

## Stephen Klineberg

**Stephen** [00:00:02] How we navigate this transition to build a truly successful, inclusive, equitable, multi-ethnic society will have enormous implications not just for the Houston future, but for the American future. This is where the American future is being worked out.

**Linda** [00:00:18] Today's episode is sponsored by HEB Curbside and Delivery, When Life Throws You a loop. HEB curbside and delivery is here to help. We shop how you shop. So you get exactly what you want. Order today at HEB.com HEB Curbside and delivery. It's never been easier to shop HEB

**Linda** [00:00:38] Hello Our voices matter audience. Thank you so much for tuning in today. I'm so excited to have our guest. Dr. Steven Klineberg is a very, very well known researcher, sociologist, demographer, author and director of the Kinder Institute on Urban Research. Steve, thank you so much to do this.

**Stephen** [00:00:59] The founding director that we have a new director

**Linda** [00:01:01] Not just the director, the founding director.

**Stephen** [00:01:03] And I can be founding director forever.

**Linda** [00:01:05] Yes, the founding director.

**Linda** [00:01:07] So tell tell our audience what the Kinder Institute is. What what is your your focus?

**Stephen** [00:01:12] Well, my focus is this survey that we've been conducting now for 38 years. We began back in 1982. Houston was booming. City world famous for having imposed the least amount of controls on development of any city in the Western world. Who cares if it's ugly? So what if it smells come on down booming city with growing problems that it wasn't really addressing. So we did a one time survey to measure how well people balancing this growth with concerns about traffic, pollution, crime. One time survey. Never occurred to us to do it again. Two months later, the oil boom collapsed. Houston, went into major recession and we said my gosh we had better do this survey again and for 38 years tracking the remarkable changes of the city. And then finally, by getting this book done.

**Linda** [00:01:54] Yes. And so this book, this book,.

**Stephen** [00:01:56] It's only been 38 years I've been working on this book

**Linda** [00:01:58] Only been 38 years. And it's you're about to finally give birth to it and bring it out of it. It's called Prophetic City. I love the title Prophetic City and.

**Stephen** [00:02:10] Houston on the cusp of a changing America.

**Linda** [00:02:13] OK. And so you are famous for having said many times that Houston is the most diverse city in the country. Explain why you say that and what the rest of the country and the world really can learn from from the experiment that is happening here if you will.

**Stephen** [00:02:32] Well, that's that's the clearest evidence of the prophetic city. Houston is where all of America is going to be in about 25 years. This was a bi racial southern city, dominated and controlled in an automatic taken for granted away by white men throughout all of its history. Suddenly, with the collapse, the oil boom, the Anglo population that had been pouring into the city stopped growing. And all the growth of Houston, the most rapidly growing city in America, is with the influx of African-Americans, Latinos and Asians. And this bi-racial Southern city has become the single most ethnically diverse city in the country. How do you measure ethnic diversity? Two ways. One is. What's the percentage of Anglos? Small, fewer, fewer Anglos, more diverse. Better way is what's called the entropy index. How close is a population? Come to one fourth Asian. One fourth Latino. One fourth African-American. One fourth Anglo. And by that

measure of the equal division among the communities, Houston just barely beats out New York as the most ethnically diverse. The other two great diversities. Los Angeles has two smaller percentage of African-Americans. Chicago has too many Anglos. Miami has too few Asians. Houston is where the four communities meet. Greater balance, greater equality. All of us minorities.

**Linda** [00:03:43] OK, so let me ask you this. As you have done this study over the past 38 years, what have you witnessed in terms of how these different communities interact with each other and get along with each other or not? What's been the what's been the progression?

**Stephen** [00:04:04] I mean, this is a big change. It's especially a big change for older Anglos. So so we have a whole series of measures. The beauty of the surveys is that we ask identical questions, asking exactly the same wording, the same position in the questionnaire each year, each year, well, alternating years, often detracting. But I mean, each survey based each survey replicates. Questions have been asked previously. So so we can then ask, is that how people change their minds or are they answering the question the same ways as before? There's a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percent, a change of of seven percentage points or more from one year to the next. It tells you this cannot happen by chance. This tells you people are seeing the world differently. And we've been watching increasing embrace of diversity over these years as people have gotten used to it. But above all, the key predictor among Anglos of comfort with diversity and support for immigration is age. Younger Anglos are coming into the world. They take for granted this diversity. We're falling in love with each other marrying, making multi-racial babies. We older Anglos are struggling to accept what younger Anglos take for granted.

**Linda** [00:05:07] And so would you say that that is at the root of what we're seeing in terms of the divisions in our country today?

**Stephen** [00:05:14] So the divisions. Yeah, well, a lot of the divisions are not among individual Americans. It's it's it's a rigid one of the striking findings in our surveys is a disjuncture between public opinion, which is what we're measuring. We asked people in the privacy of their homes. How do you see the world and politically affected opinion? Who controls a political apparatus? Who we districts the the districts to make sure that one party gets against a preference over those who who votes in these elections and who has the money to control the political decision making. And so the public views of individual Americans is much more progressive, much more accepting of this diversity, much more concerned about poverty, much more ready to make to make a sale.

**Linda** [00:06:04] So if you're saying that the public is more accepting of the changes that are happening, but it's really the political apparatus, the systems that play our democracy and the people who are leading them are the political piece of the equation are the ones who are fighting it. But OK, so what in your survey gives us hope that we're going to get past this and that we can find a way to bring ah, ah, ah, let's get rid of the divisions to the degree that we can, considering the course that we're all humans?

**Stephen** [00:06:44] Well, the polarization is serious and real, and you can see that in the Congress how difficult it is for people to talk across cause. And it's become a much more us versus them. So that's a and that's a hard thing to work through. But but the reason for hope is, is watching the general American public changing their minds, increasingly recognizing one of the questions you guys over the years is should government take action to reduce income differences between rich and poor in America, where a question that said, do you think most people receiving welfare are really in need of help or are they taking advantage of the system, the sort of traditional American belief that it is the land of opportunity anyone can make it and then not make it. They got no one to blame but themselves. That has changed. And people are much more likely today to say people are not taking advantage of the system. They really need help. And we ask a question that said which of these sayings come closest to your feelings about the public schools? The schools will be the schools have enough money if it was used wisely to provide a quality education with the schools, will need significantly more money to provide a quality education. If it was used wisely, we all believe that this all the money we need to spend, we're not using it the right way. More more people now say the schools, we need significant more money. That recognition that we need to be in a different world now, we need to address these issues in new ways has happened in the general public, hasn't yet gotten translated into public action.

**Linda** [00:08:08] Exactly. And so maybe now some of the the younger people who are entering the political arena for the first time are taking these views with them. And so we're really it's another major transition right now,.

**Stephen** [00:08:22] Another basis for hope,.

**Linda** [00:08:23] Another basis for hope

**Stephen** [00:08:25] The big transitions is to remind us is the aging of Anglo's, the 76 million babies born in that incredible period after World War 2, when the rising tide did indeed lift all boats. The average American man doubled his income in real terms between 1950-1970. And we celebrated the stay at home housewife mother in suburbia. Average American woman gave birth to 3.6 children and the baby boom was launched upon the land. The leading edge of those 76 million is turning 74 this year. So the aging of angles and and by 2020, 30, the youngest of the 76 million will turn 65 heading off into the proverbial sunset, being replaced by a very different generation of Americans. It's an epic transformation. And Houston is at the forefront of what's happening across the country.

**Linda** [00:09:12] So one of the things I wanted to ask you about is, is the fact that there are a lot of people in this community that live separately. So, yes, we're diverse, but we're also segregated.

**Stephen** [00:09:29] Right. Interest is one of the most segregated cities in America.

**Linda** [00:09:31] So how so what what is that how and how? It's so interesting. We're the most diverse and yet we're also one of the most segregated. So how does your book address that prophetic city?

**Stephen** [00:09:42] So that's what the book is capturing is a city in the midst of this remarkable transformation. That is a transformation that all of America is undergoing. Nowhere more clearly seen than Houston, but it's a transition. And we we come into the world, as you're saying, with baggage from our past and our history. That's why younger people are much more. What's a big deal? Here's what I love about America. And I can tell we've got to be gentle with us. Old Anglo's, this is a picture. But it's you know, this is a this was a deeply racist bi-racial city, black and white, deep part of Jim Crow land.

**Linda** [00:10:19] I mean, it's wonderful. And I love living here. And I really don't envision, you know, living anywhere else and having grown up, even in Chicago. I love this city and I love the diversity. But we have our problems, too. So what's that? What's the headline, would you say from your book without giving too much away? It hasn't come out yet. So, yes, I. What are the say, the top two or three?

**Stephen** [00:10:42] I'll just finish this thought, though, that we are. You're right. That there is still segment this we're more but works primarily. We're segregated much more by income than we are by ethnicity. And the real challenge for the future of America is not so much an ethnic divide. You can see that we're falling in love with each other, marrying, making multiracial. Twenty eight percent of all married Latinos in Houston are married among Latinos. Of all the marriages involving an Asian in the last two years, one third involved in our nation. There's been that eight hundred percent increase in black-white marriages between nineteen ninety eight hundred between 1990 and 2010. Wow. Still the least frequent, but but growing. Very much so. We. So it's not an ethnic divide. It's a class divide. And it's happening in all the communities. And that's the big challenge. And there's a class divide predicated above all else on access to quality education. The good blue collar jobs have disappeared. In the 70s, you could drop out of high school, the strong right arm become a rust-about on the oil fields or join a union. And then the big employers was Hughes tool company, Cameron Iron Works. Those jobs have disappeared. Seventy to Sixty five percent of all the jobs that exist in America now require education beyond high school and are in Houston and Texas are at the bottom in their spending on education, partly because you didn't need education to make money in Texas. The big Texas fortunes were made from land, exploiting all the things you could do in the land cotton, timber, cattle, sugar, oil. We are in fundamental transition from a world with a source of wealth. Was natural resources to a world with a source of

wealth is knowledge, human resources, skills. And that's the only way to improve the lot of the poor in the American economy of the 21st century is to invest in their skills. So education from birth to college, from cradle to career, is now the central question for the American and the Houston future.

**Linda** [00:12:38] Well, and we certainly had had this conversation many times, just talking about the importance of the workforce component that you're that you're talking about. And we can have a whole another show just just about that. What can give me the two headlines? And then I don't want to go a little bit more into your backstory and why this is very passionate. Why you why you made this your life's work. But what are the two headlines from the book?

**Stephen** [00:13:07] So I guess the two headlines that are number one Houston is in the midst of the three fundamental changes that have occurred in America that have transformed the 21st century. Number one, a new economy where education has become critical, a demographic revolution. And the recognition that if Houston's gonna make it, it has to become a destination of choice, a place where the best and the brightest people in America working at the cutting edge of knowledge will say, I want to live in Houston, Texas. And so you can see a whole bunch of different efforts to make you so much more attractive and interesting places that's making real progress. But it's those three challenges that happen because all of America, particularly here in Houston, and then this ability to ask over these thirty eight years in systematic way, how are people responding to these challenges? How are they seeing the world? And again, what we were just talking about earlier are kind of a mixed sense of both optimism, but real challenge to be able to make it to make it happen, but a sense that in a democracy in America, ultimately the public, the public attitudes without it. So so but it takes a long time and people in power have a hard time giving it up.

[00:14:17] I want to take a moment to welcome our newest sponsor, BMW of West Houston. Full disclosure, I'm a customer and have been for the last several years I switched from another brand, which shall remain nameless. And I've never looked back. From the Sudans to the SUVs BMW of West Houston, who put you in the ultimate driving machine of your dreams? The X5 and the X7, they're both on my wish list for when this podcast hits a million listeners. So please share away. Share away. A girl can dream. Check out this month's deals at [BMWWest.com](http://BMWWest.com).

**Linda** [00:14:56] So tell me where this passion comes from. How did you end up making this topic, your life's work?

**Stephen** [00:15:05] Well, I get unfairly credited having planned to do this. Just got it. Just kind of fell into I was teaching. I mean, my goal is a young professor, teaching and research methods, class and sociology majors. Friend of mine, Rosie Zamora Cope, you know, Rosie. And now I think, Dick Jaffy, you started back in 1981 with a new survey organization that's in a suit called Teller Surveys of Texas. And we started talking together and they were looking for new new opportunities to get their name known. And I was teaching this course. I was gonna do a survey of a freshmen and seniors at Rice and see how they've changed over time. And then we thought, here's this booming city, let's do a chance to study this. This Houston boom with no thought that it was that it was our fault. So we did the survey in May of of 1982. Price of oil has gone from \$3.20 to \$38. And 80 percent of the jobs in Houston were tied into the price of oil. This is a one company town riding the oil boom. We were building a barn on the basis of \$50 oil and suddenly there was an oil glut set worldwide recession and the price of oil fell down to \$28. And by the end of 1983, a hundred thousand jobs were lost in this booming city that had known nothing but economic boom from its beginnings until that fateful date of May 1982, when then when the world that Houston inhabited changed forever. Total collapse of the economy and then a recovery into this very different world. So we just said, well, I guess we should do the survey again with a new class next year. And then it just seems awesome and enormously supportive. And then the public became more more interested in what was happening. And so it just it just happened. And it turned out to be maybe the most interesting city and The other thing that's so interesting is that outside of Houston, no one knows much about Houston. This is true. This is true across the country, from New York, even into Dallas. I know how sharp left hand turn.

**Linda** [00:16:57] anybody from other parts of the country. Think about Texas. It's always Dallas. They don't usually turn 40 miles a trace. So I'm glad you're putting Houston a little bit more on the map.

**Stephen** [00:17:10] Well, Simon and Schuster, to their to their credit, where we made a proposal, said two things. They said we've been waiting for a book about Houston. The last serious comprehensive analysis of the city was published in 1991 by two great professors at USC. Houston book was called Pro-growth Governance. So it's been 30 years. And then they say, can you write a book about Houston that people in New York will want to read? And I said, I think we can. I think that this is a book, but it's it's it's a book about America. And, you know, the fact that, you know, the big labor, as I mentioned earlier, that we're in the prophetic city is that the census has a projection for what America will look like in 2050. And that's the picture they have of Houston, Houston today, today. So we are where all of America is going to be in the next twenty five years. All of America will look like Houston books to those who were there first. How we navigate this transition to build a truly successful, inclusive, equitable, multi-ethnic society will have enormous implications, not just for the Houston future, but for the American future. This is where the American future is being worked out, for better or worse. So it's an interesting moment for Houston.

**Linda** [00:18:26] So I know you've got children and grandchildren. You grew up on the East Coast,.

**Stephen** [00:18:30] Grew up, said the home somewhere in Philadelphia and Boston. I assumed that's where I was going to be.

**Linda** [00:18:35] Yeah. What was your what were your early years like growing up?

**Stephen** [00:18:39] So I'm I'm a youngest of three children and the son of a very famous professor of psychology at Columbia University, is a second generation academic and grew up in Scarsdale, New York, which is a nice suburb in Westchester County.

**Linda** [00:18:56] You went to Haverford College right?

**Stephen** [00:18:57] Went to this wonderful Liberal Arts College and Philadelphia and then Harvard and then tied to Princeton and then got this great offer from Rice and never been off the East coast. And we thought, well, maybe we should check this out. And and Houston was just booming as fascinating. And Rice was just an extraordinary place, just those twice the size of Haverford, half the size of Princeton. It was half the cost. The Princeton that had twice as many people on scholarship than Houston than Princeton did. It was it was a beautiful place of of where you really if you could get into Rice, you can go.

**Linda** [00:19:34] How many years have you been teaching at rice there?

**Stephen** [00:19:36] So I came in 1972.

**Linda** [00:19:37] Oh, wow. OK, so how do you witnessed the the changes in that in the student population there? Just in terms of the diversity. And then also how how the students interact. And I'm really curious about what you're seeing on campus. You know, over these last two to three years, with all the contentious divisions and things that are that are going on,.

**Stephen** [00:20:03] You know, there's less of those divisions at Rice for some reason, I think partly we have the college system. So so that was represent a random sample of of the students are sent it out, sort of assigned to each of these different colleges, 13 different 11 different colleges. And that in is a real community within that was still a small community of 4000 students. But when I first came to Rice, it was 80 percent Anglo, 75 percent Texan. Right. And now it's 40 percent Anglo. It is a tremendous diversity. And it's a diversity that works because you all you live in a smaller community and you and you get to know each other in very, very effective ways. The one week of orientation for freshmen always succeeds. And every kid at the end of that week is, thank goodness I'm in this college and not in all those other college. The bonding that goes on. But it's been fascinating. The other thing that's in the scene, I think, is it when I first came to rise,

there was some volunteering on the part of students, which was almost all through religious communities and churches. And now enormous amount of volunteer, a real understanding on the part of the students advice of how privileged they are to be to have the opportunity for the kind of education that Rice offers and the recognition that most Americans have very little chance to get that. And I need to get back and you can see that happening. The question where Houston is one of the most we are where we have low taxes, but we are more likely to volunteer in Houston than in most other cities. And that's the other great strength in Houston, I think, is that people across the board in the city love it here, believe in the city. You know, people complain in our surveys because we invite them to about traffic, pollution, crime, the hot summers and the fine cockroaches. Well, how would you rate the Houston area as a place to live? It's a wonderful place to be, and it's really serious and see that in the surveys.

**Linda** [00:22:00] Yeah, it really is. So one of the driving themes of this podcast is trying to help people see themselves and someone that they might consider to be the other. The bottom line is, you know, we're trying to have conversations here that remind us of our common humanity based on all of your research and all of your scholarly work through the years. What words can you offer us to help us look past, our divisions and our preconceived notions and ideas of people that, you know, for whatever reason, we have labeled as the other?

**Stephen** [00:22:43] Well, I think the thing about American attitudes toward immigration this is that there've been four big waves of immigration, the first with the British. Then came the Irish and the Germans. I need not remind you what we thought of the Irish. And then came this this massive numbers, fifteen point nine million from southern and Eastern Europe. They weren't Protestants. They were Catholics and Jews. And they had no history, democracy. And we take our jobs as draggin tremendous anti-immigrant attitudes and then dissipating. And now here we are again as a nation of immigrants. And what is interesting to recognize is that those angst, antagonisms and fears are dissipating as the second generation comes of age. The growth in the numbers of Latinos and Asians and African-Americans some degree and in Houston today is no longer new immigrants. It's the hundred percent American kids who are the children of the immigrants of 25 and 30 years ago. And that changes everything. Will they ever learn English? Will they ever come out of their co ethnic enclaves? Will they ever become America? And we are in as this second generation comes of age, 100 percent American kids totally at home here. And you have the same time retaining connections to their countries of origin and enriching our lives tremendously and in ways that are no longer as threatening as we've always thought immigrants are. It's never gonna become Americans are never going to assimilate them. And they always do. In America's great genius, there's assimilation. So that's another reason for optimism. You can see this this fear dissipating. And it it's as American as apple pie to be. Every every every time a new wave has come, we've said, well, the last wave was great for this country. The current wave is destroying America. Right. And here we are again. But now this wave has gone on long enough that you can see the tremendous contributions that have been made. Houston, one example is in Houston, is now world famous as one of the best places in the world eat out in just wonderful food. Wonderful, wonderful Western, wonderful fusion of of of cultures. And you end. And the arts scene that is so powerful in Houston is now beginning to reach out in a much, much more exciting way with with the mariachi operas and the and the new exhibits of the museum that remind us of the richness of the Earth of the world and of all the peoples of the world gathered together now in one remarkable place.

**Linda** [00:25:07] That's why I always love talking to you, because I always feel so much more hopeful. And to have, you know, to have the research back up. That feeling over time. Yes. Because, you know, the context is important. The context is so important because we're we're being bombarded, you know, every hour of every day with the political divisions and the impeachment's versus the election and the, you know, the this and that. And, you know, is our democracy going to survive? And what I'm hearing from you is that that it's really the people that are going to follow where we're going to be OK.

**Stephen** [00:25:45] Well, if we if we can improve our democracy. And if we can get away from the us versus them.

**Linda** [00:25:53] Exactly. Exactly. But you're hopeful that we'll be able to do.

**Stephen** [00:25:57] Yeah. I mean, it's good. It's going to take longer than it should. There's going to be frustrations of various sorts is going to be there's that antagonism that that will Trump to some important degree is speaking to that fear of change. And it's a reminder of the failure of the Democratic Party to reach out to folks who are especially with the one group that is suffering the most in America, the one group whose life expectancy is dropping. The one group that is dying rapidly from what economists call the diseases of despair, drug addiction, alcoholism, suicide. It is white men with high school educations or less living in small town or rural areas who are coming of age and discovering my father worked in the coal mines, my grandfathers in the steel mills, brother and hillbilly ality.

**Linda** [00:26:51] Right. Exactly. OK. And so you're saying this is what what President Trump. So that combination really tapped into when he won the.

**Stephen** [00:26:59] Going to have to fix the trade system rather than the coal mines will come back. Right. And and at the same time, seen an America that is seeming to pay less and less attention to poor whites and more and more attention to blacks and Latinos. And that combination is what creates a lot of that antagonism and fear in the Democratic Party, if it's going to succeed, has got to reach out effectively to poor whites and say we can we we can offer you we we need to raise the minimum wage. We need to ensure access to quality education. One of the other things that's that I think is the in Houston is an awareness of of the importance of preschool. We asked in our survey last year, we can ask it again this year. So we'll see if it's if it's changed at all are in you favor or oppose the increase in local taxes in order to provide universal preschool education for every child in Houston. You start a question with increasing local taxes. You get a whoa, maybe 50, 55 percent, 67 percent, 40 percent strongly in favor and only 30 percent opposed to increasing local taxes for that purpose. And what's interesting there is, of course, that's exactly right. One of the moments of truth in American education is 3rd grade reading. If you don't if you're not reading a third grade level in third grade, you are four times more likely to drop out of high school. And the single most powerful predictor where you could read a three way level, did you start kindergarten, ready to learn to read? And rich kids in Houston start kindergarten one and a half to two years ahead of poor kids. And that gap is the critical place where the brain has been growing by 40 percent, absorbing. Whatever are those? It's the one intervention that everybody recognizes pays off. Tremendous. We're not able to do it in Houston. We still we still have that tremendous inequality.

**Linda** [00:28:47] There is so much to be gleaned from your research. I can't wait for this book to come out. It's called Prophetic City and it will be out sometime later this spring.

**Stephen** [00:28:59] Sometime in early May we think.

**Linda** [00:29:02] OK, well, Stephen Klineberg, thank you so much. Really appreciate you sharing your your perspective and giving us a lot to think about and giving us some hope because we need it.

**Stephen** [00:29:13] Thank you for everything you're doing.

[00:29:14] Of course. Of course. And thank all of you for taking the time to watch and listen and for giving Steve permission to speak and having the courage to listen with an open mind. We'll see you next time.