

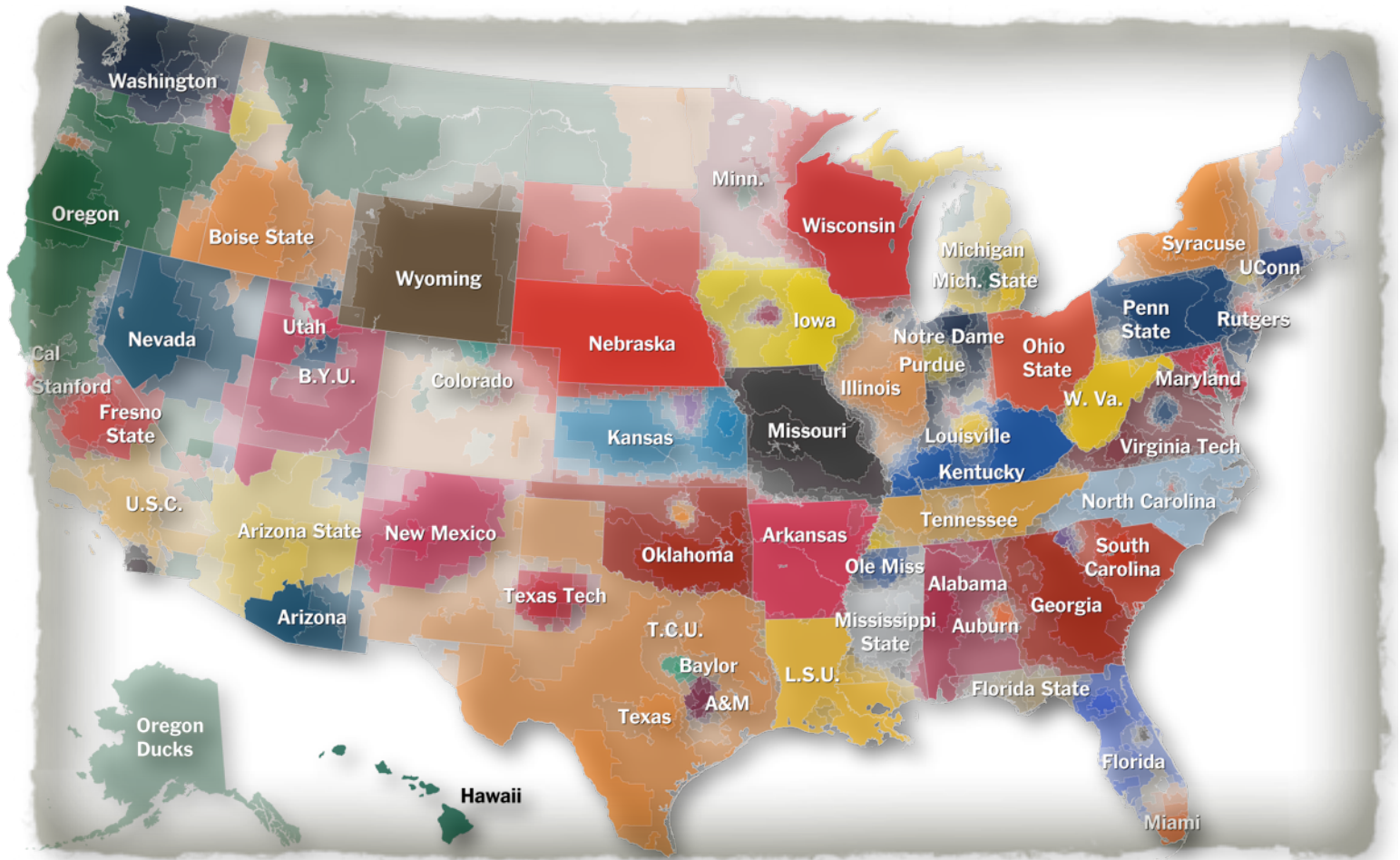
The New York Times

N.C.A.A. Fan Map: How the Country Roots for College Football

By Tom Giratikanon, Josh Katz, David Leonhardt, Kevin Quealy and Marc Tracy

With data based on Facebook ‘likes’, we estimated the boundaries of fandom for 84 teams.

OCT. 3, 2014



Twice so far at the Upshot, we’ve published maps showing where fan support for one team begins and another ends — once for baseball and once for basketball. Now we’re pleased to offer another one: the United States according to college football fans.

Unlike professional sports, the college game is much more provincial, with scrappy regional programs dominating their corners of the country. Texas and Oregon are two of the most popular teams, but together they account for only 25 percent of territory in the lower 48 states. There is no team with a level of national support that approaches that of, say, the Yankees, the Boston Red Sox or the Los Angeles Lakers.

If you squint while looking at the college football map, you might even think you're looking at a state map. In the Southeast, strong programs like Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana State and Oklahoma dominate their states — and stop right at the border.

But there are enough exceptions to make this quite different from the state maps we all grew up learning. The Minnesota Golden Gophers have been so mediocre for so long — failing to finish in the top 15 nationwide since the Kennedy administration — that fans have moved their support to the Wisconsin Badgers. And Nebraska! They do love their Cornhuskers across much of the Great Plains.

But programs can divide a state, too. Seven colleges, led by the Longhorns, lay claim to at least some part of Texas. Elsewhere, some teams have managed to carve out bits of territory, extending only a bit beyond their campus: Vanderbilt around Nashville; U.C.L.A. on the west side of Los Angeles; and Oregon State, around Corvallis, south of Portland. Then there's the Northeast, with its relative lack of interest in college football. Once you're east of the Hudson, no team dominates, and many teams claim a small percentage of fans.

All told, 84 programs can reasonably claim to be the most popular college football team somewhere in the United States.

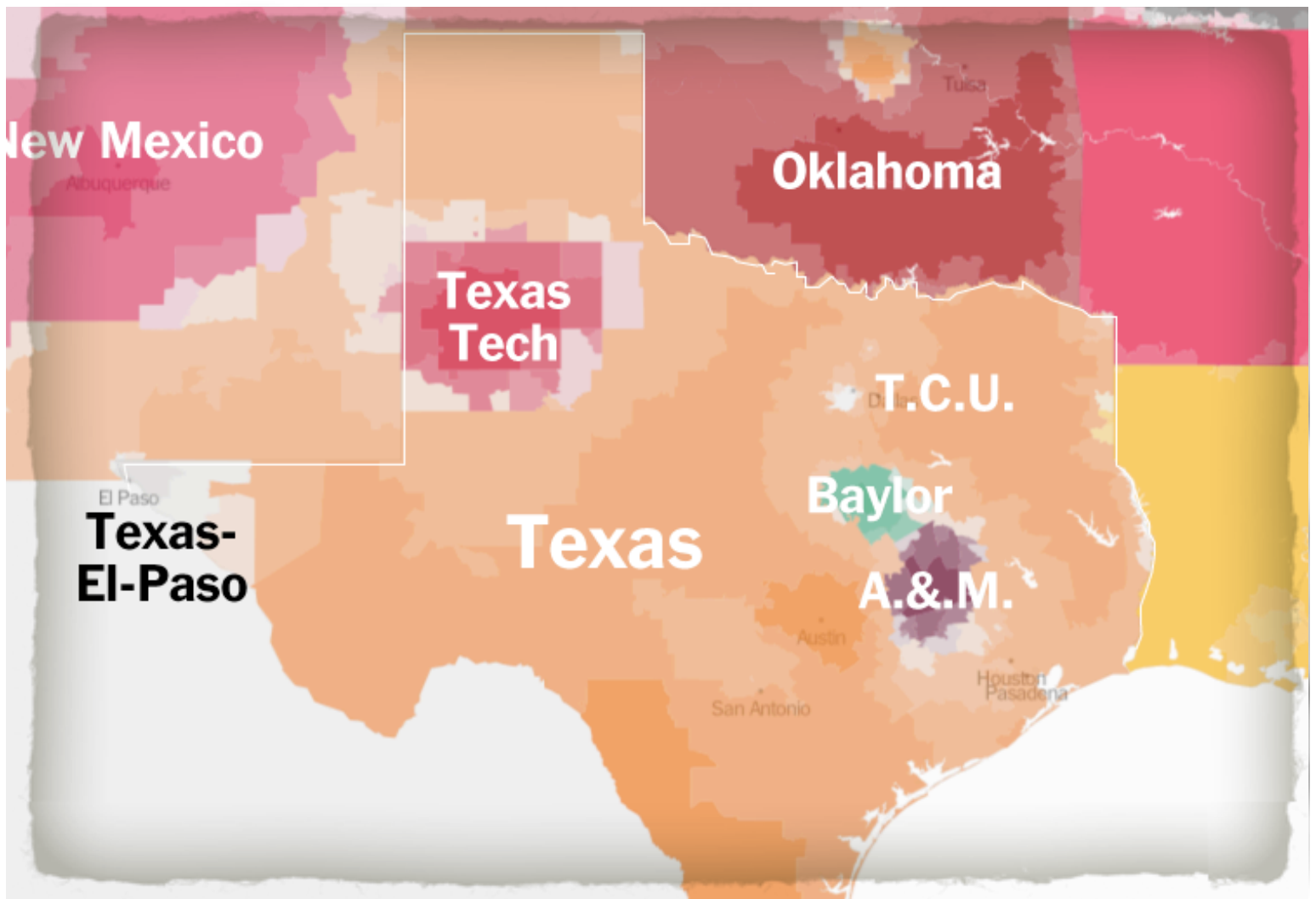
Like the other sets of maps, these were created using estimates of team support based on each team's share of Facebook "likes" in a ZIP code. We then applied an algorithm to deal with statistical noise and fill in gaps where data was missing. Facebook "likes" are an imperfect measure, but as we've noted before, Facebook likes show broadly similar patterns to polls.

Below, we've highlighted and annotated 19 of the country's most storied programs and rivalries.

A State Hooked on the Horns

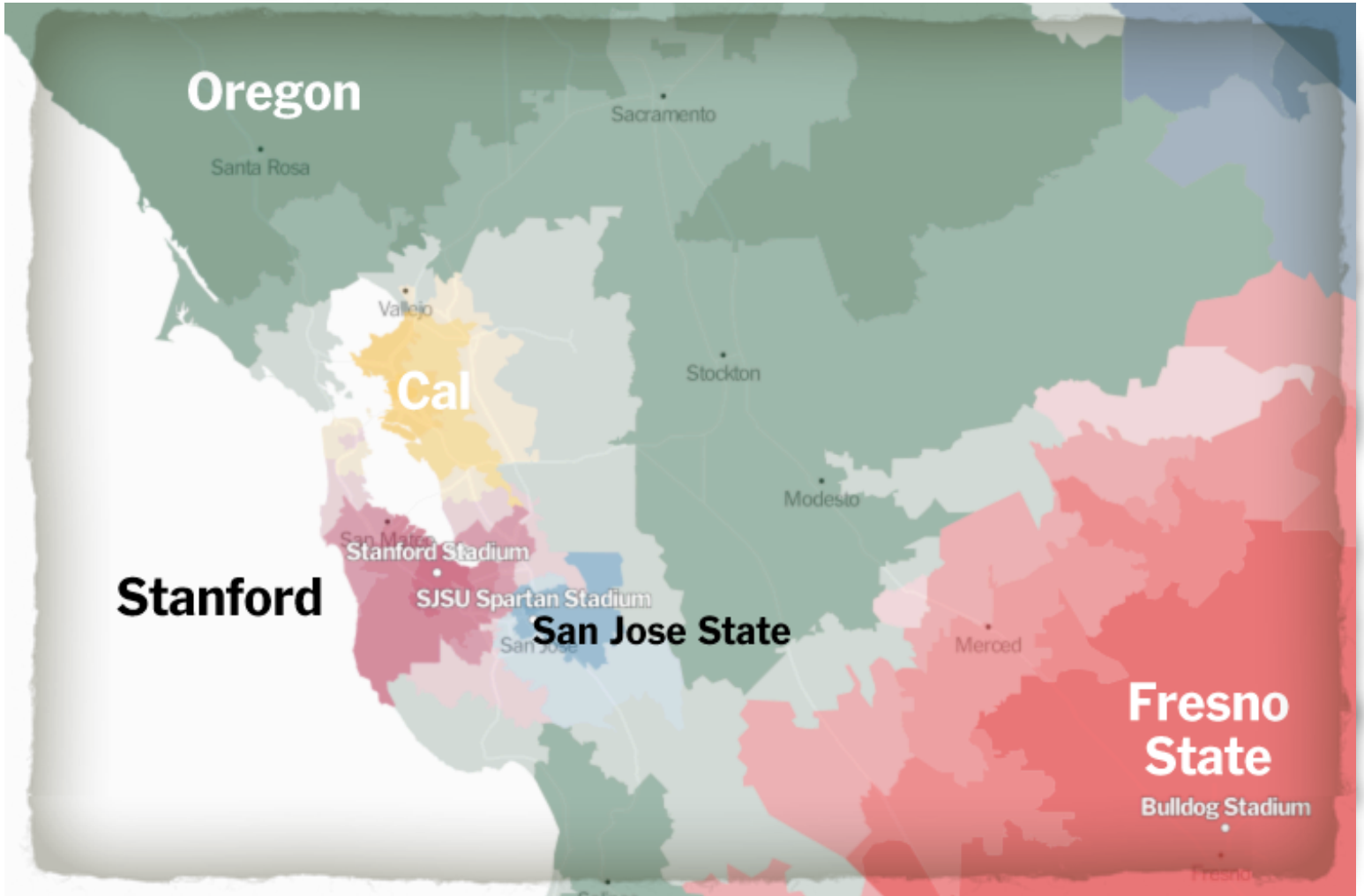
Austin's self-proclaimed weirdness doesn't stop Texas from dominating the country's richest college football state. From Galveston to Laredo to Amarillo, unless there's another campus nearby, you are likely Hooking 'Em. The same is true in parts of Colorado and New Mexico.

The other major Texas programs hold serve in their hometowns: College Station (Texas A&M), Waco (Baylor), Fort Worth (Texas Christian), Lubbock (Texas Tech), and even El Paso (UTEP). Only Southern Methodist, handed the "death penalty" by the N.C.A.A. in 1987, fails to break through. And now Mack Brown, the former Longhorns coach, is reportedly considering becoming S.M.U.'s next coach.



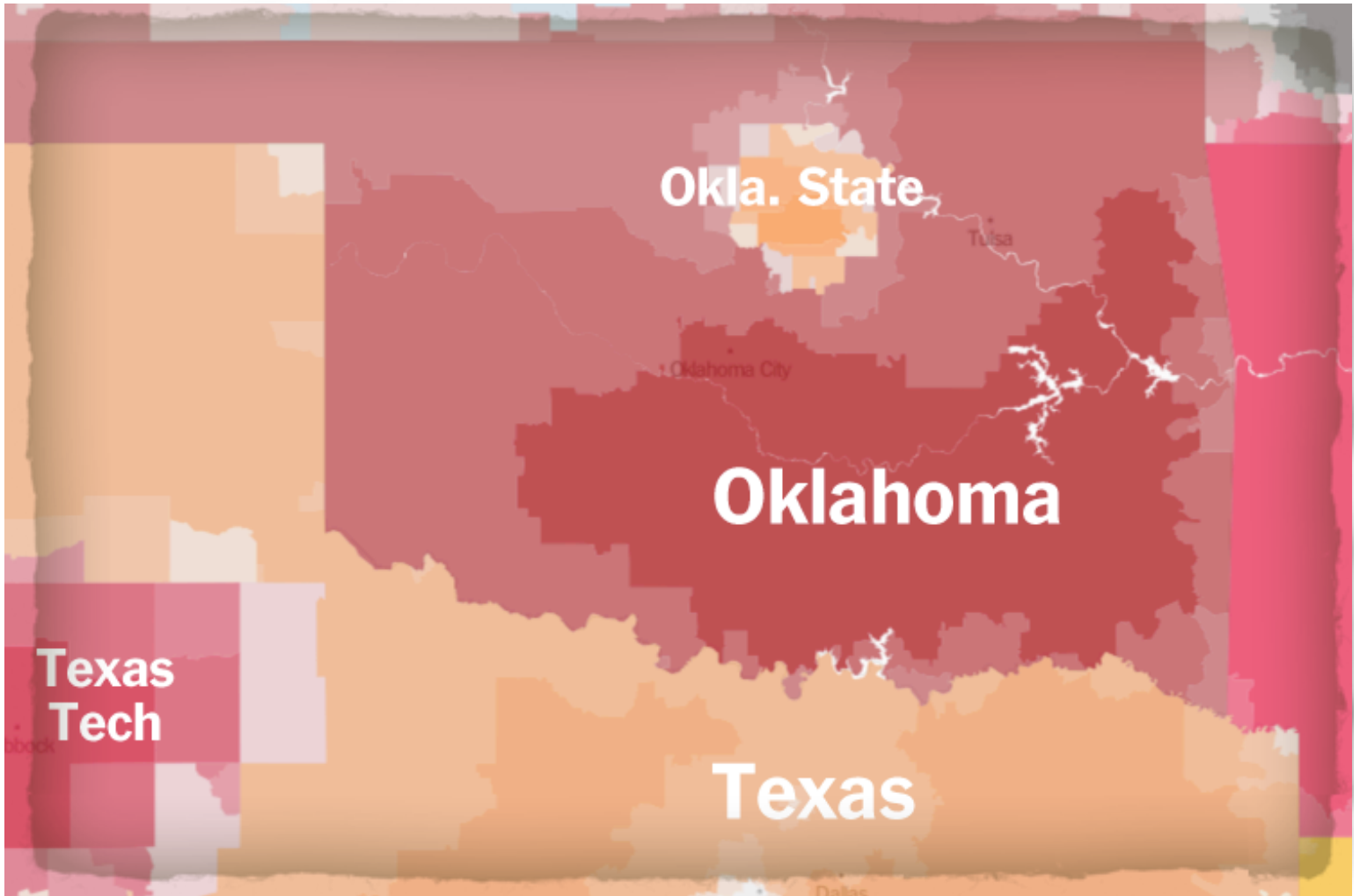
California Friendly to Ducks

Stanford may have dashed Oregon's championship hopes in each of the last two years, but the Ducks can at least offer this taunt: We control more of Stanford's home state than Stanford does. Oregon dominates much of Northern California, but loyalty shifts to local teams around the Bay Area. (Earlier, we told you that fans in Berkeley preferred Oregon – they do not, Facebook's corrected data makes clear.) Stanford has only a modest chunk of territory, not much bigger geographically than San Jose State's and smaller than Fresno State's. In the south, the San Diego State Aztecs manage to hold their own.



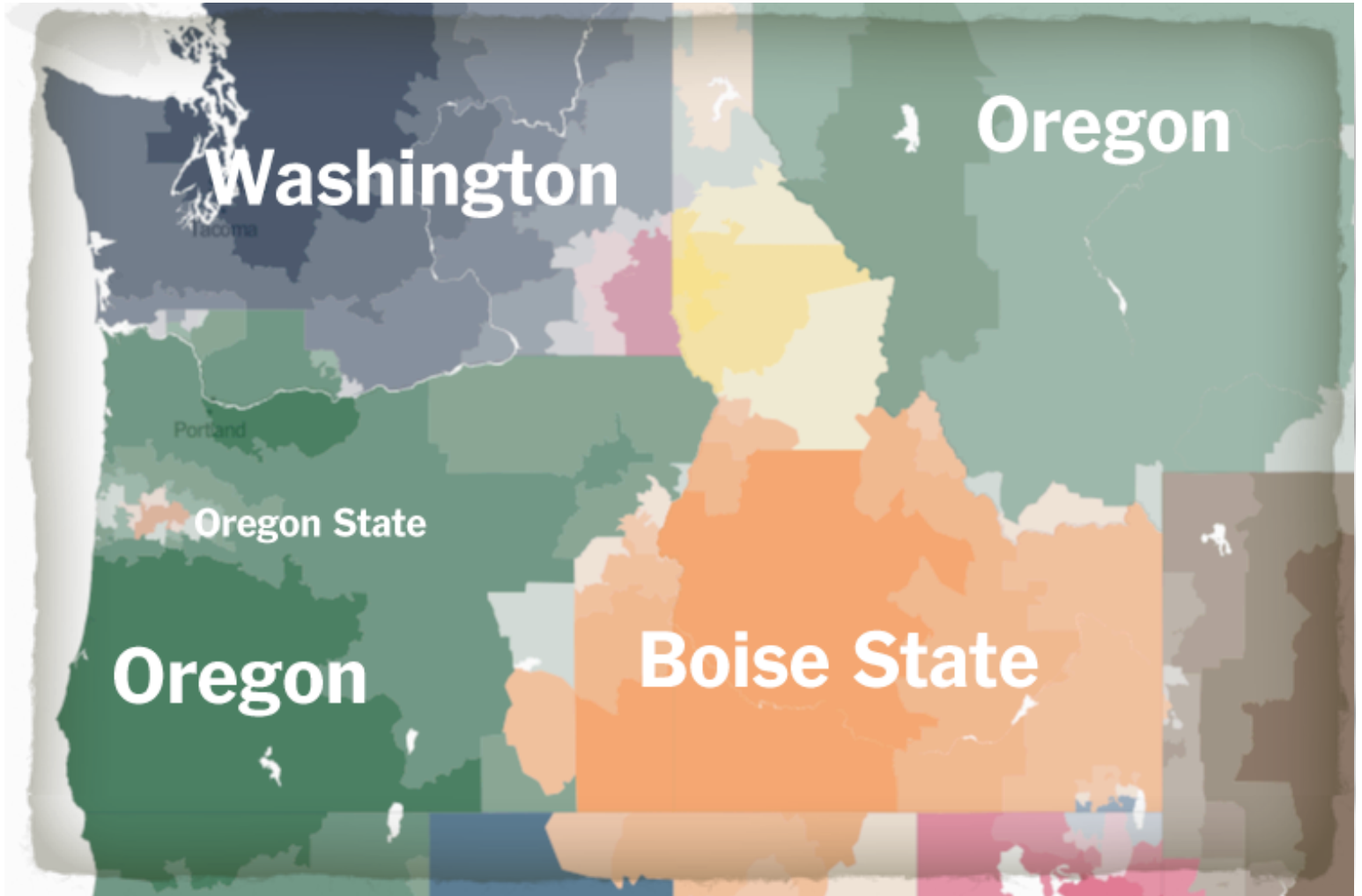
Rivalry Down by the River

For hundreds of miles — and pending a mild border dispute that perhaps involves an attempted land grab by Gov. Rick Perry — the Red River forms the Texas-Oklahoma border. It also lends its name to those two colleges' annual game. You can follow the river's windy course on the map with striking precision, as residents of each state are remarkably loyal to their respective flagship public universities. The clarity continues up the suddenly straight eastern border of the Texas panhandle. The Red River Rivalry resumes on Oct. 11.



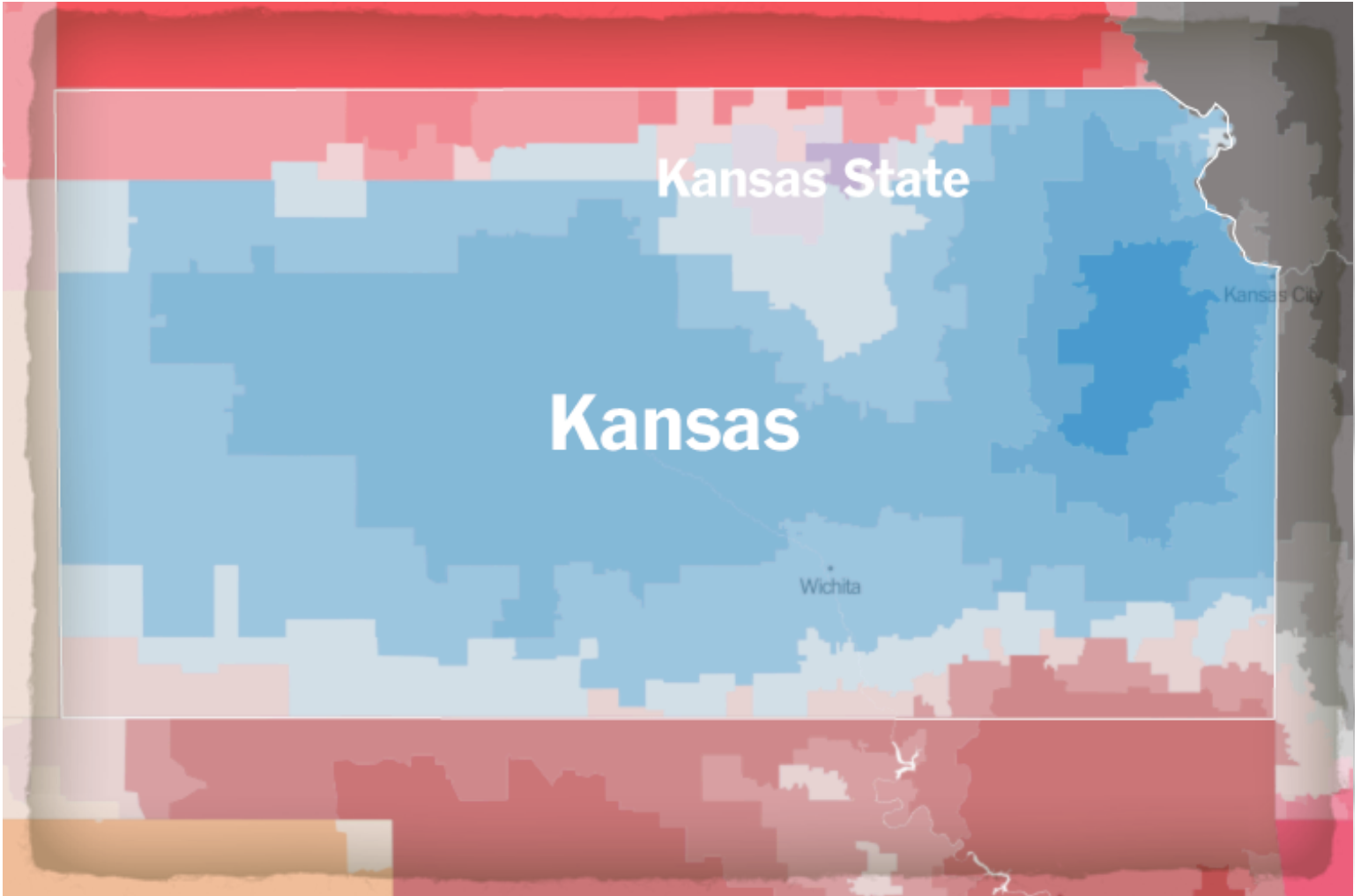
Ducks' Popularity Migrates

One of our favorite parts of this project is that we didn't know what the results would be. If you'd asked us which team had the largest and farthest-flung following, we probably would have guessed Notre Dame. But Texas has the most ZIP codes, more than 7 percent of the nation's, followed by Penn State and Florida. And Oregon has the most geographically widespread following. Despite the Ducks' lack of a national title, they have been good — and exciting — for years, and their Nike-designed uniforms apparently add some panache. Overall, Duck Nation can claim over ten percent of college football fans in more ZIP codes than any other team.



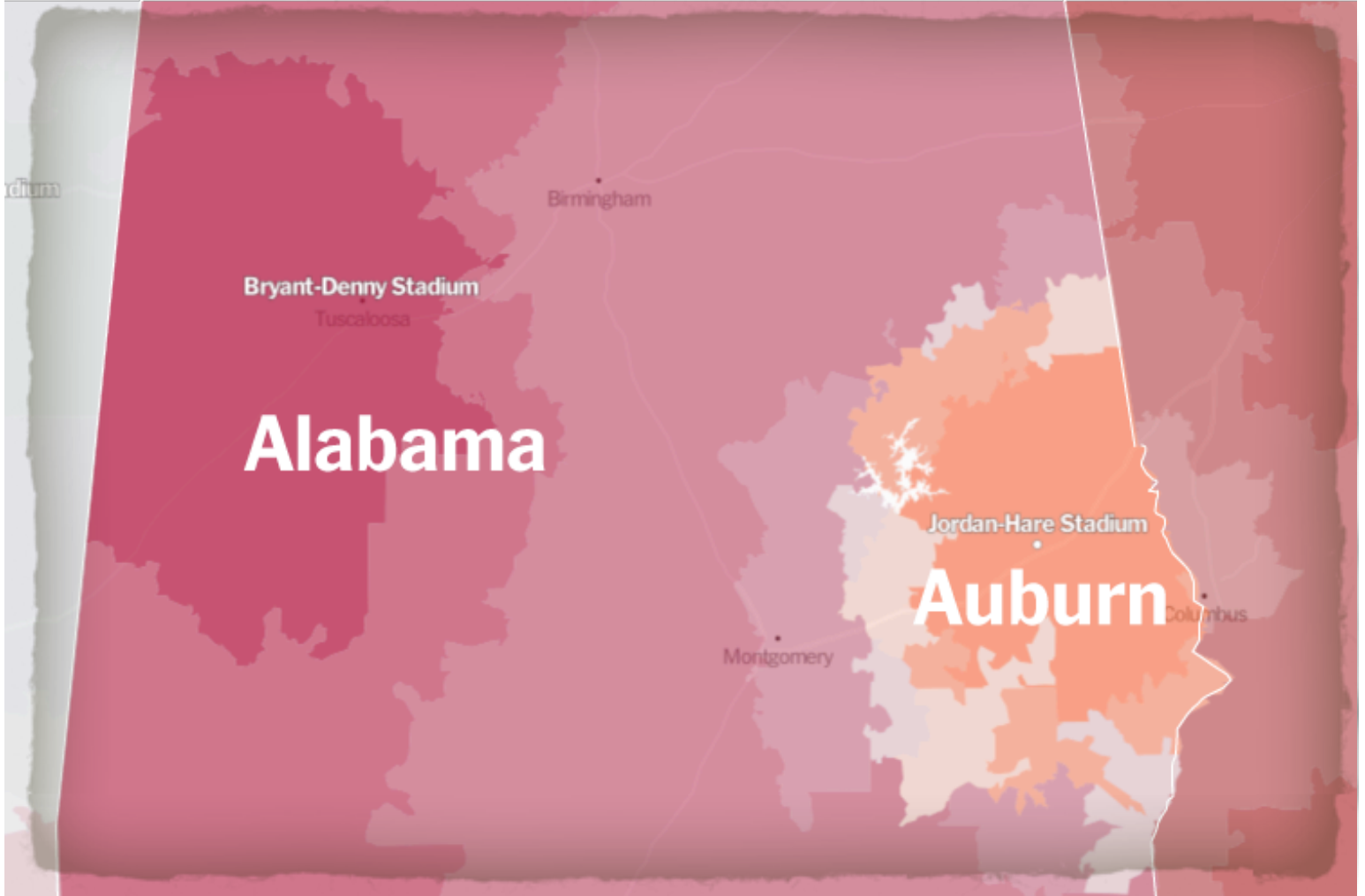
Kansas State in a Sea of Blue

Kansas State is another one of those unlucky teams without a major Facebook presence and thus that can't even claim its home ZIP code. But Kansas State can claim a small cluster of 15 ZIP codes slightly northwest of its Manhattan, Kan., campus. The other teams with only a few ZIP codes (but still more than zero) are the Southern Miss Golden Eagles (1), the Indiana Hoosiers (4), the Northwestern Wildcats (7), the Northern Illinois Huskies (8) and the Oregon State Beavers (8).



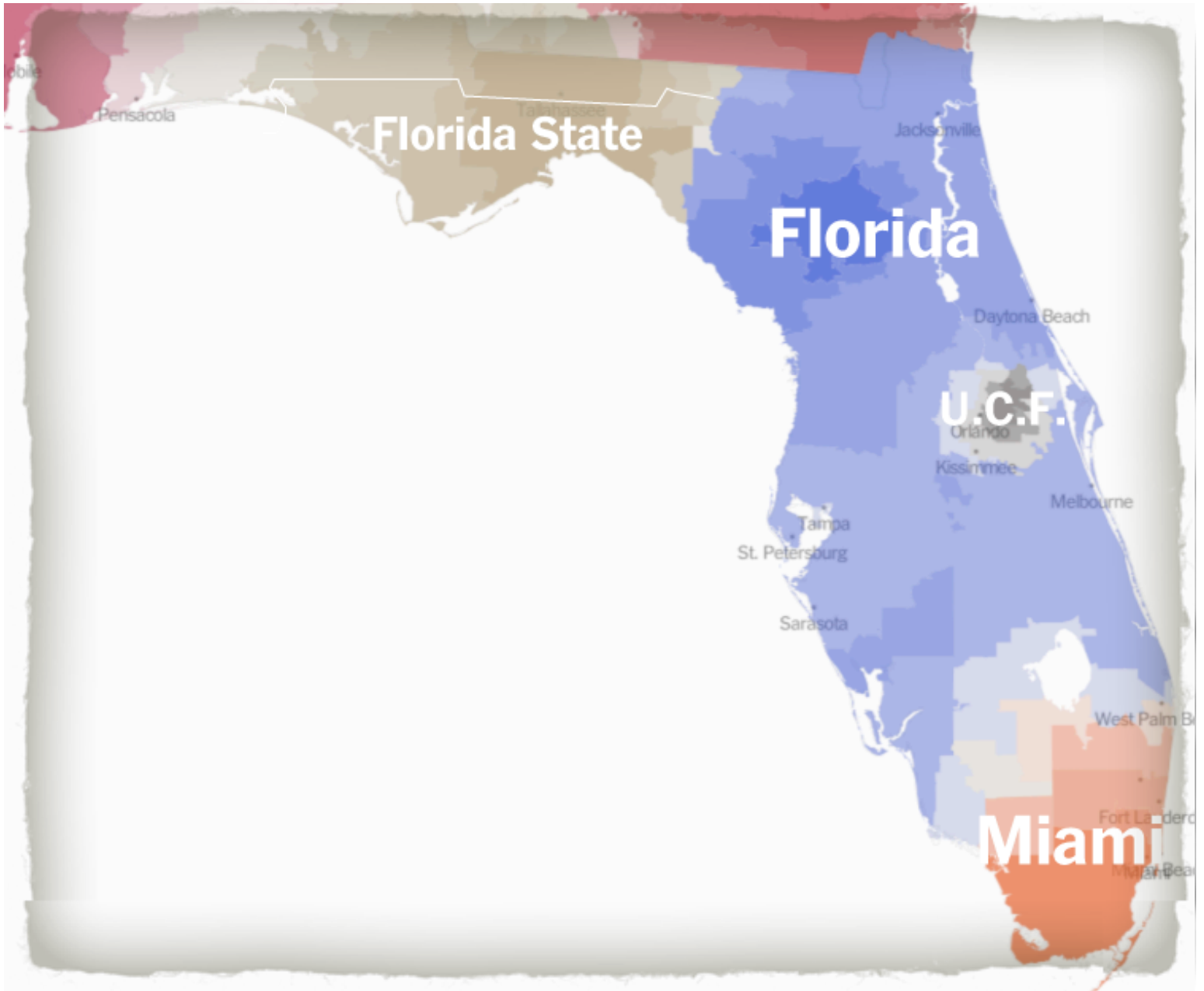
Iron Island

Alabama fans like to say that Auburn is located in western Georgia, and Auburn fans like to say Alabama is located in eastern Mississippi. The map reveals that only the former insult has a claim on the truth. Bama dominates most of the state, while Auburn's base is small, concentrated around its eponymous town near the border and spilling into Georgia. Any miffed Auburn fans are advised to watch the end of last year's Iron Bowl over and over and over again.



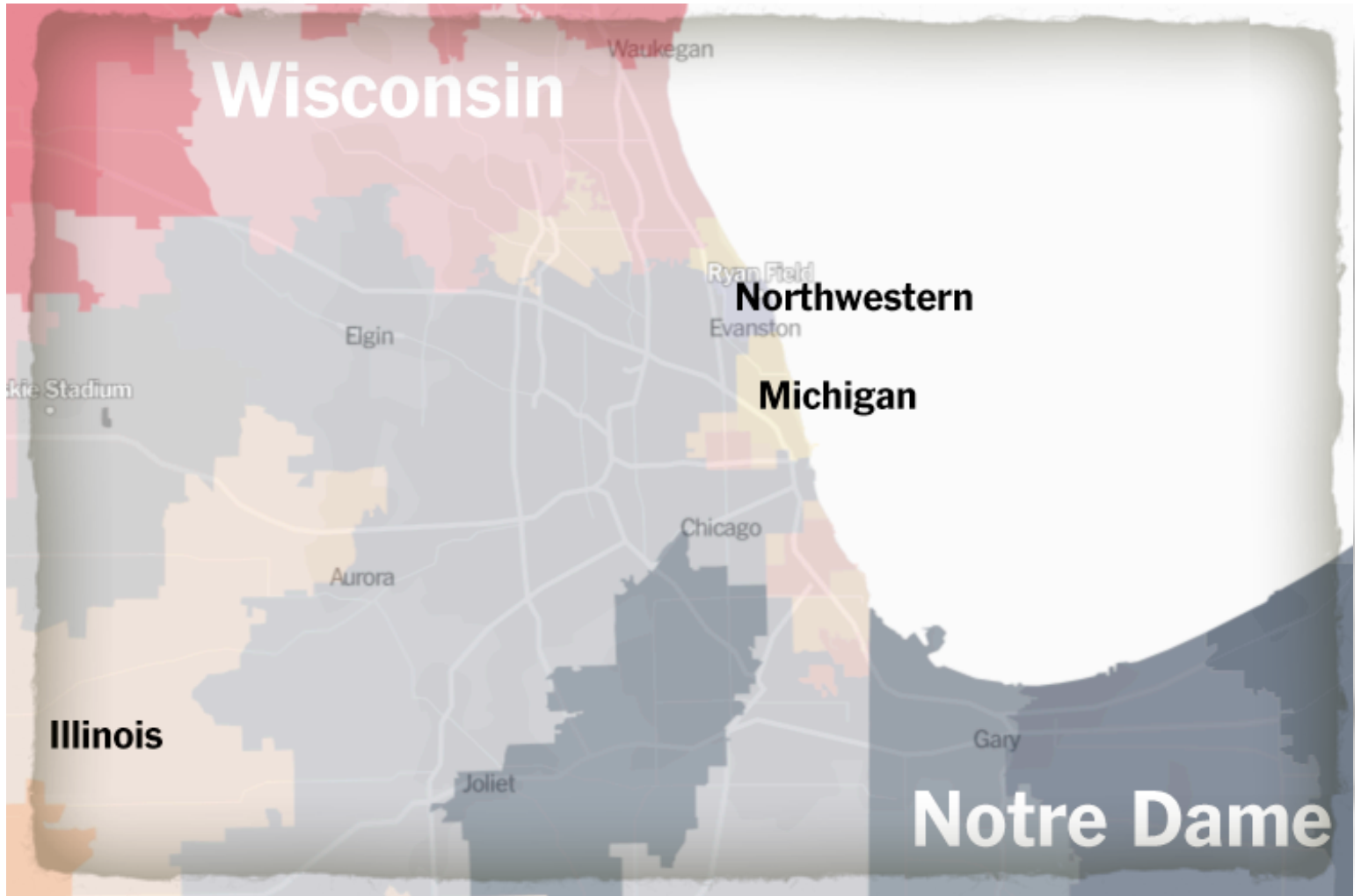
Florida Belongs to Gators

Florida State may be the defending national champion and Miami may have the most championships among state teams, but Florida bleeds Gator orange-and-blue. Gator territory extends from its north-central stronghold into all parts of the state except the panhandle, which is Seminole territory, and of course the Miami area. Perhaps most impressive, Florida also claims much of northern New England. And props to Central Florida, last season's top-ranked midmajor, for carving out a pocket in and around Orlando, where its campus is.



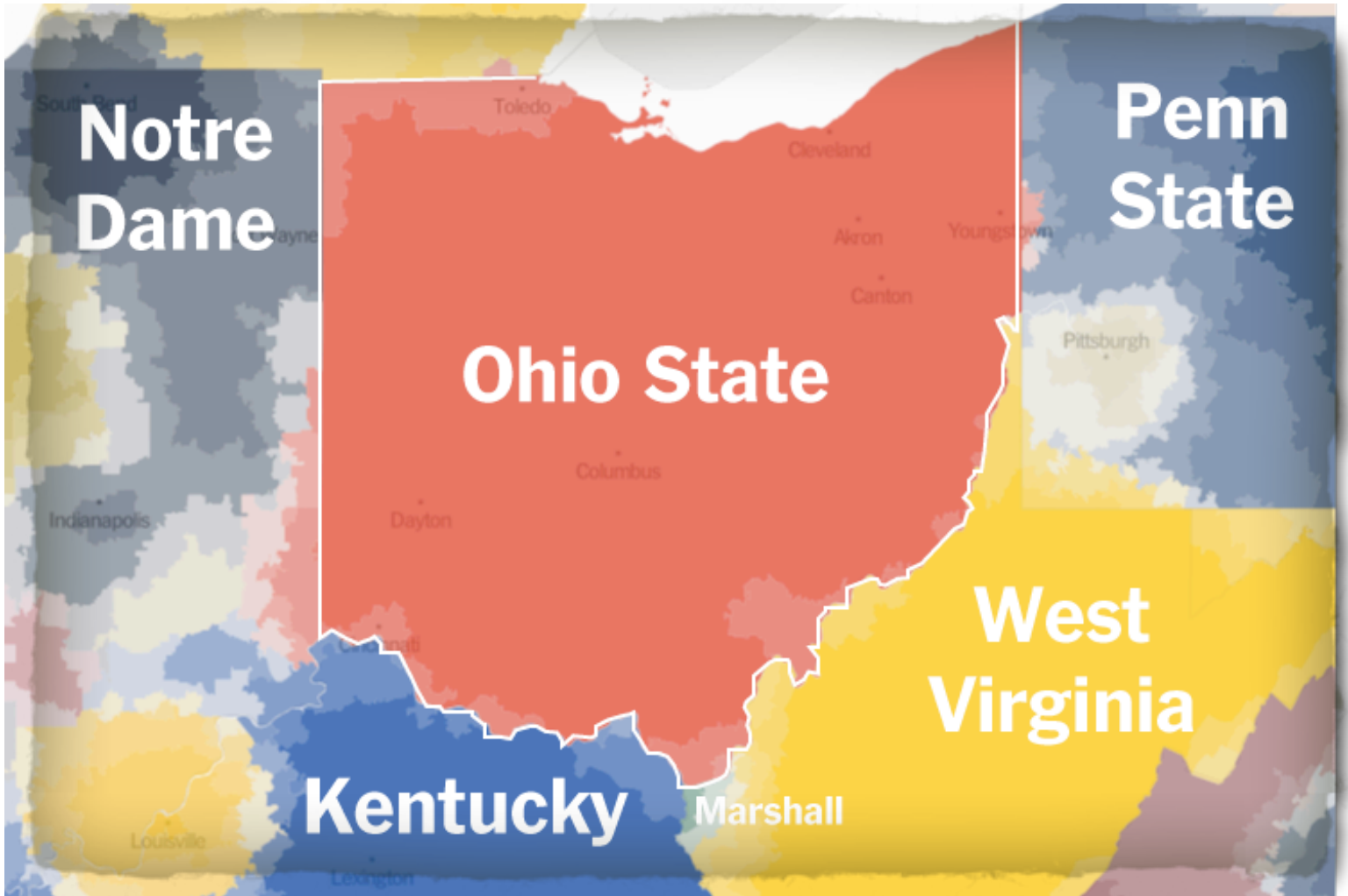
Quilt of Loyalties in Chicago

Chicago is sometimes called “a city of neighborhoods,” and it shows on this map. It may have the most intricate set of loyalties of any city in the country. Those loyalties are split among Notre Dame, Michigan, Illinois, Ohio State and Northwestern, each of which is the leading team in at least one ZIP code. Travel just a bit north of the city, and you’re in Wisconsin territory. No wonder you can find bars supporting so many different teams in Chicago.



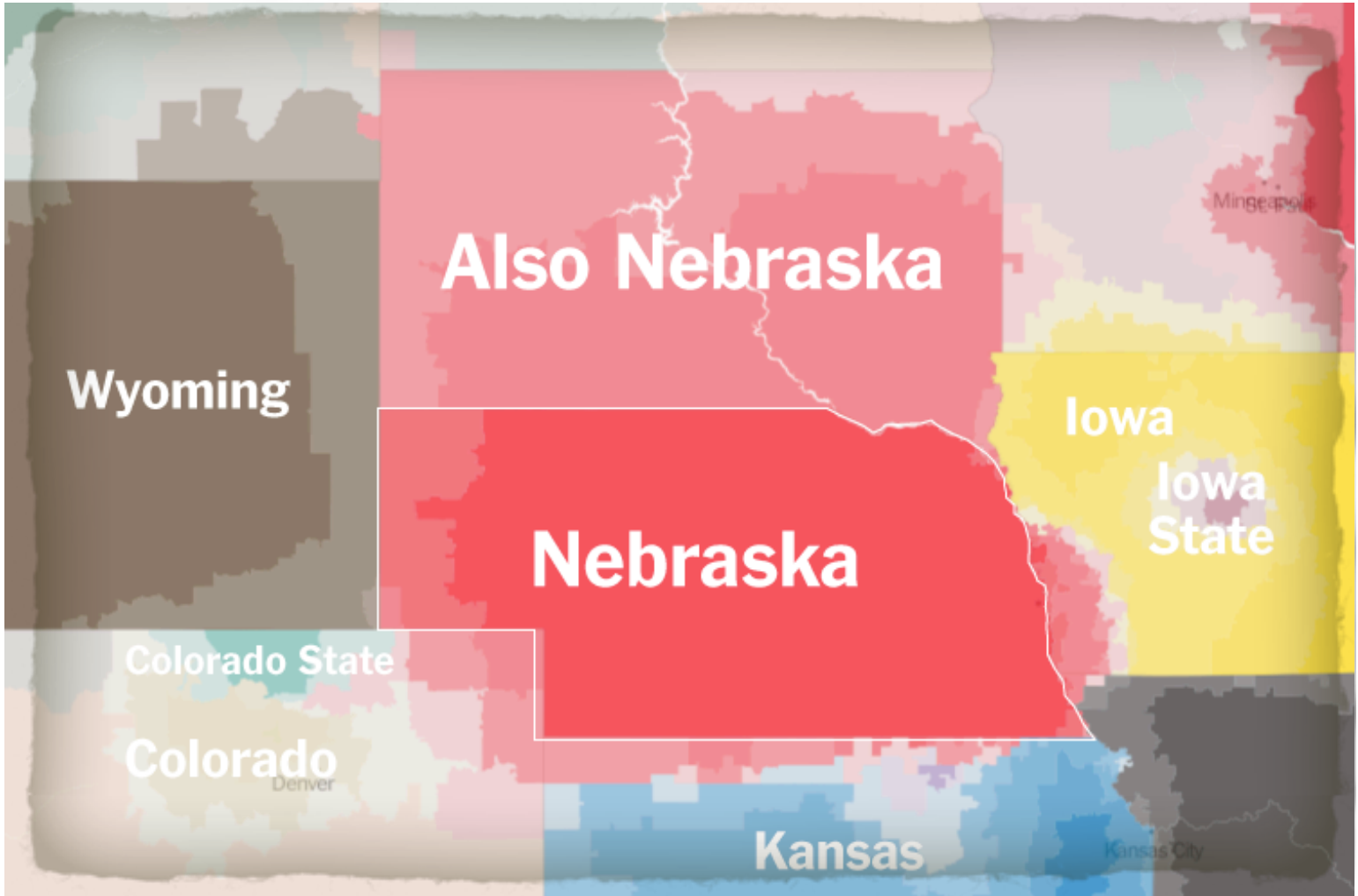
THE University in Ohio

Ohio is a populous state but has only one football program in the Big 5 conferences, so it makes sense that Ohio State has the plurality of fans in every single Ohio ZIP code. (Apologies to the Cincinnati Bearcats, Akron Zips and Miami (Ohio) RedHawks, among others.) Not only that: Ohio State claims territory in most of its neighboring states, including Indiana, Pennsylvania and — gasp — Michigan.



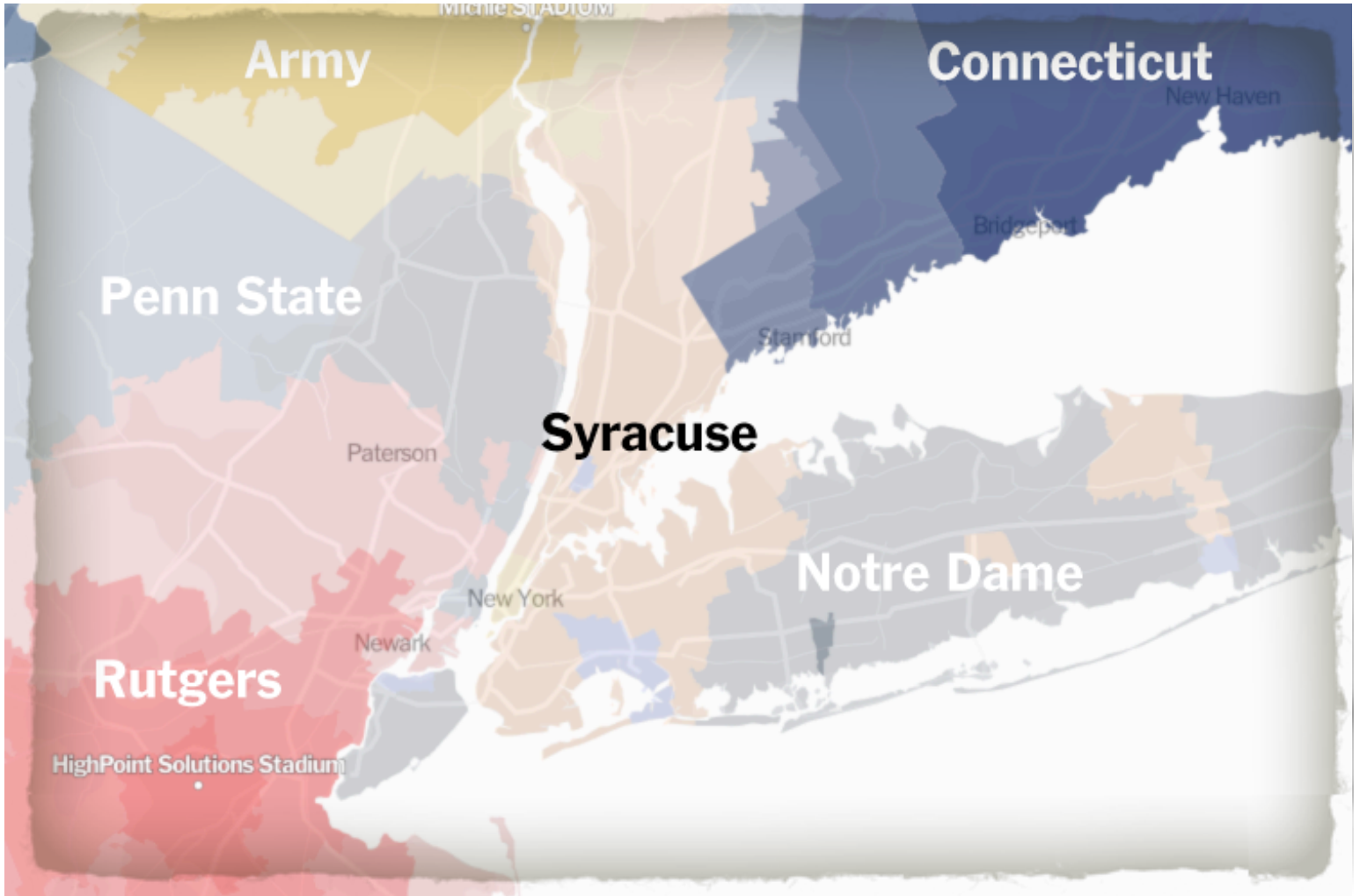
The Husker Plains

After retiring from a 25-year stint in which he coached the Cornhuskers to 307 wins, two national championships and never (!) fewer than nine wins in a season, Tom Osborne represented one of the largest House districts in the country. Minus an eastern section that includes Lincoln and Omaha, Nebraska's Third Congressional District covers the state. Judging from the map, Osborne, a Republican, has a lot of fans in the eastern part of the state too. The size of Nebraska Nation may be exaggerated by some sparsely populated zones in Wyoming and South Dakota, but the Huskers also claim some allegiance in the states of their old Big 8 rivals Colorado and Missouri.



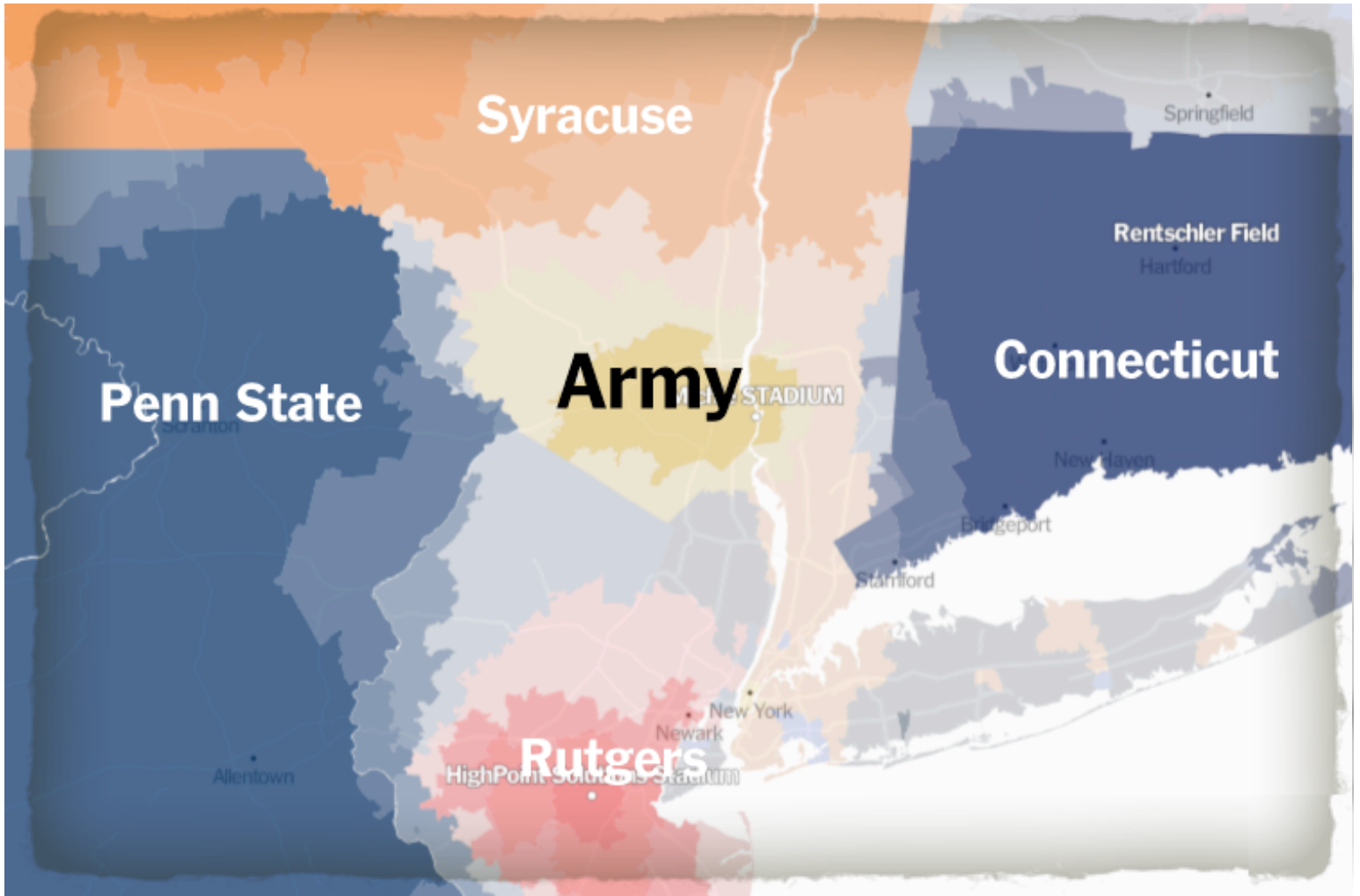
Diversity in New York

New York City has its own set of divided loyalties, but the passions tend not to run as intense as they do in other cities. In many parts of the New York region, the leading team — often Syracuse, Notre Dame, Penn State, Rutgers or Michigan — claims only about 10 percent of fans. Notre Dame does a bit better on Staten Island and Long Island, Syracuse in Westchester and Michigan, oddly enough, in Midtown and lower Manhattan, as well as parts of Brooklyn.



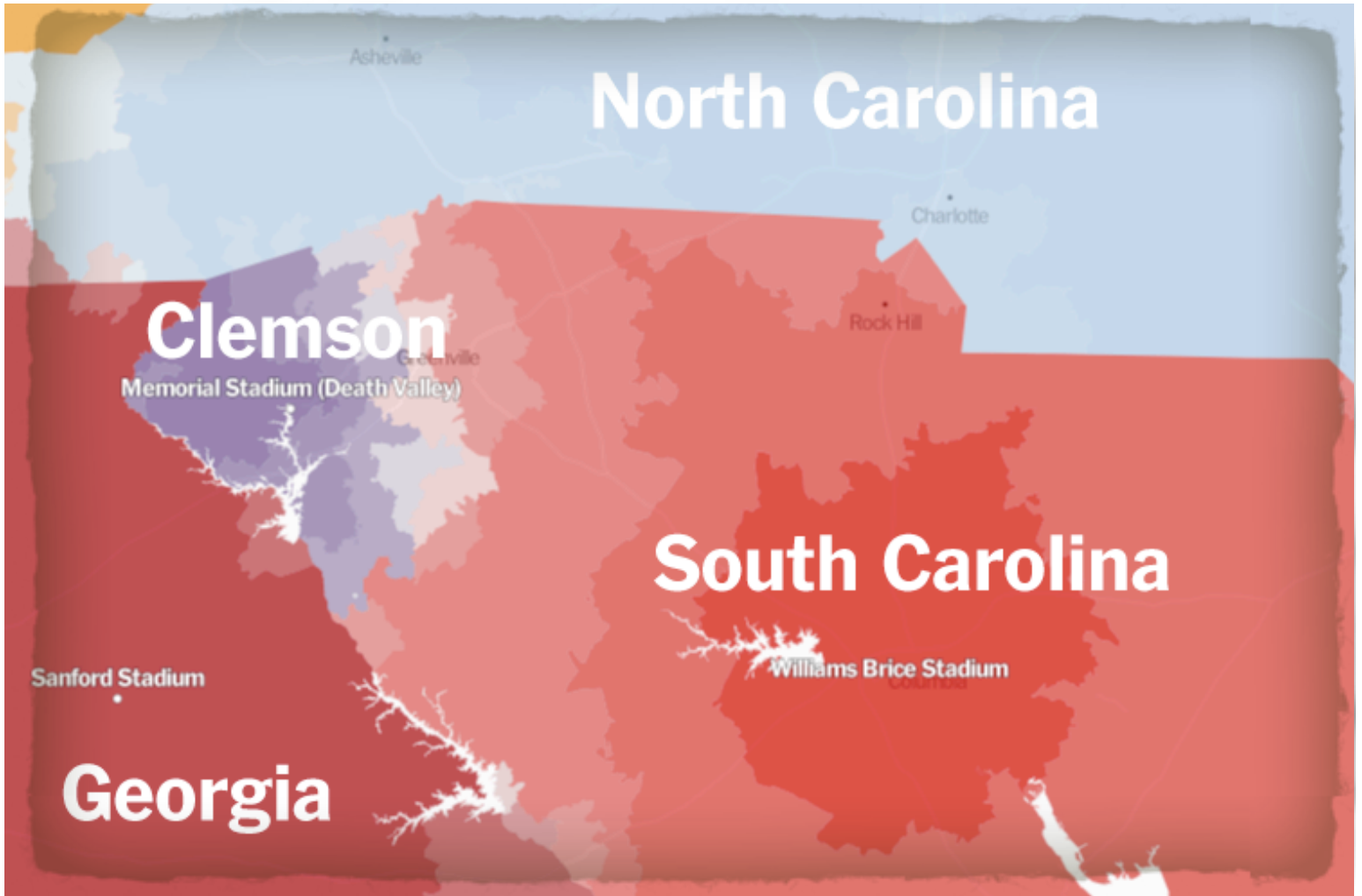
Army Holds Some Ground

Army has had only one winning season in the last 17 years. Earlier this season, it lost to Yale, which doesn't even play in the top tier of college football. Yet Army still claims a swath of the Hudson River Valley as its own, making it almost certainly the weakest of the 82 teams with some territory. No doubt, that fact stems in significant part from its location in the Northeast, which lacks many strong teams. By comparison, Navy has no territory to call its own. The area around Annapolis belongs to the Maryland Terrapins.



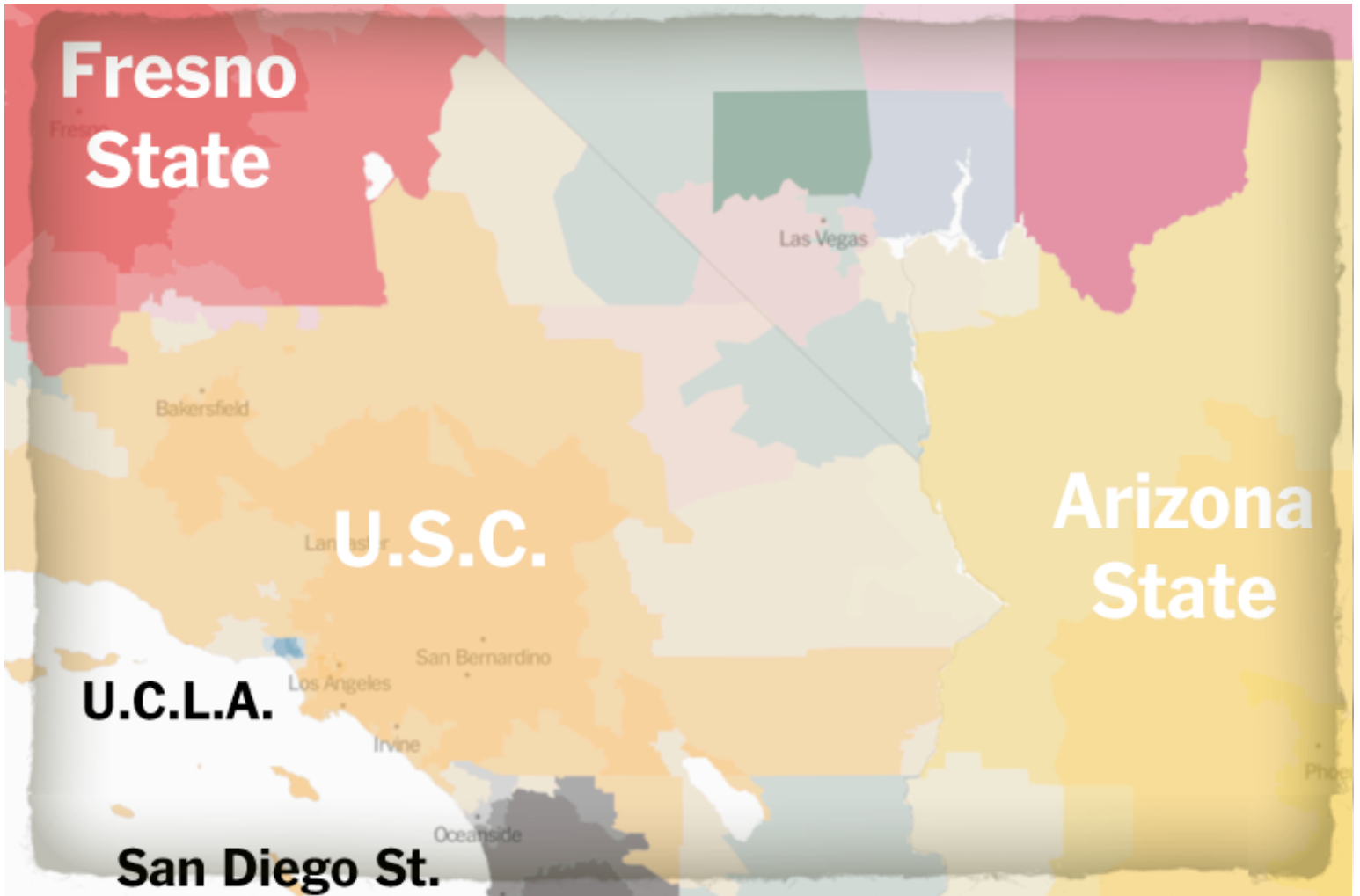
The Upstate Planet of South Carolina

In Columbia, residents refer to a section of South Carolina known as The Upstate as if it were on another planet rather than a few dozen miles down (er, up) the highway. But clearly it's a different place, a small, exotic region where Clemson — one of whose colors is known as “northwest purple” — isn't dominated by its archrival. Apparently years of “Clemsoning,” slang for elaborately choking in big games, have inured South Carolinians to the Tigers' 61-40 record against the Gamecocks.



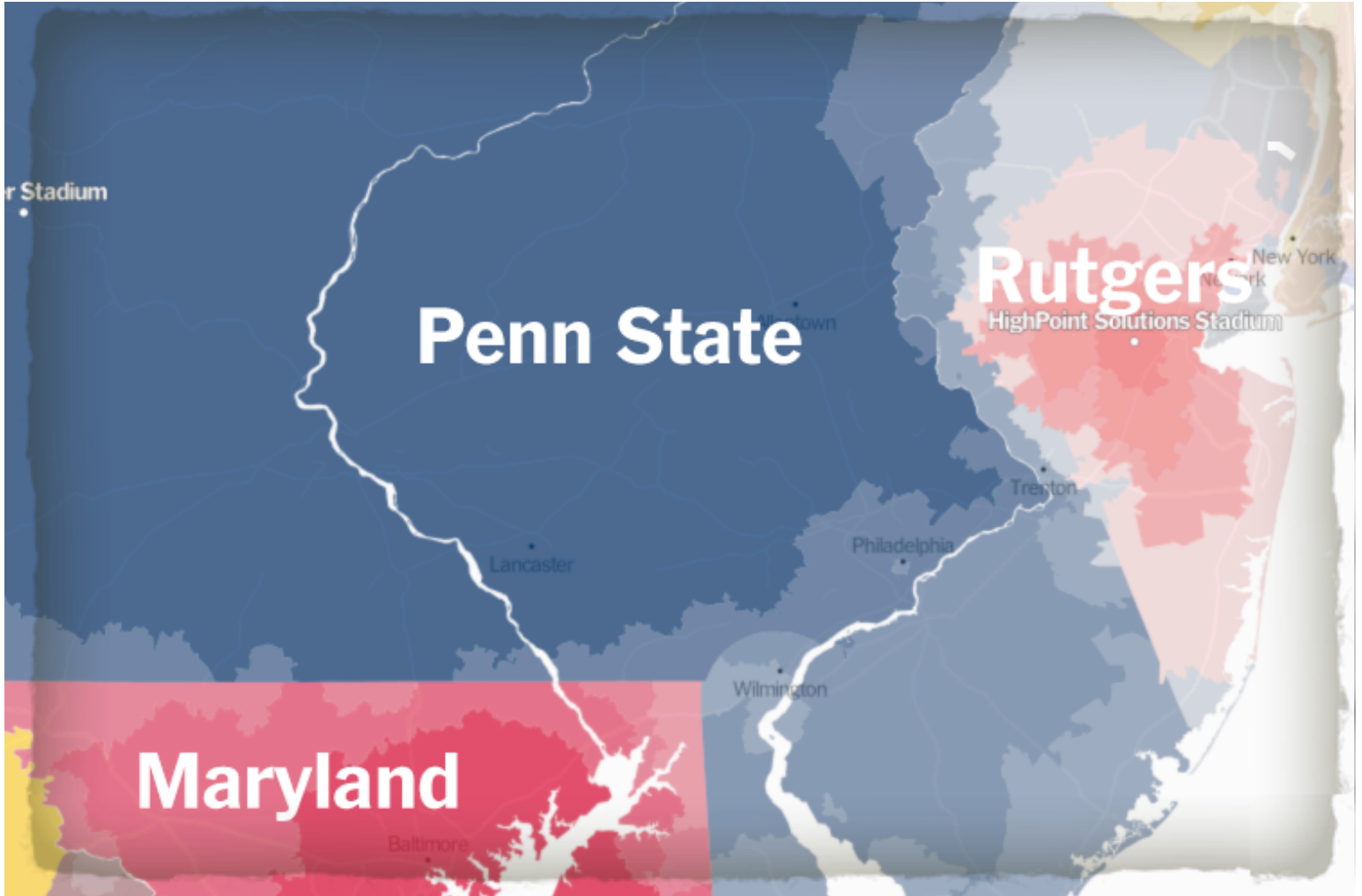
The Love in Los Angeles

In by far the largest American city without an N.F.L. franchise, U.C.L.A. has an embarrassingly small presence, winning just a few ZIP codes (including, yes, 90210) in and around its Westwood campus. The U.S.C. Trojans have everything else: downtown, the Valley, the surrounding area. Yet it's precisely in the tony Westside neighborhoods, where the Bruins are the more popular team, where many of the Trojans' celebrity fans probably live. No one said L.A. made sense.



Midwest Meets the Ocean

The Big Ten added Rutgers and Maryland for several reasons, but one the conference loves to promote is the presence of alumni from other Big Ten colleges in the Scarlet Knights' and the Terrapins' backyards. The map vindicates this view: Much of the Garden State is Penn State territory, though independent Notre Dame is popular as well. Maryland is more firmly Terp terrain, but Penn State and Ohio State have support throughout.



Deep Devotion in Wisconsin

The most consistently loyal fans in America live in Wisconsin. More than 87 percent of fans in some Wisconsin ZIP codes support the Badgers, a level that isn't reached anywhere else, our estimates show. That's why the red in the map is so dark. Though the numbers aren't nearly so high elsewhere, Wisconsin territory also stretches into Minnesota, Iowa, Illinois and Michigan.



Paul Bunyan's Border

Minnesota has won 57 games and lost 56 in its long-running battle with Wisconsin for Paul Bunyan's Axe, but you wouldn't know it from the map. Wisconsin, which recently went to three straight Rose Bowls, more than holds its own in its state and wins in some counties in Minnesota, including the Twin Cities; it even wins in the home ZIP code of Minnesota's TCF Bank Stadium (also the temporary home of the N.F.L.'s Vikings). **Bucky rules.**

