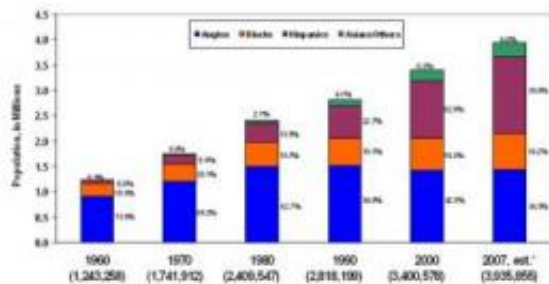


Houston: The face of America in the next 20 years

April 27 2009



Houston is now a minority-majority city. Credit: US Census

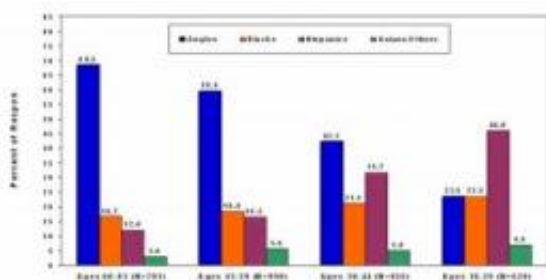
Houston is a reflection of where most of America's cities will be in the next 20 years, according to Stephen Klineberg, Rice University sociologist and director of the annual Houston Area Survey.

Klineberg, who has led the study since its inception 28 years ago, said that along with the major immigration capitals of Los Angeles and New York City, and closely following upon Miami, San Francisco and Chicago, Houston is at the forefront of the new diversity that is refashioning the social and political landscape of urban America.

Issues of public discussion such as gay rights and political affiliation could see dramatic shifts as the social and demographic trends occurring here spread to other U.S. cities.

"Throughout all of its history, Houston was essentially a biracial southern city dominated and controlled, in an automatic, taken-for-granted way, by white men," Klineberg said. "Today it is one of the most ethnically and culturally diverse metropolitan areas in the country."

In Houston, and elsewhere, the white population is growing older, while most of the younger adults are black and Hispanic. No force in the world will stop Houston (and America) from becoming more Hispanic and less Anglo as the 21st century unfolds.



Houston's aging white population will give way to a younger black and Hispanic population in the years to come. Credit: Houston Annual Survey

Houstonians' views on the new immigration and on the region's burgeoning diversity have been affected by the economic anxieties, sometimes in curious ways, Klineberg said. The number of area residents who believe that the new immigration "mostly strengthens" (rather than "threatens") American culture increased to 49 percent this year from 44 percent in 2007. The new number is still lower than the 57 percent in 2005, but higher than the 39 percent in 1997. The percentage of Harris County residents who favor "granting illegal immigrants a path to legal citizenship if they speak English and have no criminal record" rose from 56 percent in 2008 to 61 percent this year, but it too is lower than the 68

percent in 2007.

Klineberg characterized the attitudes toward immigration as "complex" and "volatile," but said he has detected among respondents "less of a sense today than in recent years that we are being overwhelmed by immigrants coming here and threatening our culture." Still, only 64 percent in the 2009 survey agreed that "the children of illegal [immigrants](#) should have the right to attend the public schools," down from 71 percent in 2007.

The effects on politics and social issues

The ongoing demographic transformations have also been a factor in local politics over the past 20 years. In 1989, 50 percent of Houstonians considered themselves Republicans, while 39 percent reported being Democrats. This year, 45 percent identify themselves as Democrats and 39 percent say they are Republicans.

The findings on important social issues reveal two quite different trends. Attitudes toward abortion rights have been virtually unchanged for all of the last two decades in Houston, but views on homosexuality have shifted. On virtually every relevant question, support for gay rights in Houston has grown in what Klineberg described as an "unmistakable, consistent increase over time."

The belief that homosexuality is "morally wrong," for example, dropped steadily from 59 percent in 1997 to 46 percent in 2009. The number who said they had a "close personal friend who is gay or lesbian" grew from 44 percent in 2004 to 56 percent today. Support for gay marriage rose to 43 percent in 2009 from 32 percent two years ago. Tolerant attitudes toward homosexuality closely follow age, Klineberg noted, with younger Houstonians more accepting of gays and lesbians. On the other hand, age is not a good predictor of opinions about abortion, he said, suggesting

that this may help to explain their different trajectories over the years.

The ability to track attitudes on a variety of subjects over time is what makes the Houston Area Survey so valuable, he said. The survey each year is designed and directed by Klineberg and his undergraduate sociology class at Rice University. The telephone interviews are carried out by the Center for Public Policy at the University of Houston.

More information: To read more data from this year's survey, go to www.media.rice.edu/images/media/2009-04-27-HAS.ppt .

Source: Rice University ([news](#) : [web](#))

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