

# Texas Should Get atop the Coming Demographic Wave

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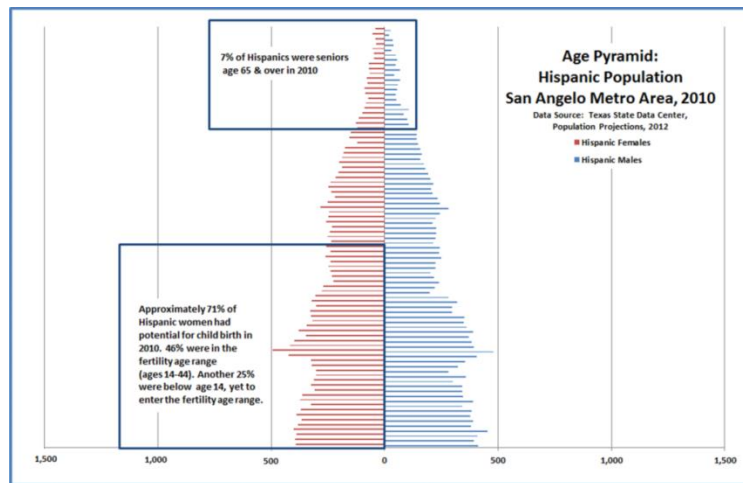
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The March issue of Texas Monthly includes a smartly titled essay, “Coming to Our Census.” The article is Michael Ennis’s review of *Changing Texas*, a new volume by former State Demographer Steve Murdock and his associates at Rice University. Ennis says this “may well be the most important book about Texas published in years.” However, he believes that few Texans will ever read it.

Ennis skillfully sums up the message of *Changing Texas* by citing two simple statistics. The average age of non-Hispanic white women in Texas is 42 years. The average for Hispanic women is 28. These numbers, as Ennis says, foretell a factor in the future of Texas.

The age pyramids for the Hispanic and non-Hispanic white populations in the San Angelo Metro area, shown below, tell the story for our local part of Texas. The pyramid for local Hispanics takes the shape of a much younger population compared to non-Hispanic whites. Some 18 percent of whites were seniors age 65 and over as reported in the 2010 Census. This compared to only seven percent of Hispanics.

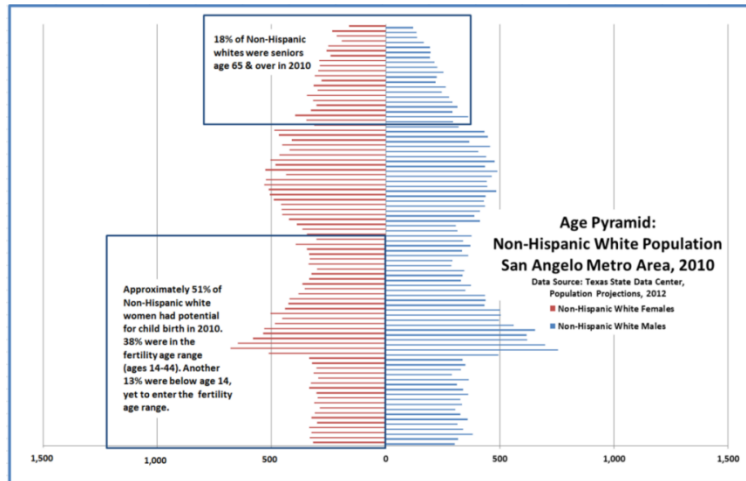
## Age Pyramid: Hispanic Population



More important to understanding the future is that 46 percent of local Hispanic women were in the fertility age range between 14 and 44 when nearly all childbirth takes place. Another 25 percent were girls below age 14 who will be entering their childbearing years.

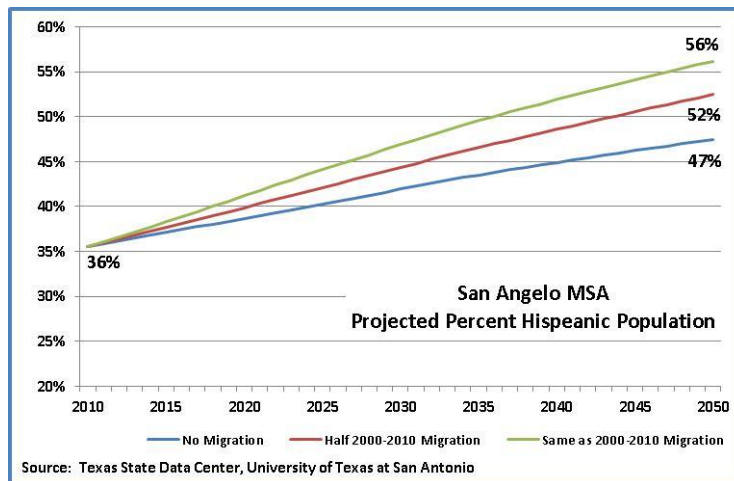
This means about 71 percent of local Hispanic women have the potential to give birth now and, in the decades, to come. Only about 51 percent of non-Hispanic white women are in the same age range. Consequently, the Hispanic population has much greater momentum for growth into the future.

## Age Pyramid: Non-Hispanic White Population



Indeed, Hispanics very likely will become the majority of the local population by mid-century because of that momentum. Current projections from the Texas State Data Center for 2050, shown in the chart below, fix the percent of Hispanics in the San Angelo Metro area at somewhere between 47 and 56 percent depending on the level of migration. Changing Texas predicts the statewide percentage will be between 51 and 56 percent, also depending upon migration.

## Projected Percent Hispanic Population



Political pundits portray this transformation in a variety of tints ranging from fears about undermining “traditional American or Texan values” to enthusiasm for prospects of “turning the state blue.” The focus in Changing Texas is more sober and challenging however. The book demonstrates that Texas, as well as local San Angelo, can no longer tolerate current levels of social and economic disparity between non-Hispanic whites and minorities while also expecting to sustain a viable and competitive economy into the future.

Results from a set of recently updated statistical indicators covering the elderly population of San Angelo provide another way of illustrating the disparities in question. The Seniors of San Angelo Social Health Index tracks 15 factors based on data for 2012 from the U.S. Census Bureau’s

American Community Survey. It includes indicators of housing and neighborhood environment attributes, income and education assets, and social isolation factors among elder residents in San Angelo's 20 census tract neighborhoods.

The index also ranks the city's neighborhoods based on a 0-100 point scoring process. The scoring assigns a score of 100 to the neighborhood with the most positive results for seniors on the 15 data items. The remaining neighborhoods receive lesser scores ranging down to zero for the section of town with the least desirable results for seniors.

This year's results identify the Sunset area (census tract 13.03) as the most desirable for seniors. The neighborhood fans out in a southeasterly direction from Sunset Mall over to College Hills Boulevard. The Red Arroyo shapes its northern border and the loop contains it on the south. Sunset is home to nearly 4,000 residents with 15 percent (about 600) forming its population of seniors aged 65 and over. The scoring places the Blackshear and Downtown areas (census tract 18) at the bottom of the city's neighborhoods. In the city's center, these areas are home to more than 2,600 people including about 300 (11.5%) seniors.

The racial and ethnic makeup of these two San Angelo neighborhoods is among their contrasting features. About seven of every 10 residents of Sunset are non-Hispanic whites. That ratio falls to fewer than two of every 10 in Blackshear and Downtown. Minorities comprise about 70 percent of seniors in Blackshear and Downtown, and only about 15 percent in the Sunset area.

A set of gaps in educational attainment and in the financial situation of residents also contrast the two neighborhoods. In the Blackshear and Downtown sections, a majority of seniors (61%) never completed high school. This compares to just eight percent of elders in the Sunset part of town. A large difference in high school completion also carries over to the working-age populations. Approximately two percent of 25-64 year-old residents in Sunset failed to attain the high school diploma compared to 37 percent in Blackshear and Downtown.

Significant disparities in income and earnings are the expected corollary of these education gaps. Accordingly, nearly \$15,000 separates the 2012 annual median earnings of full-time workers in Blackshear and Downtown (median = \$20,462) from Sunset (median = \$35,417).

Social security and retirement income data indicate similarly striking income gaps between the elder generations of the two neighborhoods. Most senior households in each area receive social security, but the average annual benefit for 2012 in Sunset was \$17,915 compared to \$10,828 in Blackshear and Downtown.

Only about one-in-five senior households in Blackshear and Downtown receive retirement income other than social security. The average yearly amount from these plans was \$11,172 in 2012. By comparison, an estimated eight-in-ten Sunset area senior households received non-social security retirement income averaging \$28,789. Since these income differences in current income between seniors reflect their respective earning histories, they represent proxy indicators of wage differences stretching back in time in the two neighborhoods.

The book *Changing Texas* drives across the point that it is exactly those disparities extending back into our community and state history that must change now, unless, that is, we are willing to have the trend of demography spell our destiny. Indeed, on the optimistic side, the book projects that closing the gaps between non-Hispanic whites and minorities can add millions of high-paying jobs and billions of dollars to economic growth in Texas and its local communities.

Either we change our ways to educate minorities and increase their earning capacities, or we enter a downward spiral. That is the harshly important message of Changing Texas. Yet, the reviewer Michael Ennis returns to the theme that the book will not change the minds of “rank-and-file” Texans “who aren’t going to read it anyway.” Ennis hopes the “political and business elite” will take note and move us toward the needed reforms.

The book is actually well worth every citizen’s attention. Just ask Max Parker, the current vice president of the SAISD Board of Trustees. In last week’s Standard Times, article “Education Pays,” Mr. Parker so eloquently spells out the relevance of Changing Texas to our own local schools. He admits having been “guilty as anyone of ignoring these topics and assuming others would solve these issues without my input.” Changing Texas, he says, helped him “understand why these issues have become so critical.”

Read the book! Better yet, let’s work together to close the gaps in this West Texas community!