



# **THE CHANGING FACE OF HOUSTON: Tracking the Economic and Demographic Trans- formations Through 27 Years of Houston Surveys**

***STEPHEN L. KLINEBERG***

The Bay Area Houston Economic Partnership  
Wednesday, 28 January 2009

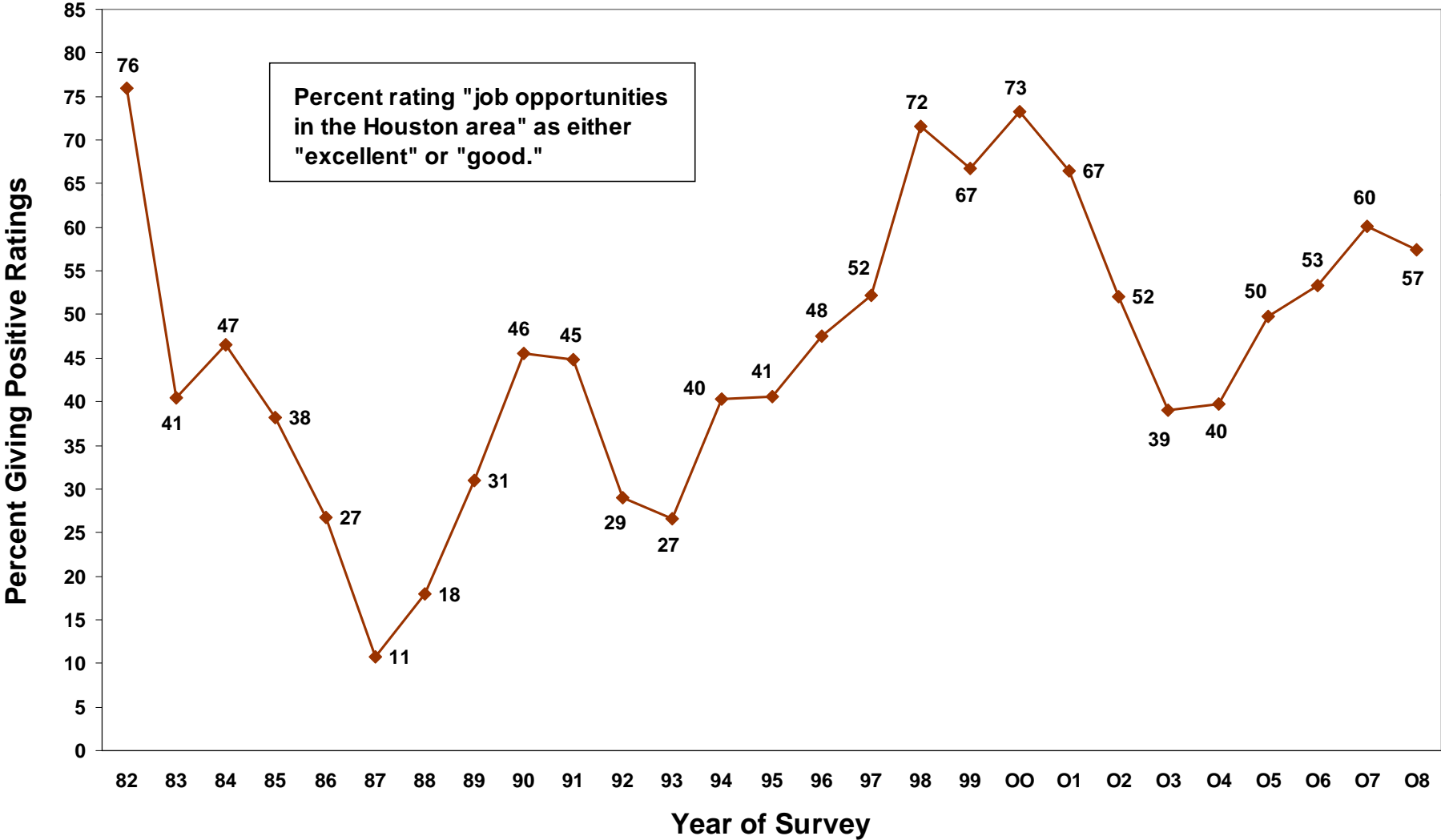


# THE HOUSTON AREA SURVEY (1982-2008)

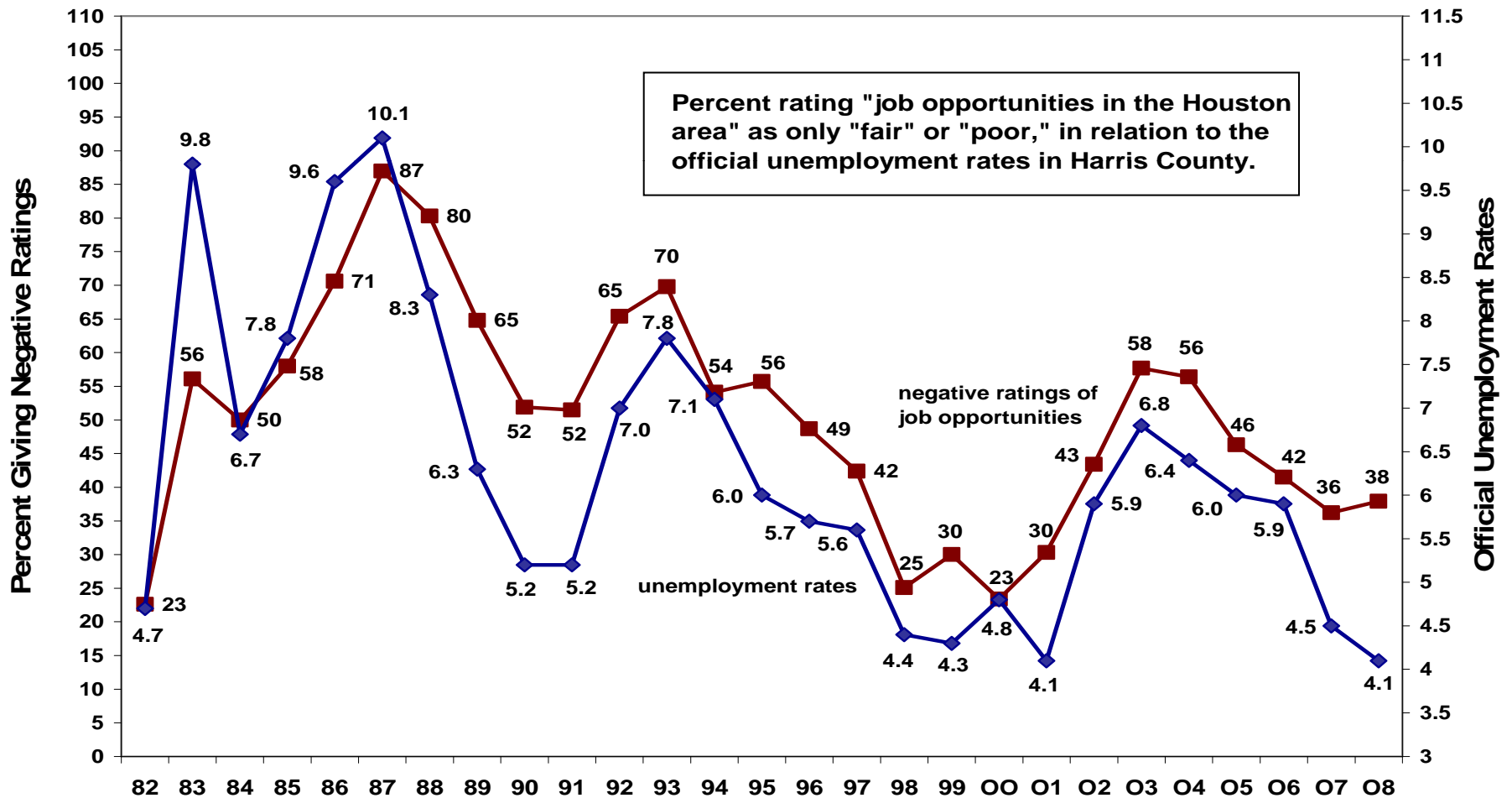


- Supported by local foundations, corporations, and individuals, the annual surveys have interviewed 27 scientifically selected successive representative samples of Harris County residents.
- In May 1982, just two months after the first Houston Area Survey was completed, the 80-year oil boom suddenly collapsed.
- The region recovered from the deep and prolonged recession of the mid 1980s to find itself squarely in the midst of . . .
  - a restructured economy and
  - a demographic revolution.
- These are the same transformations that have refashioned American society itself in the past quarter-century. For 27 years, the Houston surveys have tracked area residents' changing perspectives on these remarkable trends.

**FIGURE 1: POSITIVE RATINGS OF JOB OPPORTUNITIES IN THE HOUSTON AREA (1982-2008)**



# FIGURE 2: NEGATIVE RATINGS OF JOB OPPORTUNITIES IN RELATION TO THE OFFICIAL UNEMPLOYMENT RATES (1982-2008)

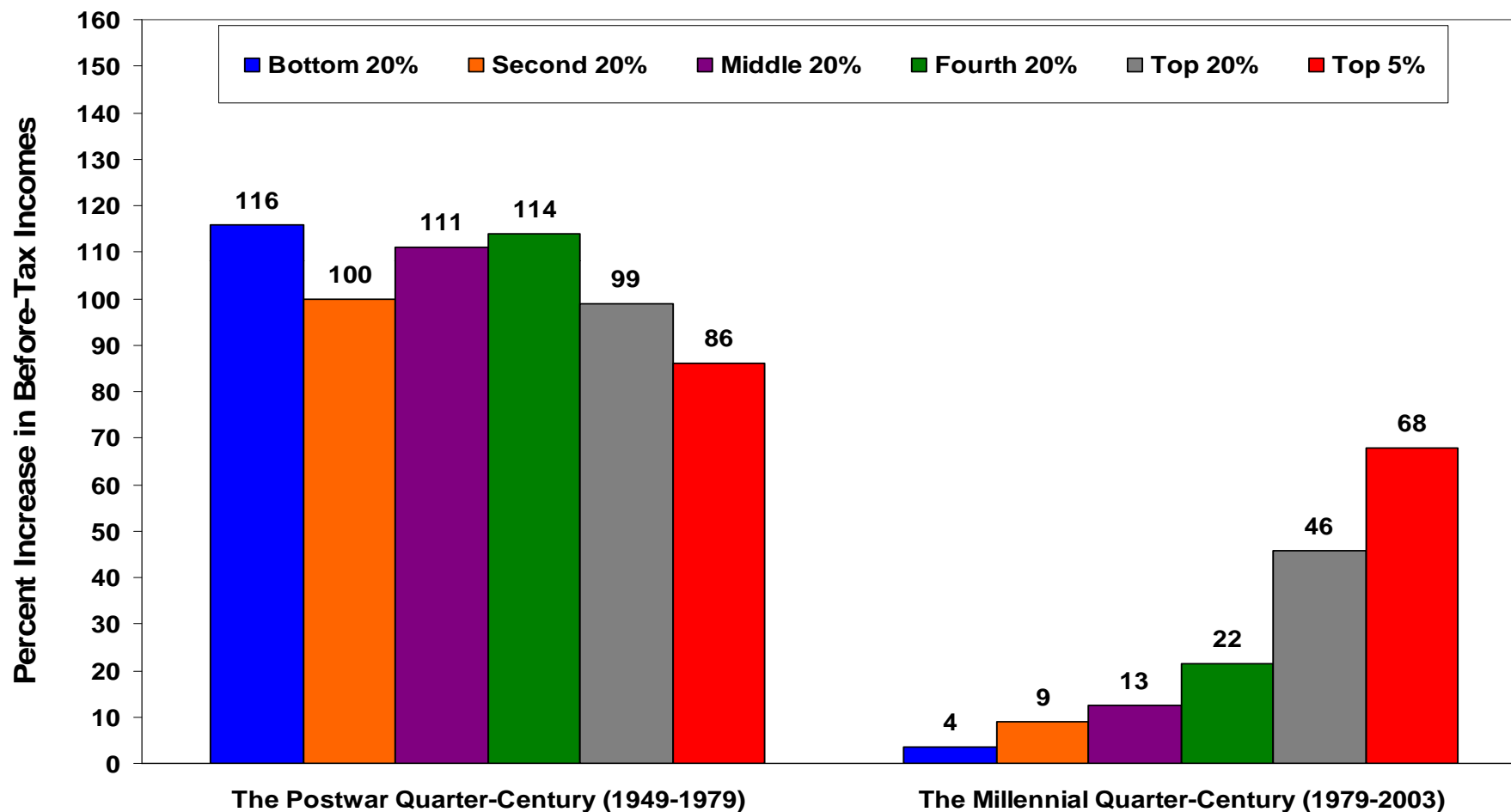


# THE RESTRUCTURED ECONOMY



- The “resource economy” of the industrial era, for which this city was so favorably positioned, has been replaced by a new high-tech, knowledge-based, fully worldwide marketplace.
- The traditional “blue collar path” to financial security has now largely disappeared. Almost all the good-paying jobs today require high levels of technical skills and educational credentials.
- In 2008, 74% of the survey respondents *disagreed* that, “A high school education is enough to get a good job.” In the 2007 survey, 61% *agreed* that, “There are very few good jobs in today’s economy for people without a college education.”
- In this increasingly unequal, hourglass economy, “What you earn,” as the saying goes, “depends on what you’ve learned.”

# FIGURE 3: TWO CONTRASTING QUARTER-CENTURIES SINCE WORLD WAR II



## Percent Increases in Before-Tax Household Incomes

Source: U.S. Census; Robert H. Frank. 2007. *Falling Behind*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, pp. 10-11.

# THE NEW IMPORTANCE OF “QUALITY-OF-PLACE” CONSIDERATIONS

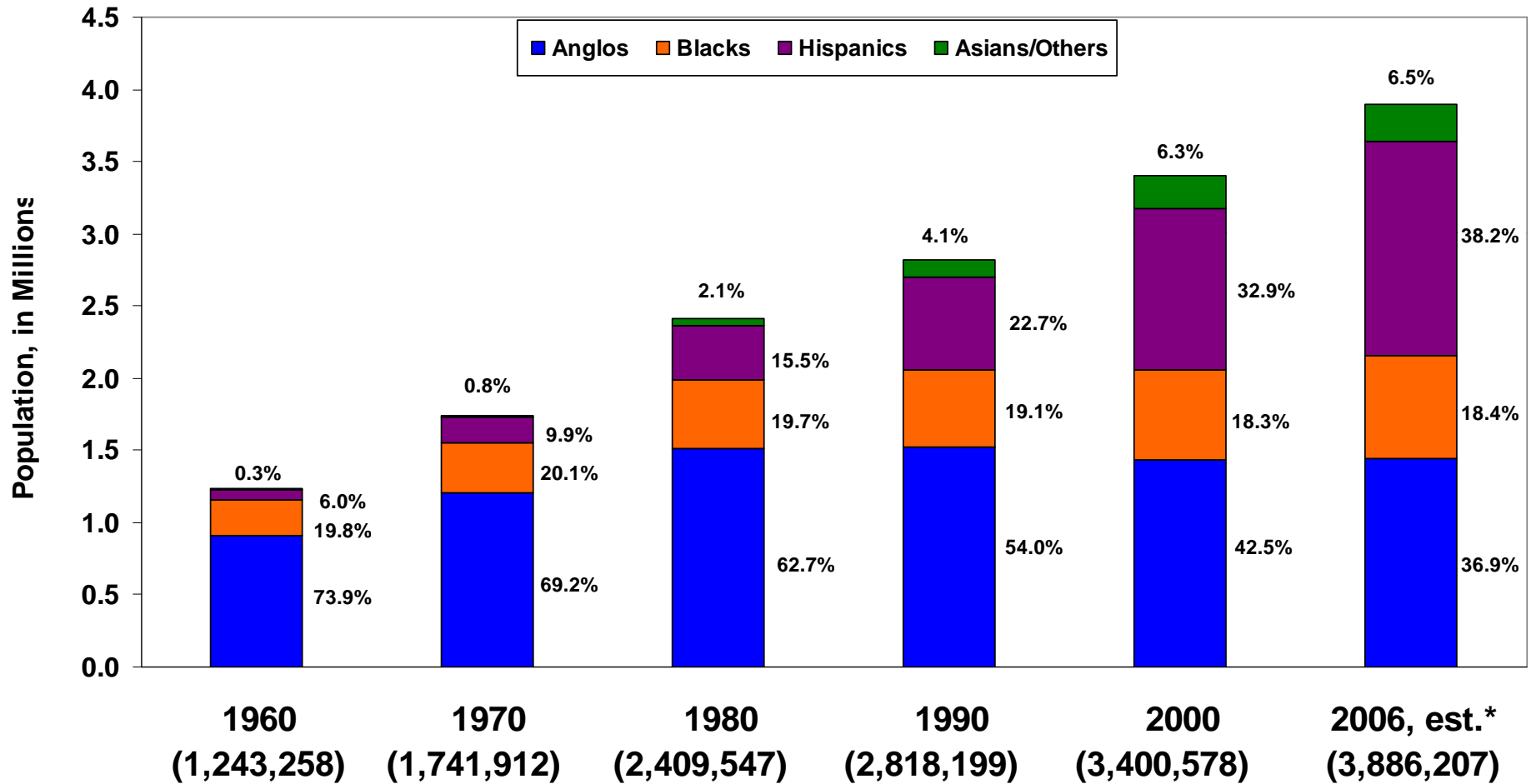
- Houston's prospects will now increasingly depend on the city's ability to attract and retain the nation's most skilled and creative “knowledge workers” and high tech companies.
- This will require continued significant improvements in . . .
  - the region's mobility and transportation systems
  - the revitalization and preservation of its urban centers
  - the excellence of its venues for sports, arts, and culture
  - the enhancement of its green spaces, trees, and bayous
  - the richness of its hiking, boating, and birding areas
  - the healthfulness of its air and water quality
  - Its overall physical attractiveness and aesthetic appeal
- The public's support for new initiatives along these lines has remained firm or grown stronger across the years of surveys.

# THE DEMOGRAPHIC REVOLUTION



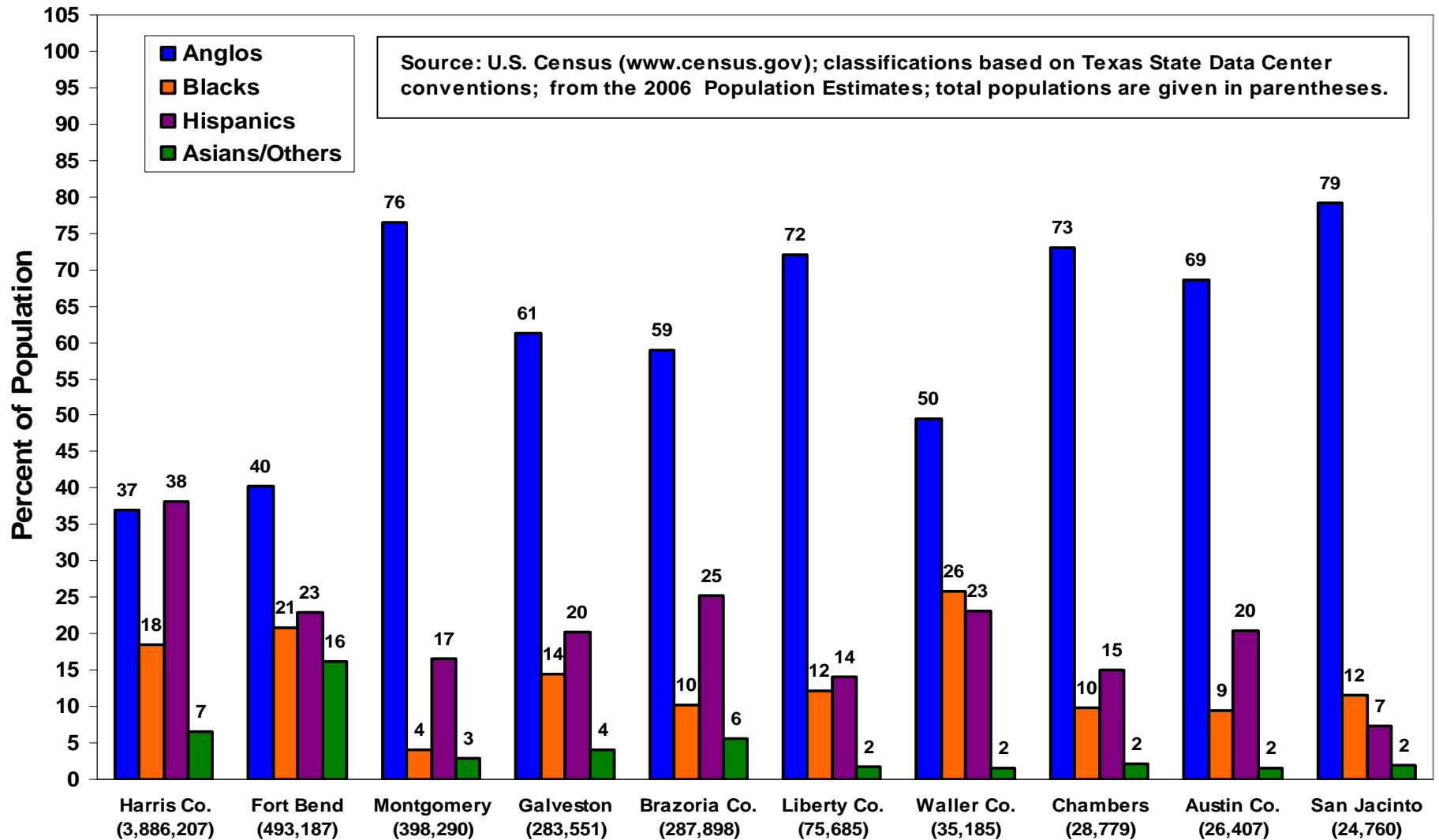
- Along with the major immigration capitals of L.A. and N.Y.C., and closely following upon Miami, San Francisco, and Chicago, Houston is at the forefront of the new diversity that is refashioning the socio-political landscape of urban America.
  
- Throughout all of its history . . .
  - this was essentially a bi-racial Southern city,
  - dominated and controlled, in an automatic, taken-for-granted way, by white men.
  
- Today . . .
  - Houston is one of the most culturally diverse metropolitan areas in the country, and
  - all of its ethnic communities are now “minorities.”

# FIGURE 4: THE DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSFORMATIONS OF HARRIS COUNTY (1960-2006)



Source: U.S. Census ([www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)); classifications based on Texas State Data Center conventions; total populations are given in parentheses; \*from the 2006 Official Population Estimates.

# FIGURE 5: THE DEMOGRAPHICS OF THE TEN COUNTIES IN HOUSTON'S METRO AREA (2006)

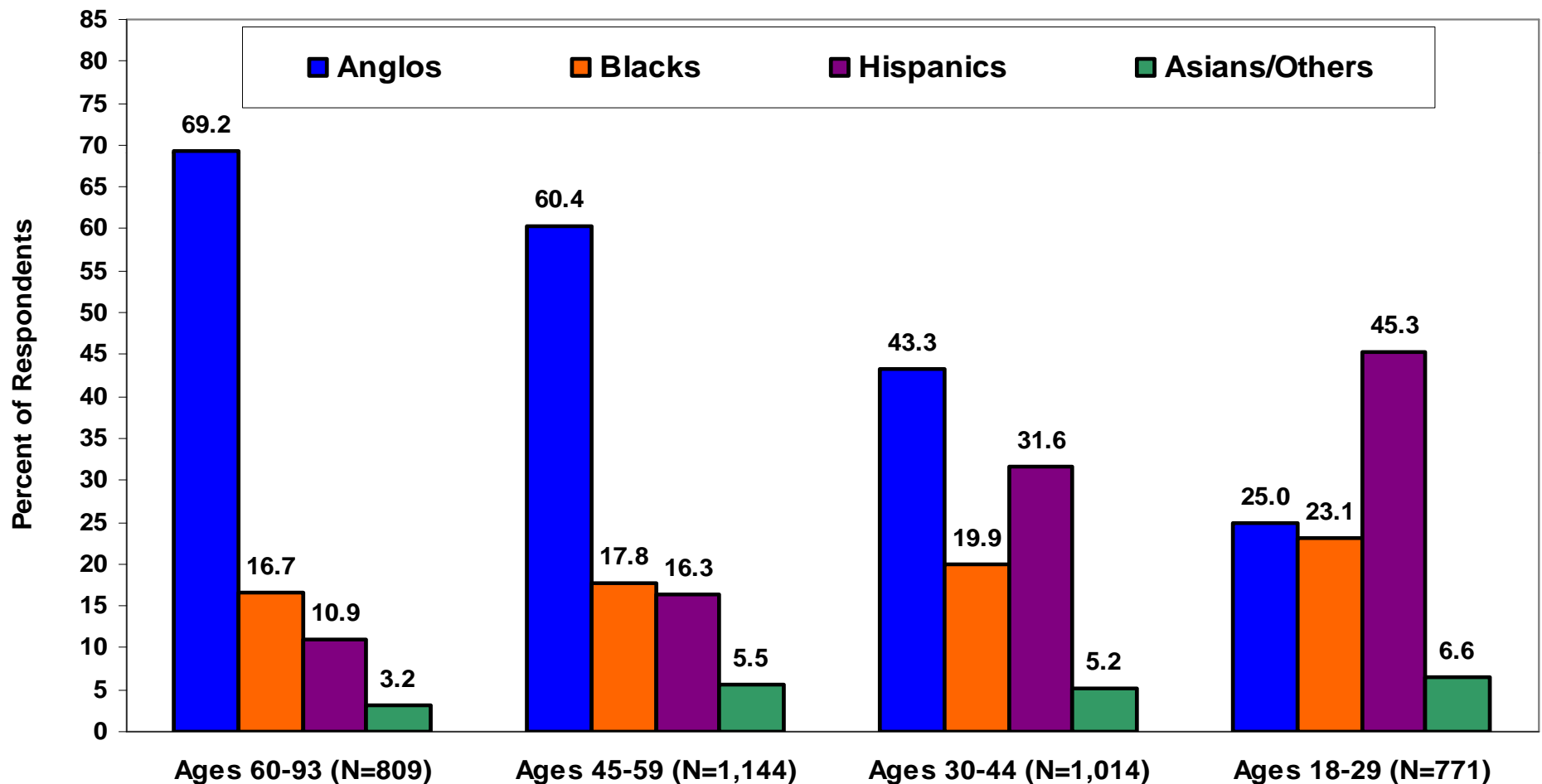


# INTERACTIONS OF ETHNICITY AND AGE



- The other demographic revolution: the remarkable “aging,” or “graying,” of the American population.
- Today’s seniors are primarily Anglos, as are the 76 million Americans born between 1946 and 1964, now aged 44 to 62. In the next 30 years, the numbers over age 65 will double.
- The younger cohorts, who will replace the “Baby Boomers,” are disproportionately non-Anglo and far less privileged.
- The “aging of America” is thus a division not only by generation, but also by socioeconomic status and ethnic background.
- Nowhere is this ongoing transformation more clearly seen than in the age distributions of the Harris County population.

**FIGURE 6: THE PROPORTIONS IN FOUR AGE GROUPS WHO ARE ANGLO, BLACK, LATINO, OR ASIAN AND OTHER (2003-2008, COMBINED)**



## ***CONCLUSIONS: HOUSTON AND AMERICA FACE SOME FORMIDABLE CHALLENGES***



- This city and nation will need to nurture a far more educated workforce, and fashion policies that can reduce the growing inequalities and prevent the rise of a new urban underclass.
- To attract the most innovative companies and talented individuals, Houston will need to grow into a more environmentally appealing urban destination, and develop the research centers that will fuel the critical drivers of the new economy.
- If the region is to flourish in the 21st century, it will need to develop into a much more unified and inclusive multiethnic society, one in which equality of opportunity is truly made available to all citizens and all of its communities are invited to participate as full partners in shaping the Houston future.

# CONTACT INFORMATION



Rice's New "Urban Research Center of Houston"  
*[Turning Research into Reality]*  
Professor Stephen L. Klineberg, Director  
713-348-3484 or [slk@rice.edu](mailto:slk@rice.edu)

Contact Rice University (at: [corrul@rice.edu](mailto:corrul@rice.edu); or call  
713-348-4225) for copies of the following publications:

- \* the report on 24 years of Houston surveys (*Public Perceptions in Remarkable Times*, 2005)
- \* the report on the six major sectors of the greater Houston area (*Regional Perspectives*, 2007)

For further information, please visit the survey Web site,  
at: [www.houstonareasurvey.org](http://www.houstonareasurvey.org)