

Patterns of Historical and Organizational Events and Conflict

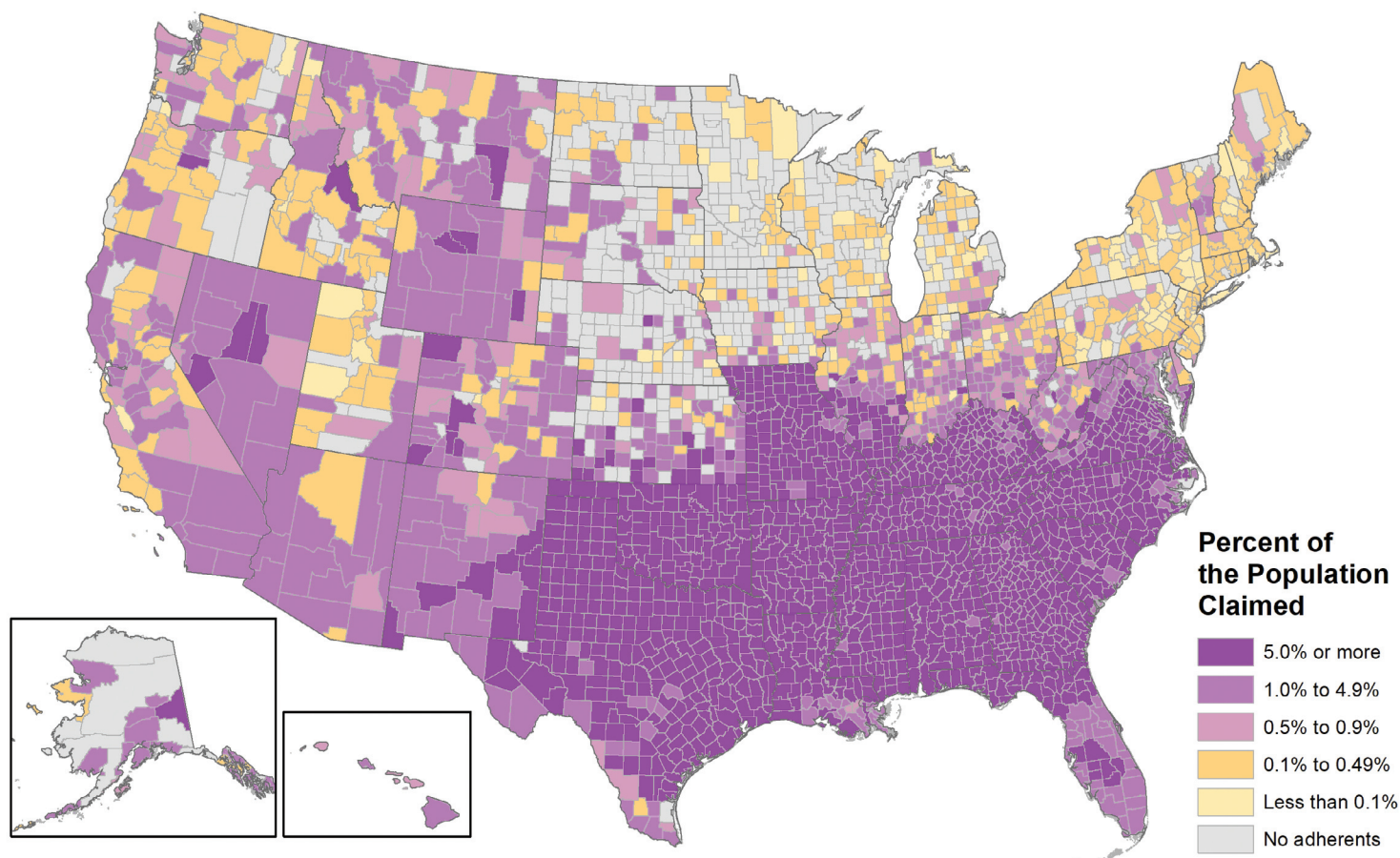
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Some of the patterns we see today in the U.S. religious landscape have their roots in historical and organizational events and conflicts that occurred over 150 years ago. In this chapter we examine the distribution of the Southern Baptist Convention and the American Baptist Churches USA, the United Methodist Church, and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the Community of Christ. These groups are some of the largest in the country and are distributed over many states. More importantly to this discussion, the events that shaped their distribution are familiar historical and organizational events: the Civil War, the westward expansion, and the killing of Joseph Smith. While many things have changed over the past 150 to 250 years, the events that formed these groups can still be observed in the religious landscape.

Baptist Patterns

Before the Civil War, Baptists churches and associations cooperated on a national level and were simply known as American Baptists. However, in 1845 a majority of Baptists in the South withdrew support from the General Missionary Convention (a.k.a. the Triennial Convention), largely in response to the decision of the convention's delegates to ban slave holders from becoming ordained missionaries, and formed the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). It should be noted that in 1995 the SBC adopted a resolution "denouncing racism and repudiating its past defense of slavery and opposition to the civil rights movement,"¹ but mapping the SBC data from the 2020 U.S. Religion Census one can still see the effect of the denomination's 1845 beginnings in its current distribution.

Map 1: Southern Baptists Convention
Adherents as a Percentage of Population, 2020



Map 1 shows the percentage of the total population within each county that is affiliated with churches aligned with the SBC in 2020. While one can see that the denomination has spread beyond the South, it is also clear that the strength of the SBC still lies in its Southern beginnings. Table 1 shows the number of SBC congregations and adherents by state. When the table is sorted by SBC adherents as a percentage of the total state population, with the exception of Oklahoma, the top 14 states consist of the Confederate states and a few slave holding states that did not secede from the Union.

Now compare the map of the SBC's distribution to that of the American Baptist Churches in the USA (ABCUSA) for 2020 (see Map 2). While there are a few places in the South where the ABCUSA has a presence, it is clear that the denomination's strength lies in the Northeast, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, and Kansas. Table 2 shows the number of ABCUSA congregations and adherents by state. When the table is sorted by ABCUSA adherents as a percentage of the total population of the state, the top 16 states and the District of Columbia all stayed under Union control, even though some of the states permitted slavery.

¹ Southern Baptist Convention | American religious organization. (2019). In *Encyclopædia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Southern-Baptist-Convention>

While there are doubtless other factors that have influenced the 2020 patterns of adherents in both the ABCUSA and SBC, the impact of the 1845 General Missionary Convention, and later the Civil War, can still be seen when mapping these two denominations.

Methodist Patterns

The United Methodist Church (UMC) was formed from a merger of The Evangelical United Brethren Church and The Methodist Church in 1968, but its roots go back to the Methodist movement started by John and Charles Wesley in England during the 1730s.² The movement eventually spread to the Colonies. “In 1776 the Methodists were a tiny religious society with only 65 churches scattered through the colonies.”³ Almost 250 years later, the UMC reported 30,051 churches and 8,018,629 adherents in the 2020 U.S. Religion Census, and reported a presence in more U.S. counties and county equivalents than any other religious group (2,989 counties, or 95% of all U.S. counties and county equivalents).

This impressive growth can partly be explained by the use of circuit riders. “Circuit riders were a religious and moral force along

² History. (n.d.). The United Methodist Church. <https://www.umc.org/en/who-we-are/history>

³ Finke, R., & Stark, R. (2002). *The Churching of America, 1776-1990: Winners and Losers in our Religious Economy* (p. 56). Rutgers University Press.

Map 2: American Baptist Churches in the USA
Adherents as a Percentage of Population, 2020

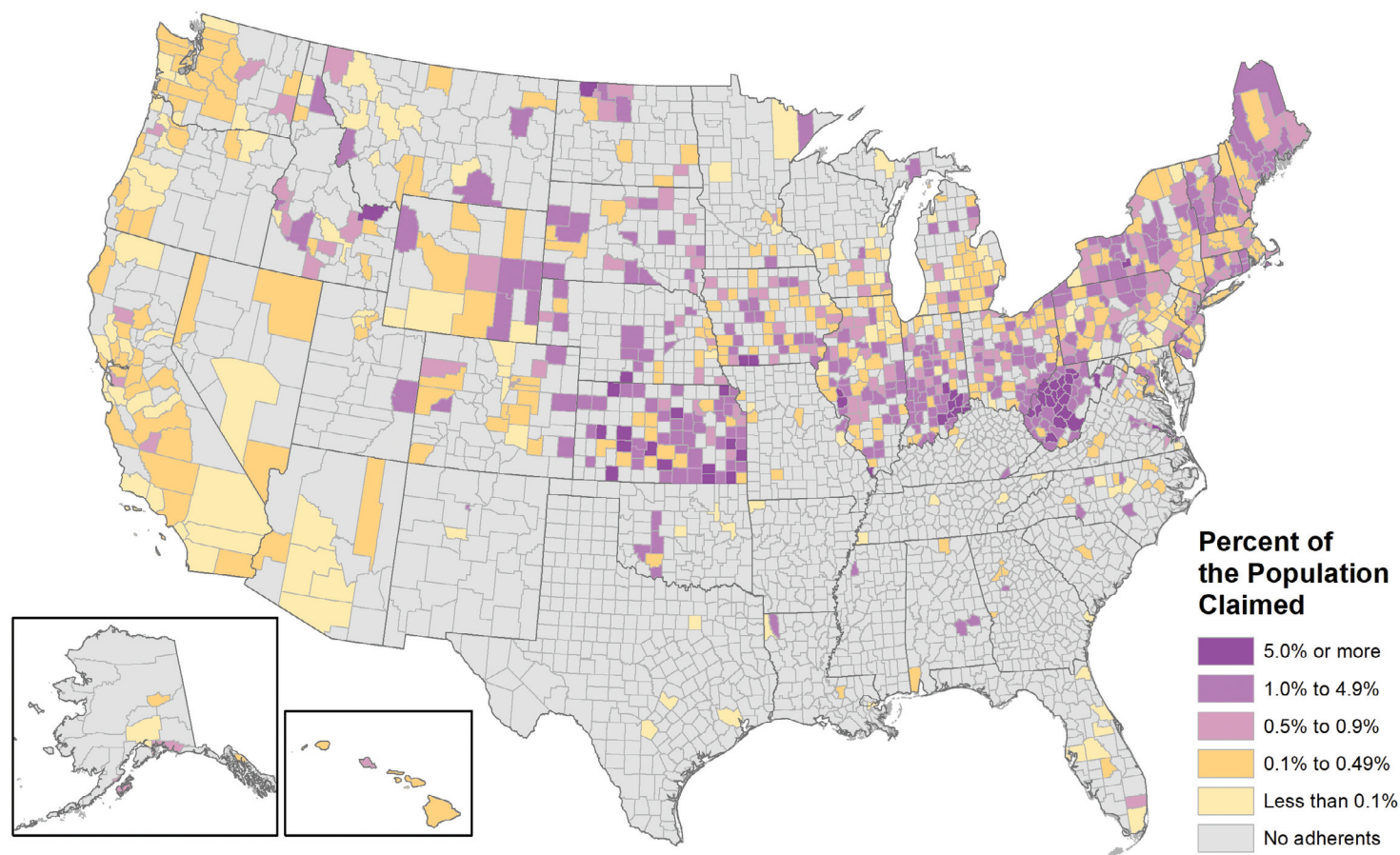


Table 1: Southern Baptist Convention Adherents by State, 2020
(Sorted by Adherents as % of Population)

State	SBC Congre- gations	SBC Adherents	2020 State Population	Adherents as % of Total Adherents	Adherents as % of Population
Mississippi	2,147	830,229	2,961,279	4.70%	28.04%
Alabama	3,265	1,255,396	5,024,279	7.11%	24.99%
Arkansas	1,551	607,751	3,011,524	3.44%	20.18%
Kentucky	2,530	904,352	4,505,836	5.12%	20.07%
Oklahoma	1,781	775,607	3,959,353	4.39%	19.59%
Tennessee	3,151	1,310,341	6,910,840	7.42%	18.96%
South Carolina	2,109	816,405	5,118,425	4.63%	15.95%
Georgia	3,561	1,584,393	10,711,908	8.98%	14.79%
Louisiana	1,633	648,734	4,657,757	3.68%	13.93%
North Carolina	4,374	1,324,747	10,439,388	7.51%	12.69%
Texas	7,935	3,319,962	29,145,505	18.81%	11.39%
Missouri	1,957	636,327	6,154,913	3.61%	10.34%
Virginia	2,030	663,951	8,631,393	3.76%	7.69%
Florida	2,879	1,092,640	21,538,187	6.19%	5.07%
District of Columbia	82	27,837	689,545	0.16%	4.04%
New Mexico	339	81,011	2,117,522	0.46%	3.83%
Kansas	359	84,805	2,937,880	0.48%	2.89%
Alaska	129	15,849	733,391	0.09%	2.16%
West Virginia	234	35,008	1,793,716	0.20%	1.95%
Wyoming	100	11,082	576,851	0.06%	1.92%
Maryland	565	113,261	6,177,224	0.64%	1.83%
Illinois	1,008	222,589	12,812,508	1.26%	1.74%
Nevada	194	42,890	3,104,614	0.24%	1.38%
Arizona	452	98,610	7,151,502	0.56%	1.38%
Indiana	453	91,318	6,785,528	0.52%	1.35%
California	2,323	497,030	39,538,223	2.82%	1.26%
Ohio	740	132,633	11,799,448	0.75%	1.12%
Montana	131	11,818	1,084,225	0.07%	1.09%
Hawaii	113	15,194	1,455,271	0.09%	1.04%
Colorado	380	57,124	5,773,714	0.32%	0.99%
Nebraska	95	17,622	1,961,504	0.10%	0.90%
Delaware	42	6,561	989,948	0.04%	0.66%
Vermont	48	4,222	643,077	0.02%	0.66%
Maine	47	8,111	1,362,359	0.05%	0.60%
Idaho	105	10,429	1,839,106	0.06%	0.57%
Washington	344	43,341	7,705,281	0.25%	0.56%
Iowa	113	16,129	3,190,369	0.09%	0.51%
Michigan	303	44,950	10,077,331	0.25%	0.45%
Oregon	156	18,102	4,237,256	0.10%	0.43%
South Dakota	56	3,683	886,667	0.02%	0.42%
Pennsylvania	319	45,080	13,002,700	0.26%	0.35%
Utah	95	10,420	3,271,616	0.06%	0.32%
Massachusetts	195	21,296	7,029,917	0.12%	0.30%
Wisconsin	131	13,950	5,893,718	0.08%	0.24%
North Dakota	30	1,663	779,094	0.01%	0.21%
Connecticut	72	7,447	3,605,944	0.04%	0.21%
New York	395	39,036	20,201,249	0.22%	0.19%
New Jersey	158	17,879	9,288,994	0.10%	0.19%
New Hampshire	30	1,949	1,377,529	0.01%	0.14%
Minnesota	122	6,979	5,706,494	0.04%	0.12%
Rhode Island	18	1,297	1,097,379	0.01%	0.12%
Totals	51,379	17,649,040	331,449,281	100.00%	5.32%

Table 2: American Baptist Churches in the USA Adherents by State, 2020
(Sorted by Adherents as % of Population)

State	ABCUSA Congre- gations	ABCUSA Adherents	2020 State Population	Adherents as % of Total Adherents	Adherents as % of Population
District of Columbia	61	31,566	689,545	2.51%	4.58%
West Virginia	346	77,838	1,793,716	6.18%	4.34%
Connecticut	115	44,638	3,605,944	3.54%	1.24%
Indiana	328	82,755	6,785,528	6.57%	1.22%
Kansas	186	34,575	2,937,880	2.74%	1.18%
Vermont	48	6,996	643,077	0.56%	1.09%
Maine	136	14,503	1,362,359	1.15%	1.06%
Rhode Island	70	11,381	1,097,379	0.90%	1.04%
Pennsylvania	397	126,222	13,002,700	10.02%	0.97%
New Jersey	285	77,184	9,288,994	6.13%	0.83%
New Hampshire	88	11,298	1,377,529	0.90%	0.82%
Ohio	270	85,308	11,799,448	6.77%	0.72%
New York	499	141,304	20,201,249	11.22%	0.70%
South Dakota	34	4,985	886,667	0.40%	0.56%
Maryland	93	33,825	6,177,224	2.68%	0.55%
Massachusetts	262	38,288	7,029,917	3.04%	0.54%
Michigan	137	51,027	10,077,331	4.05%	0.51%
Virginia	79	38,985	8,631,393	3.09%	0.45%
Nebraska	59	8,393	1,961,504	0.67%	0.43%
North Carolina	32	43,813	10,439,388	3.48%	0.42%
Illinois	240	49,864	12,812,508	3.96%	0.39%
Missouri	25	23,713	6,154,913	1.88%	0.39%
Iowa	83	12,110	3,190,369	0.96%	0.38%
Wyoming	15	2,133	576,851	0.17%	0.37%
Idaho	31	5,504	1,839,106	0.44%	0.30%
Delaware	15	2,929	989,948	0.23%	0.30%
Wisconsin	61	15,530	5,893,718	1.23%	0.26%
Washington	110	20,222	7,705,281	1.61%	0.26%
Colorado	59	14,213	5,773,714	1.13%	0.25%
Montana	25	1,994	1,084,225	0.16%	0.18%
North Dakota	13	1,391	779,094	0.11%	0.18%
Minnesota	38	10,172	5,706,494	0.81%	0.18%
California	355	68,317	39,538,223	5.42%	0.17%
Alabama	4	8,508	5,024,279	0.68%	0.17%
Oregon	38	6,344	4,237,256	0.50%	0.15%
Alaska	13	959	733,391	0.08%	0.13%
Nevada	10	3,986	3,104,614	0.32%	0.13%
Florida	34	19,124	21,538,187	1.52%	0.09%
Georgia	11	7,269	10,711,908	0.58%	0.07%
Utah	7	2,082	3,271,616	0.17%	0.06%
Arizona	22	4,336	7,151,502	0.34%	0.06%
Louisiana	4	2,694	4,657,757	0.21%	0.06%
Oklahoma	15	1,890	3,959,353	0.15%	0.05%
Hawaii	2	656	1,455,271	0.05%	0.05%
Kentucky	7	1,681	4,505,836	0.13%	0.04%
New Mexico	3	690	2,117,522	0.05%	0.03%
South Carolina	2	923	5,118,425	0.07%	0.02%
Texas	14	4,537	29,145,505	0.36%	0.02%
Tennessee	7	1,002	6,910,840	0.08%	0.01%
Arkansas	1	78	3,011,524	0.01%	0.00%
Mississippi	1	69	2,961,279	0.01%	0.00%
Totals	4,790	1,259,804	331,449,281	100.00%	0.38%

the frontier and in rural areas of the South, and they were largely responsible for the propagation of Methodism throughout the United States.”⁴ The idea that circuit riders were a religious and moral force is supported by a footnote in Wade Crawford Barclay’s work titled *History of Methodist Missions*, where he notes:

In the opinion of a secular historian, laws enacted in Ohio against anti-social practices were not as effective as the preaching of the early evangelists. “Despite the handicap of their narrow sectarianism,” he writes, “one cannot fail to be impressed with the real achievements of such men as Francis Asbury, Lorenzo Dow, James Finley, Joseph Badger and scores of other(s)....Their labors resulted not only in the founding of hundreds of congregations but also in a general awakening of the social conscience....”
—William T. Utter, *The History of the State of Ohio, II, The Frontier State, 1803-1825*, 362.⁵

⁴ circuit rider | religion | Britannica. (n.d.). [www.britannica.com. https://www.britannica.com/topic/circuit-rider](https://www.britannica.com/topic/circuit-rider)
⁵ Barclay, W. C. (1950). *History of Methodist Missions* (p. 8). The Board of Missions and Church Extension of The Methodist Church. New York.

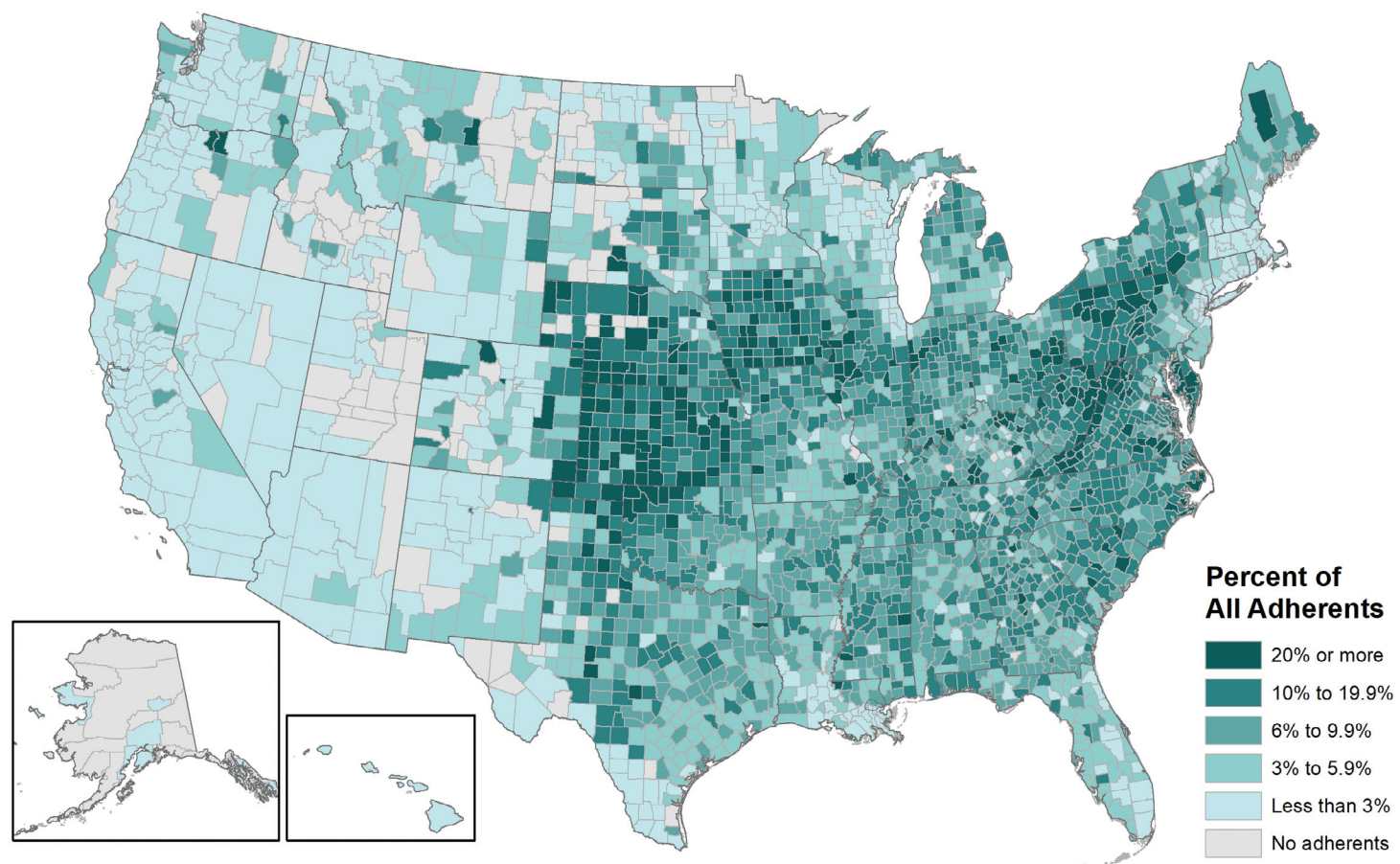
Map 3 shows adherents in the United Methodist Church as a percentage of all religious adherents, as reported in the 2020 U.S. Religion Census. One can almost see the trails of Westward expansion: the Cumberland Road through Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois; the Natchez Trace from Tennessee and down through Mississippi; the Santa Fe Trail through the state of Kansas; and the Oregon Trail starting in Kansas and going through Nebraska. Interestingly, the map seems to indicate that the Rocky Mountains were a formidable barrier to the Methodist circuit riders who established congregations during the time of Westward expansion.

Latter-day Saints Patterns

One group that did make their way through the Rocky Mountains was a group of Latter-day Saints led by Brigham Young. After the murder of Joseph Smith in Carthage, Illinois, in 1844, leadership of the Church of Christ, which Smith established in 1830, fractured into several groups. Two of these groups are now known as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, headquartered in Salt Lake City, Utah, and the Community of Christ, headquartered in Independence, Missouri.

Brigham Young and his group first arrived in the Great Salt Lake region in 1847. At the time, the area was still Mexican territory. In 1848 the U.S. acquired the area from Mexico, and in 1890 the

Map 3: United Methodist Church
Adherents as a Percentage of All Religious Adherents, 2020



Latter-day Saints “renounced its most provocative institutions—plural marriage and the notion of a separate political ‘Kingdom of God.’”⁶ In 1896, Utah was admitted as a state and has been a Latter-day Saints stronghold ever since.

Map 4 shows the distribution of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as a percentage of the population. The denomination is no longer confined to the Great Salt Lake region or even the state of Utah. The Latter-day Saints have significant portions of the populations in Idaho, Wyoming, Arizona, Nevada, and the eastern sides of Washington and Oregon. The strength of the Latter-day Saints in these areas may be another reason why the Methodists are not very strong west of the Rocky Mountains, and the strength of the Methodists in areas just east of the Rockies may explain why the Latter-day Saints do not have a presence in many of those counties.

In 1860, in Amboy, Illinois—several years after Brigham Young led his group to the Great Salt Lake—Joseph Smith III was ordained as the president of what is now called the Community of Christ. In 1888, a “number of church members had returned to Independence, Missouri, to claim land designated by Joseph Smith Jr. as the center

of Zion.”⁷ More than 150 years later, this concentration of followers is still visible in the distribution of the Community of Christ congregations.

Map 5 shows the number of Community of Christ congregations by county.⁸ There is only one county with 20 or more congregations. That county is Jackson County, Missouri, which is where Independence, Missouri is located, and the Community of Christ reported 32 congregations in the county. The next largest group of counties only have five congregations each. Those counties include Harrison County, Iowa; Clay County, Missouri; Scioto County, Ohio; Tulsa County, Oklahoma; and King County, Washington. Overall, the Community of Christ reported a congregation in 439 counties, with 348 (79%) of those counties having one congregation.

Conclusion

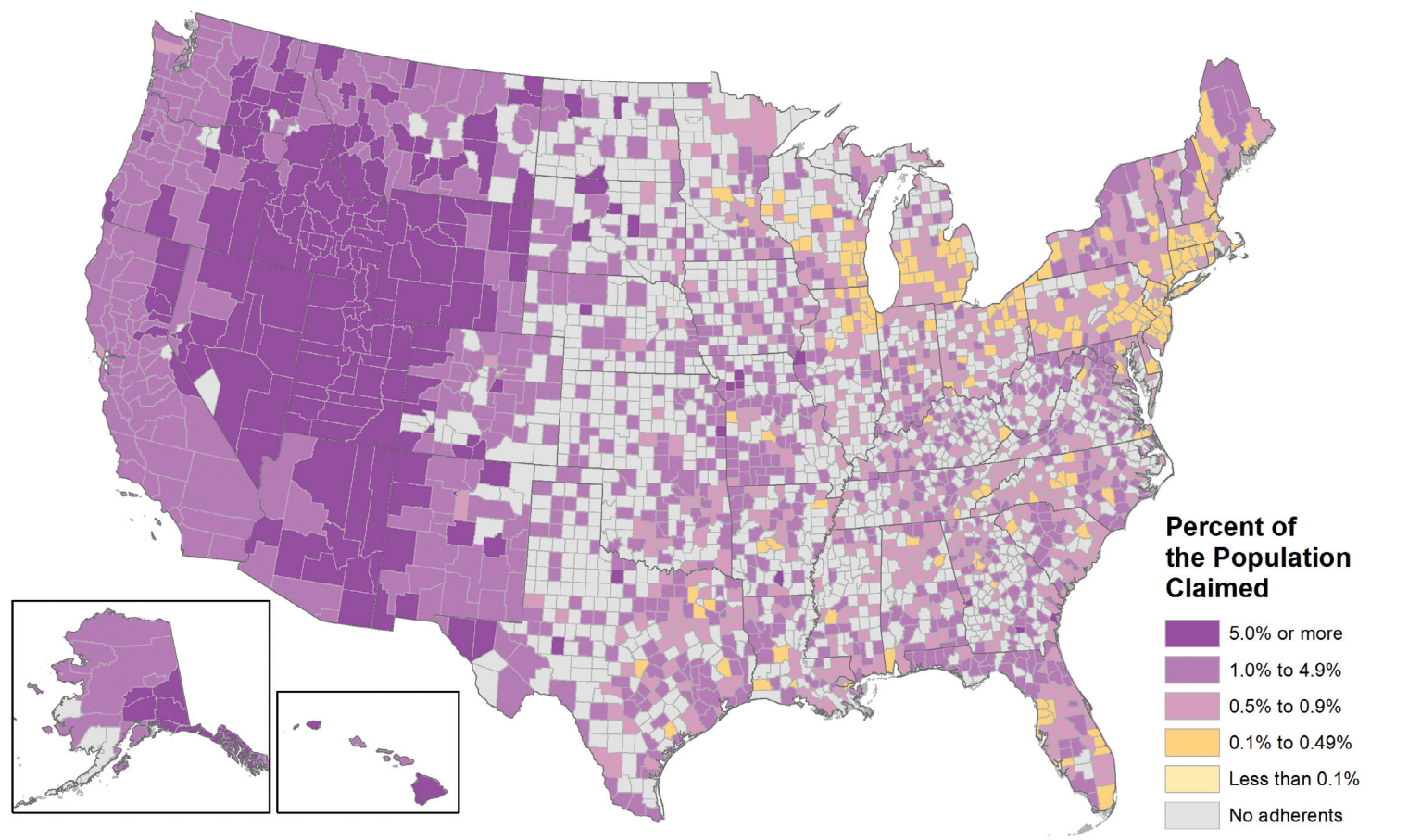
The above are just five examples of the how historical and organizational events and conflicts can leave a visible pattern in the distribution of adherents and their concentrations within the

⁶ Kosmin, B. A., & Lachman, S. P. (1993). *One Nation Under God: Religion in Contemporary American Society* (p. 37). Harmony Books. New York.

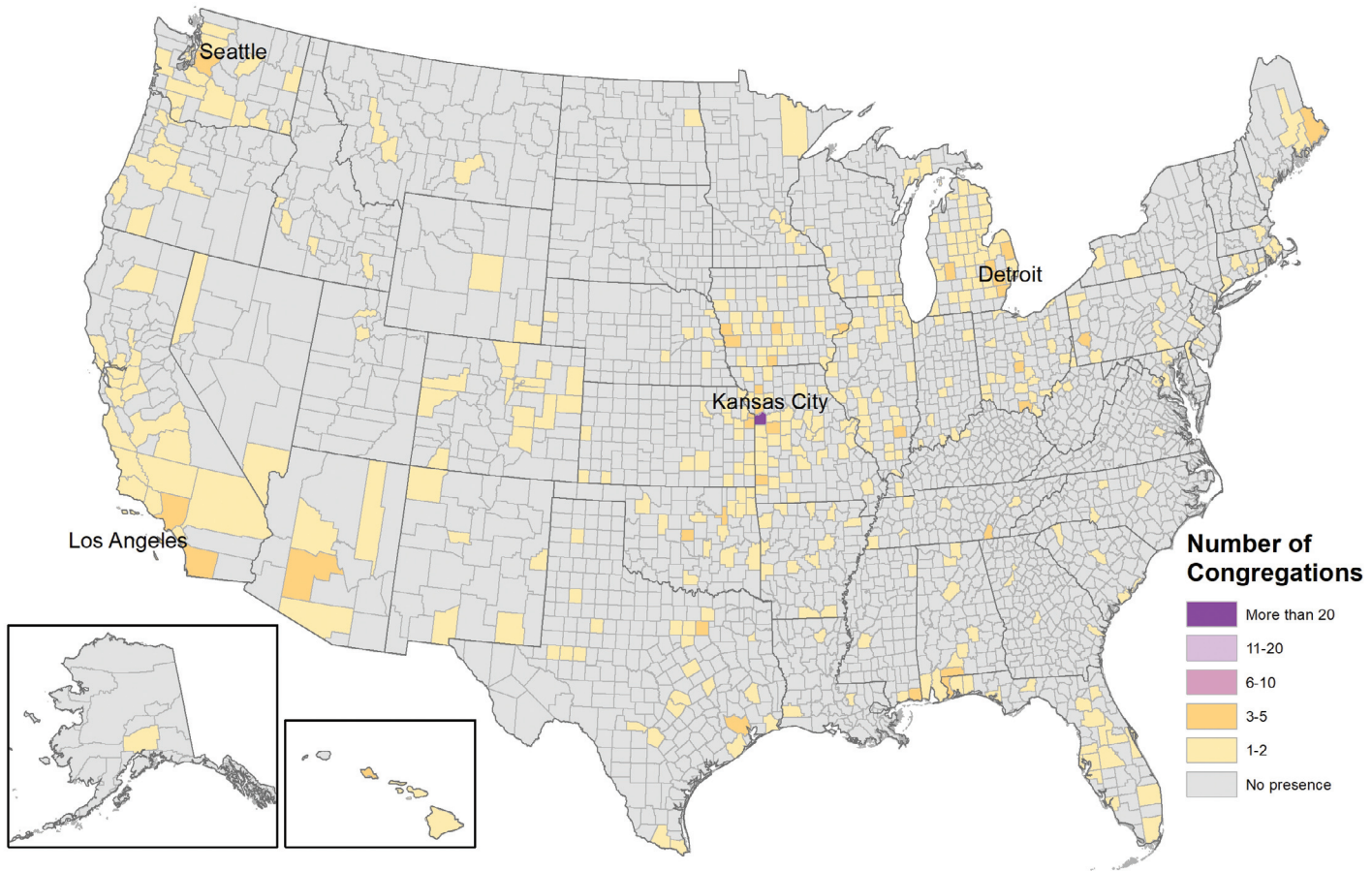
⁷ History. (n.d.). Community of Christ International Headquarters. Retrieved June 2, 2023, from <https://cofchrist.org/history/>

⁸ The Community of Christ only reported their number of congregations to the 2020 U.S. Religion Census study. They did not report adherents.

Map 4: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
Adherents as a Percentage of Population, 2020



Map 5: Community of Christ
Number of Congregations, 2020



population. All organizations have beginnings and events that shape their current reality. For the American Baptist Church in the USA, the Southern Baptist Convention, the United Methodist Church, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and the Community of Christ, these events took place more than 150 years ago and are still visible within the distribution of their congregations and adherents today.