Dear Matthew Bloch and Robert Gebeloff,

I would like to show my deep appreciation toward your great work – the Immigration Explorer1. It enables readers to quickly grasp the idea of how immigrants distribute across the US with the good-looking map shows up front, and gives more detailed information as readers navigate to a certain geographical region, filter different countries, and move their mouse cursor over a specific county. The colors and bubbles on the map, along with the time scrollbar on the top, clearly present 4-dimentional data about immigrants – geographical location, country of origin, population, and time. The interaction with the map is also intuitive, such that readers can focus more on exploring the data than on struggling to get used to the interface.

I enjoy finding out two facts with only a few minutes playing with this interactive map. One is that the geographical location is much related the direction of immigrants’ country of origin; for example, Latin Americans tend to reside in the southern states, Canadian immigrants like to stay in the northern states, and Cuban immigrants favor Florida over any other states. The other is that while the population from Western Europe scatter across the map, others tend to concentrate more at some certain locations.

After observing some of these basic phenomena, more in-depth questions may be raised about the composition of immigrant population. However, although one may hover the mouse cursor over a country, and see either the total immigrant population from all countries or that from a specified country, the information about what makes up a region’s immigrant population remains unclear. For example, to see what percentage of the immigrant population in Prince George’s County, MD, is made up of Far Easterner, readers may have to click through China, Korea, Japan, etc, and record the numbers by hand. There is an easy way to address this need – adding to the dropdown box a few items that help select a group of country, such as “All Far Eastern Country”, “All Latin American Country”, and so on. Nevertheless, to present the information more

precisely, I would like to suggest adding a Treemap\(^2\) view as an alternative to the default geographical map view. Possible hierarchy may include state, county, and country of origin. With each rectangle having area exactly proportional to the population and color represents which part of the world did this population come from, it would hopefully be more informative and allow readers to learn more about the make-up of the population.

Another feature the readers may need is multiple selections of the counties. Readers like me who hope to compare the populations of a pair of counties may end up hovering the cursor to a county, memorizing the numbers, and quickly hovering to the other before the short-term memory fade out. This requires much concentration and the ability to locate a county in a short time. In my opinion, it would be useful to make the box showing detailed numbers remain static after users click on the county, then the users can relieve themselves from memorizing anything and take time to find the other county of comparison. In addition, this feature also adds feedback to mouse clicks. Users would expect to see responses when they click on a highlighted region, but it is not the case on this map. Therefore, this feature, aside from its primary purpose, can also somewhat reduce the frustration of user experience.

Finally, there are some minor issues about the map. On my display, the color representing “Latin American under 2%” on the map doesn't quite match that on the legend. The one on the map looks more grayish, and is somewhat confusing with the “no data” regions. In addition, there is a redundant table on the left showing exactly the same content as the dropdown box, though this only happens when I browse it with Firefox.

Again, I appreciate your efforts to build this great visualization. It is capable of satisfying most of the curious minds with such a simple yet pretty user interface. I sincerely hope my suggestions above could help improve it in some way.

Best,

Di-Wei

\(^2\) URL: http://www.cs.umd.edu/hcil/treemap/