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The Graying of the Empire State: Parts of NY Grow Older Faster

By E.J. McMahon and Robert Scardamalia

The movement of people in and out of New York over the past two decades, including the combined effects of foreign immigration and domestic migration, has produced significant changes in the Empire State's age profile.

Based on decennial census data, this paper highlights growing regional differences in the age distribution of New York's population. Key trends between 1990 and 2010 included the following:

- The number of young adults – broadly defined as the 20 to 34-year-old age bracket -- dropped sharply in both upstate New York and the downstate suburbs of the Hudson Valley and Long Island.
- New York City was a magnet for young people, attracting 300,000 new residents in the 20- to 34-year-old bracket between 2000 and 2010 alone. However, many who came to the city as young adults in the 1990s left the city once they reached middle age in the following decade.
- Counter to the national trend, the population of children and teenagers decreased in all regions of New York between 2000 and 2010, after growing at less than one-eighth the national rate during the previous 10-year period.

Due to a decline in fertility rates and the aging of the post-World War II baby-boom generation, the nation as a whole got older between 1990 and 2010, as reflected by median age statistics presented in Table 1 (below). New York State got older, too – but with striking regional variations. While the median age of the nation's population rose 4.3 years between 1990 and 2010, it increased by 1.9 years in New York City, 5.2 years in downstate suburbs, and 6.6 years upstate.

Table 1. Median Age of Population

	1990	2000	2010
All U.S.	32.9	35.3	37.2
New York State	33.8	35.9	38.0
<i>New York City</i>	33.6	34.2	35.5
<i>Downstate Suburbs*</i>	34.7	37.2	39.9
<i>Upstate**</i>	33.4	37.1	40.0

* Dutchess, Orange, Putnam, Rockland, Westchester, Nassau and Suffolk counties

** All counties north of Orange and Dutchess

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, RLS Demographics

Background

New York lost nearly 2.9 million residents to other states between 1990 and 2010 – the biggest domestic migration outflow, relative to population, of any state during that 20-year period. An influx of foreign immigrants, mainly to New York City and its suburbs, reduced the state's net migration loss during that period to about 800,000 residents. As a result of these trends, New York's share of the nation's population continued to decline.

NOTE: Throughout this paper, "Downstate Suburbs" refers to the counties of the lower Hudson Valley and Long Island: Dutchess, Orange, Putnam, Rockland, Westchester, Nassau and Suffolk. "Upstate" refers to all counties north of that region. "New York City" refers to the five boroughs only.

Previous reports in this series detailed *how many* people left New York¹, *where* they went, and *what* (in terms of average income) they took with them.² This paper addresses another question: *who* has been leaving New York?

Demographic characteristics such as education, income, race and ethnicity are all important, of course. This report, however, focuses on what is arguably the most vital of statistics: the age of the population.

A state, region or community that attracts young people -- and retains them as they build careers, businesses and families -- is in a good position to build for the future. In an aging nation, youth is an especially valuable asset. But it is an asset that has been rapidly depleted in some parts of New York, as shown by the charts and tables that follow.

Table 2. Population by Age Group

A. Cumulative Percentage Change, 1990-2010

Age	US	New York State	New York City	Upstate New York	Downstate Suburbs
19 and under	16.7	1.9	5.7	(9.1)	12.6
20-24	13.5	0.1	11.4	(6.3)	(9.9)
25-34	(4.9)	(15.3)	1.7	(29.4)	(26.9)
35-54	37.1	18.3	19.7	14.7	21.0
55-64	72.5	40.7	38.0	46.9	36.8
65 and over	28.9	10.8	4.2	9.3	24.6

B. Percentage Change, 1990-2000

19 and under	12.8	8.5	14.1	(0.7)	13.3
20-24	(0.3)	(11.7)	2.3	(19.7)	(23.9)
25-34	(7.6)	(12.1)	(0.1)	(24.2)	(17.5)
35-54	31.9	21.3	20.4	21.7	22.3
55-64	14.8	3.1	6.0	1.9	0.4
65 and over	12.0	3.6	(1.6)	4.4	11.4

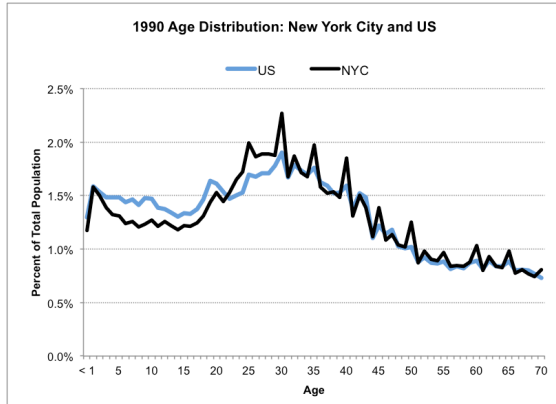
C. Percentage Change, 2000-2010

19 and under	3.5	(6.0)	(7.4)	(8.4)	(0.7)
20-24	13.8	13.4	8.9	16.7	18.5
25-34	2.9	(3.6)	1.8	(6.9)	(11.3)
35-54	3.9	(2.5)	(0.6)	(5.8)	(1.1)
55-64	50.3	36.5	30.2	44.1	36.3
65 and over	15.1	6.9	5.9	4.7	11.8

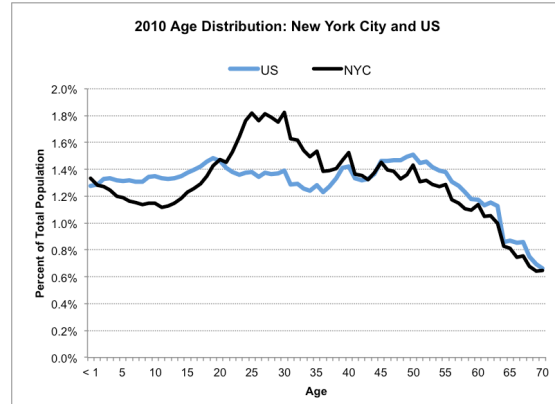
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, RLS Demographics

Migration Effects, Before and After

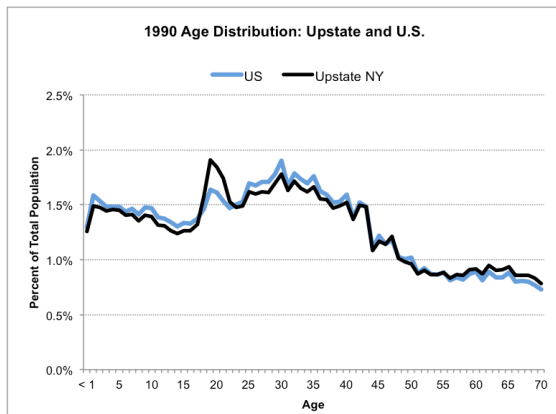
The charts below compare the age distribution of the U.S. population with the distribution in each of three major regional subdivisions of New York as measured by the decennial U.S. Census 20 years apart, in 1990 and 2010. If the age distribution in New York and the U.S. had remained unchanged during this period, the charts would be identical. Instead, notable differences developed – reflecting, in New York, the impact of gains from foreign immigration and losses due to net domestic migration. (NOTE: All charts exclude residents above age 70.)



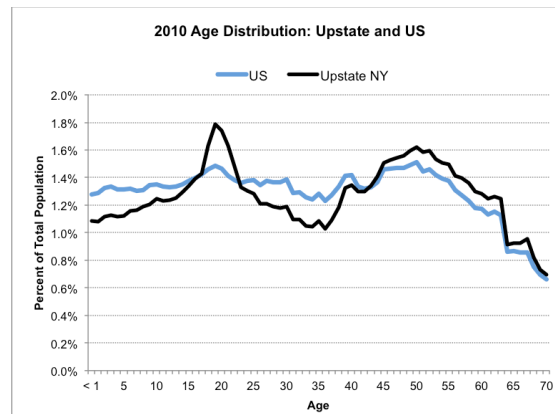
In 1990, New York City had fewer children and teens but more young adults than the national average.



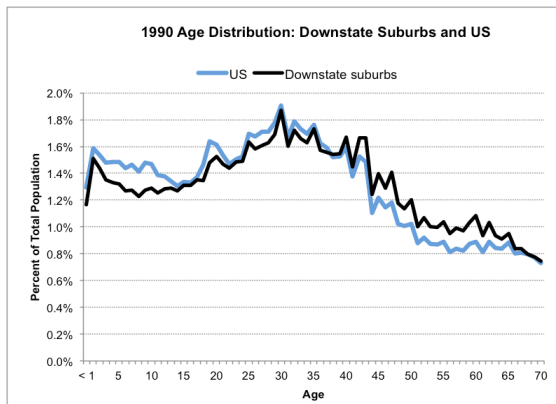
By 2010, the differences were much wider, and the city's middle-aged population was noticeably below average.



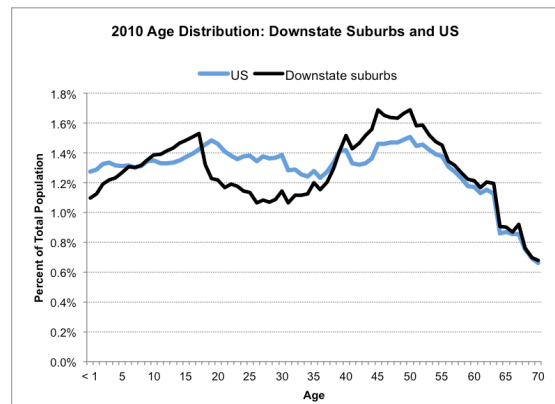
Upstate New York's age distribution closely tracked the nation's in 1990. The main deviation from the national norm was a larger percentage of residents in their late teens and early 20s, reflecting the region's exceptionally large concentration of colleges and universities.



The exodus of young adults from upstate after 1990 opened a noticeable gap between the region and U.S. in this category by 2010. With even fewer young people settling in the region, upstate's population of children also fell more sharply, while the middle-aged share increase.



The downstate population was noticeably less youthful, more middle-aged than the nation's as of 1990.

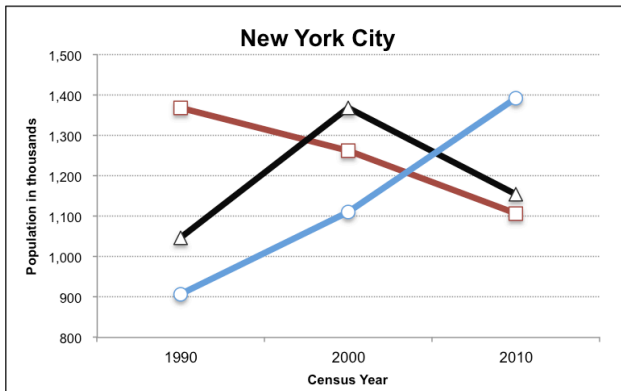


By 2010, downstate's young adult gap had grown larger than upstate's – as did the middle-age bulge.

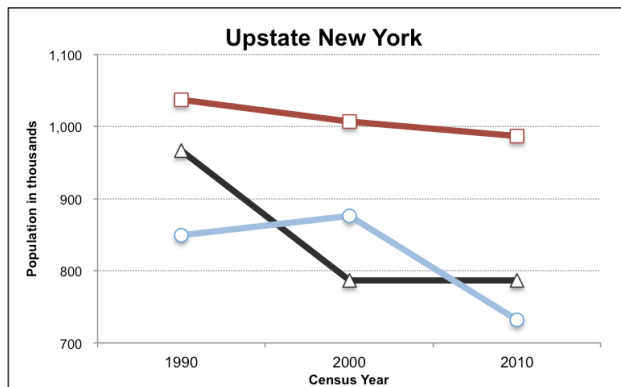
Across the Ages

The charts below track changes in the regional populations of New Yorkers who were aged 25 to 34 at the time of each of the last three decennial U.S. Census counts, grouped according to years of birth. Assuming normal mortality rates, an increase in the population of a given age group during the periods shown indicates that more people in that group moved into the region, while a decrease means members of the age group moved away.

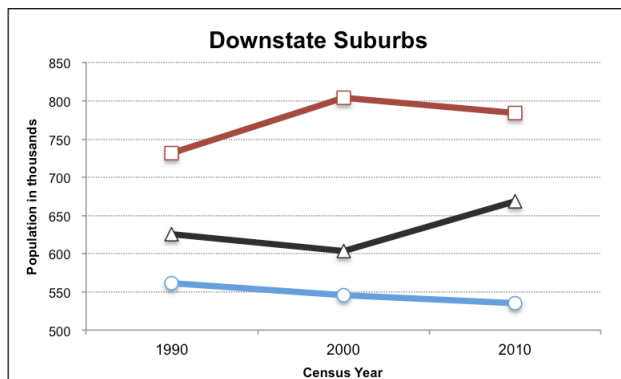
	1990	Age in: 2000	2010
■ Born 1956-65	25-34	35-44	45-54
▲ Born 1966-75	15-24	25-34	35-44
● Born 1976-85	5-14	15-24	25-34



New York City's attractiveness to young adults is illustrated by the sharp increase in the number of city residents in the 1976-85 birth cohort — those aged 25-34 as of 2010. However, roughly two-thirds of the increase in the comparable age group as of 2000 vanished over the next decade. The city's young adult cohort of 1990 — the final segment of the post-war baby boom generation — shrank by 20 percent over the next 20 years.

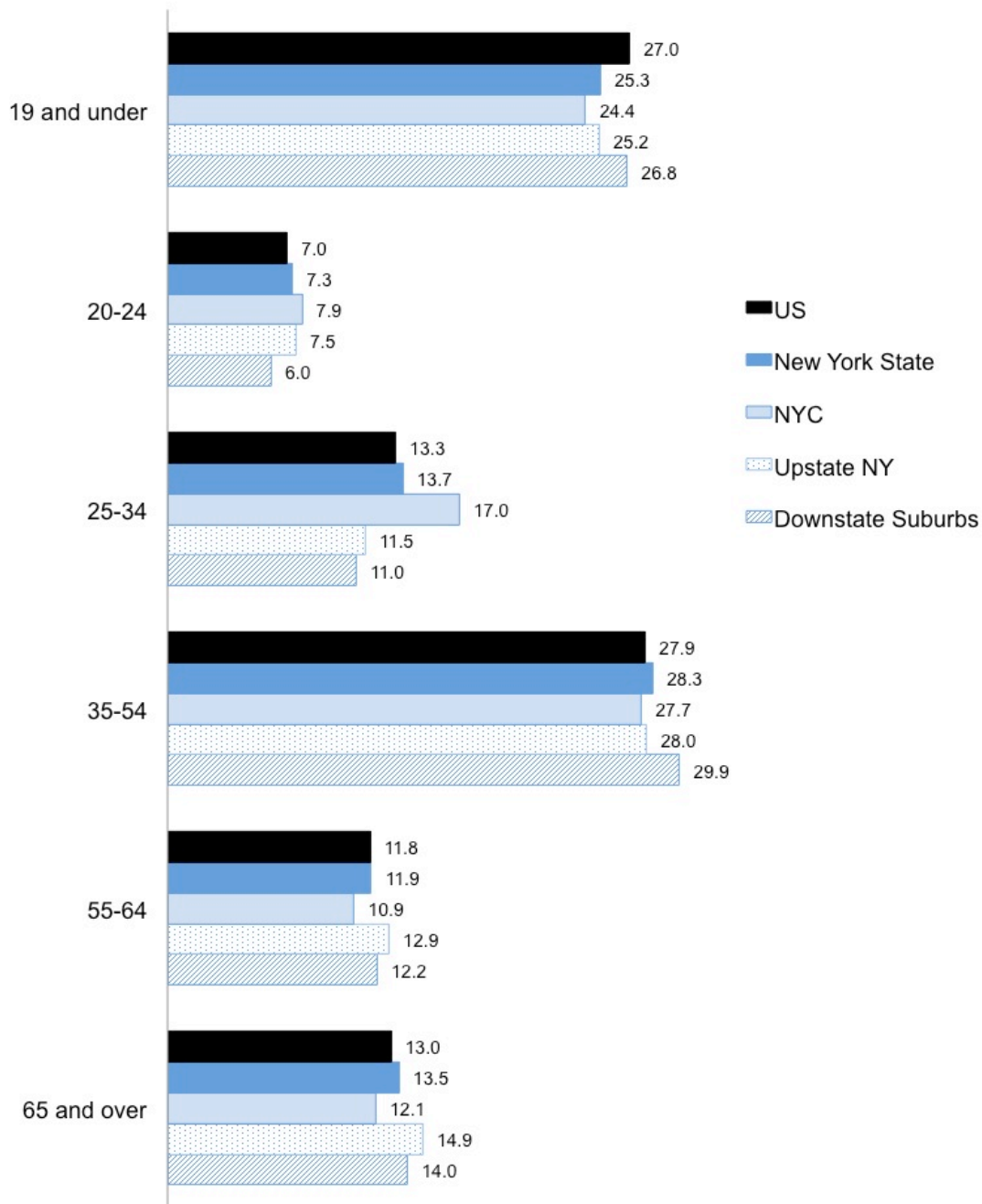


Upstate New York lost young adults at a steady rate of 17 percent per decade after 1990, as shown by the Census trend lines for members of the birth cohorts that were aged 25-34 in 2000 and 2010, respectively. The depleted ranks of the 1966-75 cohort were replenished a bit as they entered their late 30s and early 40s after 2000, while the baby boom contingent in the region decreased slowly during the period.



The 1976-85 birth cohort in downstate suburbs decreased between 2000 and 2010, indicating the region sustained at least a small net loss due to migration in this age group. The post-2000 uptick in the next oldest group (born 1966-75) probably includes some gain at the expense of New York City, where this group got smaller during the same period. Meanwhile, the region's late-stage baby-boom population has begun to drop off.

Age Group Distribution Percentage of Total Population in 2010



As of the 2010 census, children and teens made up a smaller percentage of the population in New York than in the nation as a whole. But the state had slightly higher percentages in every other age category, especially young adults and the elderly. On a regional basis, the differences with the national population distribution were even more striking. The percentage of young adults was much higher in New York City, but much lower both in downstate suburbs and upstate regions — which also had larger middle-aged and elderly populations.

Aging Implications

The relative youthfulness of a region's population is in many ways an important precursor of future economic growth. Unfortunately, with the notable exception of New York City, New York State got older faster than the rest of the country between 1990 and 2010. The graying trend has been especially pronounced in the upstate region – defined, for our purposes, as everything north of the Dutchess and Orange County lines in the mid-Hudson Valley.

In 1990, the median age of upstate residents was just above 33, close to the national median and slightly below the medians for downstate and New York City. By 2010, the upstate median age had risen to 40, and the region's population included significantly fewer children, teens and young adults than the national average.

Census data indicate that most of the people migrating from upstate New York to other parts of the country between 1990 and 2010 were not retirees fleeing cold winters. Instead, the region's out-migration loss consisted overwhelmingly of people who were children or young adults at the start of this 20-year period.³ Presumably, they moved elsewhere in search of economic opportunities their home region was failing to produce. A similarly sharp decrease in young adults occurred in New York's downstate suburbs – where high housing costs are also a significant factor.

There has been one bright spot in this picture. Reversing the trend of the previous decade, upstate actually gained nearly 70,000 residents in the 20-24 age bracket from 2000 to 2010 – a nearly 17 percent jump, which was significantly higher than the rate of increase in either New York City or the nation as a whole. This increase appears to have been due mainly to a surge in undergraduate enrollment at the region's colleges and universities, which at least temporarily attracted tens of thousands of young people to upstate from other regions and states.

Upstate's main hope for reversing its long-term decline is to create enough jobs to hold onto more of its recent bumper crop of college graduates. Unfortunately, the early indicators aren't good. Higher education enrollment is expected to drop by the end of the decade.⁴ And while the economy has begun to recover from the recession, the 1.3 percent average annual rate in private sector job growth upstate over the past two years has been less than half the rate of growth during the 1990s – which wasn't enough to prevent an exodus of young adults during that decade.

Unless the upstate region can somehow attract more young workers and their families, its population of children and young adults will continue to spiral downward. And its future outlook will grow even dimmer.

¹ "Empire State's Half-Century Exodus: A Population Migration Overview," *Empire Center Research Bulletin*, August 2011, at <http://www.empirecenter.org/pb/2011/08/migration1080311.cfm>

² "Outward-Bound New Yorkers: Where They Went, What They Took With Them," *Empire Center Research Bulletin*, September 2011, at <http://www.empirecenter.org/pb/2011/09/migration2092611.cfm>

³ For example, between 2000 and 2010, the upstate region experienced a net migration loss of 163,391 people in all age groups. The number of upstate residents born between 1976 and 1990, who were aged 10 to 24 as of the 2000 census, dropped by 130,426 by the time the 2010 census was taken, equivalent to about 80 percent of the region's total decline due to out-migration during that period.

⁴ In a 2009 report, the state Education Department projected a nearly 17 percent drop in statewide enrollment in higher education between 2008 and 2019, following a 19 percent gain between 1997 and 2008. See "An Overview of Higher Education in New York State" at www.highered.nysed.gov/oris/overview.pdf