

SOUTHERN ILLINOIS—A CULTURAL AREA

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INTRODUCTION

In the southern 31 counties of Illinois certain economic, social, and cultural traits and complexes exist which tend to differentiate the area from the other parts of the State. Geographic factors such as soil type, climatic conditions, and topography, along with the fact that it is bounded on three sides by important rivers, give it additional distinctiveness. Also, it has what might be considered a cultural center in Southern Illinois University located at Carbondale in Jackson County. This university, being the only accredited university in the southern third of Illinois, serves as a focal point for advanced education. The 31 counties included in the analysis presented here were selected on the basis that they regularly supply students to the university and are considered by the administration of the university as being in its sphere.

Although many definitions of a cultural area have been presented, the thesis of this paper is that the area analyzed complies with the definition given by Duncan.¹ He defines a cultural area or region "as a locality characterized by the prevalence of dominant cultural traits and complexes which form a common pattern of life. Such an area must have a center, or focal point, where the concentration of the characteristics becomes relatively fixed."

The analysis is still in process. To date it has been limited in scope, for the most part, to secondary source materials. It is recognized that a complete analysis must include cultural factors that do not lend themselves to quantitative methods. Since it has not been possible to date to include these cultural factors, this paper is presented in the form of a progress report. The information here presented, incomplete though it may be, indicates the presence of cultural factors which confirm one another and consistently reveal a cultural area.

It should be pointed out that before developing programs for the correction of social and economic problems confronting given geographic areas, it is essential the culture of the area be analyzed. Areas such as the one found in the southernmost part of Illinois contain problems directly related to the culture, to the social situations, and to the economic conditions found.² Only by determining the interplay of these cultural elements and social and economic factors, along with the influences they exert, can a sound program for their improvement be developed.

ANALYSIS OF THE AREA

A number of indices are being used in the analysis to determine

¹ Duncan, O. D., "Southwest, a Cultural Area in Evolution," *Southwest Review*, Vol. 27, No. 4, Summer 1942, p. 391.

² Please accept the writer's opinion that the existence of problems in the area does not necessarily mean that this is a problem area. Every area has its problems.



FIG. 1.—Infant deaths per 1,000 live births, 1942-1944.



FIG. 2.—Percent of births in hospitals, 1945.

whether a cultural area exists. Ten of these indices will be presented in this paper.³

First, let us consider three economic factors that have a close relationship and indicate distinct differences between this area and other parts of the State. The per capita assessed valuation in the southern 31 counties was \$1969 in 1945 compared to \$2416 for the State as a whole. Only six counties in the area had a per capita assessed valuation above the average for Illinois. The

lowest county and nine of the ten lowest counties of the State were found in the area. The average value of homes for Southern Illinois in 1940 was \$1323 as compared with \$3120 for the State as a whole. Only two counties, and these were different counties from the exceptions referred to in discussing the previous factor, had an average valuation of \$2000 and over. The rate of dependency upon the public aid programs was high for Southern Illinois, where in January, 1946, 51.16 persons per 1000 population received assistance. This was nearly twice the rate for the State of Illinois which was 28.58 per 1000 popula-

³ The sources used for these indices were:
 a. Sixteenth Census of the U. S. Population; Second series, 1940.
 b. The Illinois Hospital Survey and Plan, Illinois Department of Public Health, July 1, 1947.

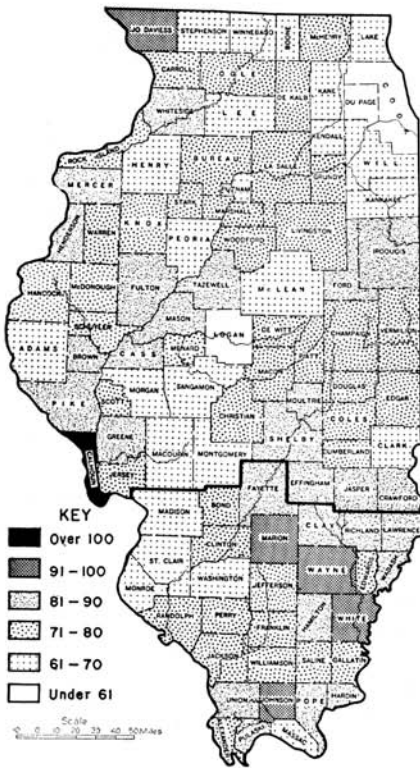


FIG. 3.—Live births per 1,000 females, 15-44 years, 1940.



FIG. 4.—Average of ten standard-of-living measures.

tion. Here again, two counties were in the lowest one-fourth of the counties of the State and neither of these two counties were among those listed as exceptions to the low status for valuation of homes or per capita assessed valuation, above.

The educational attainment of the population of the area again indicates a low level of attainment. The proportion of persons 25 years of age and over having completed six or more years of school in 1940 shows that Southern Illinois had just under 75 percent whereas the State as a whole had 81.3 percent. Other indices, such as the average year of school completed by the

population, show a similar pattern for the Southern Illinois area.

As might be expected, where economic conditions are relatively low the percentage of deaths occurring in hospitals in 1945 is also low. The same thing applies to the percentage of births in hospitals in 1945. A noticeable proportion of the population were unable to go to the hospital to die or to be born.

The infant death rate is also high in this area where we find a rate of 47.4 infant deaths per 1000 live births in the period of 1931-1944 compared to 33.1 for the State of Illinois (fig. 1). One interesting aspect of this is that as the per-

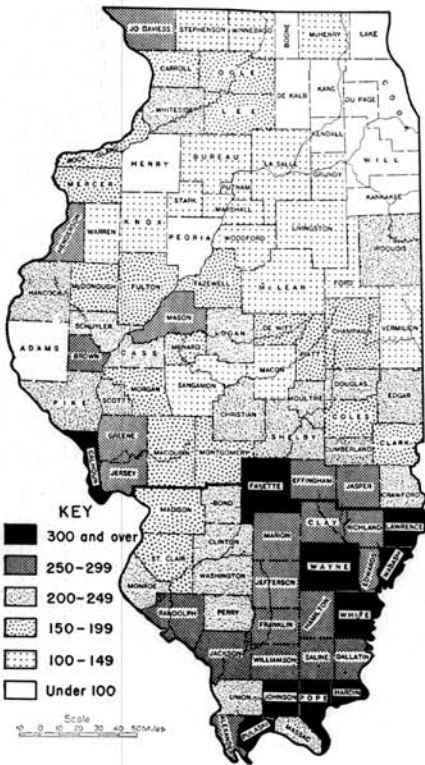


FIG. 5.—Total sum of ranks of five factors.

percentage of births occurring in hospitals increases the infant death rate decreases (fig. 2). The live births per 1000 females 15-44 years of age in 1940 was also relatively high (fig. 3). In this instance the highest county falls outside the Southern Illinois area. With the exception of five of these 31 counties, all the counties in the area fall within the four highest ranks of counties in the State, namely, those having more than 70 live births per 1000 females, 15-44 years of age in 1940.

The average of 10 standard-of-living measures shows that the Southern Illinois area in general is below

the rest of the State (fig. 4). With the exception of Calhoun County, which adjoins this area to the northwest, and may have to be considered a part of the same cultural pattern, all of the lowest counties in the State are found in the Southern Illinois area.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In order to summarize the findings to date, five factors were selected as representatives of the many factors being examined in the study (fig. 5). These were: live births per 1000 females, 15-44 years of age, in 1940; deaths per 1000 population, 1942-1944; percent of births in hospitals to total births in 1942; infant deaths per 1000 live births, 1942-1944; and the average of ten standard-of-living measures. All counties of Illinois were ranked according to each factor and the sum of these ranks computed. These sums of ranks were again used as a final basis for ranking the counties.

TABLE 1.—DISTRIBUTION OF COUNTIES ACCORDING TO SUM OF RANKS OF FIVE FACTORS

Sum of ranks	Counties of Illinois	Counties of Southern Illinois
300 and over	10	9
250-299	20	12
200-249	22	8
150-199	23	2
100-149	15	0
Under 100	12	0
Total	102	31

The counties were distributed as shown in table 1. Of the ranks of all counties, the southern area had nine of the ten lowest counties and

all but two of the thirty-one in the lowest three classes of ranks. It should be noted that a high sum of ranks indicates an unfavorable condition. In assembling the ranks to secure the over-all figures, the fertility factor was reversed since high birth rates are usually associated with rural cultural situations and with the types of factors being used to delineate in this study. The two highest ranking counties of the area were St. Clair and Madison which contain the urban center of East St. Louis and are in the metropolitan area of St. Louis.

Certain counties on the periphery, particularly Calhoun, do reflect some of the same traits as those found in the Southern Illinois area. However, until further investigation warrants a change, it seems advis-

able to hold to the original 31 counties. This is especially true when nonquantitative factors are considered. For example, the people of this area attach a name, "Greater Egypt," to the area and have a feeling of belonging to it. Certain word usages and political concepts seem to distinguish the area. These are in process of being analyzed and preliminary research lends weight to the present delineation.

It would seem to follow then that a cultural area exists, including the southernmost 31 counties. Only after careful analysis of the conditions, and, of course, with the prerequisite that an objective, scientific point of view be adopted, can adequate plans be developed for retaining the desirable elements of the culture and changing the undesirable.