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Periodic Atlas of the Metrocape: The Dream of the 90s is Alive in Portland. Really?

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The dream of the 90s is alive in Portland. *Really?*

by Vivek Shandas
cartography by Ryan Dann

If the dream of the 90s is alive in Portland, as described by the popular TV show *Portlandia*, then we would expect to see little change over the past couple of decades. However, as we know, the only constant in life is change, and the Portland region is no exception. Since 1990, during the emergence of grunge music, the Simpsons, and the first web page, people and places have undergone dramatic change. While the nightclubs and radio stations may not be playing as much grunge music as they did in the 1990s, the changes, as viewed through maps about those who live in the region, tell a different story.

In this edition of the *Metroscope*[®] atlas we ask if the dream of the 90s is still alive in the Portland region. We explore the demographics changes over the last 20 years, to commemorate 20 years of publication of *Metroscope*[®], and describe how our people and places have changed. By examining two decades of population change, we offer a perspective for you to evaluate the quality of these changes, and our own place in them. We might also catch a glimpse of what we'd like our region to look like in the two decades ahead.

A Spatial 20 Years

As a region we've seen about 700 thousand new residents from 1990 to 2010 – about 400 thousand new residents arriv-

ing to the seven county region (including Clark County) between 1990 and 200, and another 300 thousand between 2000 and 2010. Although this region is no different than many other metropolitan areas of the western United States, the unique aspect of the Portland region is the distribution of people within an urban growth boundary. In the coming 20 years, population forecasts by the State of Oregon describe another 1 million people moving to the Portland region. Where these new comers may live might be determined by what has happened in the past, among other factors such as housing markets, policy goals, and employment opportunities.

Each of the following maps uses publicly available data from the U.S. Census. They use block group geography – a convenient mapping unit that is largely determined by the number of people living in different areas of a region. Since many block group boundaries changed from 1990 to 2010, we didn't attempt to mix the two datasets, but we instead describe changes in paired maps – one representing 1990 and one 2010 – and by theme. We note that these maps and descriptions require caution in their interpretation. Like any sampling method, maintaining accuracy in the exact numbers of people in a region is challenging due to repre-

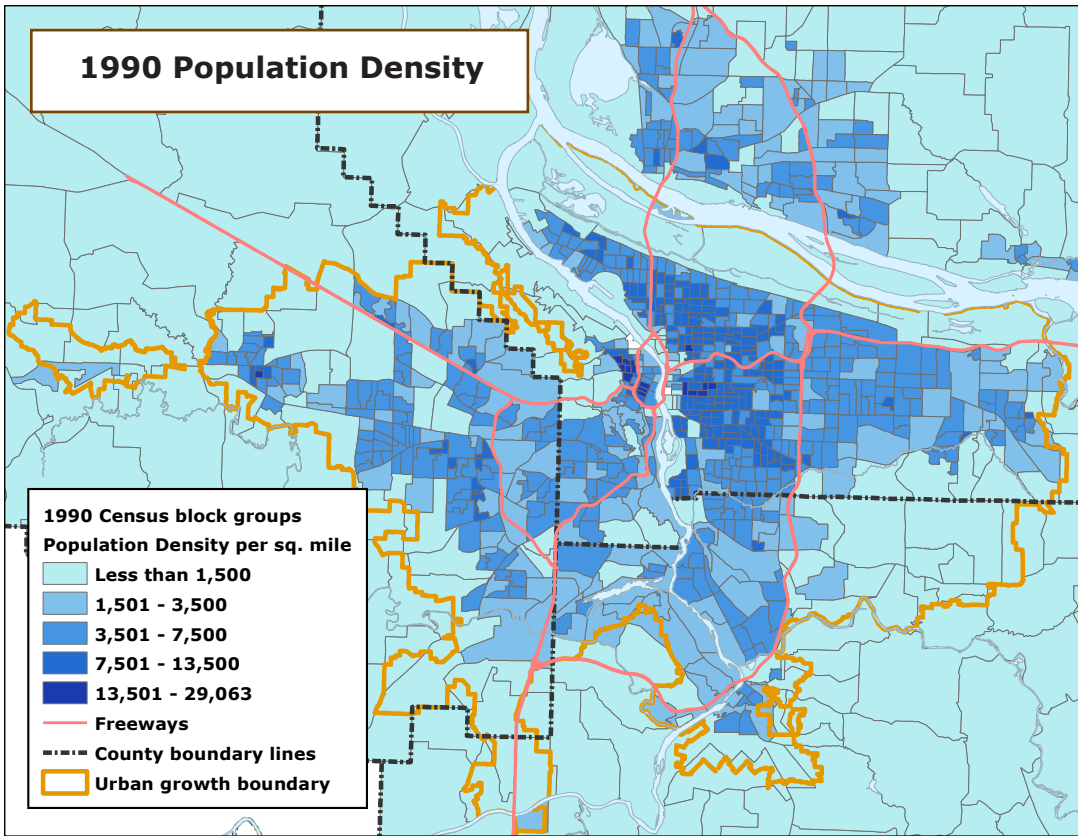


Figure 1

Data Source: Social Explorer. Based on data from U.S. Census Bureau, 1990 Census.

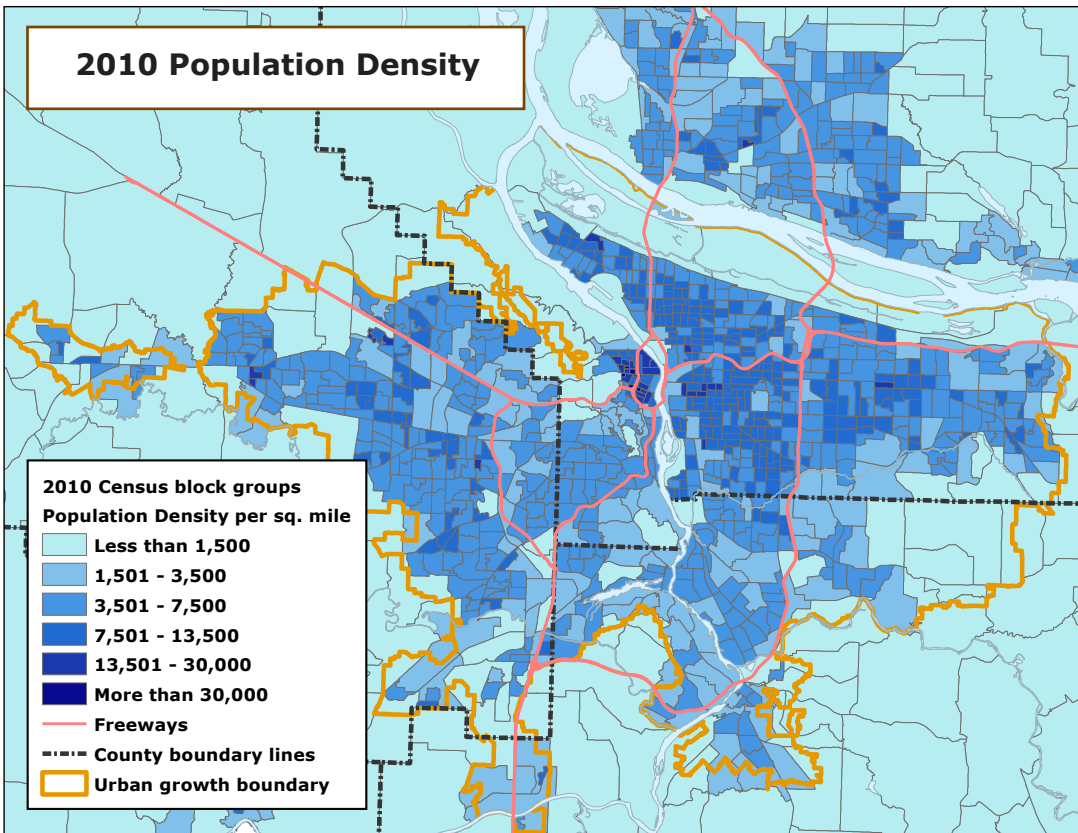


Figure 2

Data Source: Social Explorer. Based on data from U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census.

sensation and survey techniques. At the same time, these data from the U.S. Census are the only comprehensive description of people in regions throughout the country – it’s the best we have!

The first of these maps describes changes in the population density between 1990 and 2010 (Figures 1 and 2). Only a handful of places had upwards of 29 thousand people per square mile during 1990, and in 2010 almost a dozen block groups contained more than 30 thousand people per square mile. These patterns illustrate a densification of specific areas of the region. On the other hand, although almost the whole region experienced an increase in population density, the only large areas of land that remained relatively low density (less than 1,500 per square mile) remained in the outer Southeast, within Clackamas County.

Although the total number and density of people in the region may provide a perspective into changes

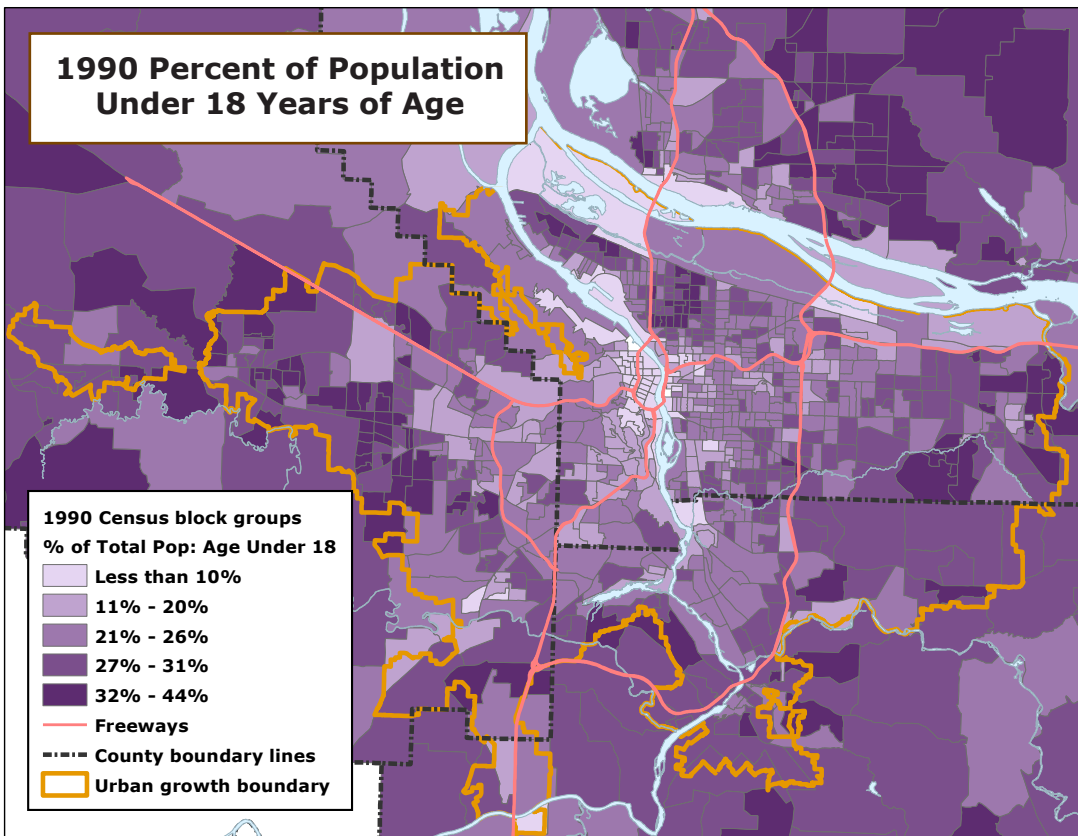


Figure 3

Data Source: Social Explorer. Based on data from U.S. Census Bureau, 1990 Census.

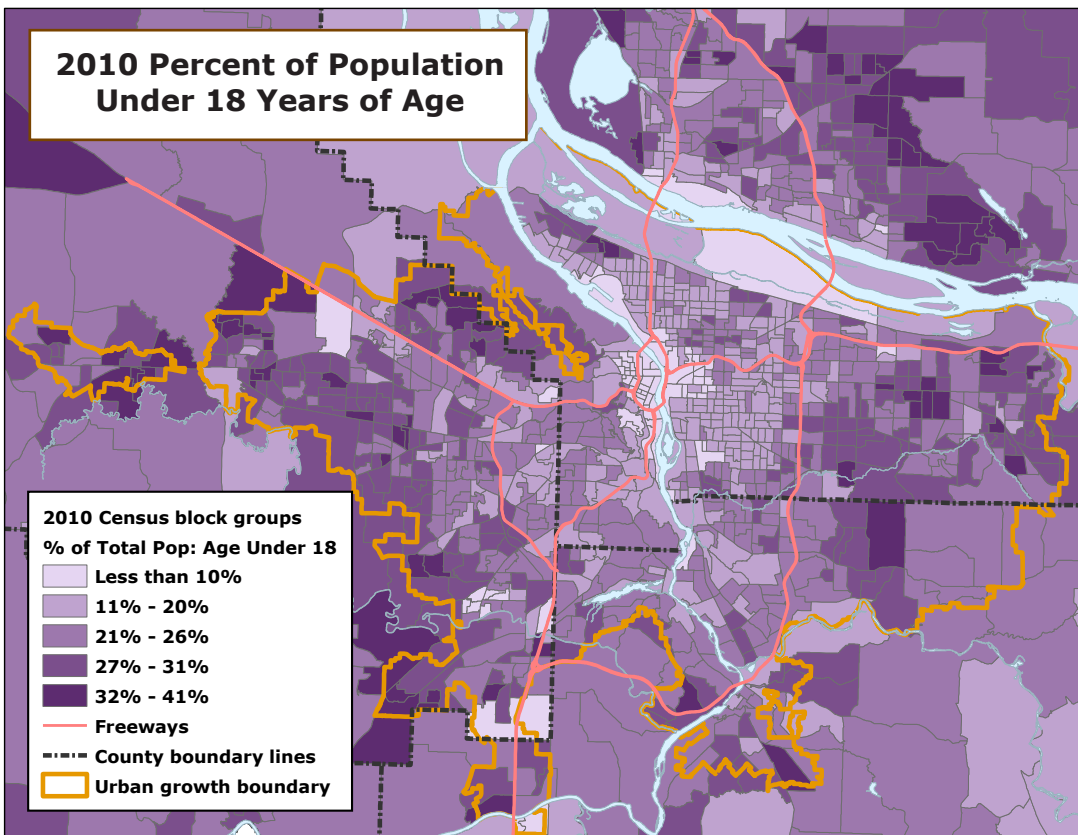
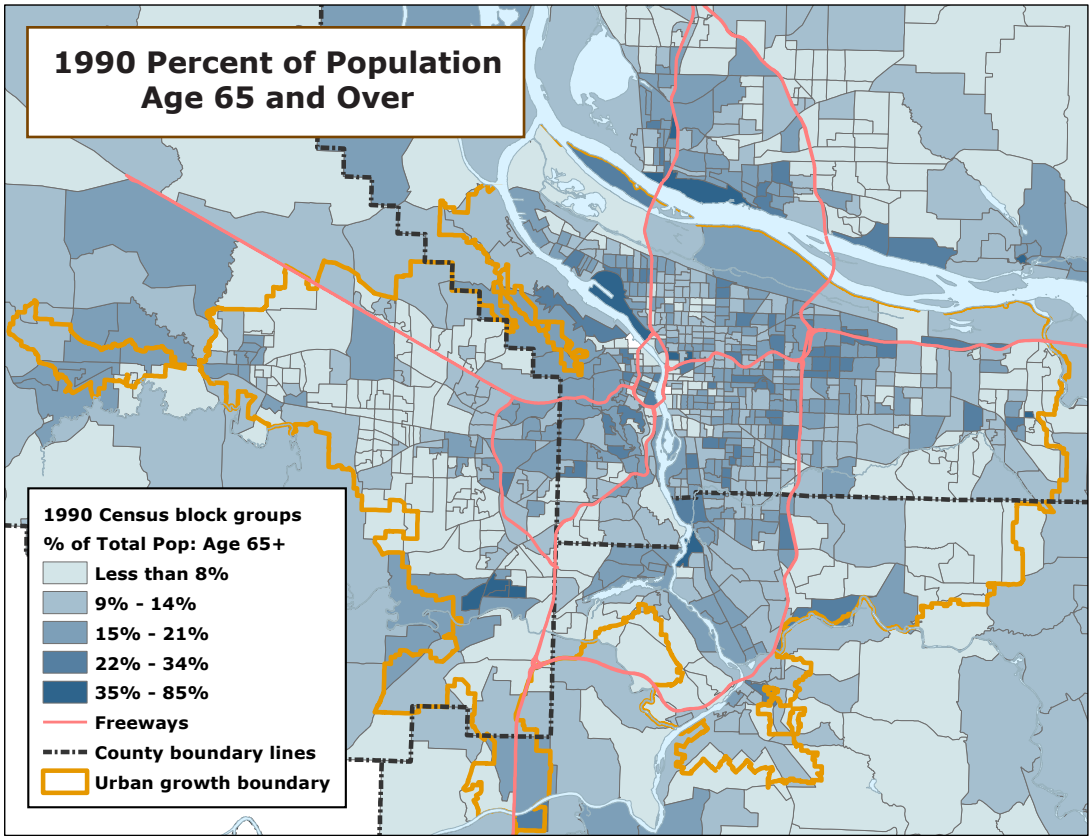


Figure 4

Data Source: Social Explorer. Based on data from U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census.

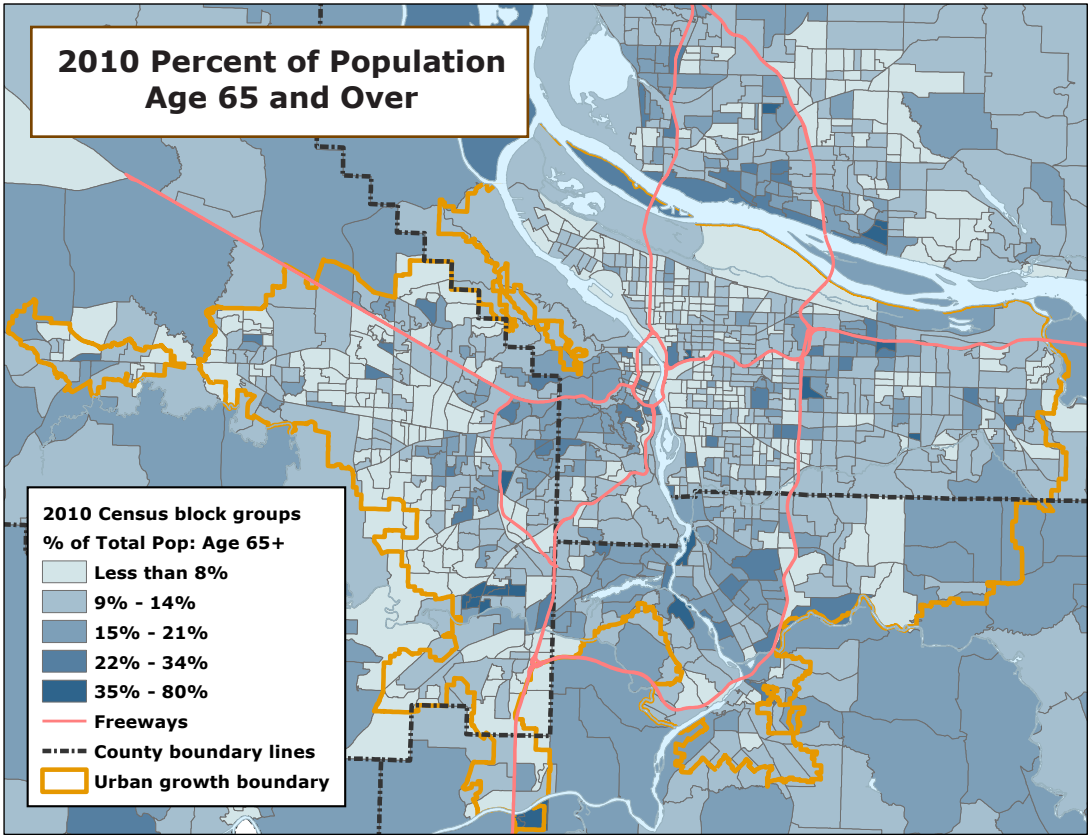
in different areas of the region, by examining the demographics – or the specific characteristics of our communities – we can better gauge who is moving to the different areas of the region over the past 20 years. To describe these changes, we look specifically at the number of young and old people and where they have lived over the two time periods. We also look at the race of people who live in different parts of the city.

In terms of those under 18 (Figures 3 and 4), the maps don't describe much change between 1990 and 2010 within inner Portland neighborhoods; however, Northeast Portland saw a change in people below 18 years of age from upwards of 44% to as low as 10% in many block groups. Clark County and the suburbs (western Washington and eastern Multnomah Counties) saw the largest of these changes. Decreases in young people occurred primarily in the rural areas of Oregon.



Data Source: Social Explorer. Based on data from U.S. Census Bureau, 1990 Census.

Figure 5



Data Source: Social Explorer. Based on data from U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census.

Figure 6

The number of older adults (those above 65) increased between 1990 and 2010 in the rural parts of the region, and across both Oregon and Washington. The suburbs also witnessed an increase, coinciding with older adults moving away from the inner parts of East Portland (Figures 5 and 6).

In terms of race, we examine four different racial categories as defined by the U.S. Census: Black, Hispanic, Asian, and White. Beginning with the Black or African American population (Figures 7 and 8), the maps describe an overall reduction in concentration across the region and within census block groups. These results may not be surprising because they corroborate earlier findings by other reports, including the State of Black Oregon (2010), the Regional Equity Atlas (2009), and several Oregonian articles on the topic of neighborhood change. Since these maps provide

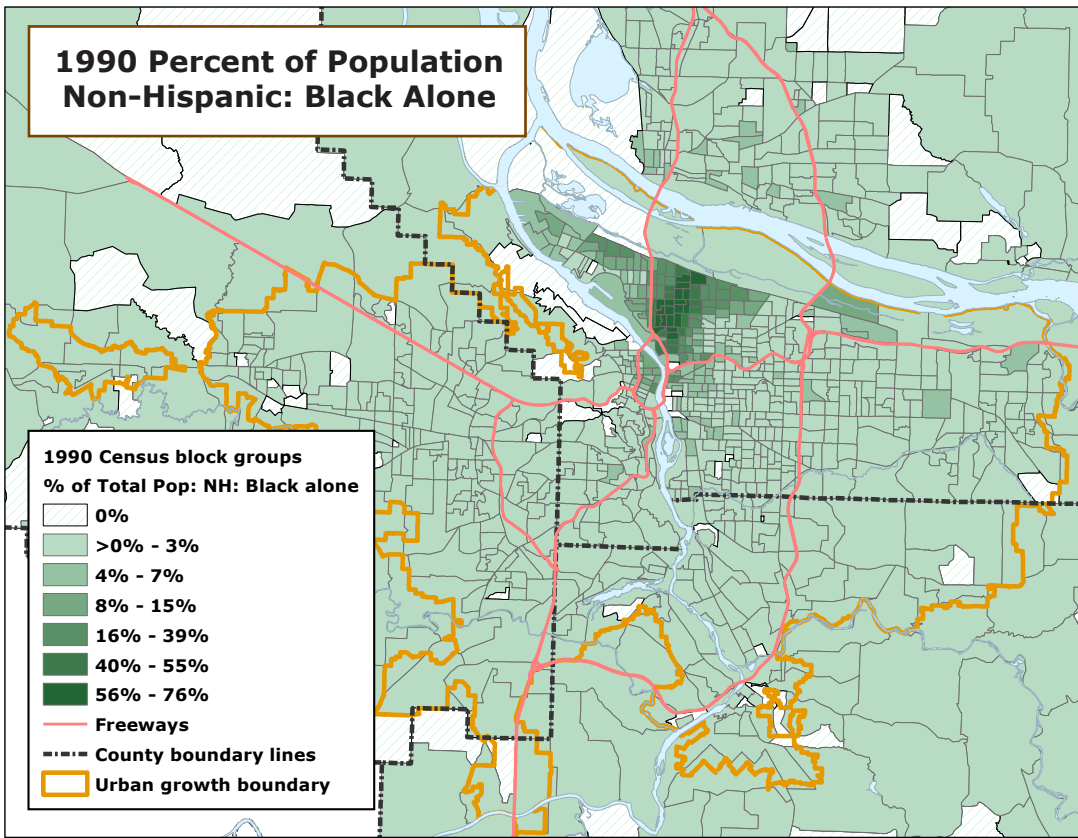


Figure 7

Data Source: Social Explorer. Based on data from U.S. Census Bureau, 1990 Census.

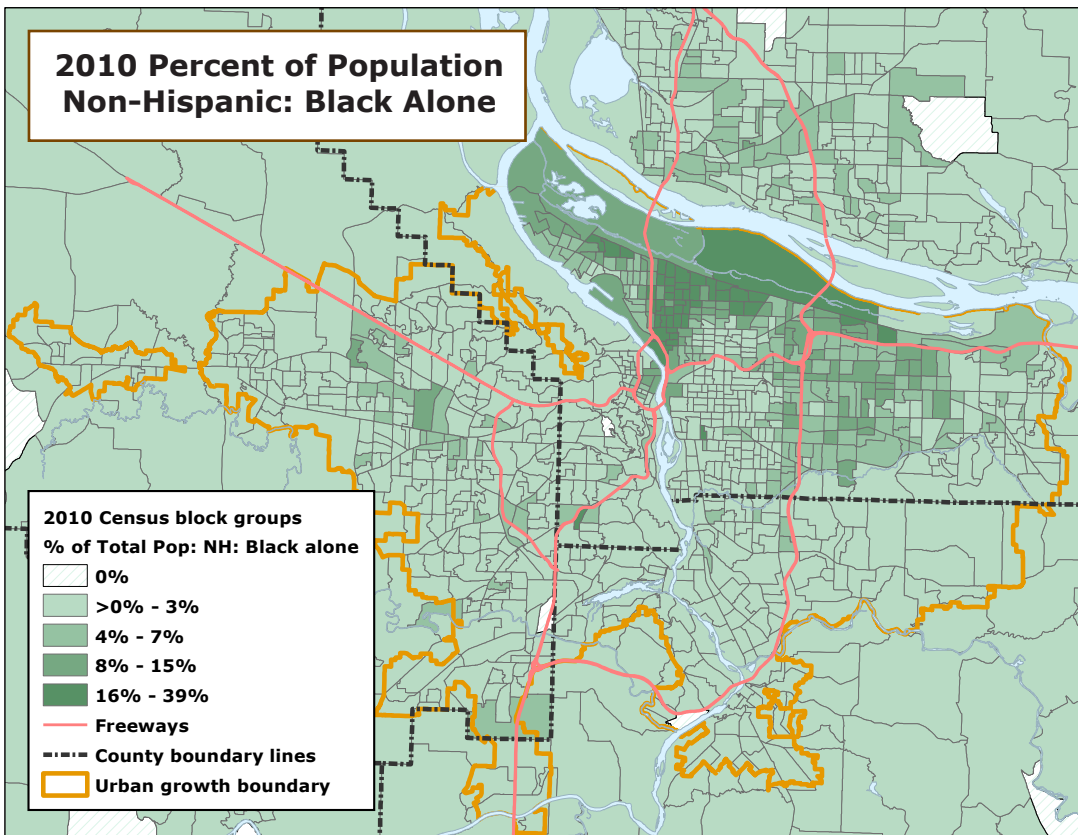
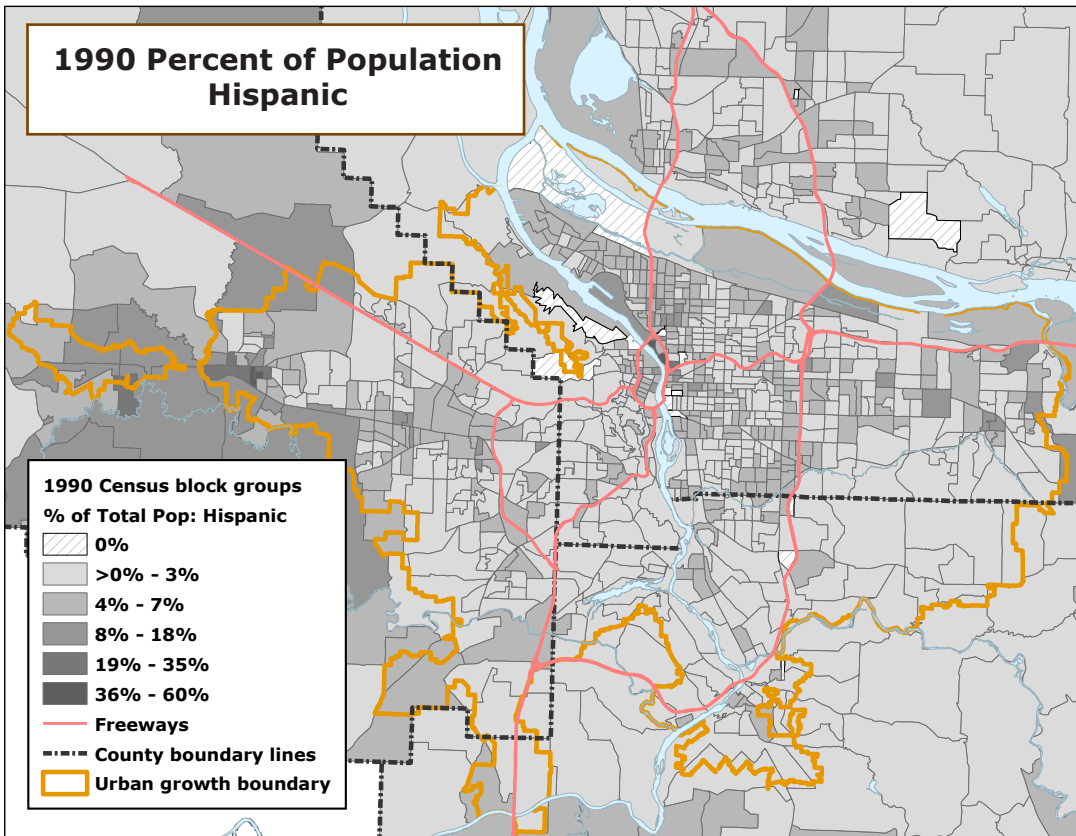


Figure 8

Data Source: Social Explorer. Based on data from U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census.

a regional view, they also offer a perspective into those areas of the region that have seen an increase in African Americans, where in 1990 few lived. For example, the concentration of communities in Northeast of Portland (1990) led to a distribution of people to eastern parts of Multnomah County, into Clark County, and to the suburbs of Washington County. Indeed, we see fewer block groups with a majority of African Americans overall.

Hispanics are the fastest growing population in the region. In 2010 very few block groups contained zero percent of people who self-identify as Hispanic, and no block groups saw a decrease in the Hispanic population between 1990 and 2010 (Figures 9 and 10). In fact, Hispanics are highly distributed, with only a few areas having greater than 75%. Like the Hispanics in the region, the Asian American population also saw a significant increase between 1990 and 2010.



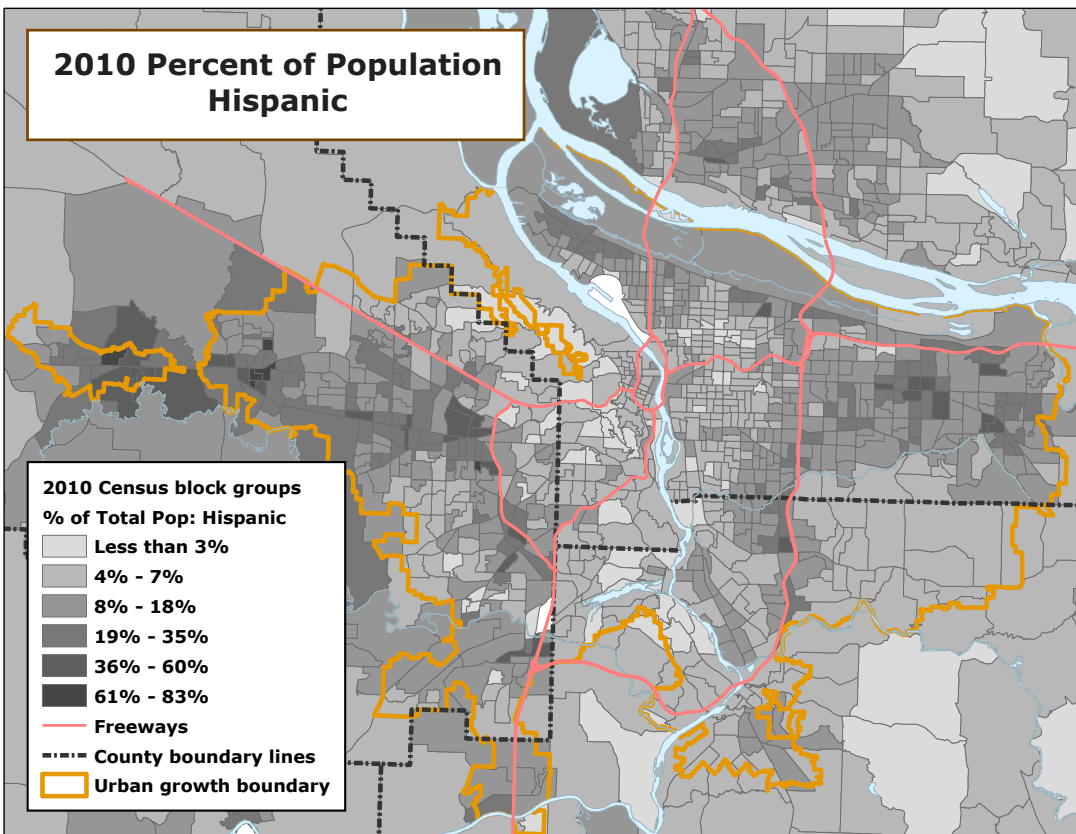
Data Source: Social Explorer. Based on data from U.S. Census Bureau, 1990 Census.

Figure 9

Asian Americans are, in fact, the second fastest growing population in the region, with the suburbs seeing the largest growth within the region, specifically areas along I-205, Clackamas County, and Washington County (Figures 11 and 12). While in 1990, the block groups with the highest percentage of Asian Americans was less than a third, by 2010 some block groups, such as those north of the Sunset Highway (26), saw an increase to almost 50%.

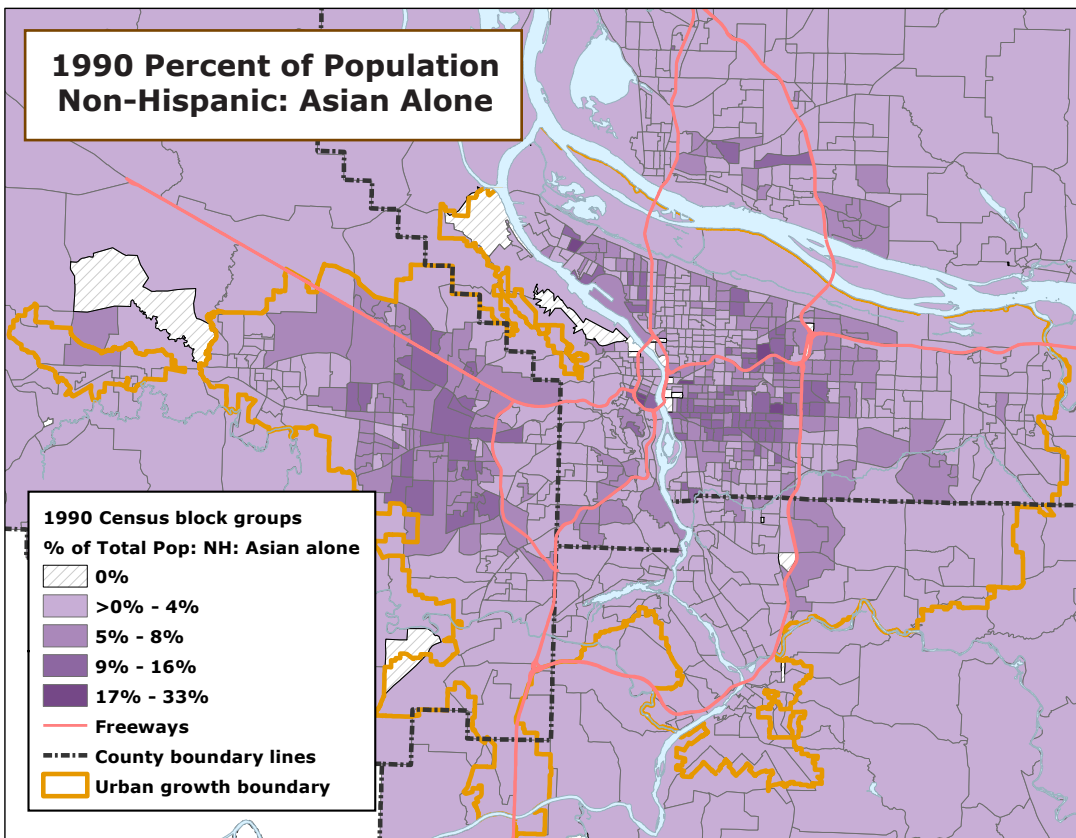
Dreaming of the 90s

Given these changes, can we believe that the dream of the 1990s is alive in Portland? No doubt, the region has experienced a lot of change since the 1990s; however, if we want to strive for improving the places we live, work, and play, then we'll need to grapple with some profound questions about these changes, and what they mean for our future. For example, what will the



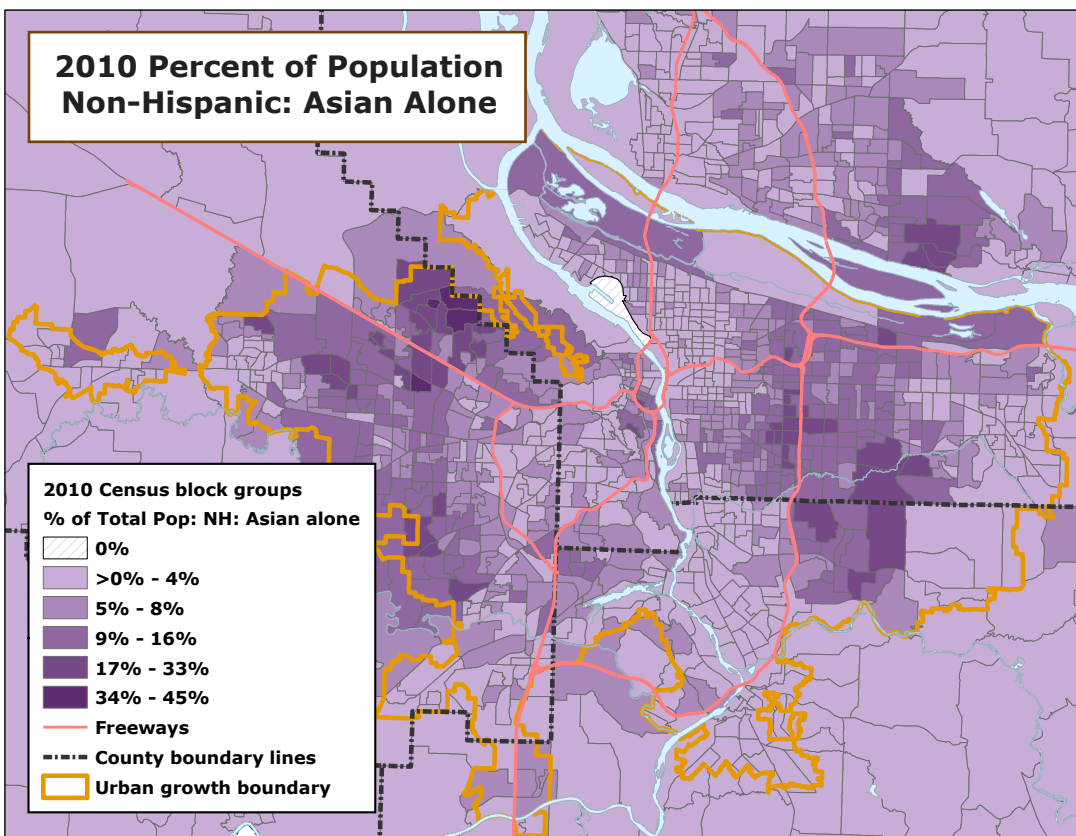
Data Source: Social Explorer. Based on data from U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census.

Figure 10



Data Source: Social Explorer. Based on data from U.S. Census Bureau, 1990 Census.

Figure 11



Data Source: Social Explorer. Based on data from U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census.

Figure 12

shift of African American communities out of northeast Portland mean for connecting people with the places they live? What will the increases in Hispanic and Asian communities mean for broadening participation in the political process? These difficult questions invite immediate and thoughtful attention. Our overall aim is not to address these questions through a few maps or to present definitive depictions of the younger, older, and racial groups in the region. But we want these maps to generate discussions about how the region has changed over the past 20 years, and to challenge policymakers to consider what we can do to improve the quality of life for all people in the metroscape. **M**

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