



RICE | KINDER
INSTITUTE FOR URBAN RESEARCH

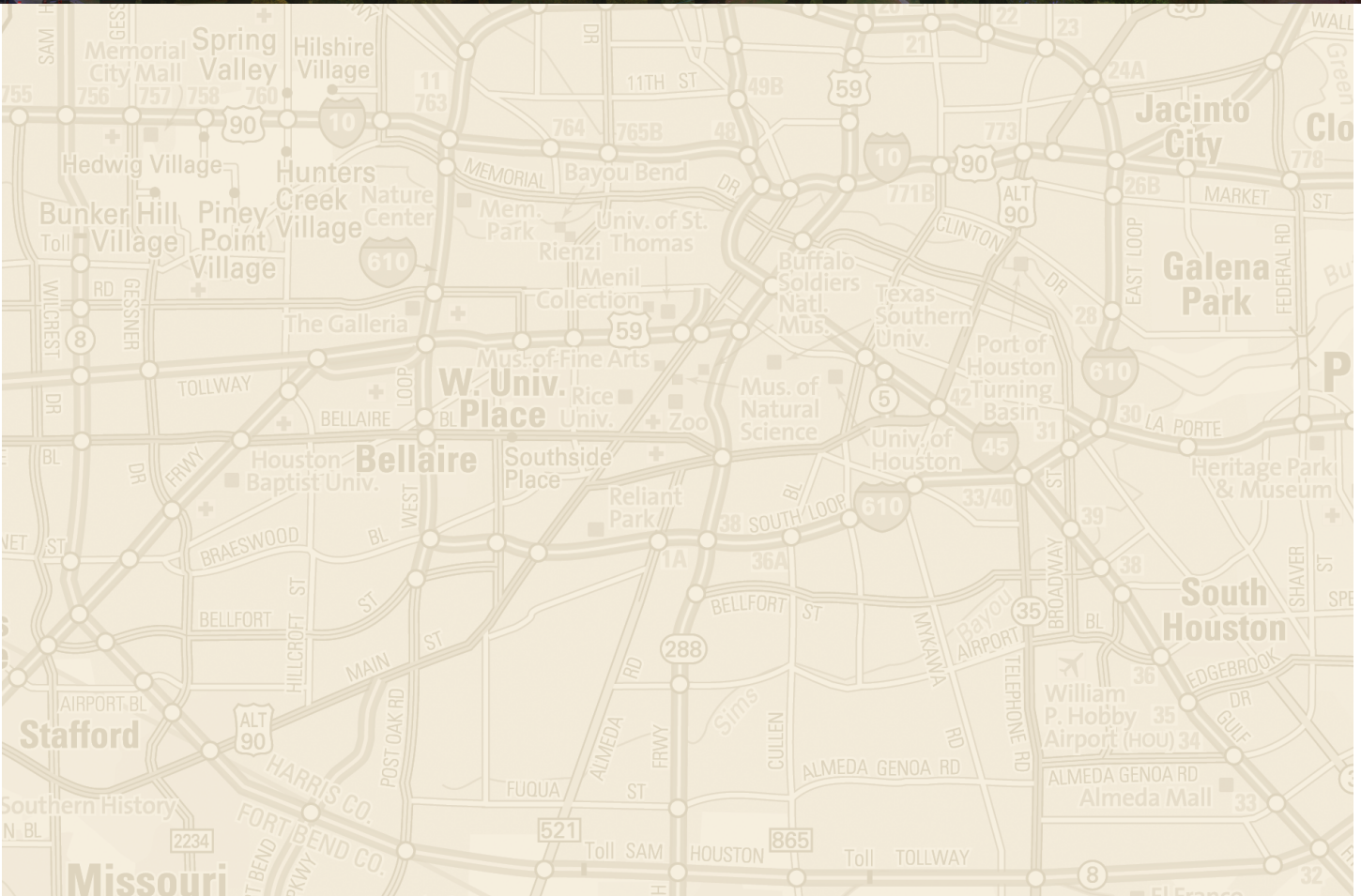
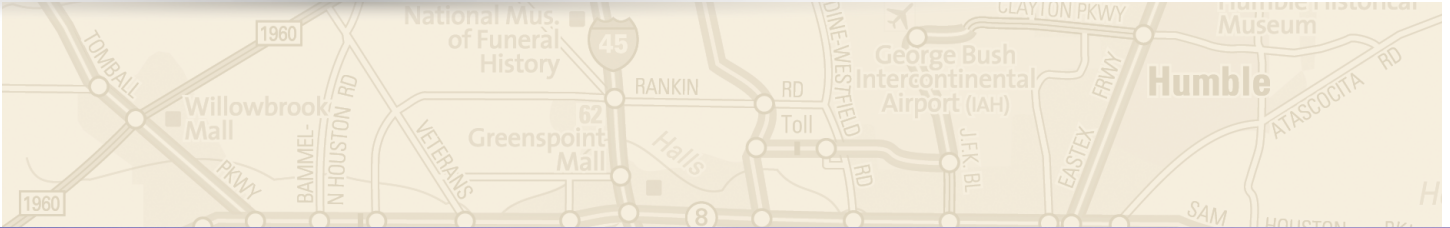


Table of Contents

1. Executive Summary	2
2. Introduction	3
3. Methodological Background	3
4. Racial/Ethnic Composition in Harris County	4
<i>Racial/Ethnic Diversity: Who is the Second-Largest Group?</i>	
<i>Where Are These Different Types of Neighborhoods?</i>	
<i>Looking Into the Past: Which Places Stay the Same and Which</i>	
<i>Ones Change?</i>	
<i>White Contraction, Hispanic Expansion</i>	
<i>Only Moderate White and Black Expansion</i>	
<i>Persistence</i>	
5. Conclusion	7

1. Executive Summary

Houston is often referred to as the most racially diverse metro area in the country and a harbinger of the types of demographic shifts the nation is likely to face in the future. This report provides a comprehensive look at the evolution of the area's racial/ethnic composition on a small geographic scale. The analysis uses two new approaches designed to better capture the nuances of this diversity and recent demographic shifts.

Background

Houston, the largest city in Harris County, has undergone tremendous demographic shifts in recent decades, the most notable of which is the increase in the Hispanic population. In 2000, non-Hispanic whites made up 42 percent of Harris County's population, and Hispanics made up 33 percent. A decade later, those proportions had almost exactly flipped. This report examines how the racial/ethnic composition of individual census tracts in Harris County has changed — or in some cases, has not — in the face of 30 years of demographic shifts across the region.

Methodology

The analysis starts with a simple examination of which racial/ethnic group formed the majority of the population in each Harris County census tract in 2010. Then, we make two key extensions. First, we highlight the second-largest racial/ethnic group within each census tract as a way of providing an added layer to our understanding of racial/ethnic composition of these areas. Second, we compare the 2010 racial/ethnic composition to the composition that existed in 1980, 1990 and 2000.

Findings

- Whites are the second most populous group in more than half of the majority Hispanic tracts in Harris County. But in majority black tracts, whites represent the second most populous group less than 3 percent of the time.
- Thirty percent of majority white tracts in 1980 are now majority Hispanic and 29 percent have no majority today.
- From 1980 to 2010, majority white areas rarely changed to majority black. Areas that started as majority black or majority Hispanic were very unlikely to experience racial/ethnic composition transitions.
- The position of black communities has been less disrupted by Houston's demographic changes. Many boundaries delineating majority black areas in 1980 remained largely intact in 2010.
- Areas where no single racial/ethnic group has a majority tend to be along or near the edges of the city. In 1980, almost all of these areas were majority white.

Future Reports

The Kinder Institute will release a sister report on neighborhood economic status in Harris County in spring 2016. The first report using these measures to identify and explain spatial disparities — focused on supermarkets — will be released in 2016.

2. Introduction

Houston has quickly developed a reputation as one of the most diverse places in the United States, and potentially, a harbinger of some of the broader demographic shifts expected to face the country in the coming decades. Indeed, since the 1980s, Houston's rapid population growth is almost entirely due to the growing number of Hispanic residents, along with growth in the Asian-American and black populations as well.

The changes have been stark. In 2000, the population of Harris County (which includes Houston and its suburbs) was 42 percent non-Hispanic white and 33 percent Hispanic. Just a decade later, that ratio was flipped. And the trend is projected to continue. Today, just 21 percent of Harris County children under the age of 5 are non-Hispanic whites.

Yet with that diversity comes challenges. In 2015, the Kinder Houston Area Survey found that the majority of white residents in Harris County consider ethnic relations in this diverse region to be "excellent" or "good." But only 46 percent of Hispanics and 36 percent of blacks offered the same positive outlook.

Meanwhile, in recent years, Houston has enjoyed economic success that has outpaced that of the rest of the country. This success has been driven by an energy industry that, until late 2014, was booming. But not all Houston area residents have benefited from the rising tide. In the 2015 Kinder Houston Area Survey, only 38 percent of area residents said they believe living conditions are improving in Houston.

This study seeks to offer a new tool for understanding the issue of "spatial disparity," or the differences facing the city's disparate communities, particularly with regard to services and amenities some of us take for granted. A crucial part of the Kinder Institute's mission is to better understand, and explore solutions to, the spatial disparities in Houston. In this research report, the first of a two-part series, we lay the foundation for that work by using new approaches to understand the racial/ethnic composition of individual communities.

This report provides context for understanding the racial/demographic shifts that have unfolded in the Houston metro area in recent decades. In particular, it provides an in-depth view of how individual communities are changing (or in a few cases, are not) at a time when the entire region has experienced dramatic demographic shifts.

3. Methodological Background

Often researchers represent the racial/ethnic composition of a census tract (or block group) by identifying which single racial/ethnic group is the largest. Indeed, to most people who want to characterize neighborhoods, this intuitively seems like an effective (and relatively straightforward) way to do that. If we were to define the largest group using

the statistical majority, then the result is a map depicting which areas have a total population that is 50 percent or more white, black, Hispanic or Asian, as well as areas with no majority — that is, places where no single racial/ethnic group comprises at least 50 percent of the population.

Though common, this approach has several deficiencies. Most significantly, in a racially and ethnically diverse city that has changed dramatically, the majority approach offers an overly simplistic view of the geography under consideration. Therefore, for this analysis, we added two new layers to measuring racial/ethnic composition by identifying the second-largest racial or ethnic group in every census tract and by tracking how the racial/ethnic composition has changed (or stayed the same) over time.

First, drawing from this new consideration of how to capture racial/ethnic composition in a diverse context, we created a set of categories based on the majority racial/ethnic group and the second most populous group (for example, "majority white-Hispanic"). The result was 10 types of tracts — three each for majority white, majority black and majority Hispanic tracts, plus tracts with no one group over 50 percent. (Majority Asian tracts are not represented in this analysis because Harris County, which represents the Greater Houston area, contained no such tracts during the time period we analyzed. However, Asians are included in many of the categories as the second-largest group.)

Second, to track changes over time, we categorized each tract in Harris County across four points in time: 1980, 1990, 2000 and 2010. The last year the non-Hispanic white population grew in the city of Houston was 1980, making it an ideal starting point for examining changes in racial/ethnic composition. We first represent this change over time descriptively using maps for each decade using the approach described above.

However, we also more explicitly examine the historical trajectories of these places using another set of categories. Tracts that had the same majority group in 1980 and 2010 were labeled as "persistent." Tracts that changed majority status were labeled as "transition" tracts. Transition tracts were further identified by the nature of their transition — for example, tracts that were majority white in 1980 but majority Hispanic in 2010 were identified as white-to-Hispanic transition tracts. In some cases, the majority group was the same in 2010 as in 1980 but had a different majority in between. Despite the subtle inconsistency, we still categorized these cases as "persistent."

The data for this study come from census population estimates. Majority status is determined using the total population count for a census tract and the breakdown of the total tract population by race/ethnicity. Hispanics include all persons of any racial category who indicated that they are of Hispanic/Latino origin. Correspondingly, white, black and Asian counts refer to the non-Hispanic segment of those populations.

4. Racial/Ethnic Composition in Harris County

The racial/ethnic diversity of Houston and the speed at which the city has reached that level of diversity, poses important conceptual challenges. Looking at only the majority racial group of a tract, at a single point in time, doesn't tell the whole story.

In Harris County, Hispanics made up a larger share of the total population than did non-Hispanic whites in 2010 (41 percent and 33 percent, respectively; see Figure 1). However, in 2000, just 10 years prior, the relative size of Hispanics and whites was completely flipped — whites were the largest racial/ethnic population at 42 percent, and Hispanics were only 33 percent of the county population. Not only is Houston's population diverse, it's also changing rapidly.

If we were only to focus on the largest group at a single point in time when categorizing census tracts in Harris County, then the breakdown would be as follows:

Table 1. Majority Racial/Ethnic Group: Census Tracts in Harris County, 2010		
	Number of Tracts	Percent of Tracts
Majority Hispanic	247	31.4
Majority White	256	32.6
Majority Black	85	10.8
Majority Asian	0	0.0
No Majority	198	25.2
Total	786	100.0

But these broad groupings miss important diversity within the Greater Houston area that we can better observe after moving beyond a simple examination of which group is the majority.

Racial/Ethnic Diversity: Who is the Second-Largest Group?

Using these more refined measures of racial/ethnic composition is most important when considering majority Hispanic and majority white census tracts. Consistent with larger residential segregation trends, there is less distinction among majority black tracts in terms of which group is the second largest. The details of those differences are explained in Table 2.

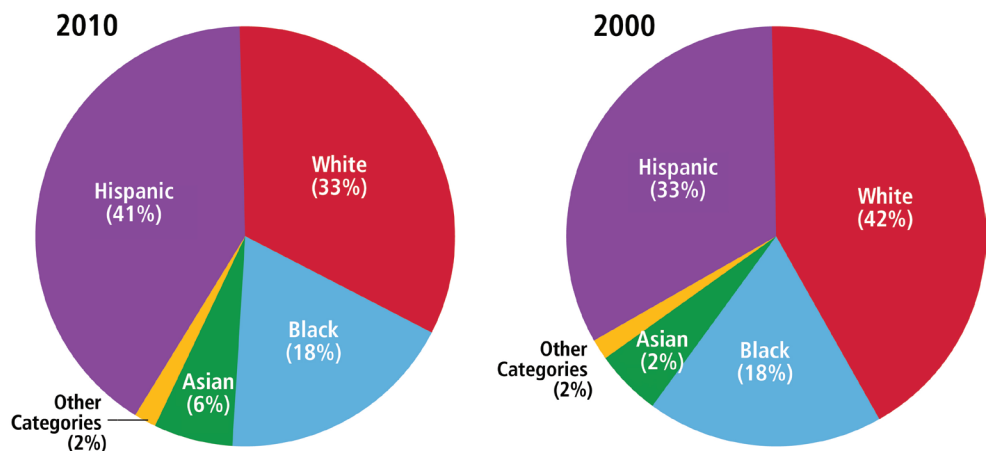


Figure 1. The Racial/Ethnic Composition of Harris County, 2010 and 2000

Table 2. Majority Tracts by Which Group is Second Largest, 2010

Majority Hispanic Tracts

	Number of Tracts	Percent of Total in Majority Category Tracts
White	125	50.6
Black	91	36.9
Asian	9	3.6
>90 percent	22	8.9
Total	247	100.0

Majority White Tracts

	Number of Tracts	Percent of Total in Majority Category Tracts
Hispanic	198	77.3
Black	14	5.5
Asian	41	16.0
>90 percent	3	1.2
Total	256	100.0

Majority Black Tracts

	Number of Tracts	Percent of Total in Majority Category Tracts
Hispanic	70	82.3
White	2	2.4
Asian	1	1.2
>90 percent	12	14.1
Total	85	100.0

After accounting for places where the majority group is 90 percent or more of the total local population — places where the presence of the second-largest group may be less meaningful — just over 50 percent of majority Hispanic tracts have whites as the second-largest group. But the other half of the majority Hispanic tracts is dominated by places where blacks are the second-largest group (37 percent). Similarly, while 77 percent of majority white tracts count Hispanics as the second-largest group, 16 percent have Asians as the second-largest group.

Despite sharing the same majority status, these places may have substantially different social positions within the county depending on which group is the second largest. Those differences will be described in more detail in subsequent reports.

In contrast, majority black tracts in Harris County are much more one dimensional in their racial/ethnic composition. More than 80 percent have Hispanics as the second-largest group. And among those not in the black-Hispanic combination, all but three of those tracts have black populations that are more than 90 percent of the local population. This approach, of examining the second most populous racial/ethnic group, may therefore be less informative for majority black areas.

Where Are These Different Types of Neighborhoods?

The location of these different types of tracts within the county gives additional insight into the potential distinctions among these categories.

In 2010, there are several clear “pie slices,” or areas that split the county along racial/ethnic boundaries. On the east side of the city of Houston, which lies roughly in the center of Harris County, slices alternate between majority Hispanic and majority black. The center of the county also has a slice that is majority white that extends west. In addition to this central pattern, tracts outside of this central circle that extend out into the county are predominately majority white or have no single group that is over 50 percent of the local population (i.e., no majority).

But there are nuances within these majority slices.

Majority Hispanic tracts that have blacks as their second-largest group are most often on the periphery of the majority Hispanic slices. They occupy the boundary between majority white-Hispanic spaces and majority

black-Hispanic spaces. And tracts where Hispanics are over 90 percent of the local population are often within the central portion of the majority Hispanic slices.

A similar pattern is evident for majority black tracts: tracts where Hispanics are the second-largest group serve as a sort of buffer or transition area between the core of the majority black areas and other parts of the city.

Majority white tracts are more spread out in the county, in the sense that they appear in both the center of the county and at its edges. However, they also are more concentrated. They only appear in one slice of the city, on its west side, and there are virtually no majority white census tracts on the east side of the city.

Within that central, western slice, majority white tracts have a mix of second-largest groups, but the most evident combination is with Asians. There are only two areas of the county where majority white tracts have blacks as the second-largest group. One is the area just within the perimeter of the county. The other is located on the western edge of the county center or the area that is referred to by residents as Briar Forest. This area of the city is circled on the map and is further characterized by its proximity to Buffalo Bayou. This is an area of the city that has seen a recent increase in the black population — in all years prior to 2010, the second most populous group after whites had been Hispanics. Although this is an uncommon population shift in Houston (discussed more below), the example of Briar Forest provides evidence of its possibility.

Finally, despite the overall diversity within Harris County, tracts that have no single racial/ethnic majority are not well represented within the core areas of the region. Nearly all of the tracts that have no single racial/ethnic majority are located beyond the center of the county — they are the “crust,” so to speak, of the slices

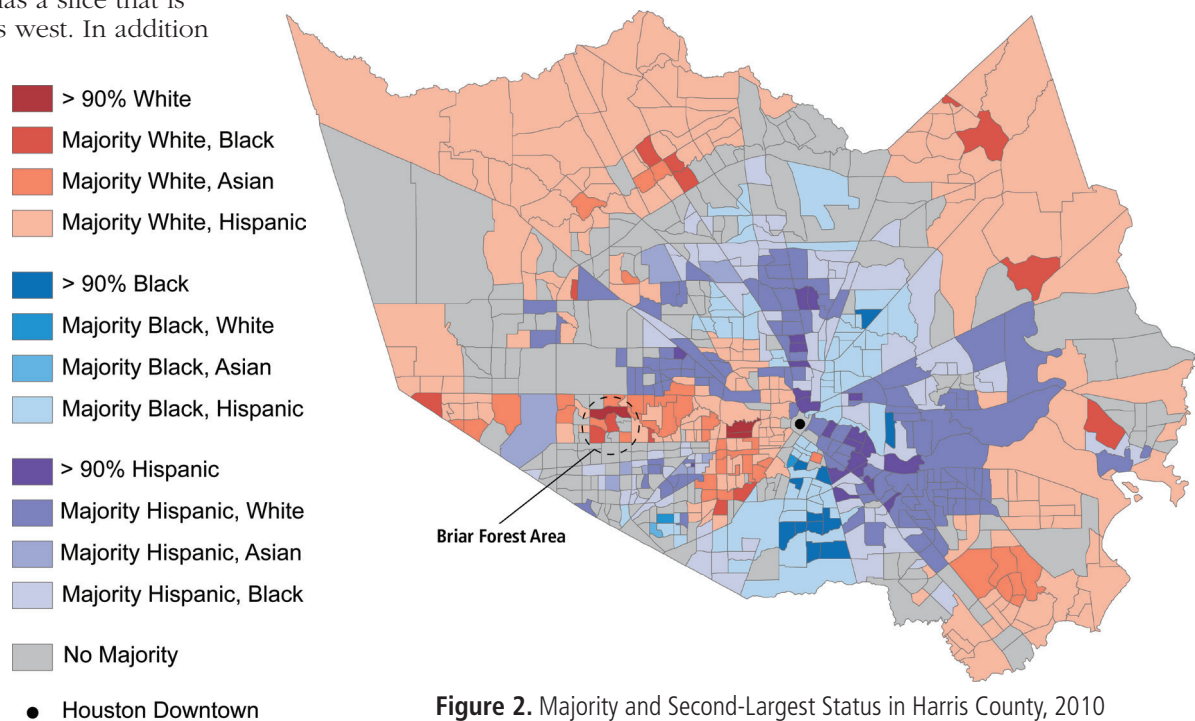
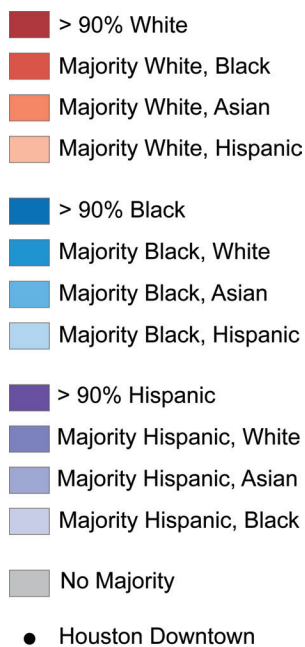


Figure 2. Majority and Second-Largest Status in Harris County, 2010

Figures 3-5. Majority and Second-Largest Status in Harris County, 1980–2000

within the center of the county. The primary exceptions to this pattern are located in the downtown area of Houston, including along Main Street, a major corridor extending southward from the downtown business center toward the Texas Medical Center. Main Street is the site of recent light-rail construction and the neighborhoods around this area are characterized by tracts that lack any racial/ethnic majority.



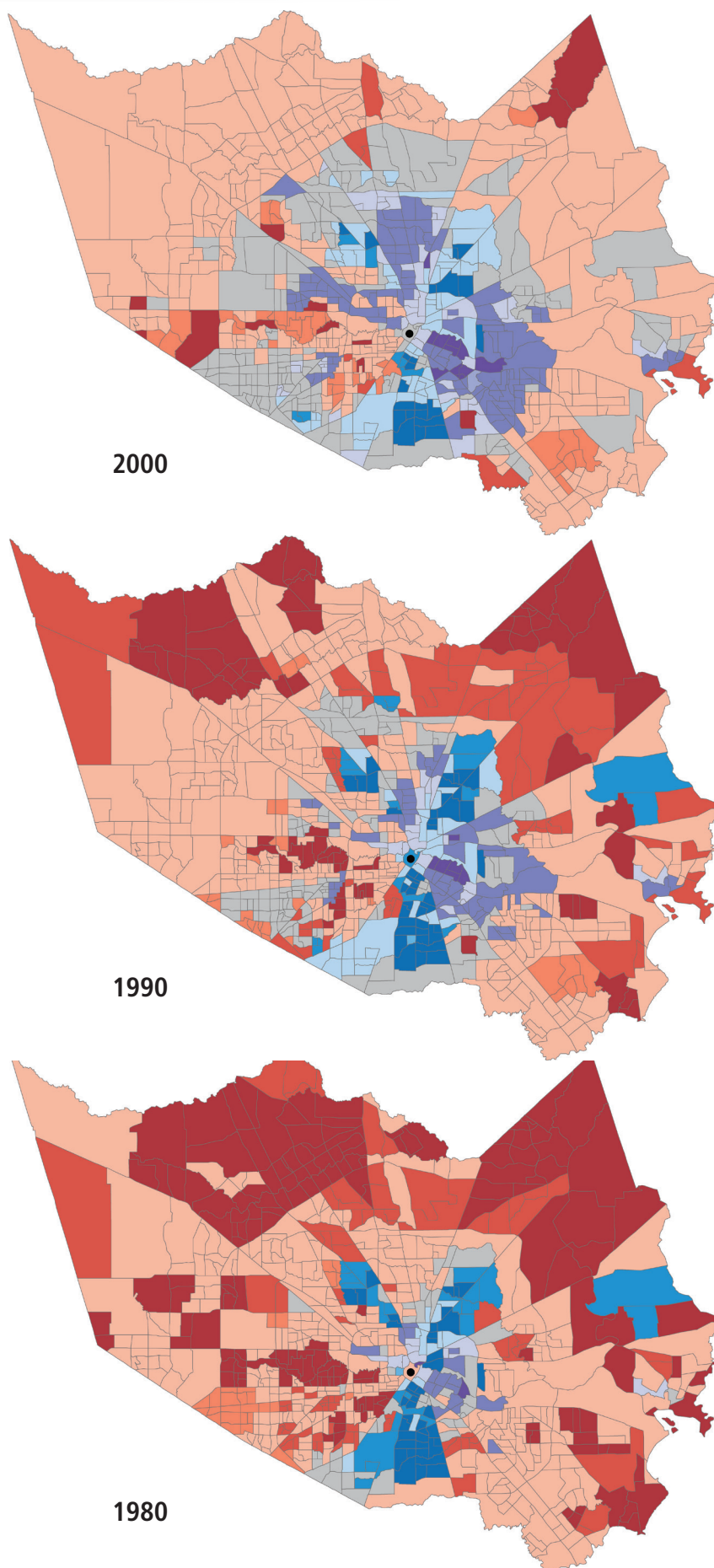
Looking Into the Past: Which Places Stay the Same and Which Ones Change?

Racial/ethnic composition is not static, and the county certainly did not get the way it is today overnight. To add to our understanding of the racial/ethnic composition dynamics in Harris County we also provide the map of the majority second-largest categories for 1980–2000.

The dominant pattern, as was described for 2010, remains the same throughout the period. There are alternating slices within the center of the county that are interrupted by a single majority white slice to the west and topped off by no majority and majority white rings around the center circle.

However, consistent with citywide population trends, the stark, saturated colors present in 1980 gradually give way to blurrier lines and lighter colors. There were far fewer spaces that lacked any majority in 1980 than there were in 2010. Additionally, in 1980, the majority Hispanic slices were barely visible. But over time these patterns shifted. As a result of the in-migration of Hispanics, black isolation — represented by the places where blacks are 90 percent or more of the local population — declined over the period, and majority white spaces, once the dominant shade in the 1980 map, are much less so by 2000 and 2010.

To more explicitly detail these historical transitions in racial/ethnic composition status, we introduce a second measure that combines majority status in 1980 with majority status in 2010. For simplicity, we focus only on the



statistical majority without the additional complexity of identifying which group is the second largest. However, there is a clear connection between the two measures. The contemporary second-largest group is often the historical majority among tracts that underwent racial/ethnic composition transition.

There was sizable reorganization of the distribution of racial/ethnic groups within Houston between 1980 and 2010 — 438 out of the 786 contemporary census tracts shifted from one majority in 1980 to another majority type in 2010, meaning that they are “transition” tracts (56 percent). However, transitions were concentrated within certain racial/ethnic pairs.

White Contraction, Hispanic Expansion

Most transitions were tracts that moved from majority white to majority Hispanic or no majority. This kind of transition is represented primarily by areas in the suburbs, further from the city center, but also parts of the city like Spring Branch Central, which corresponds roughly with the emerging purple slice in the western portion of the county center. There were few transitions between any other combinations. Majority white areas very infrequently changed to majority black, and areas that started as majority black or majority Hispanic were very unlikely to experience racial/ethnic composition transitions.

Only Moderate White and Black Expansion

In contrast to the picture for Hispanics, the concentration of the non-Hispanic white and black populations was far less likely to expand into new spaces. All but six of the census tracts that are majority white in 2010 were already majority white in 1980. Similarly, there were only 20 tracts that transitioned to being majority black in 2010 that started from another majority status in 1980.

Persistence

There was also remarkable persistence of tracts that maintained the same majority status. In fact, except for when looking at no-majority tracts, it is persistence — reflected by the bolded values along the diagonal in Table 3 — that was the most common outcome. Census tracts were more likely to keep the same majority status than to transition to any one other category.

The Hispanic population comprised a majority in few areas of the city in 1980 — just 29 tracts — but virtually all of them stayed that way through to 2010 (90 percent).

Table 3. Persistence and Transition in Racial/Ethnic Composition Status, 1980–2010

2010 Status	1980 Status				
	Total	Majority Hispanic	Majority White	Majority Black	No Majority
Majority Hispanic	247	26	188	6	27
Majority White	256	1	250	0	5
Majority Black	85	1	15	65	4
No Majority	198	1	182	8	7
Total	786				
Persistent	348	26	250	65	7
Transition	438	3	385	14	36

Only three census tracts changed from majority Hispanic to another majority status during this time period.

Similarly, few tracts that were historically majority black transitioned to another majority status. Only six such census tracts are now majority Hispanic. Even smaller still, only eight transitioned to no-majority census tracts, and none transitioned to being majority white. As a result, the historically black areas of the county have been far less disrupted, and the boundaries seen in 1980 remain visible in 2010. The historical boundaries of the Fifth Ward, for instance, remain intact despite an increased presence of Hispanics to neighborhoods northeast of downtown.

The varying historical trajectories of census tracts within Harris County show an increasingly complex picture of racial/ethnic composition that cannot be captured by just thinking about which group is the majority or even what the racial composition is at any one point in time.

5. Conclusion

People interested in understanding cities and their spatial disparities need approaches to measuring racial/ethnic composition that reflect the complex urban landscape. For Houston, that landscape is diverse and changing. And the same is likely true in other cities, including Sun Belt and West Coast cities — such as Atlanta, Austin, Charlotte, Los Angeles and Seattle — as well as more traditionally studied cities — such as Chicago and New York.

We need to be critical of overly simplistic representations of racial/ethnic composition and instead focus on an approach that contributes more meaningfully to our understanding of these rapidly changing places.



The mission of the Kinder Institute is to:

- Advance understanding of the most important issues facing Houston and other leading urban centers through rigorous research, policy analysis and public outreach
- Collaborate with civic leaders to implement promising solutions to these critical urban issues