



# **HOUSTON'S FUTURE:**

**Tracking the Economic and Demographic Transformations Through 28 Years of Houston Surveys**

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## **THE HOUSTON AREA SURVEY (1982-2009)**

Supported by local foundations, corporations, and individuals, the annual surveys have interviewed 28 scientifically selected successive representative samples of Harris County residents.

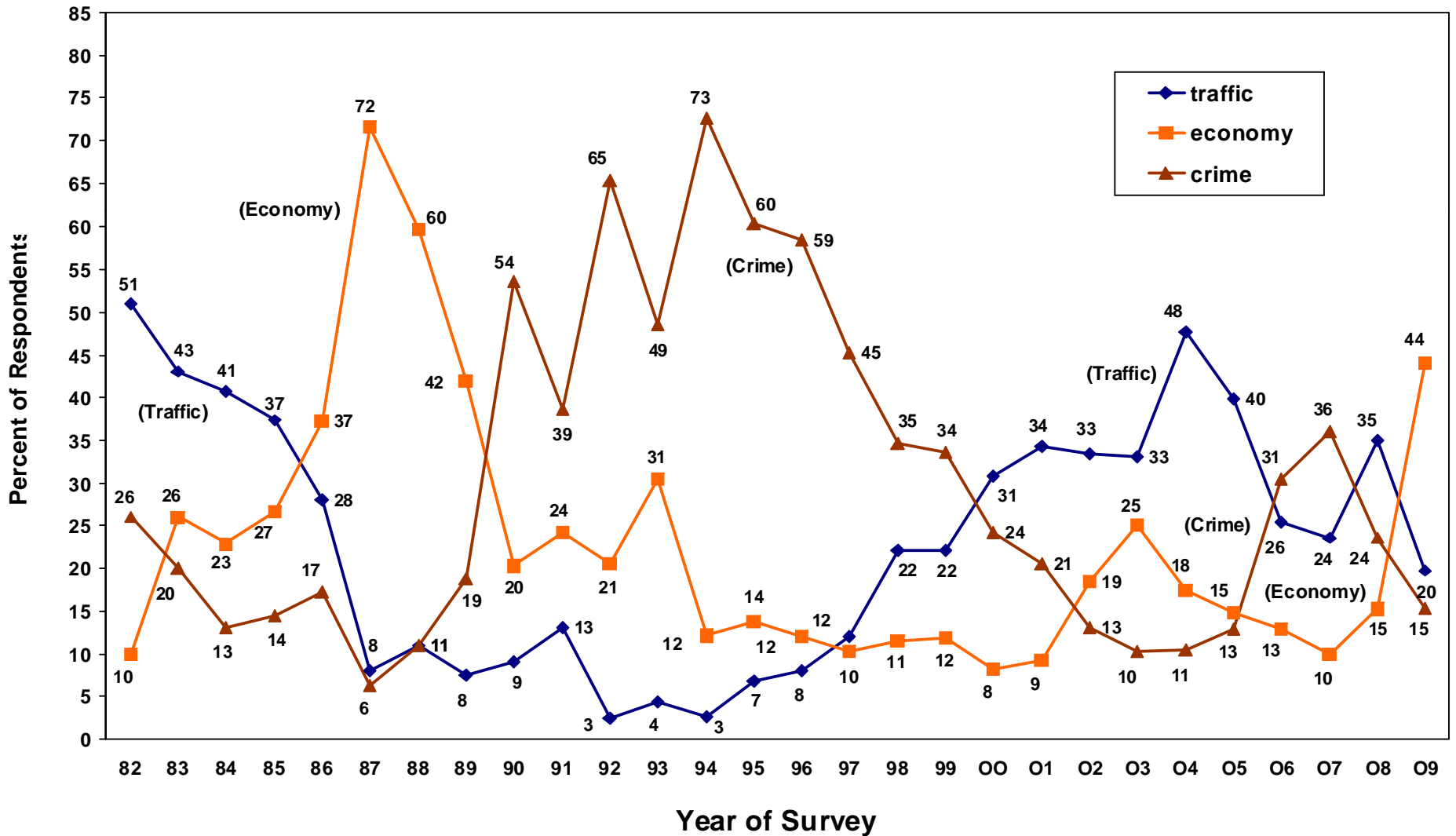
In May 1982, just two months after the first Houston Area Survey was completed, the 80-year oil boom suddenly collapsed.

The region recovered from the deep and prolonged recession of the mid 1980s to find itself squarely in the midst of . . .

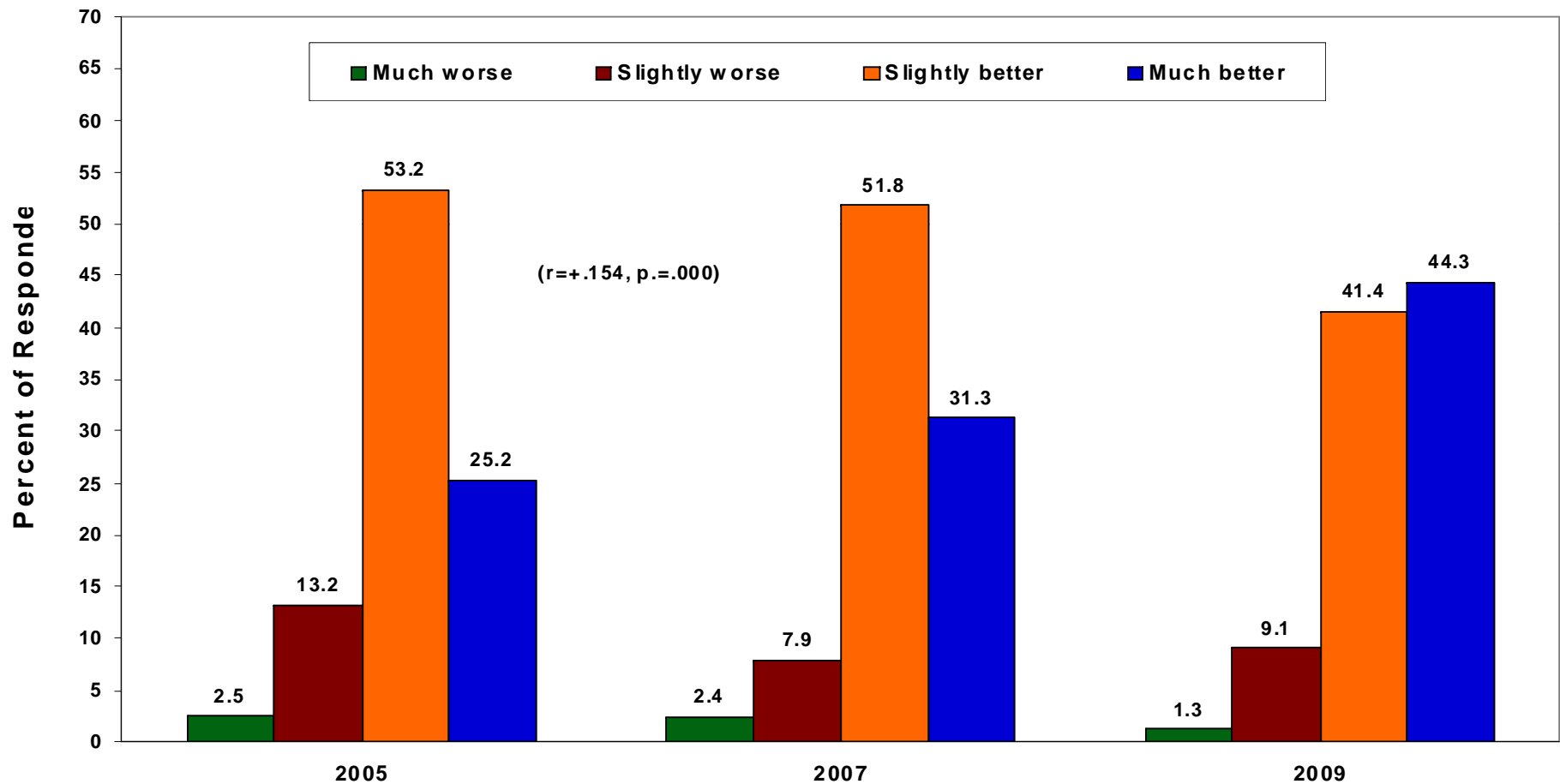
- a restructured economy and
- a demographic revolution.

These are the same transformations that have refashioned American society itself in the past quarter-century. For 28 years, the Houston surveys have tracked area residents' changing perspectives on these remarkable trends.

**FIGURE 1: “WHAT IS THE BIGGEST PROBLEM IN THE HOUSTON AREA TODAY?” (1982-2009)**



## FIGURE 2: HOUSTON AS A PLACE TO LIVE, COMPARED WITH OTHER CITIES (2005-2009)



"Compared to most other metropolitan areas in the country, would you say that the Houston area is a much better place, a slightly better place, a slightly worse place, or a much worse place in which to live?"

# THE RESTRUCTURED ECONOMY

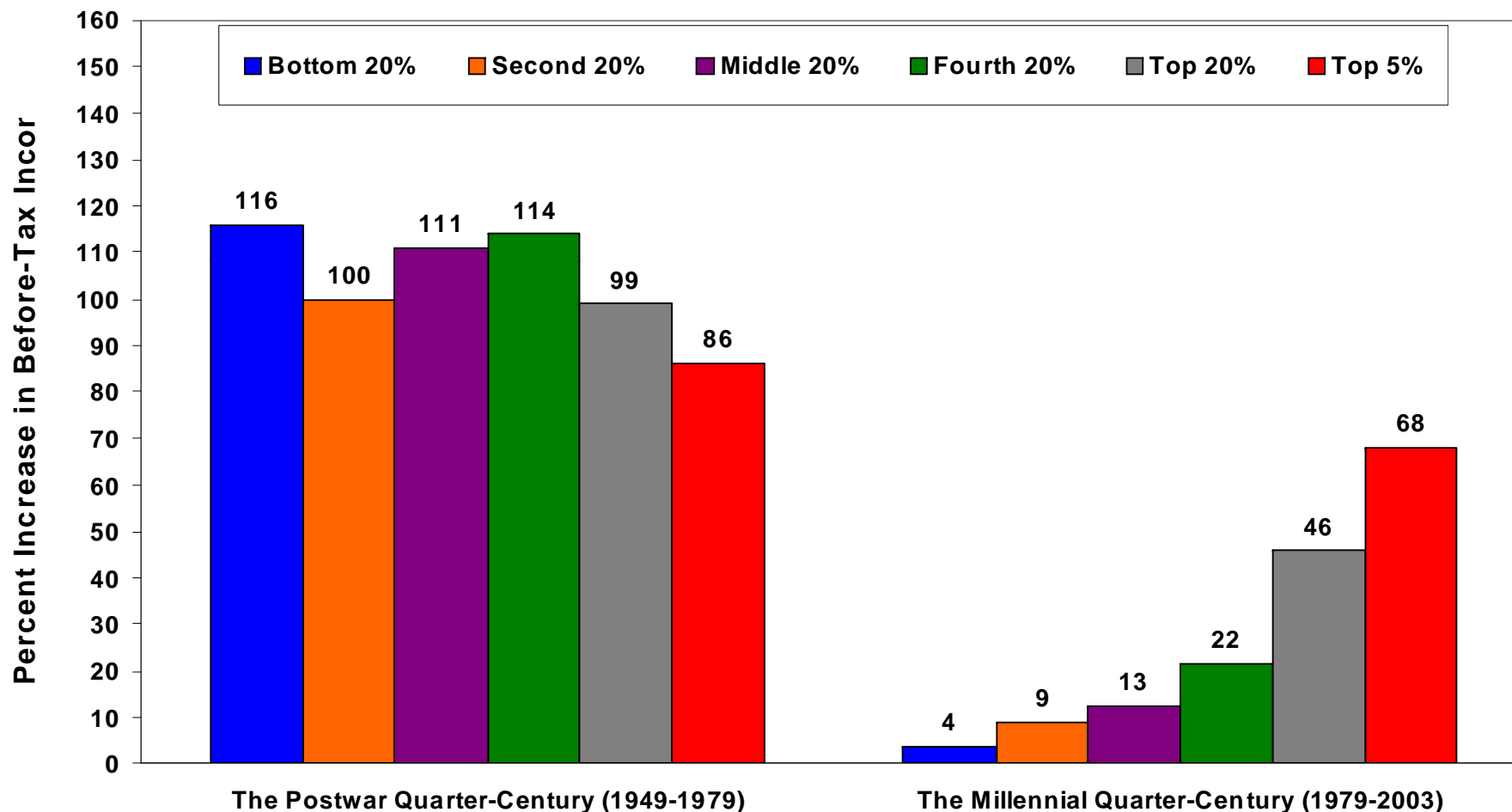
The “resource economy” of the industrial era, for which this city was so favorably positioned, has been replaced by a new high-tech, knowledge-based, fully worldwide marketplace.

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

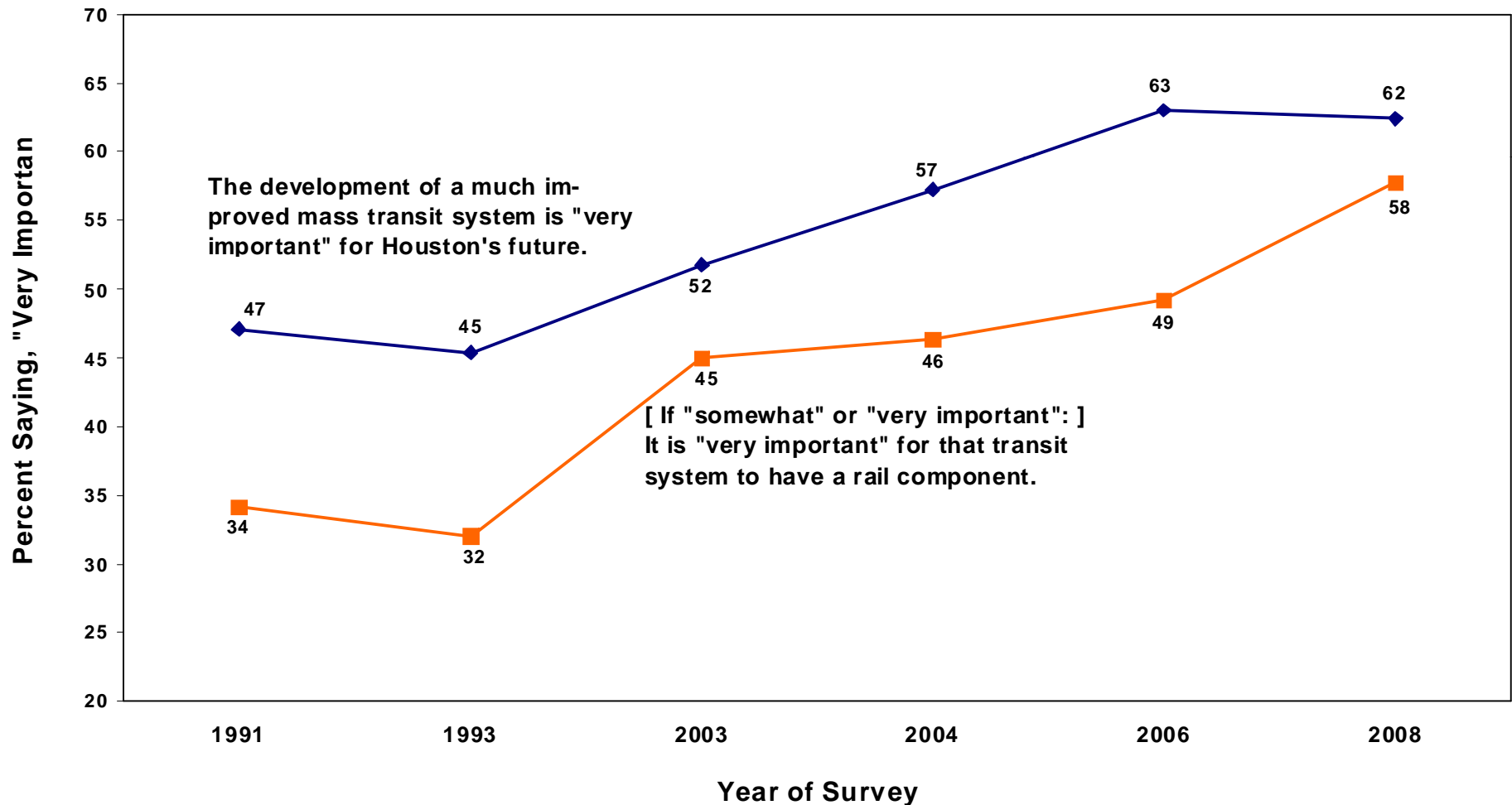
Houston's prospects will now increasingly depend on the city's ability to attract and retain the nation's most skilled and creative “knowledge workers” and high tech companies.

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.

# FIGURE 4: THE IMPORTANCE OF A MUCH IMPROVED MASS TRANSIT SYSTEM AND OF INCLUDING A RAIL COMPONENT (1991-2008)



# U.S. IMMIGRATION POLICY BEFORE AND AFTER THE REFORM ACT OF 1965



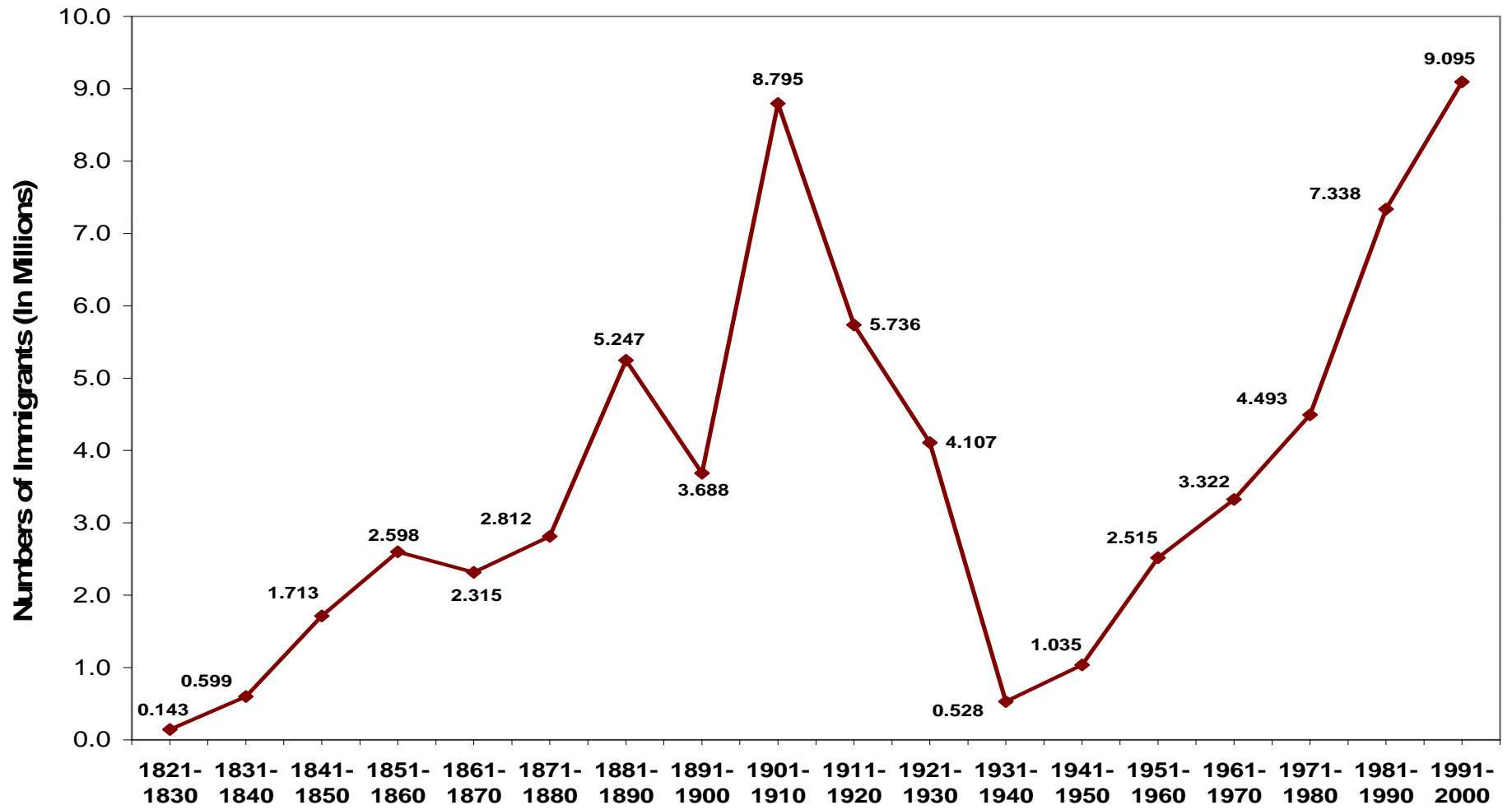
Between 1492 and 1965, 82 percent of all the people in the world who came to American shores came from Europe.

Under the notorious 1924 “National Origins Quota Act,” U.S. immigration was dramatically reduced, and newcomers were restricted almost entirely to the “Nordics” of Western Europe.

In 1965, the “Hart-Celler Act” for the first time accepted large numbers of non-Europeans, with preferences based primarily on family reunification, professional skills, or refugee status.

As a result, major new immigrant flows — non-European and of striking socioeconomic diversity — are rapidly transforming the composition of the Houston, and American, populations.

**FIGURE 5: THE NUMBERS OF DOCUMENTED U.S. IMMIGRANTS, BY DECADE (1820-2000)**



Source: U.S. Census ([www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)).

# 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.

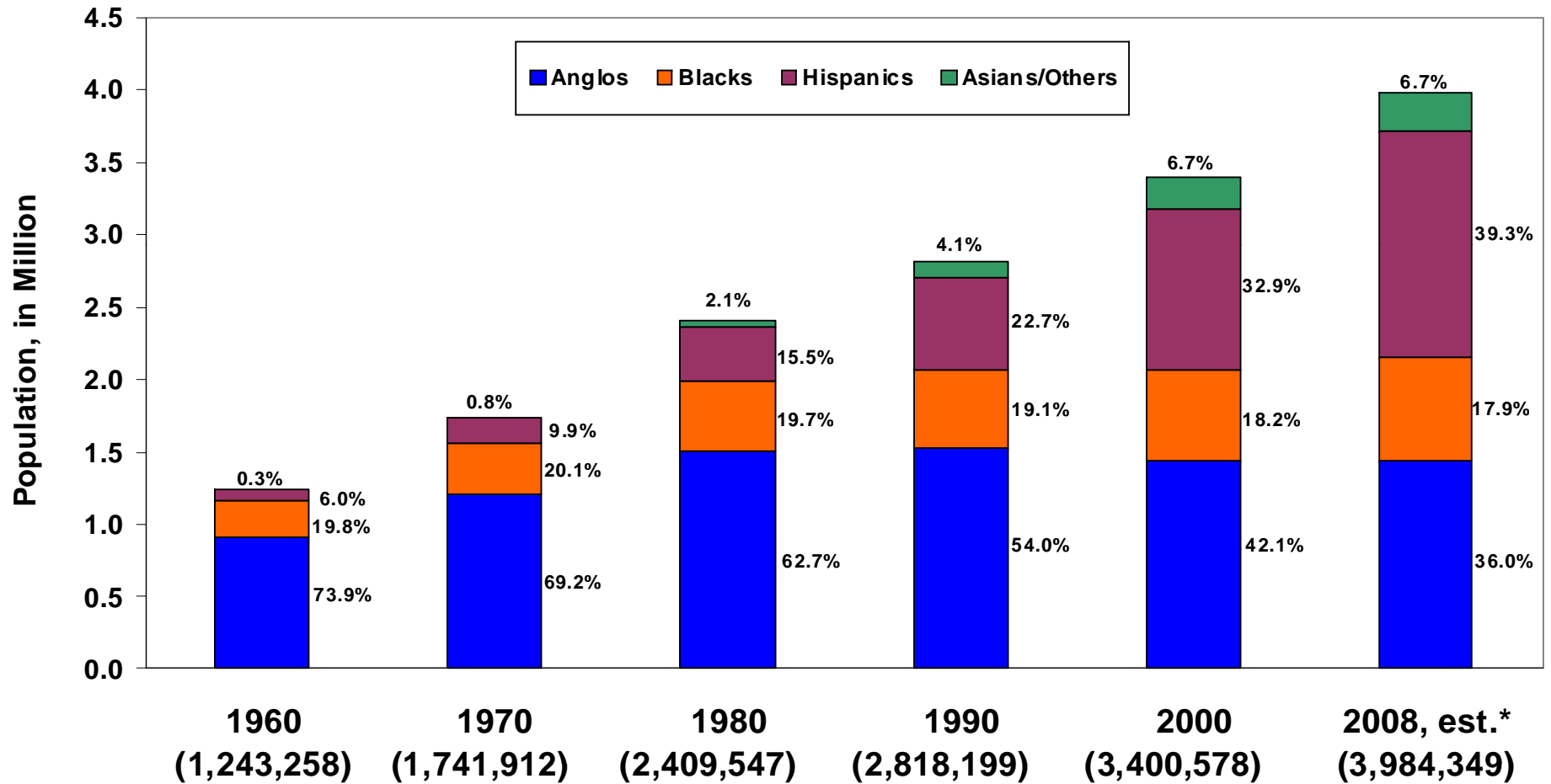
Throughout all of its history . . .

- 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 6: THE DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSFORMATIONS OF HARRIS COUNTY (1960-2008)



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 2007 Official Population Estimates.

# INTERACTIONS OF ETHNICITY AND AGE

The other demographic revolution: the remarkable “aging,” or “graying,” of the American population.

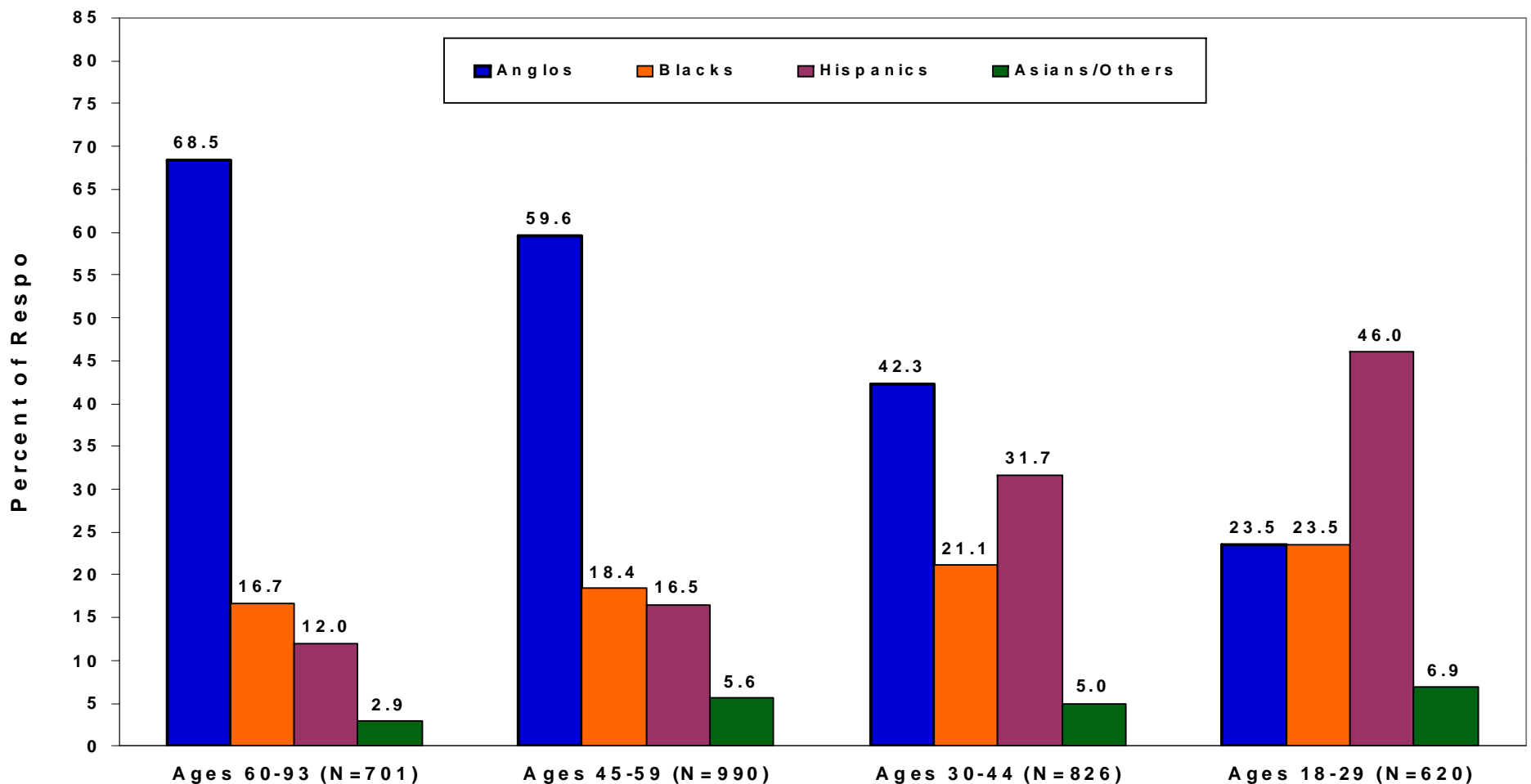
Today’s seniors are primarily Anglos, as are the 76 million Americans born between 1946 and 1964, now aged 44 to 62. In the next 30 years, the numbers over age 65 will double.

The younger cohorts, who will replace the “Baby Boomers,” are disproportionately non-Anglo and far less privileged.

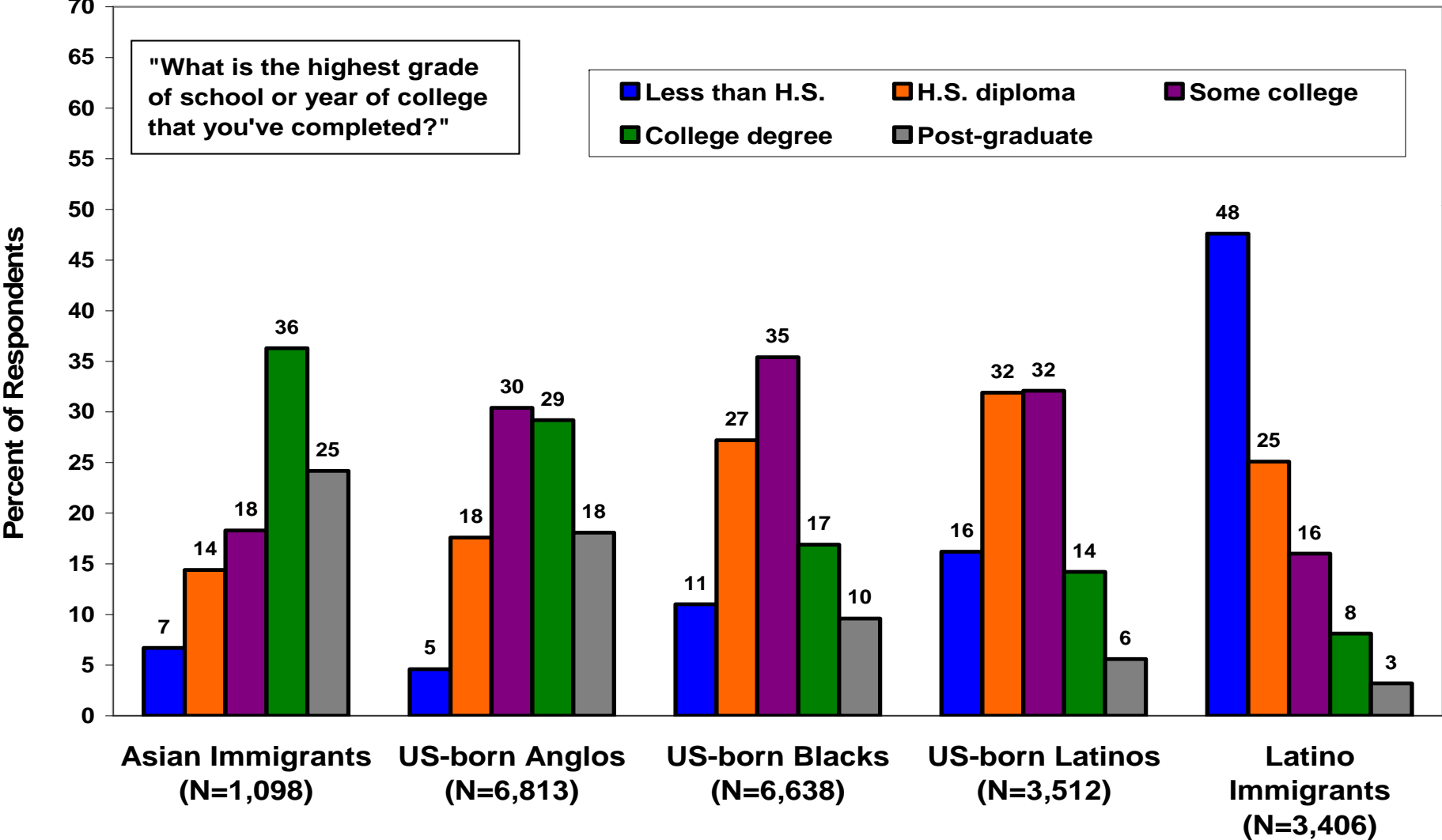
The “aging of America” is thus a division not only by generation, but also by socioeconomic status and ethnic background.

Nowhere is this ongoing transformation more clearly seen than in the age distributions of the Harris County population.

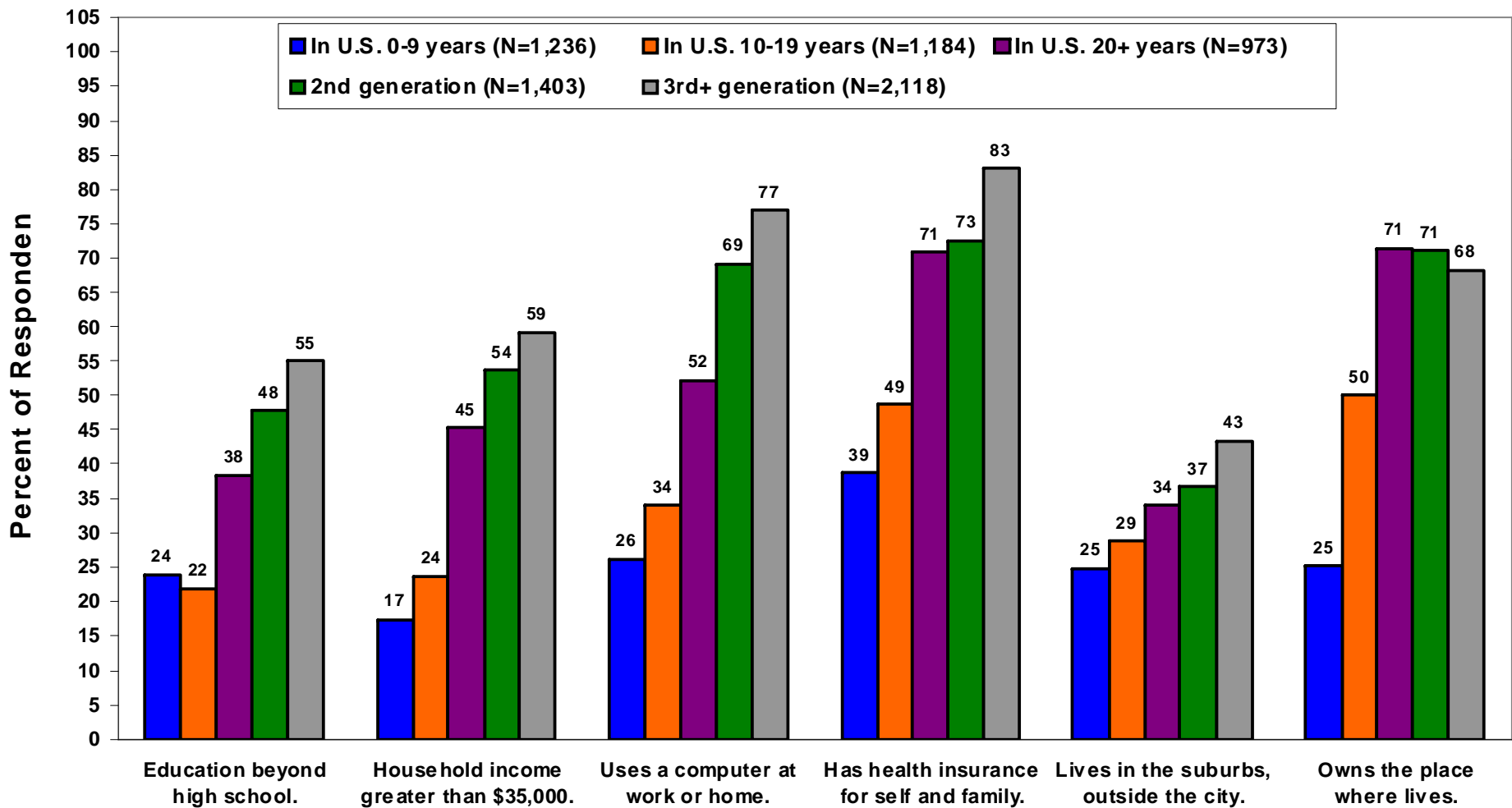
**FIGURE 7: THE PROPORTIONS IN FOUR AGE GROUPS WHO ARE ANGLO, BLACK, LATINO, AND ASIAN OR OTHER (2004-2009, COMBINED)**



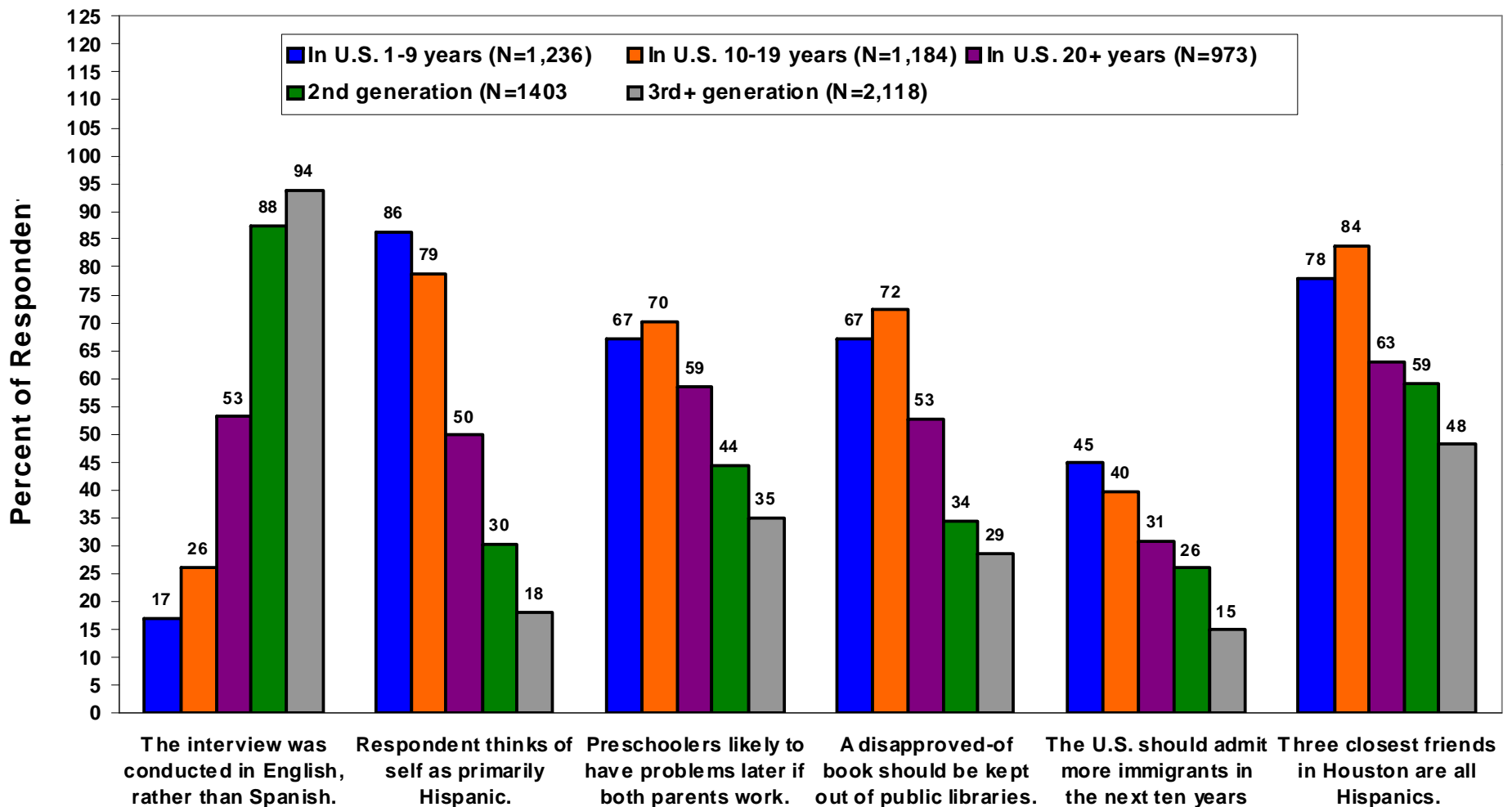
# FIGURE 8: EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT IN FIVE HOUSTON COMMUNITIES (1994-2009)



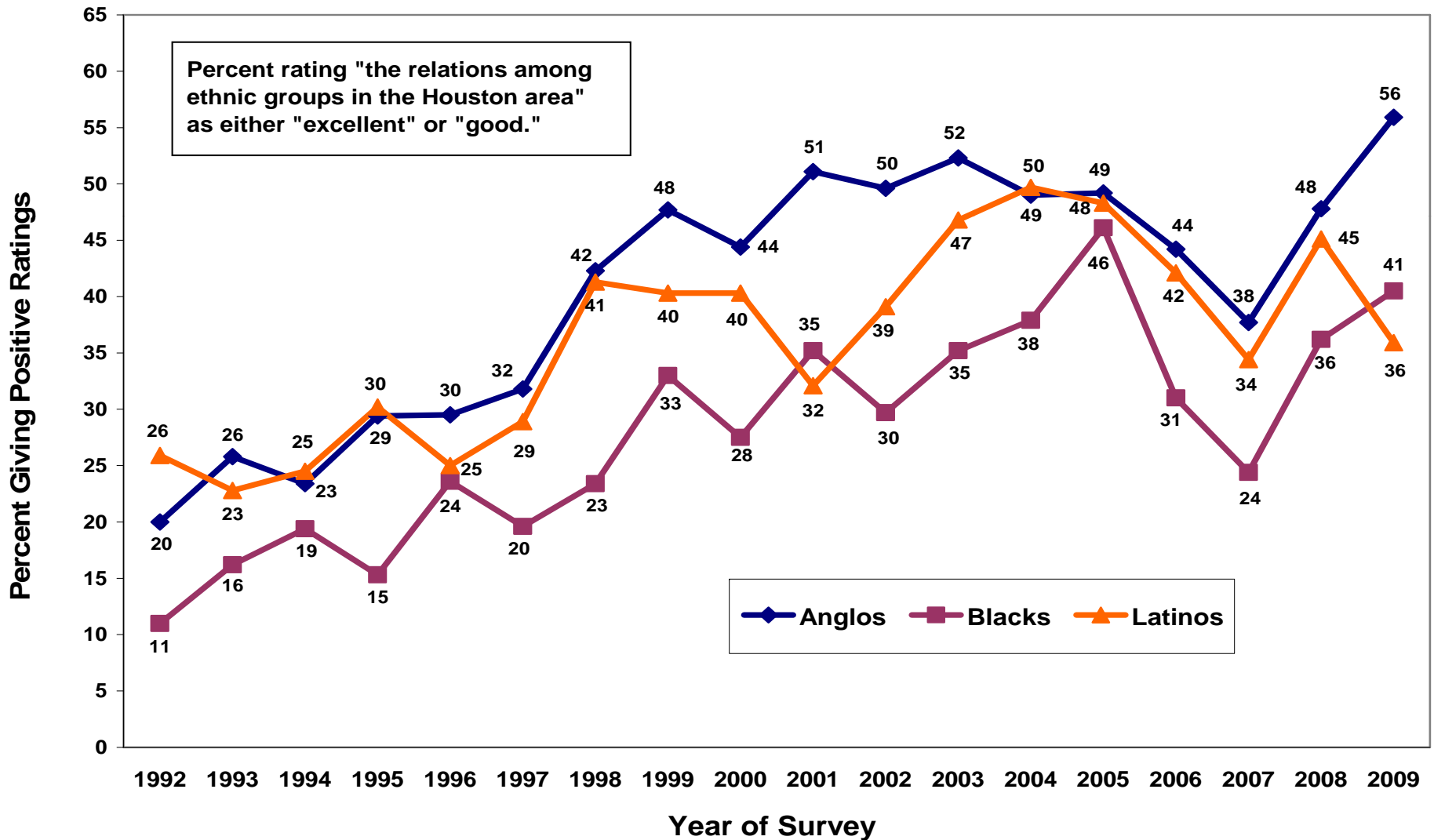
# FIGURE 9: MEASURES OF SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS AMONG LATINO IMMIGRANTS BY TIME IN U.S. AND BY GENERATION (1994-2009)



# FIGURE 10: INDICATORS OF ASSIMILATION AMONG LATINO IMMIGRANTS BY TIME IN THE U.S. AND BY GENERATION (1994-2009)



**FIGURE 11: POSITIVE RATINGS OF “THE RELATIONS AMONG ETHNIC GROUPS” (1992-2009)**



## ***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



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

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

For further information, or to download additional reports  
and PowerPoint slides, please visit the Institute’s websites,  
at: [www.houstonareasurvey.org](http://www.houstonareasurvey.org) or [www.iur.rice.edu](http://www.iur.rice.edu)