



THE CHANGING FACE OF HOUSTON: Tracking the Economic and Demographic Trans- formations Through 29 Years of Houston Surveys

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THE HOUSTON AREA SURVEY (1982-2010)

- Supported by local foundations, corporations, and individuals, and now housed in Rice's Institute for Urban Research, the annual surveys have interviewed 29 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 are refashioning all of American society. The Houston surveys have tracked area residents' changing perspectives on these remarkable trends.

FIGURE 1: POSITIVE RATINGS OF JOB OPPORTUNITIES IN THE HOUSTON AREA (1982-2010)

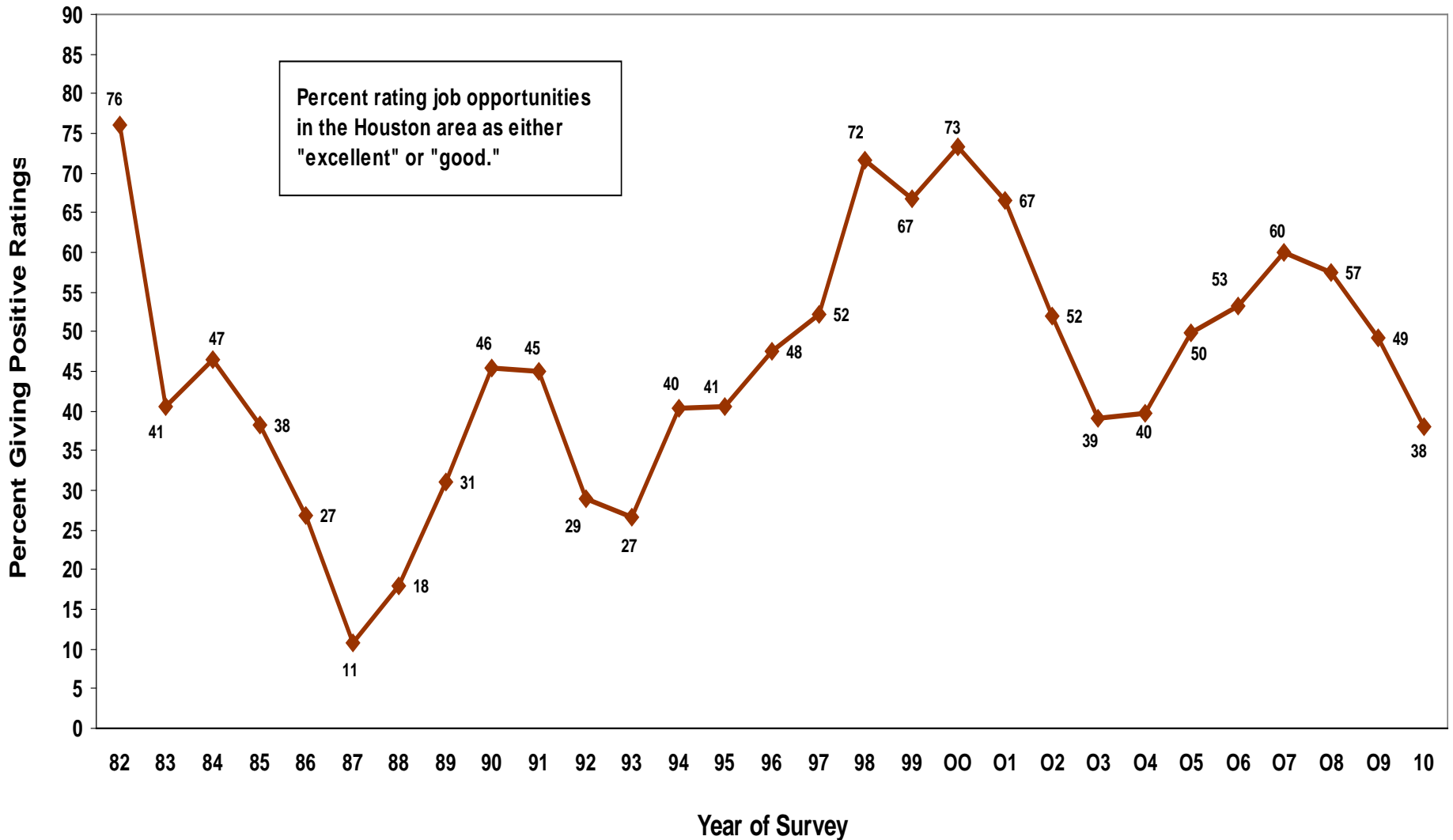
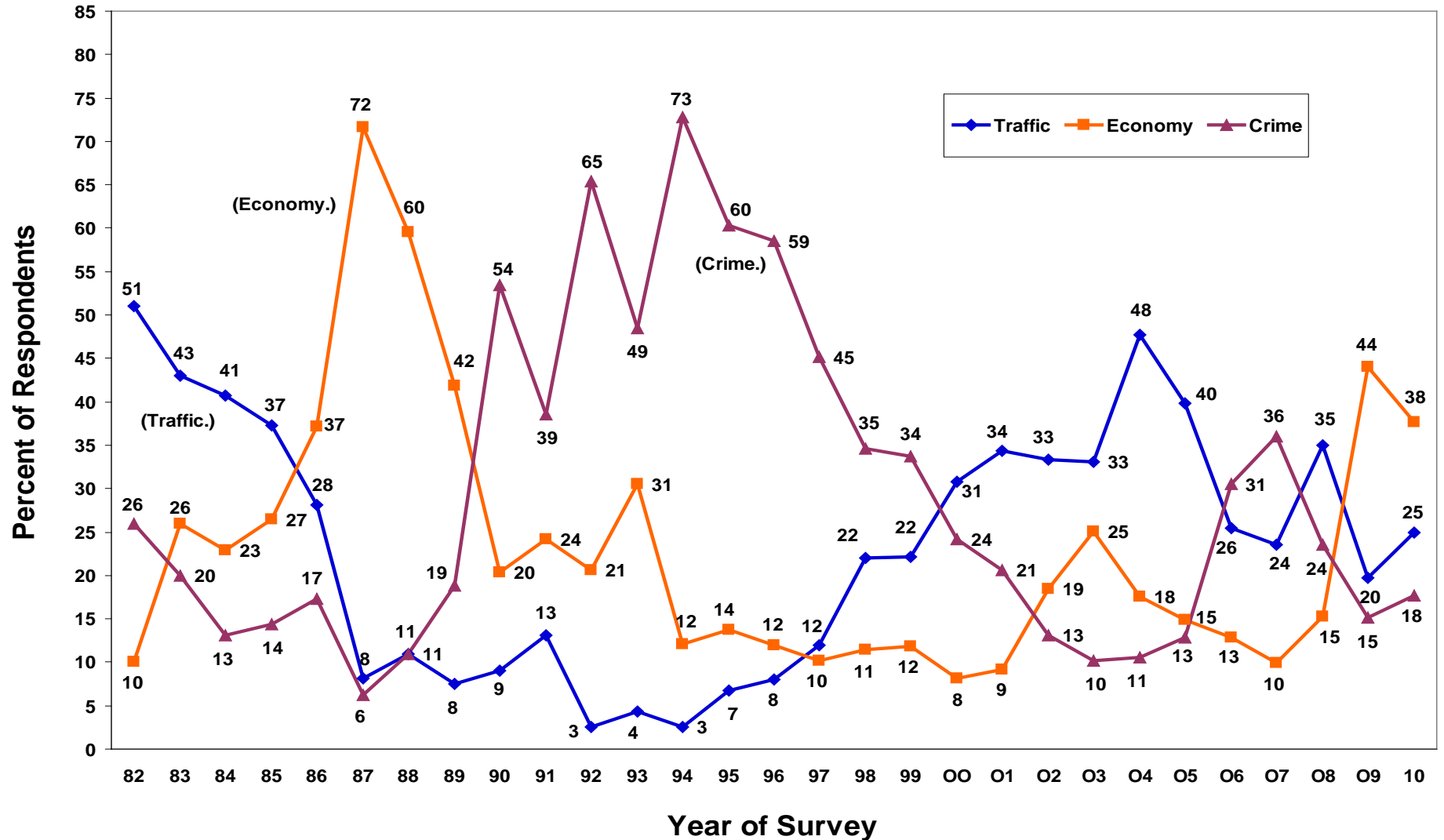


FIGURE 2: “WHAT IS THE BIGGEST PROBLEM IN THE HOUSTON AREA TODAY?” (1982-2010)



**FIGURE 3: PERCENT DOING BETTER FINAN-
CIALLY IN LAST FEW YEARS AND EXPECTING
TO DO BETTER IN NEXT FEW YEARS (1982-2010)**

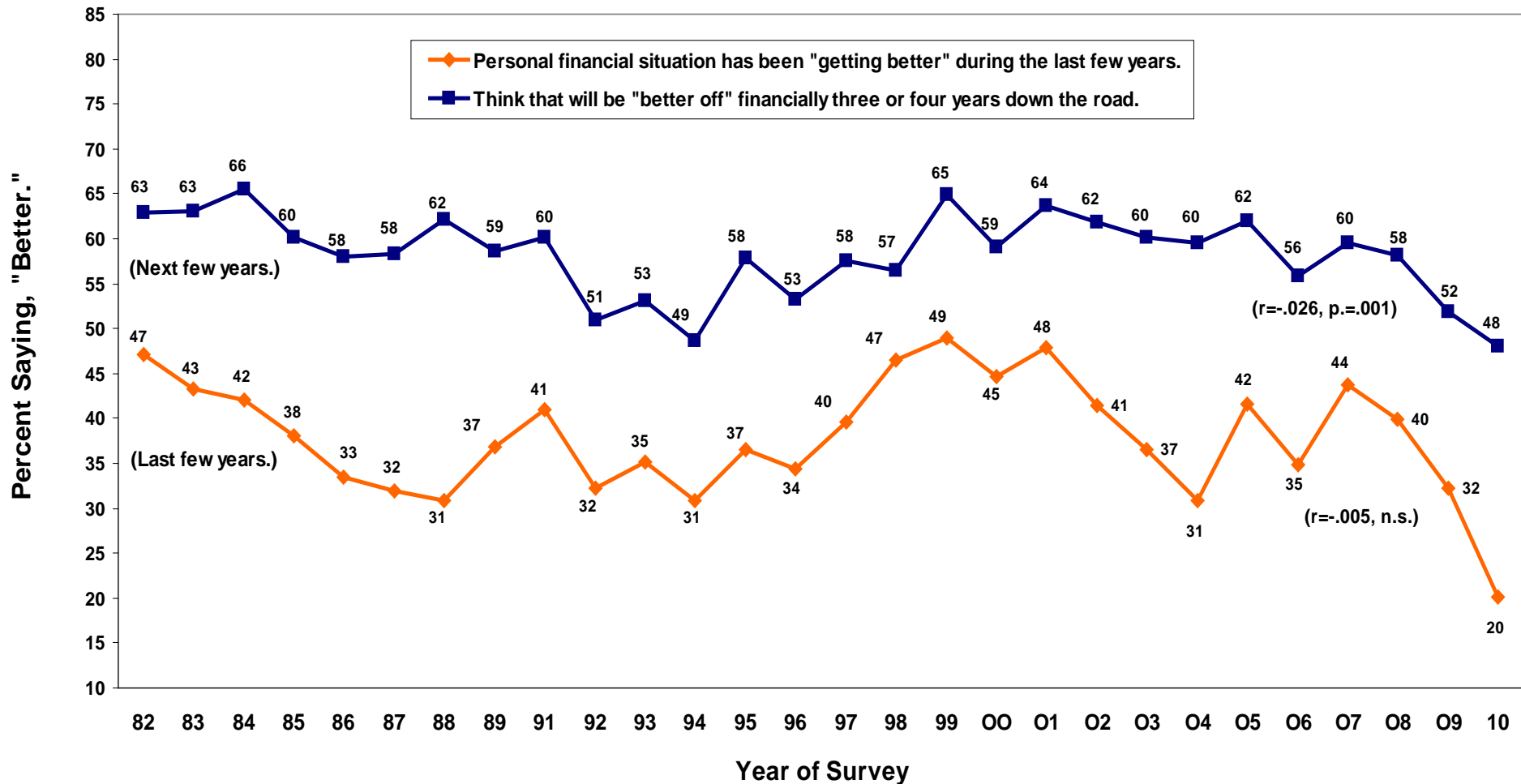
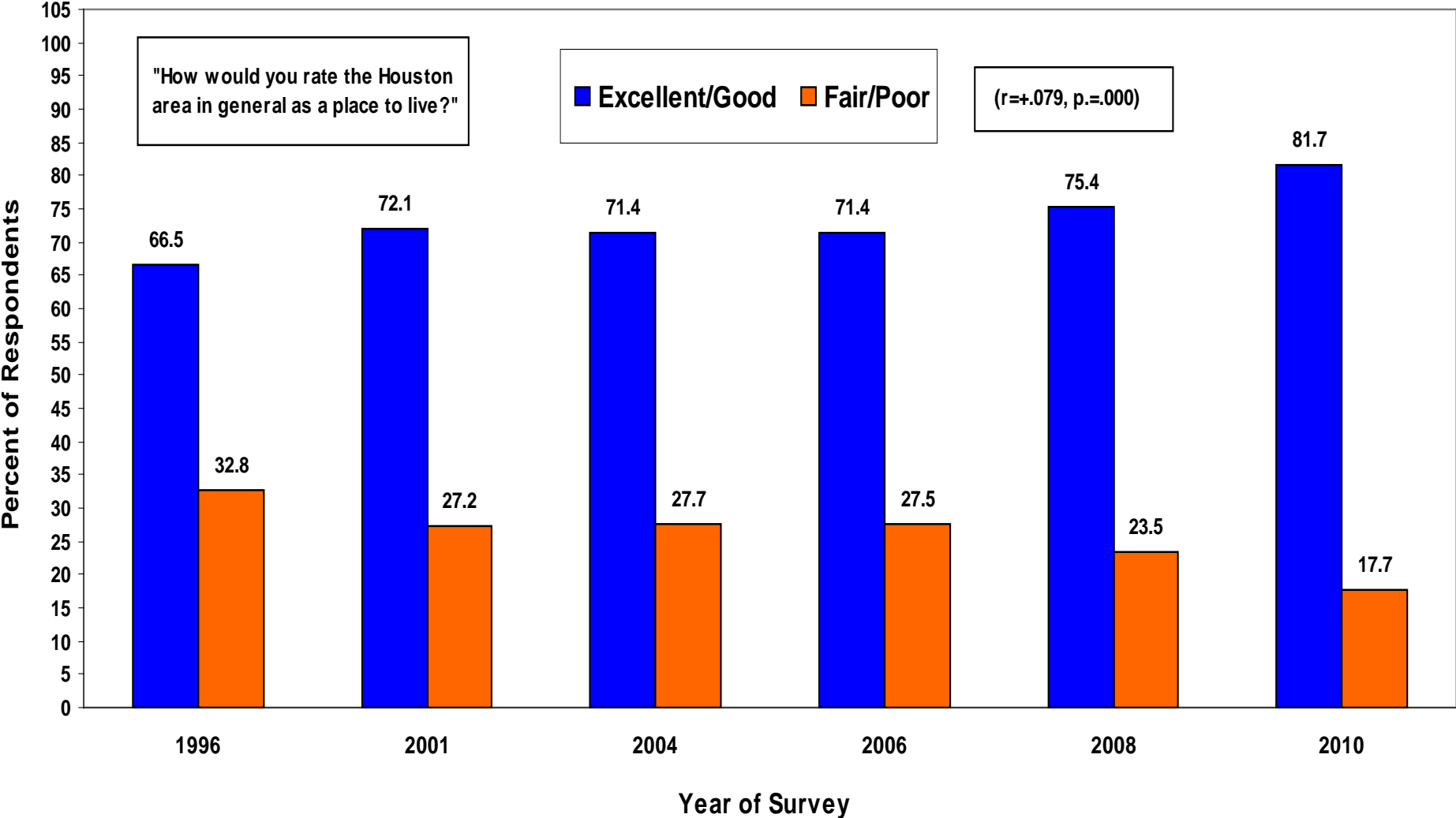


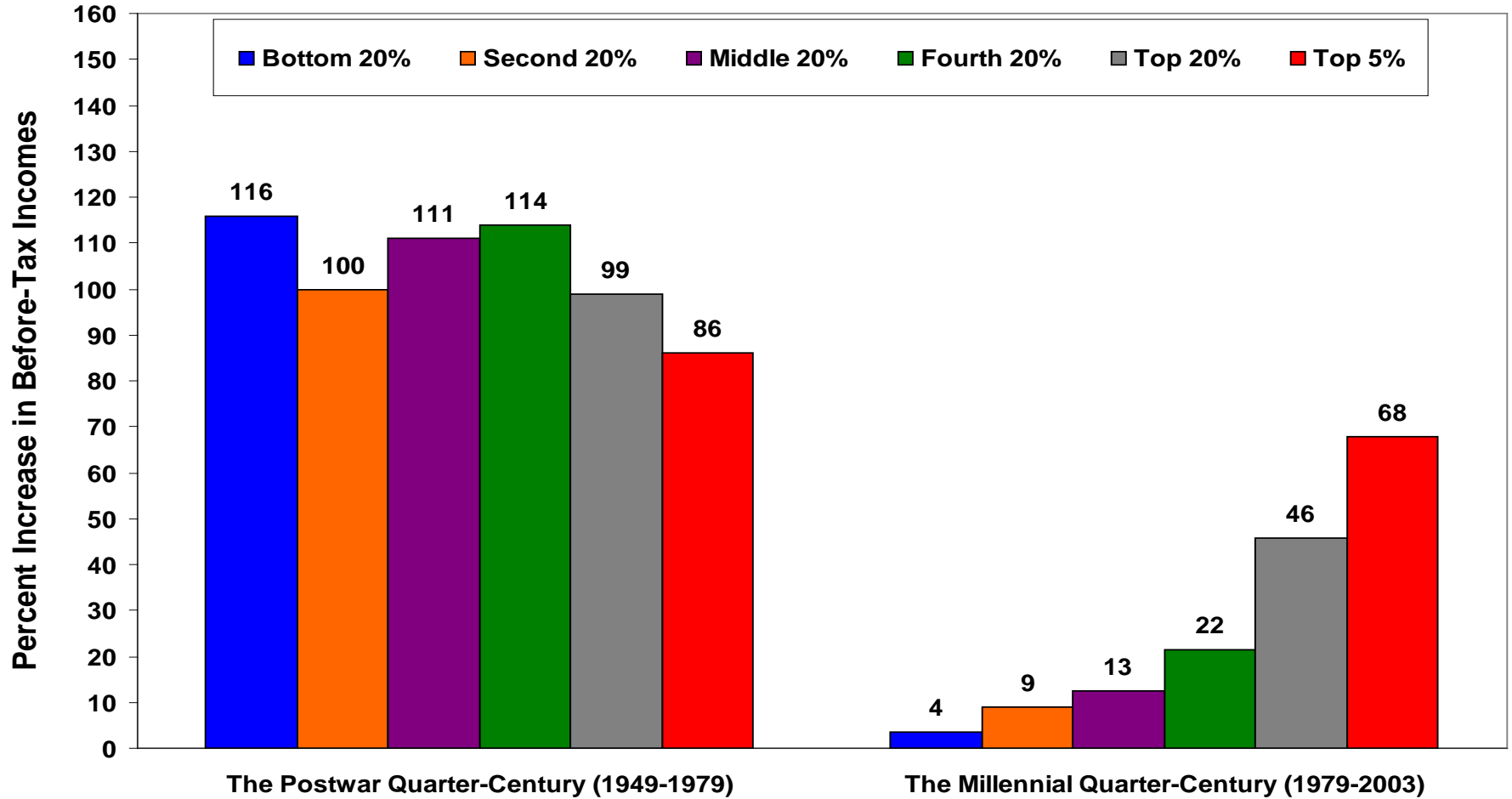
FIGURE 4: RATINGS OF THE HOUSTON AREA IN GENERAL AS A PLACE TO LIVE (1996-2010)



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- The “resource economy” of the industrial era, for which this city was so favorably positioned, has been replaced by a new high-tech, knowledge-based, fully worldwide marketplace.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 2010, 67% of the survey respondents *agreed* that “There are very few good jobs in today’s economy for people without a college education.” In the 2008 survey, 74% *disagreed* that “A high school education is enough to get a good job.”
- In this increasingly unequal, hourglass economy, “What you earn,” as the saying goes, “depends on what you’ve learned.”

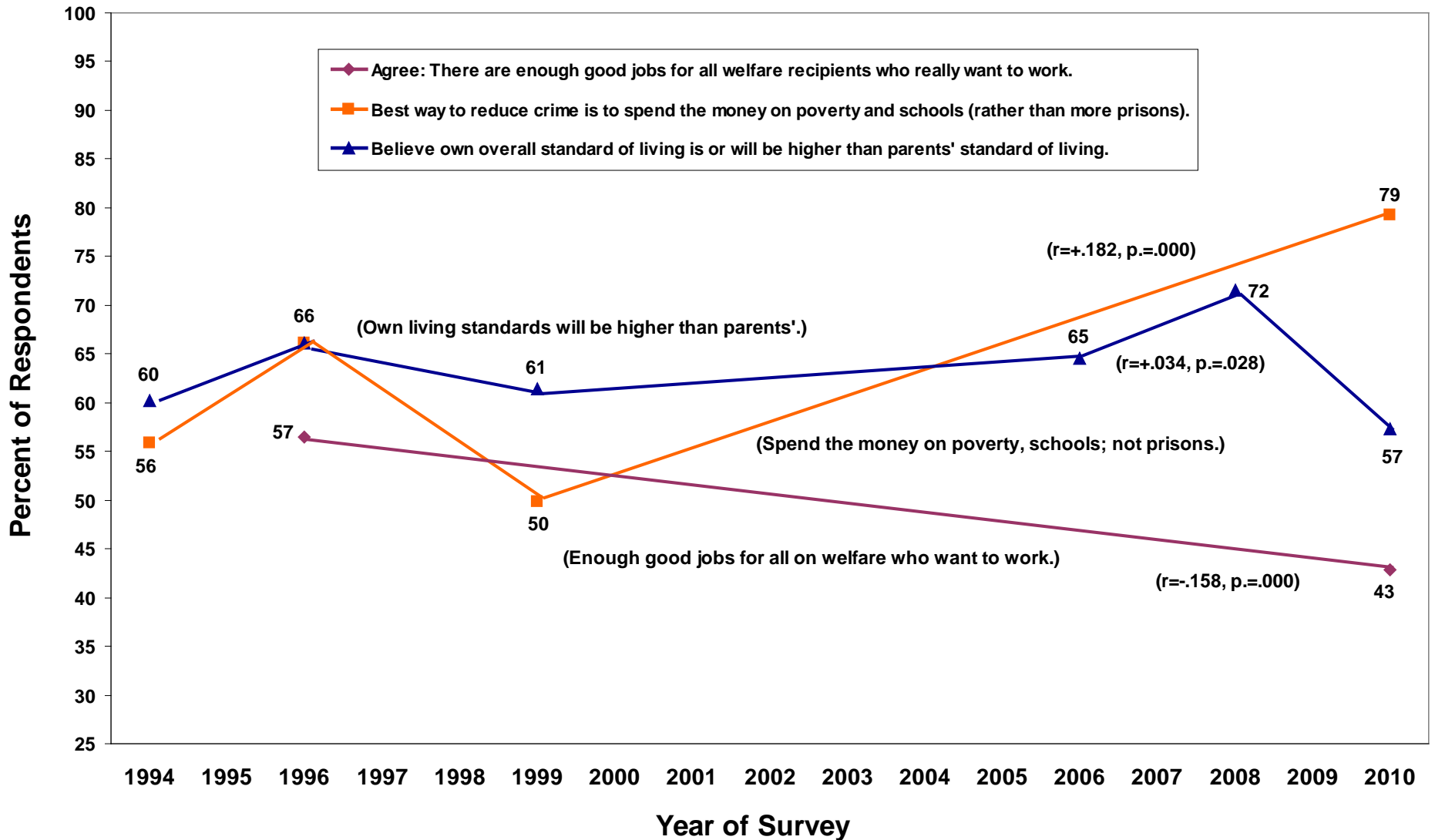
FIGURE 5: TWO CONTRASTING QUARTER-CENTURIES SINCE WORLD WAR II



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.

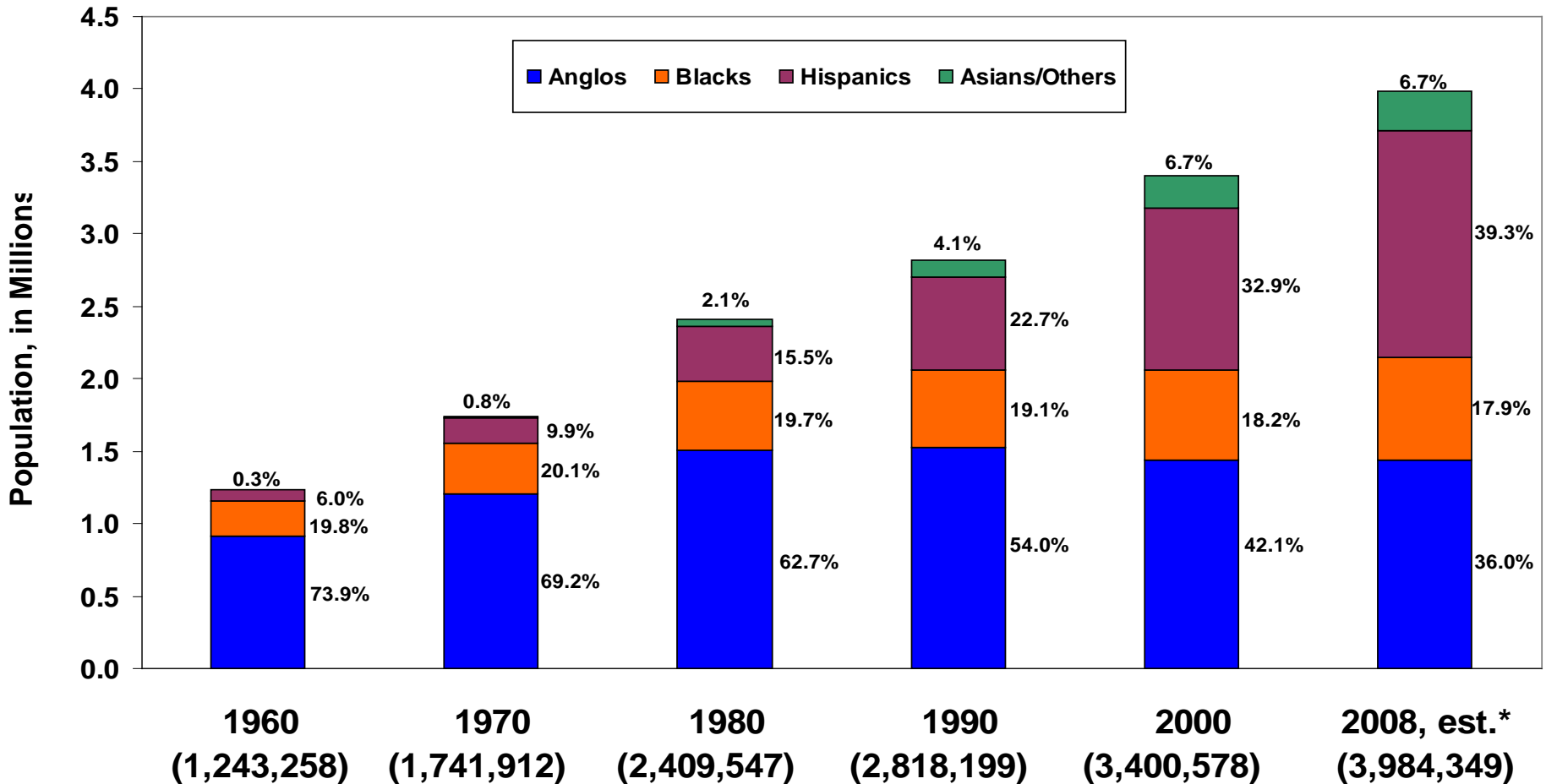
FIGURE 6: CHANGING PERSPECTIVES ON THE AMERICAN ECONOMY (1994-2010)



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



Source: U.S. Census (www.census.gov); classifications based on Texas State Data Center conventions; total populations are given in parentheses; *from the 2008 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 46 to 64. 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 8: THE PROPORTIONS IN FOUR AGE GROUPS WHO ARE ANGLO, BLACK, LATINO, AND ASIAN OR OTHER (2006-2010, COMBINED)

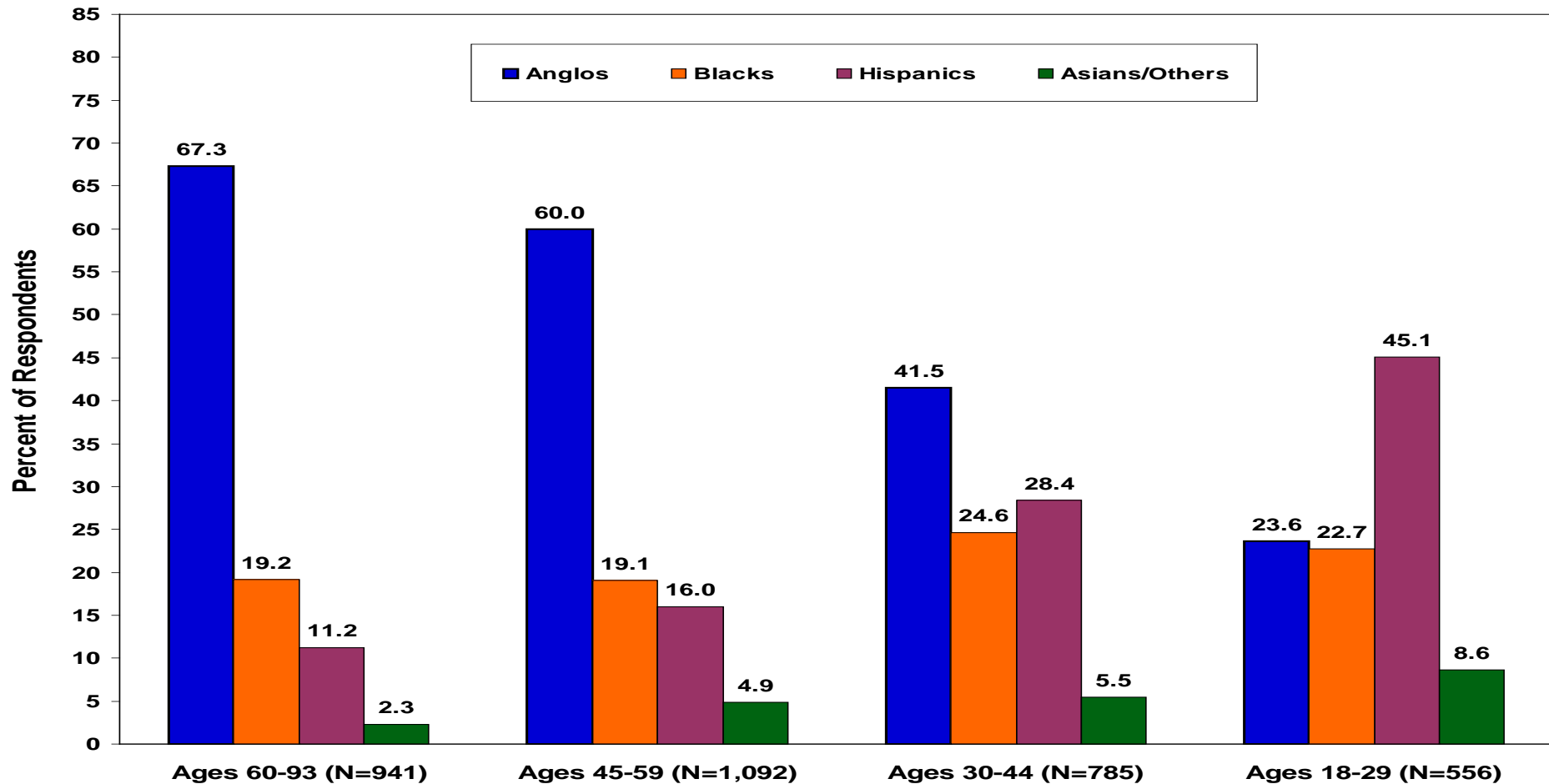
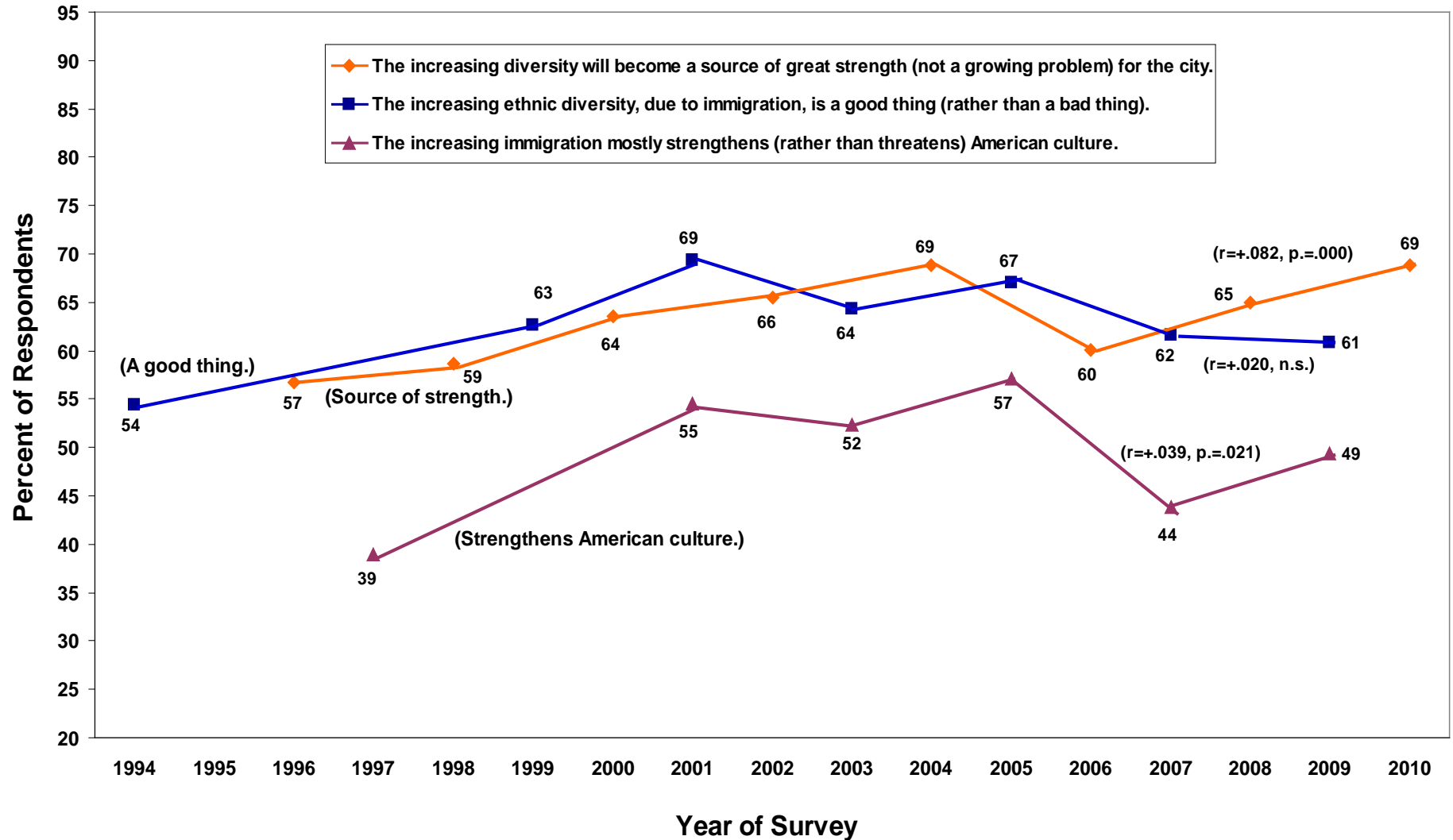


FIGURE 9: CHANGING ASSESSMENTS OF HOUSTON'S ETHNIC DIVERSITY (1994–2010)



CONCLUSIONS: THE CHALLENGE AND PROMISE OF THE NEW DIVERSITY

- Houston's burgeoning diversity constitutes a tremendous potential asset for this major port city in the global economy.
- Yet if most area residents continue to live and work in segregated enclaves, and if they remain divided by mutual misperceptions, reinforced by widening educational disparities, the expanding diversity is likely instead to diminish Houston's competitiveness and set the stage for serious social conflict.
- This region is unlikely to flourish in the new era if it does not 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; 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.iur.rice.edu or www.houstonareasurvey.org