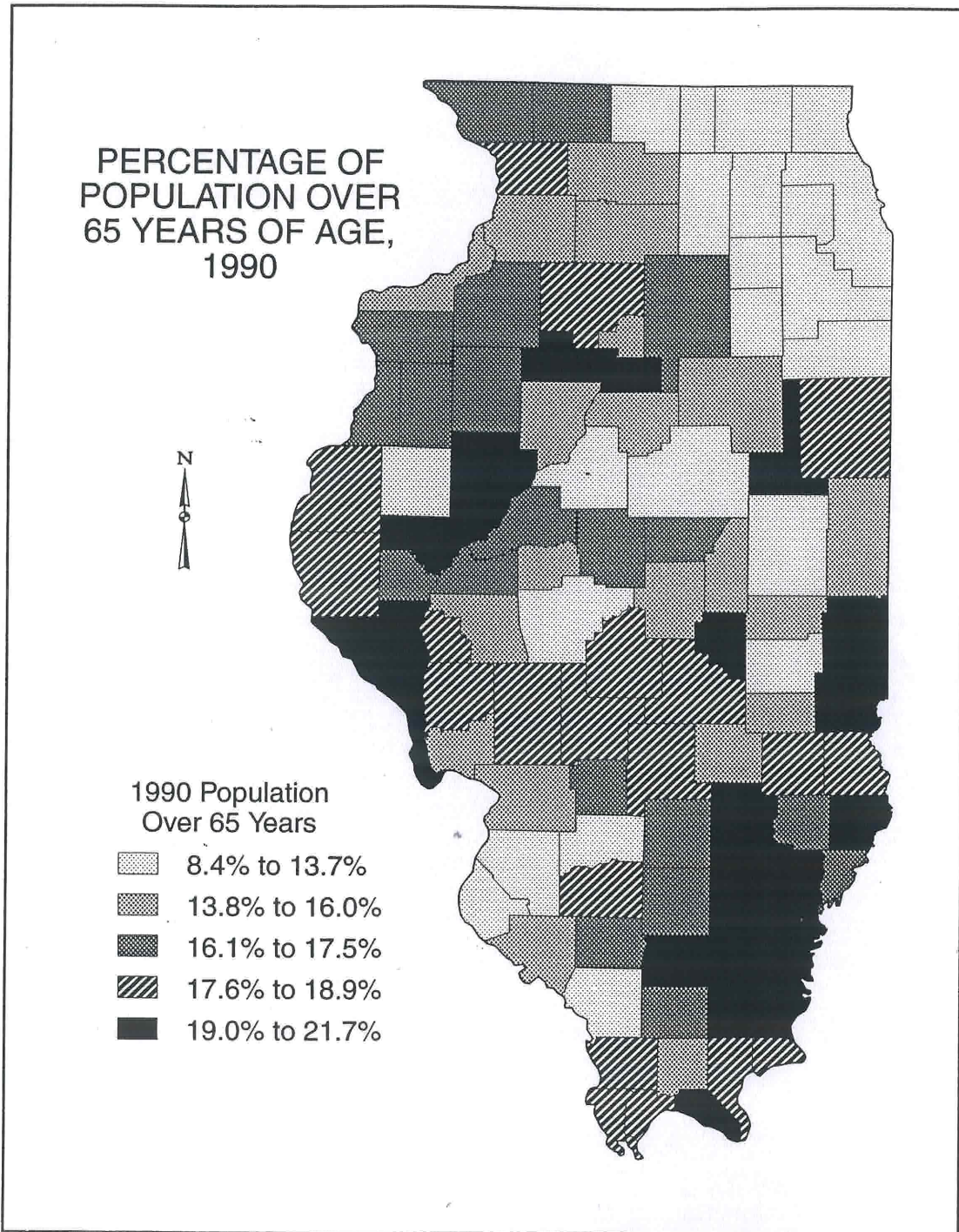


FIGURE 5-4. Population over 65 years of age, 1990.

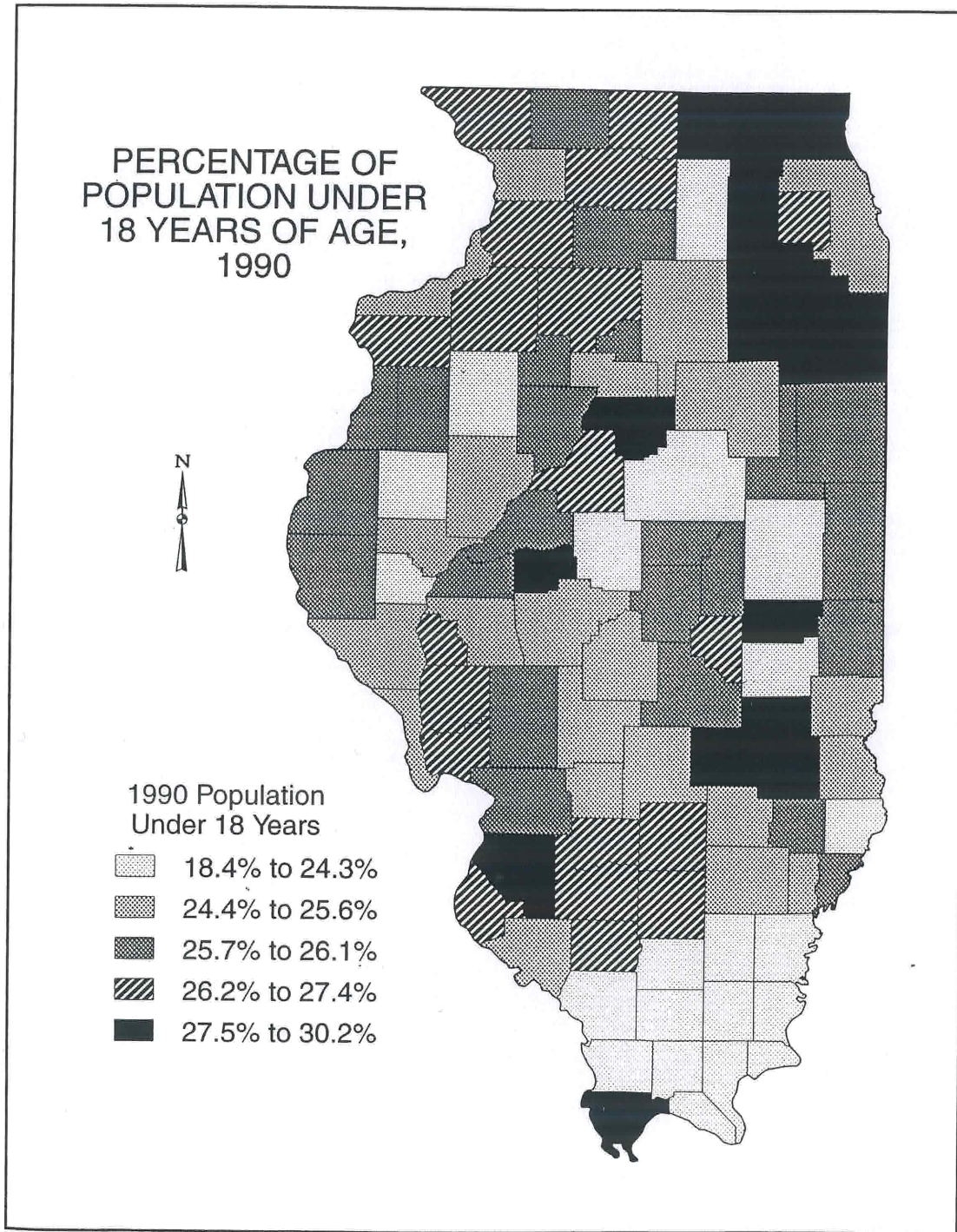


FIGURE 5-5. Population under 18 years of age, 1990.

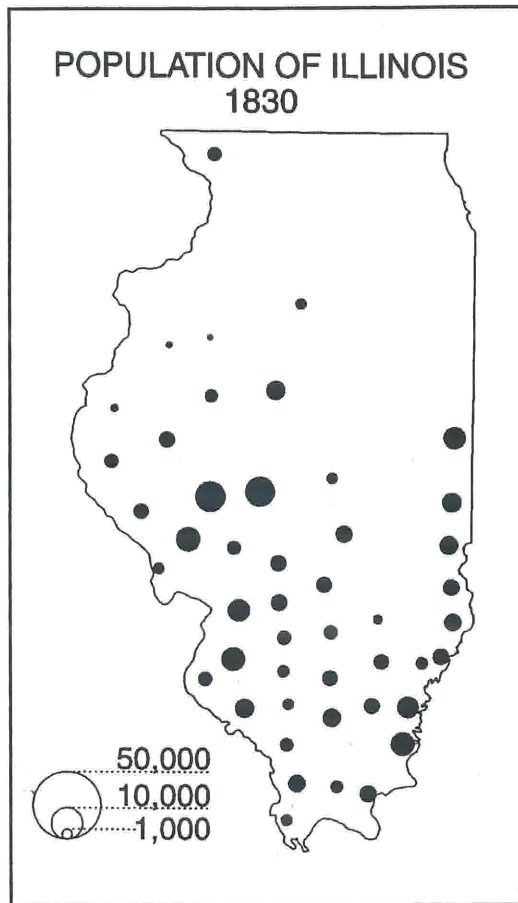


FIGURE 5-6. Population of Illinois, 1830.

state had been ceded by Indians during the first two decades of the century, although the last negotiation for Indian land was not until 1833.

At the time of Illinois' statehood, its population was concentrated in both the southeast and southwest. This pattern was still evident in 1830 with the largest concentrations along the lower Illinois River. Beginning about 1830, widespread realization of the value of prairie soil increased settlement in central and northern Illinois. After the resolution of problems with native Americans, a new group of pioneers, directly from the northern and mid-

dle Atlantic states, reached northern and central Illinois. There was a general land rush helped by the beginning of steam navigation on the Great Lakes in the early 1830s as well as by use of the Erie Canal. Many Easterners moved to the western frontier where they hoped to prosper. Additionally, new settlers came directly from Europe seeking the same prosperity. The strategically important location of Chicago with reference to Great Lakes transportation led to its early growth, although it came into existence in August of 1810 with only 150 inhabitants. Land offices were established in the northern part of Illinois in the early 1830s, and a major land boom followed in 1836. Galena, in the far northwest had been established much earlier as a lead mining center. Settlement after the 1837 depression was spurred by the building of the Illinois and Michigan Canal to connect the Great Lakes and Chicago with the Mississippi system, by the appearance of the first railroads, and by the building of plank roads. In 1833 Alton, in the southwest, was the state's largest city, but increased settlement in the north was fast shifting the population balance. By 1845 the largest city was Nauvoo, settled by a colony of Mormons, in west-central Illinois. Other colonies were planted in Illinois, although most settlers arrived singly or in family groups. By 1850 counties in the northern part of the state were growing considerably faster than those in the south, but the growth was not uniform (Figure 5-8B). Especially striking was the contrast between the sizeable growth of both the northernmost counties and the Military Tract of west-central Illinois and the very small population increase in the ill-drained Grand Prairie of the east-central section.

With the 1850s Illinois ceased to be part of the frontier as the leading edge of settlement disappeared westward. Now industrialization became established, especially in Chicago. A conscious statewide effort to push the growth

of its own towns and cities, while doing little to aid those of adjoining states, allowed Chicago to attain a supreme position. Continued transportation improvements made increased rural settlement feasible and brought new settlers to Illinois who worked as laborers on the construction of new transport facilities. Large numbers of Europeans came to Illinois, many taking up residence in Chicago. Especially numerous in the 1850s were Irish and Germans. By 1860 foreign-born outnumbered native-born. Not all new settlers stayed in Illinois; some moved farther west, but the newcomers always outnumbered those leaving the state. In 1857, eleven railroad main lines radiated from Chicago and served in transporting immigrants to unsettled land and

in collecting produce from developing farms. In the 1850s and 1860s, Chicago's growth was supported not only by immigration but also by its use of materials from the Great Lakes area for industrialization. In 1849, 40 percent of the state was still public land, but within six years almost all the remaining public domain passed to private owners. Realizing that woodlots were not a necessity, farmers settled increasingly on the open prairie, especially with the aid of new implements. As the railroads had come into ownership of public land, they also entered into the business of selling land. Even those east-central counties of the ill-drained Grand Prairie began to grow with the construction of the Illinois Central Railroad. Many towns

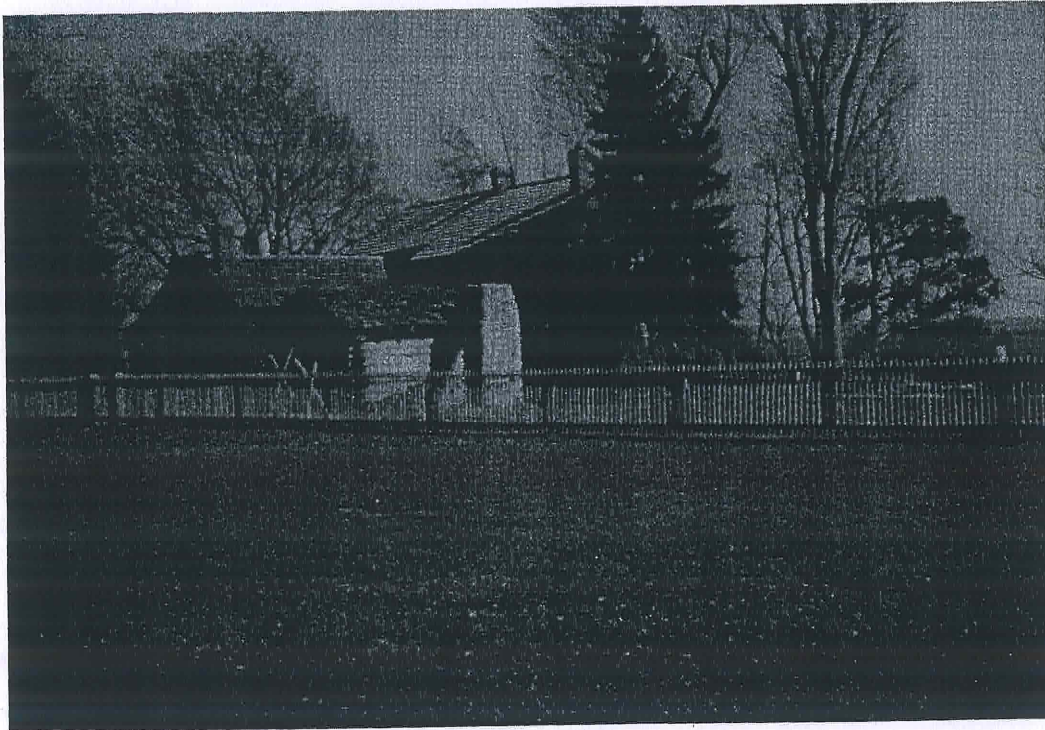


FIGURE 5-7. The restored home of Mormon Prophet Joseph Smith in Nauvoo on the bank of the Mississippi River. Although it was the largest city in Illinois in 1845, Nauvoo soon was abandoned by the colony of Mormons following the murder of Smith and the destruction of their temple. (Photograph by R.E. Nelson.)