

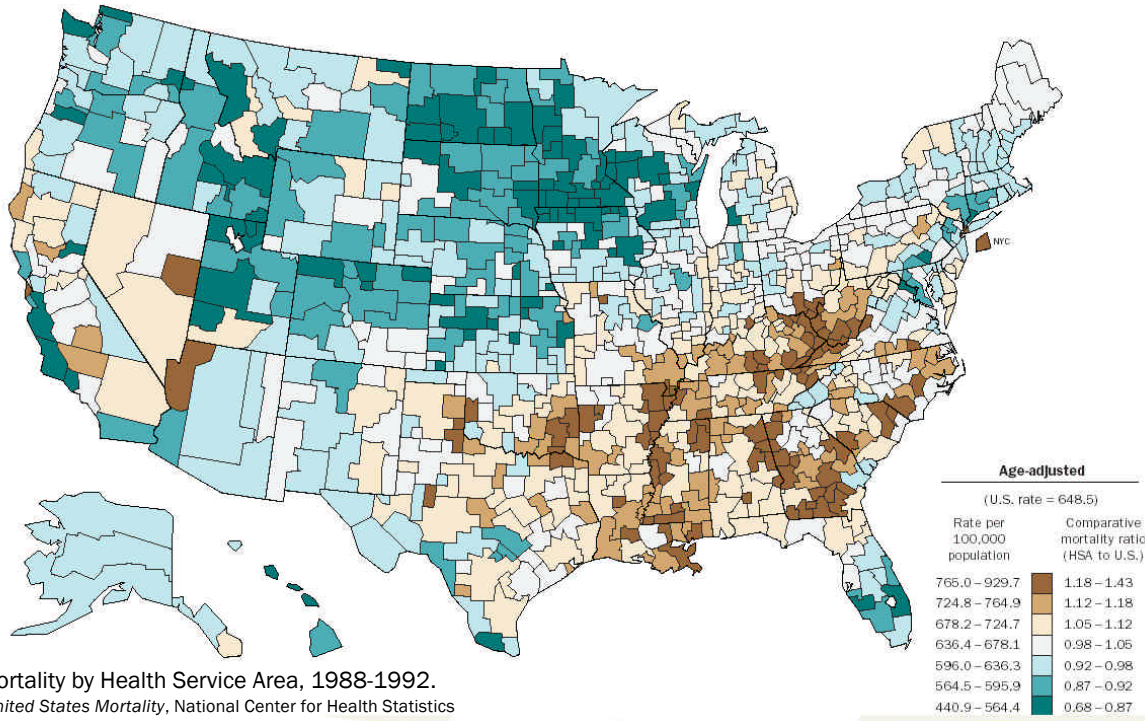


REAL GEOGRAPHY

EXPLORING THE GEOGRAPHY OF EVERYDAY LIFE

McGraw-Hill Higher Education

The Geography of Death by Jon C. Malinowski, Ph.D.



White Male Mortality by Health Service Area, 1988-1992.
Source: *Atlas of United States Mortality*, National Center for Health Statistics

The map above shows mortality rates for white males during the period 1988-1992. The geographic unit is called a health service area (HSA). The colors represent deaths per 100,000 people in the HSA.

A quick glance at the map reveals that mortality is not spatially constant. The south and southeastern regions of the country, as well as a few loca-

tions in the west and north have considerable higher death rates.

The reasons for these spatial differences can be numerous. For one, some of the areas with higher death rates have higher numbers of elderly residents. Rural areas with few job opportunities often experience an out-migration of youngsters seeking jobs in cities.

Another factor that can cause geographic differences in mortality is the availability of health care and public's access to it. Some area may have more hospitals or health clinics. Some states may have better health-care systems for the poor, which can reduce mortality.

Finally, it is important to recognize that cultural factors such as diet (preference for fried

foods, etc.) and lifestyle (exercise, etc.) can increase or decrease mortality rates. Smoking, for example, is culturally more accepted in some regions than in others.

While this is not a pleasant topic for many, the work of medical geographers can be very useful to the public health community as they conduct their work.

Further Research

1. Find out what the highest causes of death are in your region of the country. What factors might help to explain your findings?

Links:

- Atlas of United States Mortality <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/pubs/pubd/other/atlas/atlas.htm>
- Cancer Mortality Maps & Graphs <http://www3.cancer.gov/atlasplus/>
- Medical Geography Specialty Group <http://www.pop.psu.edu/aag/mgsg.html>