



# REAL GEOGRAPHY

EXPLORING THE GEOGRAPHY OF EVERYDAY LIFE

McGraw-Hill Higher Education

## “Researching the Ethnic Landscape” by Jon C. Malinowski, Ph.D.

There is a tendency among a lot of new geography researchers to assume that the only source of data about the people of an area comes from government or academic sources. But this approach can cause a scholar to overlook some great and inexpensive sources of data available right under our noses. In the study of ethnic landscapes, non-government sources can be a great addition to your bag of tricks.

One great source of information is the phone book, both white pages and yellow pages. Say, for example, that you're researching the spatial distribution of Korean in your state. Go online to a yellow pages directory and search for all Korean restaurants in your state. Jot down the zip code of each restaurant and then plot the zip

codes on a blank state map. Does this tell you where Koreans are? Not necessarily, but it gives you a good idea of where to look. Then look for community groups, associations, and other organizations in that community to continue your research.

A similar approach that has been used successfully by researchers is to search for particular business names that might be associated with an ethnic group.

Another common and inexpensive source of data is the local cemetery. Find the oldest cemeteries in your area and spend some time writing down the last name and dates from a sample of grave markers in all parts of the cemetery. Then, make a timeline of your town's history and insert a selection of names in each time period. Does the apparent ethnicity of the names change over time? If so, do the times correspond to a significant period in your town's history or in North American immigration history?

Another source of information are local genealogy groups.



Folk Dancer at Festival, Los Angeles 2002

This is one of the most popular hobbies in the United States and most states and regions have genealogy websites that can point you in the right direction. These sites often feature

history links, tombstone transcriptions, and historical census data that can help uncover the unique ethnic history of a large region or small town.

### Further Research

1. Read a town or city history of your community written more than 50 years ago. Often, older histories will detail event that later historians choose to ignore.
2. Try to document any organizations, churches, or groups in your area that have an affiliation with a particular ethnic group, such as the Polish-American Club, etc. How long has the group been active in the community?

### Links:

- Verizon Superpages <http://www.superpages.com/>
- The USGenWeb Project (Genealogy Links) <http://www.usgenweb.org/>
- Genealogy.com <http://www.genealogy.com/>