



Who Are Katrina's Victims?

Center for American Progress

Release: September 2, 2005

Update: September 6, 2005

The communities struck by Katrina were some of the poorest and most vulnerable in America.

Median incomes in New Orleans and the other affected areas are significantly lower than the national average. Median household income in New Orleans was \$31,369, well below the national median of \$44,684. In the affected areas of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama, more than 90,000 people had incomes of less than \$10,000 per year (see Table 1). African Americans earned 40 percent less than whites (see Table 4).

Based on poverty rate, Mississippi is the poorest state in the nation. Louisiana is the second poorest. The poverty rate in New Orleans prior to the storm was 23 percent, 76 percent higher than the national average of 13.1 percent. This means there were 103,000 people living in poverty in New Orleans alone in 2004. Poverty rates in the affected regions of Mississippi and Alabama were also significantly higher than the national average (see Table 2). In Louisiana, African Americans comprise 31.5 percent of the population, but 69 percent of the children in poverty.¹

The effect of high poverty in these areas is magnified by low levels of social insurance not captured by the poverty data. The poverty data do not, for example, include Medicaid payments. The average payment per Medicaid enrollee

¹Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals, *Minority Health in Louisiana: From Disparity to Parity, 2003 report*.

in Louisiana in 2001 was \$3,251, 43rd in the nation and \$760 below the national average. The average payment in Mississippi was lower (see Table 5).

New Orleans also has other indicators of poverty. In New Orleans alone, 83,569 people lack health insurance, or 18.8 percent of residents, compared to a national average of 15.5 percent. More than twice as many black women lack health insurance compared to white women.² High proportions of elderly residents have disabilities—56.4 percent, or 28,195 people, compared to a national average of 39.6 percent (see Table 9).

Besides being poor, many families also lacked vehicles to get out of New Orleans. About 9 percent of households in New Orleans did not have a vehicle available (see Table 8). Combined with low incomes and high poverty rates, it now appears that a significant number of families simply were not able to marshal the resources to evacuate, and are now especially dependent on national relief efforts.

The following tables outline some of the demographic, racial and economic characteristics of the hurricane affected regions on the Gulf Coast.

²See footnote 1.

Table 1: ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF AFFECTED REGIONS: POPULATION, MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME AND PERCENT OF HOUSEHOLDS WITH VERY LOW INCOME.

	Population	Median Inc.	Income < \$10k
National	285,691,501	\$44,684	9,748,420 (8.9%)
New Orleans (2004)	444,515	\$31,369	28,765 (15.9%)
Mississippi			
(State, 2004)	2,805,028	\$31,642	162,720 (15.1%)
(Affected regions, 2000)	699,045	\$19,932	35,630 (13.1%)
Alabama			
(State, 2004)	4,414,559	\$36,709	215,178 (12.3%)
(Affected regions, 2000)	569,485	\$34,925	28,192 (13.5%)

Data: U.S. Census Bureau, CPS and ACS datasets. Median Income for affected regions is the average median income for affected counties.

Table 2: ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF AFFECTED REGIONS: INDIVIDUAL POVERTY RATES, CHILD POVERTY RATES, RANK OF STATE BY POVERTY LEVEL.

	Poverty	Rank	Child Poverty
National	37,425,587 (13.1%)		13,027,000 (17.8%)
New Orleans (2004)	103,127 (23.2%)	2	
(Statewide, 2004)			237,000 (20.7%)
Mississippi			
(State, 2004)	605,886 (21.6%)	1	203,000 (26.7%)
(Affected regions, 2000)	120,935 (17.0%)		
Alabama			
(State, 2004)	710,744 (16.1%)	9	264,000 (24.2%)
(Affected regions, 2000)	92,826 (16.3%)		

Data: U.S. Census Bureau, CPS and ACS datasets. Child poverty is percentage of persons below age of 18 living in poverty. State rank is for poverty rates.

Table 3: RACIAL COMPOSITION OF AFFECTED REGIONS.

	African American	Hispanic	White
National	12.2%	14.2%	75.6%
New Orleans (2004)	67.9	3.2	28.0
Mississippi			
(State, 2004)	37.2	1.5	61.4
(Affected regions, 2000)	23.5	1.7	73.2
Alabama			
(State, 2004)	26.0	1.9	71.1
(Affected regions, 2000)	27.0	1.4	69.6

Data: U.S. Census Bureau

Table 4: MEDIAN EARNINGS, 16 YEARS AND OLDER.

	Median Earnings		
	All	White	Black/African American
National	\$26,691	\$28,049	\$22,575
New Orleans (2004)	\$21,848	\$31,479	\$18,939
Mississippi			
(State, 2004)	\$21,557	\$25,500	\$15,904
Alabama			
(State, 2004)	\$23,718	\$26,212	\$17,836

Data: 2004 ACS dataset, Census Bureau.

Table 5: CHARACTERISTICS OF AFFECTED REGIONS: MEDICAID BENEFITS

	Enrollees	Payment per Enrollee	State Rank
National	35,769,603 (12.3%)	\$4,011	
Louisiana			
(State)	831,822 (18.5%)	\$3,251	43
Mississippi			
(State)	590,663 (20.5%)	\$3,202	44
Alabama			
(State)	657,110 (14.6%)	\$3,780	33

Data: Enrollees are from 2003 Louisiana Health Report Card; estimates based on percent of state population receiving Medicaid in 2001, and state populations in 2004; and payments are for 2001 from Kaiser Family Foundation, available at <http://www.statehealthfacts.org>.

Table 6: CHARACTERISTICS OF AFFECTED REGIONS: POPULATION WITHOUT HEALTH INSURANCE

	Number of Uninsured	Percent Uninsured
National	44,282,183	15.5%
New Orleans (2004)	83,569	18.8%
Mississippi		
(State, 2004)	482,465	17.2%
Alabama		
(State, 2004)	595,965	13.5%

Data: U.S. Census Bureau. New Orleans estimates based on state-wide percent of uninsured.

Table 7: CHARACTERISTICS OF AFFECTED REGIONS: PUBLIC ASSISTANCE THROUGH TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE FOR NEEDY FAMILIES (TANF)

	Max Grant	State Rank	Max Earnings	State Rank
National Median	\$403		\$1,246(80%)	
Louisiana				
(State, 2002)	\$240	45	\$1,260(101%)	11
Mississippi				
(State, 2002)	\$170	50	\$704(56%)	39
Alabama				
(State, 2002)	\$164	51	\$205(16%)	51

Data: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Sixth Annual Report to Congress. November 2004 (Chapter XIV: State Profiles)

Table 8: CHARACTERISTICS OF AFFECTED REGIONS: AVAILABLE VEHICLES

	Housing Units with No Available Vehicles
National	9,626,376 (8.7%)
New Orleans (2004)	38,295 (8.6%)
Mississippi	
(State, 2004)	82,754 (7.7%)
(Affected regions, 2000)	17,886 (7.0%)
Alabama	
(State, 2004)	111,751 (6.4%)
(Affected regions, 2000)	16,300 (7.6%)

Data: U.S. Census Bureau.

Table 9: CHARACTERISTICS OF AFFECTED REGIONS: ELDERLY POPULATION

	Persons over 65	With Disability
National	34,205,301 (12.0%)	13,538,962 (39.6%)
New Orleans (2004)	50,027 (11.3%)	28,195 (56.4%)
Mississippi		
(State, 2004)	329,504 (11.7%)	171,625 (52.0%)
(Affected regions, 2000)	75,477 (10.8%)	39,580 (52.4%)
Alabama		
(State, 2004)	562,189 (11.7%)	258,376 (46.0%)
(Affected regions, 2000)	69,432 (12.2%)	32,932 (47.4%)

Data: U.S. Census Bureau, CPS and ACS datasets.