

Joshua COMENETZ

THE GEOGRAPHY OF CZECH AND SLOVAK IDENTITY IN THE UNITED STATES

Comenetz J.: *The geography of Czech and Slovak identity in the United States*. Kartografické listy 2004, 12, 6 figs., 17 refs.

Abstract: The current spatial distribution of American of Czech and Slovak ancestry largely reflects immigration patterns of a century ago. Despite their proximity in Europe, these two ethnic communities created quite different settlement patterns in the USA. Recent immigration patterns point to a gradual shift away from rural areas (Czechs) and steel- and coal-producing areas (Slovaks) toward the northeast and faster-growing states of the southern and western USA.

Key words: census, Czech, ethnic group, immigration, Slovak

Immigrant origins

Czechs and Slovaks have been migrating to North (Rechcigl 1999) and Latin (Opatrny 1994) America since the sixteenth century. In numerical terms, however, large-scale migration began in the mid-19th century and ended in the 1920s with the legal restriction of immigration from eastern and southern Europe following World War I. Even with the liberalization of immigration policy in the 1960s, relatively few Czechs or Slovaks have entered the USA as immigrants since the 1920s, and the vast majority of Czech- and Slovak-Americans are therefore several generations removed from their ancestral homelands. Despite the passage of several decades, however, the modern spatial distribution of Americans of Czech and Slovak ancestry largely reflects the patterns established by their immigrant forebears a century ago. This paper describes and explains the current geography of Czech and Slovak identity in the USA.

People from what is now the Czech Republic began moving to the USA in large numbers in 1848 following the revolution against Hapsburg domination. Most Czech emigrants were farmers who were able to resume their occupations upon arrival in America. The availability of free or very cheap land in the Great Plains attracted a very diverse array of migrants in the 19th century (Luebke 1977). This included many Czechs, though the discovery of gold in California proved attractive to some (Capek 1944). The ongoing war and genocide against the indigenous American population in the 19th century (Comenetz 2003) meant that land in the Great Plains suitable for agriculture was readily available. Large numbers of Czechs settled in that region, especially in Nebraska, Iowa, Wisconsin, and later Texas, with the largest urban clusters in Chicago (Garver 1980, Jordan and Thrower 1970, Roucek 1934) and midwestern cities such as Omaha and Cedar Rapids, Iowa (Fig. 1). Later, following the Communist takeover in the 1940s and the 1968 revolution, an urban community developed in New York (Allen and Turner 1988).

Czechs and Slovaks were neighbors in Eastern Europe but in the USA their settlement patterns were entirely different. Large-scale Slovak immigration to the USA did not begin until the 1870s. By this time, with rapid economic development and the increasing occupation of the Plains agricultural land, the greatest opportunities for foreigners lay in industry and mining. Slovak migration

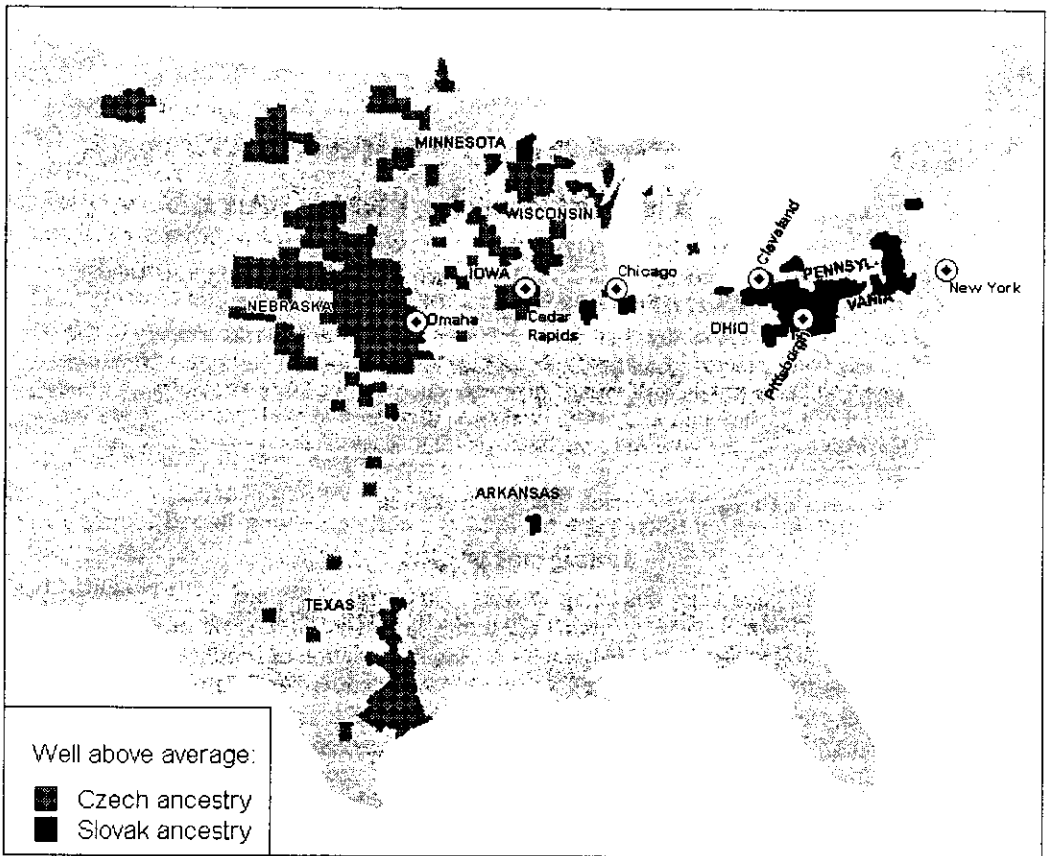


Fig. 1 Counties with at least five times the national level of Czech or Slovak ancestry. Named cities are historically-important urban centers for Czech- or Slovak-Americans

was therefore largely determined by the geography of steel and coal: most Slovaks headed for the coal mines of Pennsylvania and neighboring states, or the nearby steel mills of Pittsburgh and Cleveland (Allen and Turner 1988, Berthoff 1951, Stolarik 1989). Smaller numbers headed for other coal or steel centers such as Birmingham or Chicago. Slovak eminence in the steel industry persists today, as shown by Slovakia's leading position as a steel and car producer in Europe (Fig. 2). Slovak-American investment in the modern Slovak steel industry thus presents an investment and development opportunity for Slovakia today. In contrast to the Czechs, few Slovaks took up farming or went to California. There also was no exodus following World War II comparable to the Czech migration.

The period of major Slovak migration (1870s to 1920s) was considerably shorter than that of the Czechs (1840s to 1920s; 1940s to 1960s), and it was also much more spatially compact (centered on Pennsylvania and Ohio). From the point of view of ancestral geography in the USA, modern Slovak-Americans clearly have much more in common with each other than do modern Czech-Americans. Existing demographic maps demonstrate that Slovak-Americans are still more spatially clustered than Czech-Americans (Allen and Turner 1988). History and geography suggest the following hypotheses, to be tested by cartographic analysis of recent census data:

- Slovak ethnic identity is stronger than Czech identity in the USA,
- Czech and Slovak ethnic identity are stronger in areas where people of these ancestries form a larger share of the population.

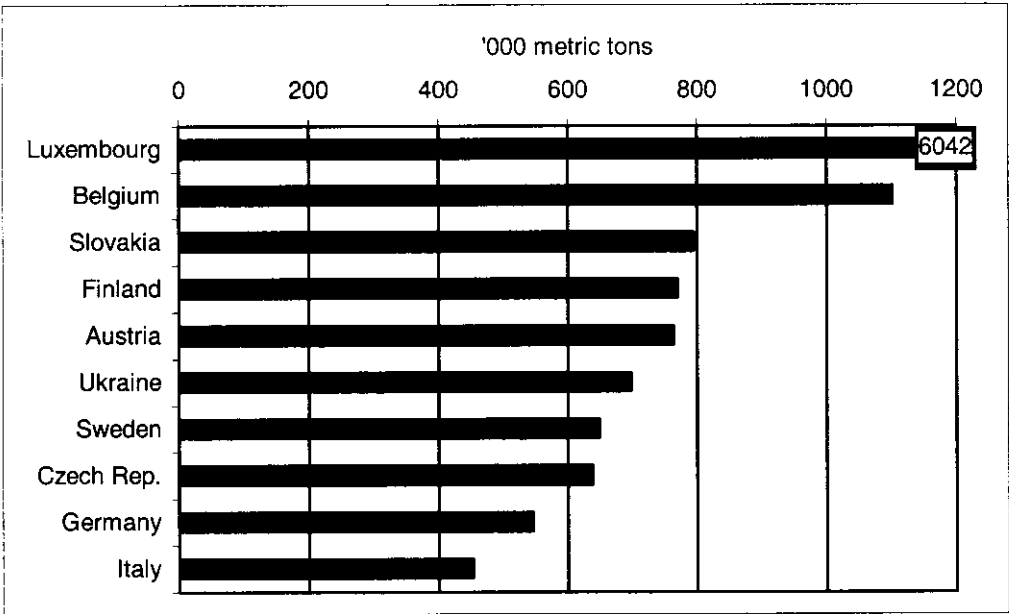


Fig. 2 Largest European steel producers, 2002. Data source: IISI (2004)

Data sources

Ethnic or national origin is recorded by the US census through questions on race, Hispanic origin, ancestry, language spoken at home, and place of birth (there is no census question on religion). For study of specific European ethnic groups, only the latter three questions provide useful information. Unfortunately, for the 2000 census, data on Czech and/or Slovak home-language speakers has not been released, and place of birth data combine Czechs and Slovaks into a single category. However, the number of people in the latter category is a small minority of the total number of Americans of Czech or Slovak origin: only 83,000 Czechoslovak-born people were recorded in 2000, as compared to roughly 2.5 million with ancestry from the region.

In recent censuses, the ancestry question provides the most detailed information on people of Czech or Slovak origin. People are allowed to list one or two ancestries and in the most recent (2000) census, the census bureau tabulated first and second responses of Czech, Slovak, and Czechoslovak separately. Thus in 2000, a person could be recorded as:

- Czech only, or as the first of two responses,
- Slovak only, or as the first of two responses,
- Czechoslovak only, or as the first of two responses,
- Czech as a second response (something else first),
- Slovak as a second response (something else first),
- Czechoslovak as a second response (something else first).

Previous census years combined responses of Czech and Czechoslovak (Slovak has remained a separate category) and sometimes recorded single and multiple ancestries rather than first and second responses, so data are not entirely comparable from census to census. To complicate matters, response to the ancestry question is highly variable depending on the wording of the question, which asks for ancestry but provides a list of example responses. National origins that are provided

as examples in any given year experience huge jumps in response (Rosenwaike 1993). In 1990, "Slovak" was used as an example, with the results shown in Fig. 3. The enumerated number of people of Czech or Czechoslovak origin decreased slowly between 1980 and 2000, while the number of people claiming Slovak ancestry increased slightly. However, in 1990, there were apparently more than twice as many Slovaks as in 1980 or 2000. Either the entire population of Bratislava relocated to the USA for a few years, or people are greatly influenced by the wording of census questions.

Census year:	2000	1990	1980
Czech/Czechoslovak ancestry:	1,703,930	1,615,477	1,892,456
Slovak ancestry:	797,764	1,882,897	776,806

Fig. 3 Number of people with Czech or Slovak ancestry according to census results

Annual immigration data are recorded separately from census data. Unfortunately, immigration data are not very useful for charting Czech and Slovak immigration because no record is kept of return migration (migration back to Europe). Since immigrants often travel between their native country and the USA several times, it is impossible to calculate the total number of permanent settlers from immigration records. Also, until 1899 Czechs and Slovaks were recorded by country of origin (Austria-Hungary) rather than ethnicity, with the result that all Slovaks were classified as Hungarians (Alexander 1987). It is impossible to determine how this practice has affected modern response to the census: do some Slovak-Americans remember that their grandparents came from Hungary and therefore choose Hungarian ancestry? With such geographic uncertainty it is not surprising that Americans are much influenced by the wording of the census ancestry question. It is notable that the current geographic distribution of Hungarian-Americans resembles that of Slovak-Americans, with the addition of clusters in New York City, southern Florida, and California. The latter have the three largest Jewish communities in the USA and Jews formed a large share of the Hungarian population in the 19th century (Magocsi 2002).

Large-scale immigration from Czechoslovakia ended around 1930. Over 100,000 people from the region entered the USA in the 1920s but since then no decade has seen more than 20,000 (USDHS 2003) – this includes all post-war refugees. Thus the vast majority of Czech- and Slovak-Americans are the American-born descendants of migrants who arrived before 1930. Due to a high rate of intermarriage with Americans of other backgrounds, most people who claim Czech or Slovak ancestry also claim ancestry from one or more other countries (Massey 1995), but there is still a substantial minority who identify solely with their Czech or Slovak origins.

Current spatial patterns

Fig. 1 shows the regions of the USA where people of Czech and Slovak ancestry are most significant as a share of the total population. The 2000 census found that 0.56% of Americans who reported an ancestry (20% of census respondents omitted the question) listed Czech on the census form, 0.35% listed Slovak, and 0.20% listed Czechoslovakian. The map shows counties where Czech or Slovak ancestry was at least five times the national average. Almost every county with a high rate of Czechoslovakian response also had a high rate of Czech response, or was adjacent to such a county, suggesting that Czech-Americans are more likely than Slovak-Americans to identify themselves this way. Remarkably, of the 261 counties highlighted, only two (one near Cleveland and the other in northern Wisconsin) had high levels of both Czech *and* Slovak ancestry. It is clear from the map that the spatial patterns established by immigration a century ago still prevail: settlements of Czechs in Nebraska and other Plains states, east Texas, and Wisconsin and the Slovak cluster in Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio still persist. Also, the Czech and Slovak ethnic communities remain geographically quite distinct.

Fig. 4 gives a national view. In general, the pattern corresponds to population size-states with more people have more Czech- and Slovak-Americans – except for areas highlighted in Fig. 1 such as Nebraska. Czechs outnumber Slovaks in most states, while the Slovak community remains clustered in its historic settlement area of Pennsylvania and Ohio.

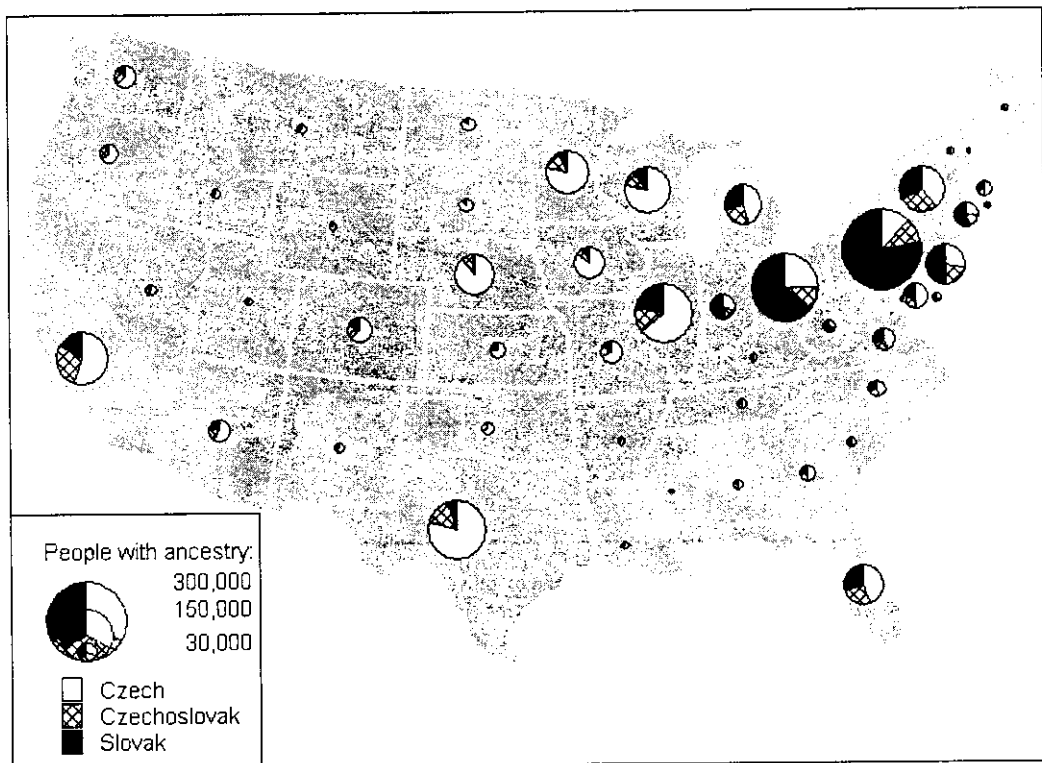


Fig. 4 Number of people with Czech or Slovak ancestry by state (omitting the offshore states of Alaska and Hawaii due to very small numbers) according to the 2000 census

One can gauge the strength or intensity of ethnic identification in the USA by looking at whether people listed Czech or Slovak as their first (or sole) or second ancestry. Given the chance to list two ancestries, it is probable that many people will list their primary ancestry, or the one with which they more strongly identify, first on the census form. By this measure, Slovak identity is slightly stronger than Czech identity in the USA: 64% of Slovak-Americans, but only 59% of Czechs, listed that ancestry first. However, the format of the census form is once again influential. People who claimed "Czechoslovakian" ancestry had an even higher level of primary identity (71%). This apparent nod to ethnic harmony most probably only reflects the small space available to write one's ancestry on the census form: the word Czechoslovakian fills the entire space, making it difficult to enter a second ancestry! Also, some people may list two ancestries alphabetically, or randomly, not to mention the fact that many Americans have ancestral ties to more than two countries, but there is no way to determine with certainty why ancestries are ordered as they are. Since the relatively large quantity of recent Czech migration, along with whatever benefit accrues to ancestries earlier in the alphabet, have probably elevated the Czech value to some extent, it is fair to say that Slovak identity is indeed somewhat stronger, as hypothesized above.

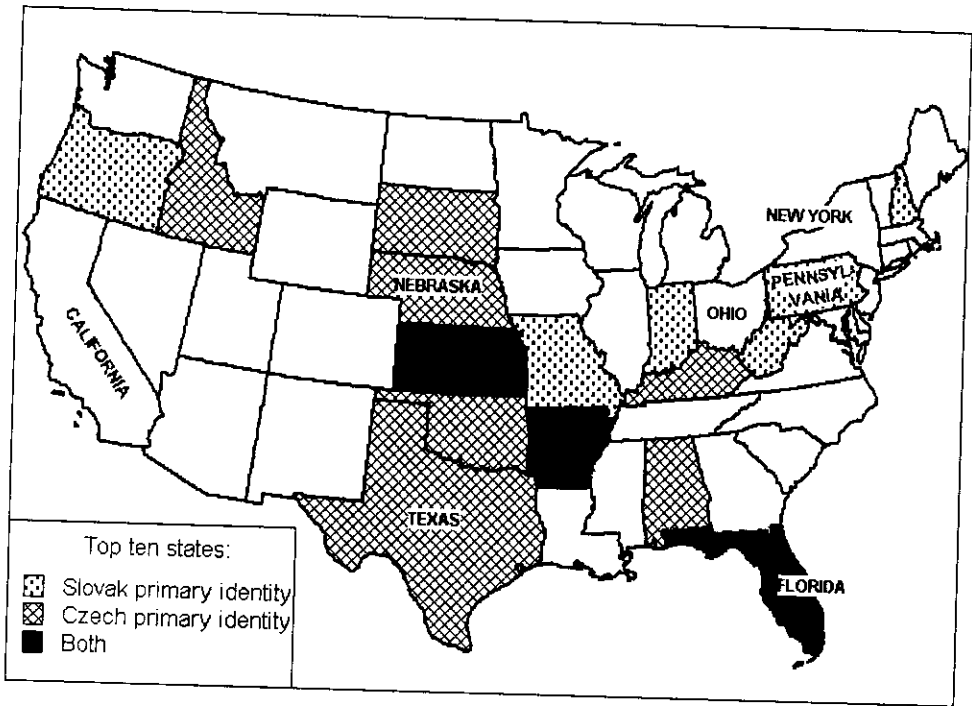


Fig. 5 States with the highest levels of Czech or Slovak first ancestry among all Czech- or Slovak-Americans, according to the 2000 census (Hawaii is the tenth state for Slovaks.)

With the above caveats, if one selects the states with the highest levels of primary ancestral identity i.e., the percentage of people who claim Czech or Slovak ancestry who listed this ancestry first on the census form—the resulting spatial pattern (Fig. 5) lends some support to the hypothesis that ethnic identity is stronger where the share of the total population is higher. Czech or Slovak primary identity appears to be relatively strong in many of the states with historically high levels of immigration (this is true at the county level too). However, the pattern is not perfect, with several states such as Ohio and Iowa that stand out in Fig. 1 not registering on Fig. 5. Florida's high levels of both Czech and Slovak primary identity is no doubt due to its popularity as a retirement destination: a comparatively high fraction of its residents of central or eastern European ancestry are elderly immigrants who have moved there from northern or Plains states.

Recent migration and the future

As noted above, the vast majority of Czech- and Slovak-Americans are American-born. People born in Czechoslovakia (census birthplace data are not reported separately for the Czech Republic and Slovakia) comprise only 3% of the ancestral population - including the many post-World War II Czech immigrants. Comparing the distribution of the foreign-born minority with that of the total Czech and Slovak ancestry population, and making the assumption that most post-war immigrants also classified themselves as Czechs or Slovaks by ancestry, one can see that foreign-born pattern of residence is strikingly different from that of the ancestral population (Fig. 6). This partly explains the divergence between Fig. 1 and Fig. 5 several southern and western states absent from Fig. 1 have received relatively recent immigration, and therefore have higher levels of Czech or Slovak primary identity.

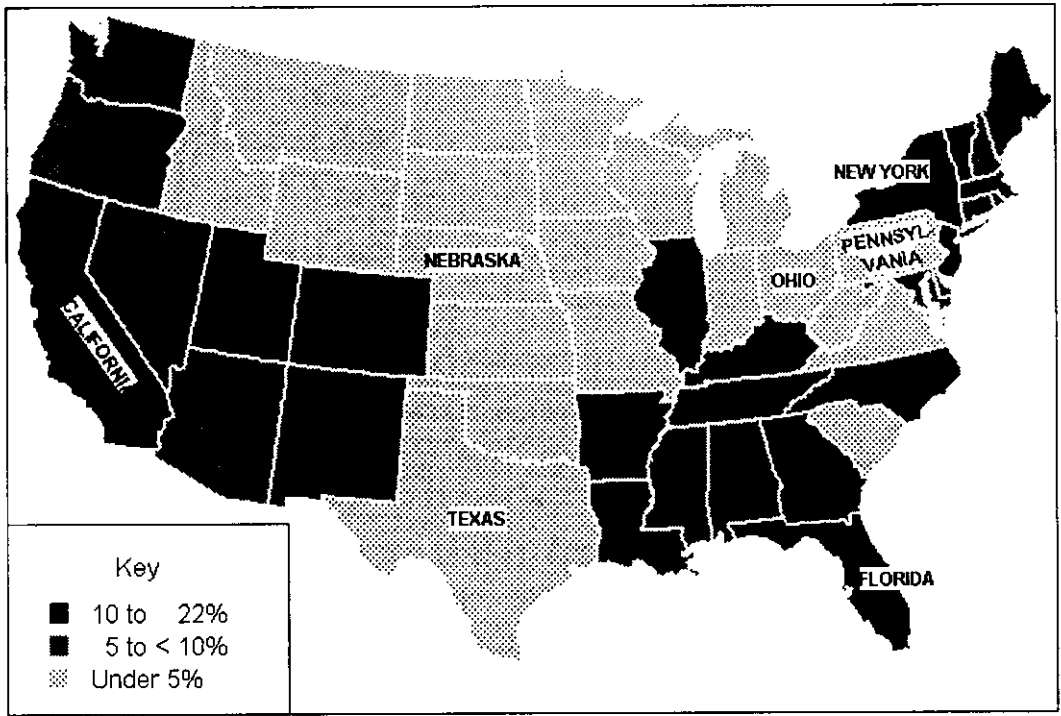


Fig. 6 Percent of Czech- or Slovak-Americans born in Czechoslovakia (in 2000)

Immigrants' share of the total ancestral population is lowest in the Great Plains and in Pennsylvania and Ohio, while it is much higher in the southern, western, and northeastern states that have received the vast majority of postwar overseas immigrants. Long-term reasons for this include the decline of the steel industry in Pennsylvania and Ohio, the demographic exodus from the rural Plains, greater job opportunities in eastern and western cities, and the tendency of post-war Jewish refugees to settle in large cities. With few exceptions (Texas, Chicago area), none of the historic Czech or Slovak settlement centers serves a major immigrant destination today. Therefore, future Czech and Slovak immigrants to the USA will undoubtedly reinforce the pattern of Fig. 6 rather than that of Fig. 1.

References

- ALEXANDER J. G. (1987). *The Immigrant Church and Community: Pittsburgh's Slovak Catholics and Lutherans, 1880-1915*. Pittsburgh (University of Pittsburgh Press).
- ALLEN J. P., TURNER E. J. (1988). *We the People: An Atlas of America's Ethnic Diversity*. New York (Macmillan).
- BERTHOFF R. T. (1951). Southern Attitudes toward Immigration, 1865-1914. *Journal of Southern History*, 17, s. 328-360.
- CAPEK T. (1944). Sociological Factors in Czech Immigration. *Slavonic and East European Review: American Series* 3(4), s. 93-98.
- COMENETZ J. (2003). The Geography of Indigenous Identity in the United States. *Espace, Populations, et Sociétés*, 21, s. 77-88.
- GARVER B. M. (1980). Czech-American Freethinkers on the Great Plains, 1871-1914. In: Luebke FC, ed. *Ethnicity on the Great Plains* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.)
- IISI (2004). *Steel Statistical Yearbook 2003*. Brussels (IISI – International Iron and Steel Institute).

- JORDAN T.G., THROWER N.J.W. (1970). Population Origin Groups in Rural Texas. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 60, s. 404-405 and map supplement.
- LUEBKE F.C. (1977). Ethnic Group Settlement on the Great Plains. *Western Historical Quarterly*, 8, s. 405-430.
- MAGOCSI P. R. (2002). *Historical Atlas of Central Europe*. 2nd ed. (Seattle: University of Washington Pres).
- MASSEY D. S. (1995). The New Immigration and Ethnicity in the United States. *Population and Development Review* 21, s. 631-652.
- OPATRNY J. (1994). Algunos Problemas del Estudio de la Emigración Checa a America Latina. *Estudios Migratorios Latinoamericanos*, 9, s. 381-399.
- RECHCÍGL M. (1999). Bohemian and Moravian Pioneers in Colonial America. In: Machann C, (ed.). *Czech-Americans in Transition*. Austin, Texas (Eakin).
- ROSENWAIKE I. (1993). Ancestry in the United States Census, 1980-1990. *Social Science Research*, 22, s. 383-390.
- ROUCEK J. S. (1934). The Passing of American Czechoslovaks. *American Journal of Sociology*, 39, s. 611-625.
- STOLARIK M. M. (1989). *Immigration and Urbanization: The Slovak Experience, 1870 to 1918*. New York (AMS Press).
- USDHS (United States Department of Homeland Security) (2003). *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics 2002*. Washington (Government Printing Office).

R e s u m é

Geografia českej a slovenskej identity v Spojených štátoch amerických

Súčasnú rozmiestnenie Američanov českého a slovenského pôvodu väčšinou odráža migračné rozloženie v minulom storočí. Väčšina českých a slovenských Američanov sú potomkovia ľudí, ktorí migrovali do USA v rozmedzí rokov 1850 a 1930. Napriek ich príbuznosti/blízkości v Európe, tieto dve národné komunity vytvorili v USA celkom rôzne sídelné rozmiestnenia. Českí prisťahovalci väčšinou sídlia v centre USA (Great Plains) alebo blízko mestských oblastí ako je napr. Chicago. Naproti tomu prví slovenskí imigranti boli verbovaní na prácu do kamenouhoľných baní a oceľiarň miest Pittsburgh, Cleveland a susedných oblastí. Tak sa slovenské osídlenie oproti českému zhluklo na veľmi malom území, ktoré pretrváva dodnes. Toto zoskupovanie je jedným z dôležitých faktorov súčasných oblastí národného vedomia/identity. Cenzus a imigračné dáta indikujú, že slovenská národnostná menšina v USA je tak trochu vyhranenejšia než česká, dokonca aj tá novšia (po druhej svetovej vojne). Hociako súčasné imigrantské oblasti sa presúvajú z pôvodných poľnohospodárskych (rurálnych) oblastí (Češi) a oblastí produkcie uhlia a ocele (Slováci) do severovýchodných a rýchlo rastúcich južných a západných oblastí USA.

- Obr. 1 Štáty najmenej s päť generáčnou úrovňou českého alebo slovenského rodu. Názvy miest označujú historicky dôležité centrá osídlenia českých a slovenských Američanov
- Obr. 2 Najväčší európski producenti ocele v roku 2002
- Obr. 3 Počet obyvateľov s českým a slovenským pôvodom podľa výsledkov sčítania obyvateľstva
- Obr. 4 Počet osôb s českým alebo slovenským pôvodom podľa štátov (s výnimkou Aljašky a Havaja – veľmi malý počet) podľa cenzu 2000
- Obr. 5 Štáty s vyššou úrovňou českých alebo slovenských potomkov z prvej línie zo všetkých (českých alebo slovenských) potomkov (Havaj je desiaty štát pre Slovákov)
- Obr. 6 Percento českých a slovenských Američanov narodených v Československu (2000)

Lektorovala:

Doc. RNDr. Dagmar KUSEDOVÁ, CSc.,
Univerzita Komenského, Bratislava