



# Demographics

The wide-open spaces of the Upper Rio Grande region are sparsely populated except for the city of El Paso, home to nearly all of the region's population and income growth. The region is largely Hispanic and young compared both to Texas as a whole and the U.S. Its residents' average educational attainment is lower than Texas and U.S. averages, as are their income levels.

The Upper Rio Grande region consists of six counties and includes the metropolitan statistical area (MSA) of El Paso, contained entirely within El Paso County. As defined

by the federal government, an MSA is a core urban area of 50,000 or more residents accompanied by adjacent communities that have a high degree of economic and social interaction with that core (as measured by commuting to and from work).<sup>1</sup>

In 2008, the El Paso MSA had a population of 744,940, or 96.8 percent of the region's total population of 769,859. **Exhibit 8** illustrates the region's counties and their county seats.

## Population Growth

El Paso also accounts for most of the region's population growth. **Exhibit 9** shows growth indices for Texas and the region, with 2003 as a base year. Between 2003 and 2013, El Paso's population is projected to rise by 12.5 percent, or 1.2 percent annually. Outside of El Paso County, the region's

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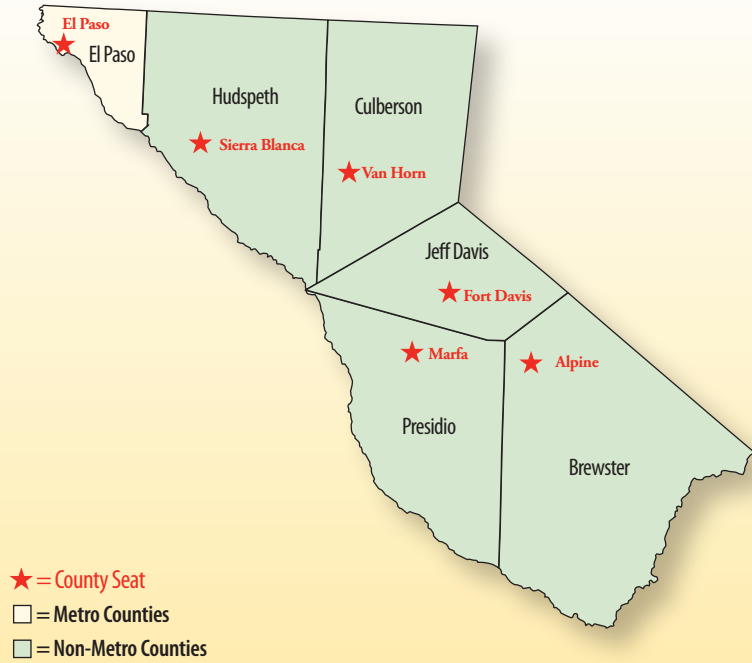
University of Texas at El Paso Classroom

PHOTO: University of Texas at El Paso, University Communications



Exhibit 8

Upper Rio Grande Metro Counties



Sources: Office of Management and Budget and Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts.

population should remain roughly unchanged at its 2003 level. By contrast, the state population is expected to increase by nearly 17 percent, or 1.6 percent annually, over this period.<sup>2</sup>

Ethnicity

The Upper Rio Grande population is predominately Hispanic, with an 81 percent share in 2008. Anglos accounted for 14 percent of the population and African Americans 2.4 percent. The remaining 2.6 percent fell in the “other” category, including persons of American Indian, Asian and Native Hawaiian descent and those claiming descent from two or more races (Exhibit 10).<sup>3</sup>

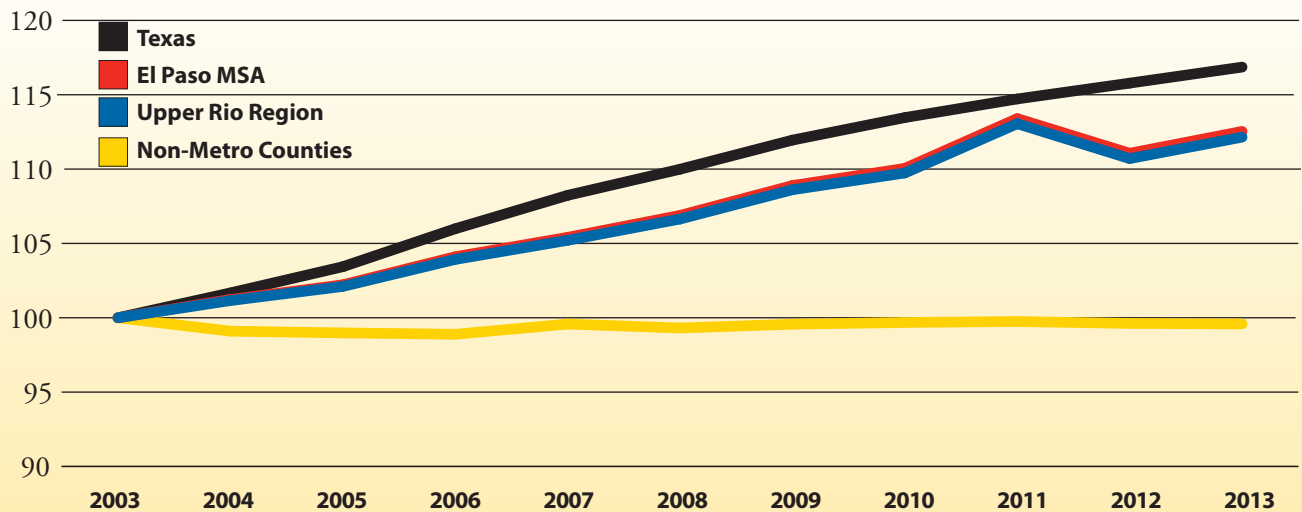
Age

The region’s ethnic makeup has significant implications for its age distribution.

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Exhibit 9

Upper Rio Grande Actual and Projected Population Increase, 2003-2013



Source: Economic Modeling Specialists Inc.



### Terlingua Ghost Town

The town of Terlingua developed in the mid-1880s as a mining town when cinnabar, a mercury-bearing ore, was discovered in the area. Mines were established throughout the region and by the early 1900s, the mining town had grown to a thousand inhabitants with mail service, a water supply and other amenities. In the 1920s, Terlingua produced 40 percent of the nation’s mercury. In 1942, however, the local mining company filed for bankruptcy and after World War II its new owners eventually ended mining operations in the area.

Terlingua became a classic Western ghost town. It began returning to life in the 1960s, as the site for what became known as the World Chili Championship. Terlingua became famous for its annual chili cook-off and was dubbed the “Chili Capitol of the World” by the Chili Appreciation Society.<sup>4</sup>

Currently, this unlikely tourist destination has 259 residents and plays host to visitors from around the world. Many abandoned commercial buildings and homes have been renovated. The La Posada Milagro guesthouse is billed as the area’s largest restored “dry-stack” stone building and provides unique accommodations for visitors. The town’s Starlight Theatre, once a movie house and theater for the miners, has been transformed into a restaurant, bar and dance hall providing entertainment for both local residents and visitors.<sup>5</sup>

### Public Safety

Public safety plays a prominent role in the Upper Rio Grande region. According to the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) the region’s overall crime rate fell from 2006 to 2007 (See chart below). Violent crime rose while property crimes declined.

According to DPS, the Upper Rio Grande region employed nearly 1,600 commissioned peace officers and almost 1,300 civilian workers in 2007. (A commissioned peace officer has taken training courses and is certified by the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement. Civilian staff includes administrative professionals, jailers and other non-certified workers.)

The Comptroller’s office estimates that federal, state and local public safety positions in the region accounted for almost \$600 million in earnings in 2007.<sup>6</sup>

### Crime Rates – Upper Rio Grande, 2006-2007

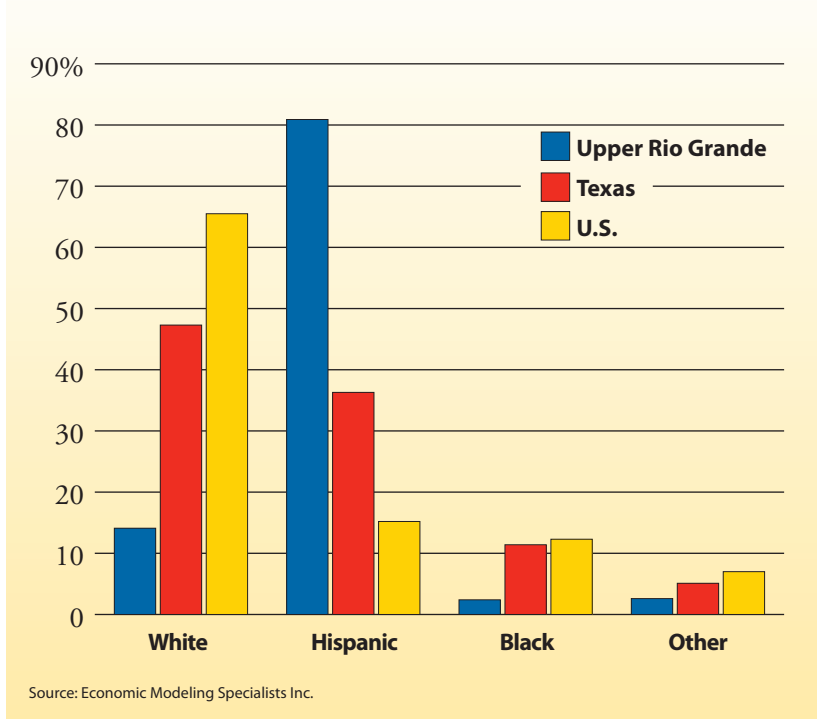
	2006 Upper Rio Grande Crime Rate	2006 Texas Crime Rate	2007 Upper Rio Grande Crime Rate	2007 Texas Crime Rate	Upper Rio Grande Change in Crime Rate	Texas Change in Crime Rate
Murder	2.9	5.9	2.6	5.9	-8.4	0.5
Rape	43.8	35.8	38.2	35.3	-12.8	-1.4
Robbery	71.2	158.5	71.6	162.2	0.5	2.3
Assault	254.8	317.4	281.0	307.8	10.3	-3.0
<b>Violent Crime</b>	<b>372.6</b>	<b>517.6</b>	<b>393.4</b>	<b>511.2</b>	<b>5.6</b>	<b>-1.2</b>
Burglary	375.1	917.8	383.1	955.2	2.1	4.1
Larceny	2,243.0	2,756.9	2,227.9	2,771.4	-0.7	0.5
Auto Theft	508.0	407.3	431.9	393.3	-15.0	-3.4
<b>Property Crime</b>	<b>3,126.1</b>	<b>4,082.0</b>	<b>3,042.9</b>	<b>4,119.9</b>	<b>-2.7</b>	<b>0.9</b>
<b>Total Crime Rate</b>	<b>3,498.6</b>	<b>4,599.6</b>	<b>3,437.6</b>	<b>4,631.1</b>	<b>-1.7</b>	<b>0.7</b>

Note: All crime rates are reported per 100,000 population.  
Source: Texas Department of Public Safety.



Exhibit 10

**Upper Rio Grande Region, Texas and U.S. Population by Ethnicity, 2008**



In 2000, the median age of Texas Hispanics was 25.5 years, compared to 29.6 years for African-Americans and 38.0 years for Anglos.<sup>7</sup>

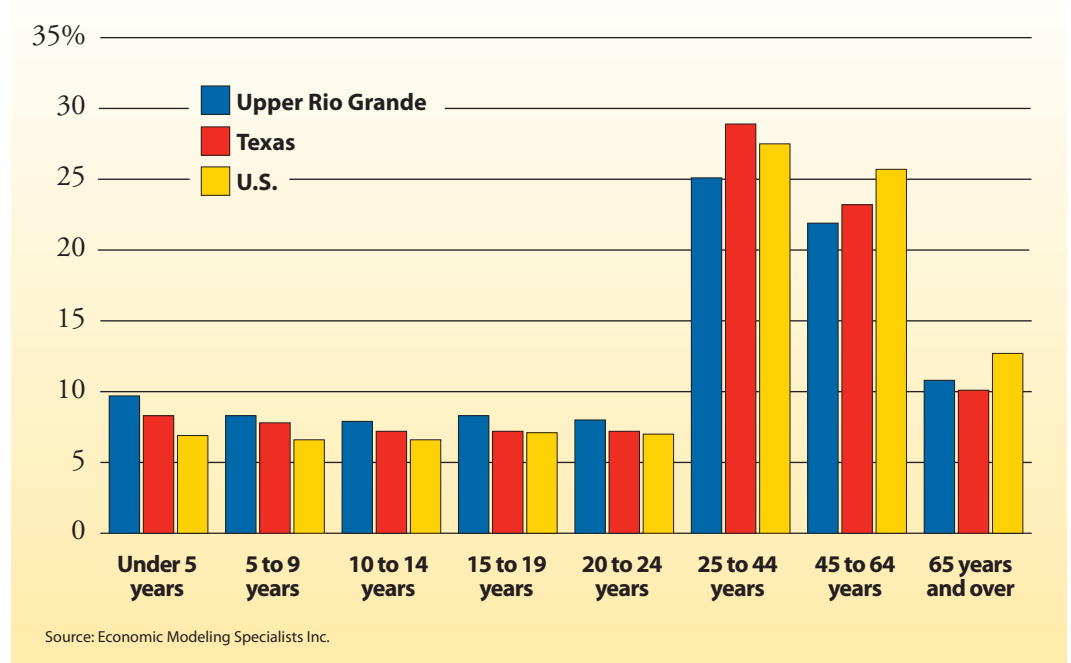
With its large Hispanic population, the Upper Rio Grande’s population is very young compared to those of Texas as a whole and the U.S. More than 42 percent of the region’s residents were under the age of 25 in 2008, compared to 37.7 percent in Texas and 34.1 percent in the U.S. Furthermore, nearly 10 percent of the region’s residents were under the age of five, compared to 8 percent in Texas and 7 percent in the U.S. (Exhibit 11).

**Educational Attainment**

The average educational attainment of Upper Rio Grande residents is lower than both Texas and U.S. averages. Thirty-two percent

Exhibit 11

**Upper Rio Grande Region, Texas and U.S. Population by Age, 2008**





## El Paso Mission Trail

In 1598, Don Juan de Oñate was chosen to lead an expedition to settle the lands of present-day New Mexico. He took with him 500 colonists, including soldiers, their wives and children, Indians, servants, clergy and livestock. This caravan created a series of new missions and communities.

One of these, Ysleta mission, is the “oldest continuously active parish in the State of Texas,” located in the oldest town in Texas, Ysleta (now a part of El Paso). The settlement began with a temporary church built in 1660; a larger mission was built in 1692 and subsequently destroyed twice by flood in 1740 and 1829. Fire consumed the church in 1907 but the sacristy survived.

Mission Socorro was founded in 1680. This mission also saw cycles of flood damage and rebuilding. The ceiling beams and supports have been dated to 1691. A massive restoration project concluded in 2005 with a restored irrigation system and plaza.

Presidio Chapel San Elizario was originally built as a church serving a military fort built by the Spanish government in 1684. The original church was destroyed by flooding in 1829, but was subsequently rebuilt; the current building was completed in 1882. The presidio’s military mission lost importance when Mexico won its independence but by then the surrounding area had developed into a large settlement that became the first seat of El Paso County in 1850. The area is home to orchards, a plaza and historical district.<sup>8</sup>

The El Paso Mission Association conducts tours of these sites.<sup>9</sup> In 2008, the association guided tours for about 3,000 visitors. The mission trail also offers self-guided tours. The association estimates that the missions received about 6,000 visitors in 2008. In April 2009, the association held its first annual Thanksgiving Pageant, which attracted over 500 participants. The association works diligently to preserve the history of the trail and to share its history with locals and tourists.<sup>10</sup>

of Upper Rio Grande residents above the age of 25 have less than a high school diploma, versus 22 percent for Texas as a whole and just 14 percent for the U.S. Only 23 percent of the region’s residents have earned an associate, bachelor’s or graduate degree, compared to 31 percent of all Texans and 34 percent of U.S. residents (**Exhibit 12**).<sup>11</sup>

## Income

The region’s average income levels also fall below the state’s. In 2007 (most recent data available), the median household income for a Texas family of four was \$47,563. Within the Upper Rio Grande region, Jeff Davis County had the highest median household income at \$38,850, while Hudspeth

County’s was lowest at \$25,095 (**Exhibit 13**). El Paso County’s median household income was \$35,116 in 2007.<sup>12</sup>

Such comparisons, however, do not take the cost of living into account. A cost-of-living adjustment facilitates a more accurate comparison of income.

For instance, a person earning an annual salary of \$35,000 in El Paso has the same purchasing power as a person living in Dallas earning \$40,646, a difference of about 16 percent. In Austin, the equivalent purchasing power would be \$42,046.<sup>13</sup>

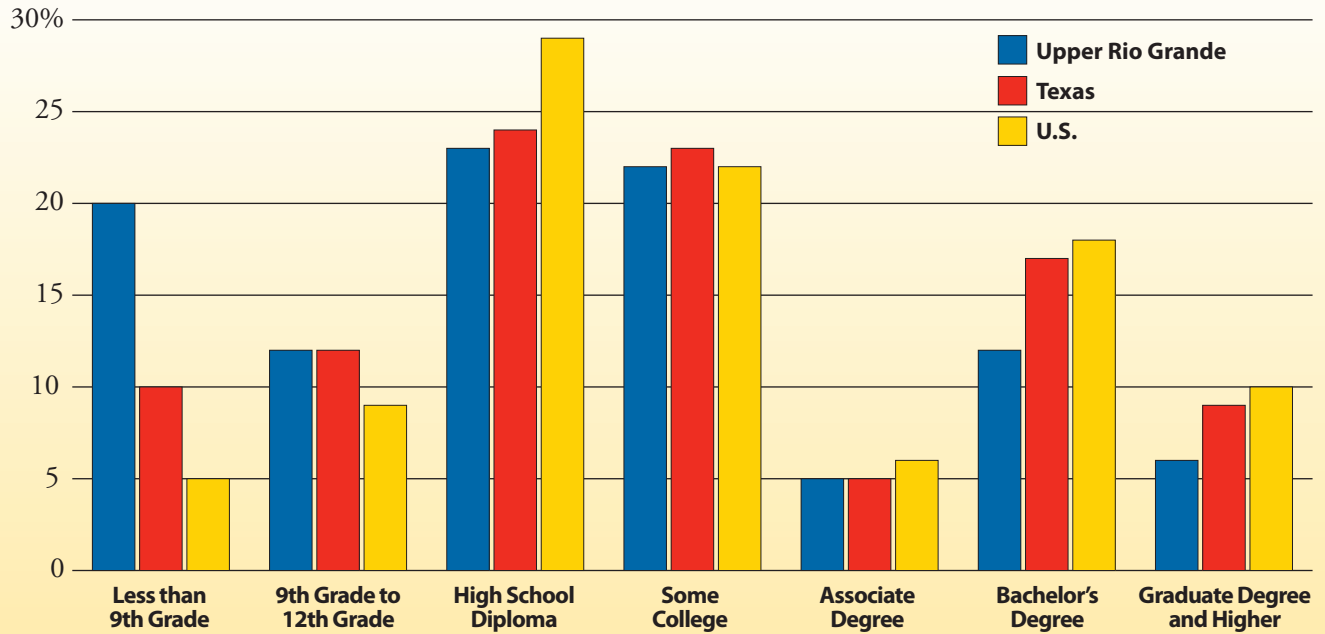
The region’s income per person averaged \$26,491 in 2007, or 71 percent of the state average of \$37,083. Brewster County had

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Exhibit 12

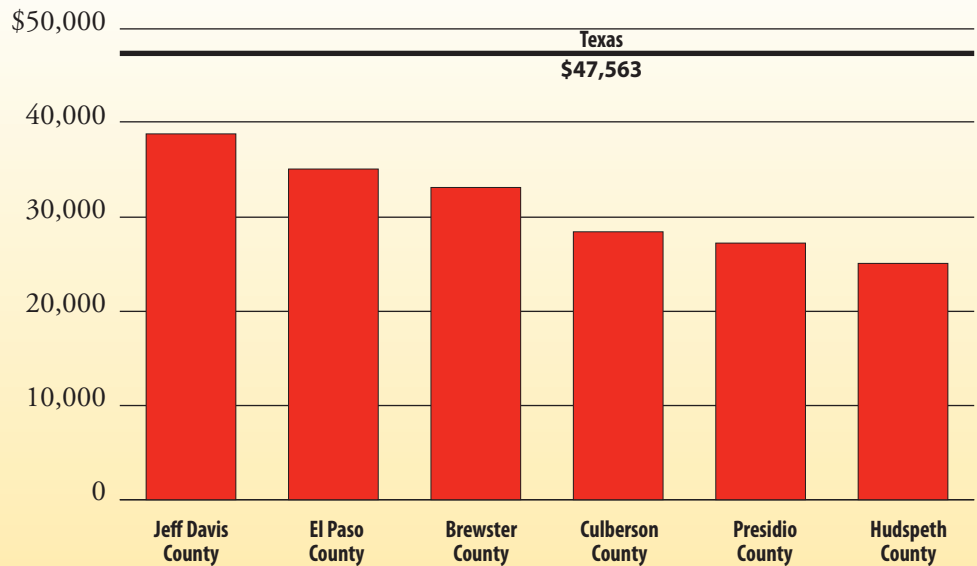
**Educational Attainment for Population Over the Age of 25, Upper Rio Grande, Texas and U.S. Averages, 2008**



Source: Economic Modeling Specialists Inc.

Exhibit 13

**Median Household Income, Upper Rio Grande Counties, 2007**



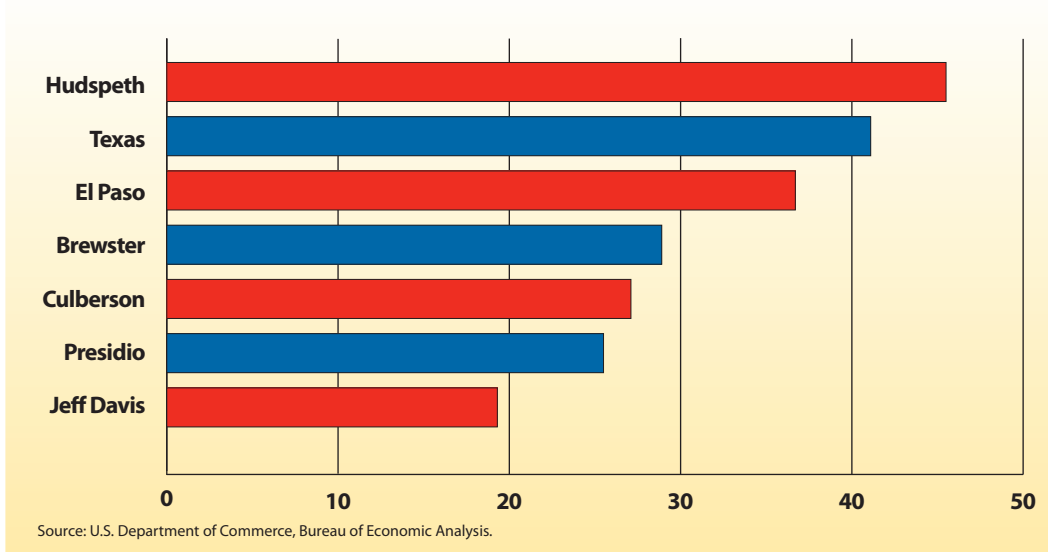
Sources: U.S. Census Bureau and Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts.



the region's highest per capita income at \$29,103, followed by El Paso County at \$26,585. Total personal income in the region rose by 36.4 percent between 2002 and 2007, compared to 41.1 percent for the state as a whole (Exhibit 14).<sup>14</sup>

Exhibit 14

**Upper Rio Grande Personal Income Percent Increase 2002-2007**



Total personal income in the region rose by 36.4 percent between 2002 and 2007, compared to 41.1 percent for the state as a whole.

**The Marfa Lights**

The first recorded sighting of the famed Marfa Lights occurred in 1883, although some say that Native Americans had older legends of the lights. Old-timers of the area still recount stories of mysterious encounters with the lights, which appear just after sunset.

The Marfa Lights can be seen from U.S. 90 just east of Marfa, looking toward the Chinati Mountains. The lights have been variously reported as resembling stars or distant headlight beams. They can appear to dance or move about but always appear in the same general area.

Marfa High School students, in conjunction with the Texas Department of Transportation, designed and built a unique observation center nine miles east of the town on U.S. 90. This observation center provides an excellent vantage point to the view the lights and is open every day after sunset.<sup>15</sup>

Currently, there is no one official explanation for the phenomena. In the early 1970s, Sul Ross State University scientist Donald Witt attempted to uncover the mystery behind them, initially concluding that the lights originated from nearby M.E. Ranch and auto headlights on U.S. 67. In 1974, however, Witt experienced the lights in their full brilliance one night and decided that his initial judgment had been too hasty. Other theories include atmospheric light refraction, mineral reactions to heat or light, secret military technology and, needless to say, ghosts.<sup>16</sup>

Every year, the city of Marfa celebrates its local wonder with a festival held over Labor Day weekend in September, including a parade, arts and crafts displays, concerts and other attractions. The festival takes place both during the day and at night and often serves as a reunion opportunity for current and former Marfa residents.<sup>17</sup>



### Famous People from the Upper Rio Grande Region

The Upper Rio Grande region has produced a wide variety of celebrities. Movie, television and Broadway star Debbie Reynolds was born in El Paso in 1932. Another actor and former radio deejay, Thomas Haden Church, was born in El Paso in 1960.

Gene Roddenberry, creator of the television series *Star Trek*, was born in El Paso, as were television news personality Sam Donaldson and former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor.<sup>18</sup>

### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, "Metropolitan and Micropolitan Statistical Areas," p. 1, <http://www.census.gov/population/www/metroareas/metroarea.html>. (Last visited May 1, 2009.)
- <sup>2</sup> Economic Modeling Specialists, Inc., "Demographic Data Report Spring 2009." Custom queries created.
- <sup>3</sup> Economic Modeling Specialist, Inc., "Demographic Data Report Spring 2009."
- <sup>4</sup> The Handbook of Texas Online, "Terlingua, Texas," <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/TT/hnt13.html>. (Last visited May 1, 2009.)
- <sup>5</sup> City-data.com, "Study Butte-Terlingua, Texas," <http://www.city-data.com/city/Study-Butte-Terlingua-Texas.html>; Big Bend Chamber of Commerce and Brewster County Tourism Council, "Historic Terlingua, Texas," [http://www.historic-terlingua.com/historic\\_terlingua\\_ghostown\\_001.htm](http://www.historic-terlingua.com/historic_terlingua_ghostown_001.htm); Big Bend Chamber of Commerce and Brewster County Tourism Council, "La Posada Milagro Guesthouse," [http://www.historic-terlingua.com/historic\\_terlingua\\_ghostown\\_016.htm](http://www.historic-terlingua.com/historic_terlingua_ghostown_016.htm); and Big Bend Chamber of Commerce and Brewster County Tourism Council, "Starlight Theater," [http://www.historic-terlingua.com/historic\\_terlingua\\_ghostown\\_008.htm](http://www.historic-terlingua.com/historic_terlingua_ghostown_008.htm). (Last visited May 1, 2009.)
- <sup>6</sup> Texas Department of Public Safety, "Texas Crime Report for 2006, Chapter 9: Crime by Jurisdiction," <http://www.txdps.state.tx.us/crimereports/06/cit06ch9.pdf>; "The Texas Crime Report for 2007, Chapter 7: Texas Enforcement Personnel," <http://www.txdps.state.tx.us/crimereports/07/citch7.pdf> (Last visited May 26, 2009); and Texas Workforce Commission, "Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW)," <http://tracer.2.com/cgi/dataanalysis/AreaSelection.asp?tableName=Industry>. (Last visited March 24, 2009.) Custom query for Upper Rio Grande WDA, Code 9221: Justice, Public Order, and Safety Activities.
- <sup>7</sup> The Center for Demographic and Socioeconomic Research and Education, Department of Rural Sociology, Texas A&M University System, *A Summary of The Texas Challenge in the Twenty-First Century: Implications of Population Change for the Future of Texas*, by Steve H. Murdock, Steve White, Md. Nazrul Hoque, Beverly Pecotte, Xiuhong You and Jennifer Balkan (College Station, Texas, December 2002), p. 7, <http://txsdc.utsa.edu/download/pdf/TxChall2002Summary.pdf>. (Last visited May 1, 2009.)
- <sup>8</sup> El Paso County, Texas, "The El Paso Mission Trail," <http://www.epcounty.com/history/missiontrail.htm>. (Last visited May 1, 2009.)
- <sup>9</sup> The El Paso Mission Tour Association, "Mission Tours," [http://www.themissiontrail.net/mission\\_tours.html](http://www.themissiontrail.net/mission_tours.html). (Last visited May 1, 2009.)
- <sup>10</sup> E-mail communication from Ben Sanchez, executive director, El Paso Mission Trail Association, San Elizario, Texas, April 13, 2009.
- <sup>11</sup> Economic Modeling Specialist, Inc., "Educational Attainment Data Report." Custom queries created.
- <sup>12</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, "Small Area Income & Poverty Estimates: State and County Interactive Tables," <http://www.census.gov//did/www/saipe/county.html>. (Last visited May 1, 2009.) A custom query was created for Upper Rio Grande counties.
- <sup>13</sup> Sperling's Best Places, "Cost of Living Calculator," <http://www.bestplaces.net/col/>. (Last visited May 1, 2009.) Custom queries were created comparing El Paso to Austin and Dallas, Texas.
- <sup>14</sup> U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, "Regional Economic Accounts: Table CA1-3 — Personal Income, Population, Per Capita Personal Income," <http://www.bea.gov/regional/reis/default.cfm?selTable=ca1-3&section=2>. (Last visited May 1, 2009.) Custom queries created for Texas population, personal income and per capita personal income.
- <sup>15</sup> Marfa Chamber of Commerce, "Marfa Lights," <http://www.marfacc.com/todo/marfalights.php>. (Last visited May 1, 2009.)
- <sup>16</sup> Texas Monthly, "Marfa Lights," by Gary Cartwright, <http://www.texasmonthly.com/ranch/readme/marfa.php>. (Last visited May 1, 2009.)
- <sup>17</sup> Marfa Chamber of Commerce, "Marfa Lights."
- <sup>18</sup> DebbieReynolds.com, "Debbie Reynolds Biography," pp. 1-3, <http://www.debbiereynolds.com/debbie-reynolds-biography.htm>; Internet Movie Database, "Biography for Thomas Haden Church," <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0002006/bio>; Internet Movie Database, "Biography for Gene Roddenberry," <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0734472/bio>; Academy of Achievement, "Sam Donaldson," <http://www.achievement.org/autodoc/page/don0bio-1>; and Cornell University Law School, "Sandra Day O'Connor (1981-2006)" <http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/justices/oconnor.bio.html>. (Last visited May 1, 2009.)