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## ESSENTIAL FACTS ABOUT THE VICTIMS OF HURRICANE KATRINA

by Arloc Sherman and Isaac Shapiro

Many Hurricane Katrina victims faced difficult living conditions even before the storm arrived. Mississippi, Louisiana, and Alabama are, respectively, the first, second, and eighth poorest states in the nation. And of the 5.8 million individuals in these states who lived in the areas struck hardest by the hurricane, more than one million lived in poverty prior to the hurricane's onset.

The information provided below helps explain why relief efforts are so important to Katrina victims. Many of the storm's victims have little or no resources on which to rely in these difficult times.

### Poverty and Income in the Affected States and Counties

Table 1 shows the poverty rate and median household income in Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi. The table compares the data for these states to the data for other states and the nation.<sup>1</sup>

- In 2004, more than 19 percent of Louisianans were poor in 2004, far above the national poverty rate of about 13 percent, and higher than the poverty rate in all states except one.
- Mississippi had the highest state poverty rate in the nation — 21.6 percent.
- Alabama had the eighth highest rate, at 16.1 percent.

TABLE 1 Poverty Especially High, and Incomes Especially Low, in States Hit Hardest by Katrina				
	Poverty Rate	Rank	Median Household Income	Rank
Alabama	16.1%	8 <sup>th</sup> Worst	\$36,709	9 <sup>th</sup> Lowest
Louisiana	19.4%	2 <sup>nd</sup> Worst	\$35,110	5 <sup>th</sup> Lowest
Mississippi	21.6%	Worst	\$31,642	2 <sup>nd</sup> Lowest
U.S.	13%*		\$44,684	

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS) for 2004.

According to the ACS (which the government uses for ranking states by poverty), the national poverty rate was 13.1 percent in 2004. According to another government survey, the Current Population Survey, it was 12.7 percent.

<sup>1</sup> These comparisons are based on the latest available survey data (for 2004). Much of the rest of this analysis relies on earlier 2000 census data, which are available with greater geographic detail. In the 2000 census data, Alabama is ranked the fifth poorest state, while the ranks for Mississippi and Louisiana do not change. These state ranks exclude the District of Columbia.

- The table also shows that the incomes of the typical (or median) household in these three states are well below the national average and are among the lowest in the nation.

Using data from the 2000 decennial census, we also calculated the poverty rates for individuals who lived in the areas hit hardest by the hurricane. These areas —the counties and parishes that have been declared eligible for federal disaster assistance for individuals — include about two-thirds of the population of Louisiana and Mississippi and one-sixth of the population of Alabama.<sup>2</sup>

- The census data indicate that 5.8 million people (in 2.1 million households) lived in these counties and parishes in 2000.
- More than 1 million of these people — or nearly one-fifth of the population affected by the hurricane — lived in poverty.

### **New Orleans — Poverty and Lack of a Vehicle**

Of the 5.8 million people living in the areas hit hardest by Katrina, some 1.3 million lived in the New Orleans metropolitan area, with close to one-half million people living in the city of New Orleans itself. The poverty rate in the city is exceptionally high. The Census data indicate that more than one in four — 28 percent — of the city’s residents were living in poverty before the hurricane descended upon the city. Of the 245 large cities in the nation (those with populations of 100,000 or more), New Orleans tied for the sixth poorest in the 2000 census.

Those who were poor in New Orleans commonly lacked their own means of transportation. Our calculations, based on the Census data, show that more half of the poor households in New Orleans — 54 percent — did not have a car, truck, or van in 2000. Among the elderly, the proportion was higher. Sixty-five percent of poor elderly households in New Orleans did not have a vehicle, making it more difficult for them to escape the storm and its effects.

### **African Americans**

The Census data also confirm that African Americans made up a disproportionate share of the hurricane’s victims. About one of every three people who lived in the areas hit hardest by the hurricane were African American. By contrast, one of every eight people in the nation is African American.

African Americans living in New Orleans were especially likely to be without a vehicle before the hurricane struck. More than one in three black households in New Orleans (35 percent) — and nearly three in five *poor* black households (59 percent) — lacked a vehicle. Among white non-Hispanic households in New Orleans, 15 percent lacked a vehicle.

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<sup>2</sup> In addition to these hardest-hit counties, the table also shows data for a broader list of counties. The broader list includes counties that are part of the federal disaster area, and are eligible for FEMA assistance to public agencies, but may not be eligible for FEMA assistance to individuals. In this broader list of counties, the combined population was 14.2 million and 2.4 million people were poor.

On the other hand, it should also be noted that the number of housing units that are irreparably damaged or need substantial rehabilitation is fewer than the number living in counties eligible for individual assistance.

**POPULATION AND POVERTY DATA FOR AREAS AFFECTED BY  
HURRICANE KATRINA, FROM THE 2000 CENSUS**

Source: 2000 census; FEMA designations as of 9-14-05

"Black or African American" includes some individuals who specified more than one race.

**Numbers in thousands**

	<u>ALL RACES</u>				<u>BLACK OR AFRICAN-AMERICAN</u>			
	All Persons	Number Poor	Pct Poor*	Number below 50% of poverty line	All Persons	Number Poor	Pct Poor*	Number below 50% of poverty line
U.S.	281,422	33,900	12.4%	15,337	36,213	8,535	24.7%	4,279
<b>Hardest-hit states: AL,LA,MS</b>	<b>11,761</b>	<b>2,097</b>	<b>18.4%</b>	<b>973</b>	<b>3,671</b>	<b>1,208</b>	<b>34.4%</b>	<b>589</b>
Alabama	4,447	698	16.1%	315	1,167	350	31.2%	168
Louisiana	4,469	851	19.6%	408	1,462	511	36.6%	256
Mississippi	2,845	548	19.9%	250	1,042	348	34.9%	165
<b>Federal disaster areas:</b>								
<b>Counties eligible for</b>								
<b>Any FEMA assistance**</b>	<b>14,194</b>	<b>2,417</b>	<b>17.5%</b>	<b>1,124</b>	<b>4,065</b>	<b>1,278</b>	<b>32.7%</b>	<b>624</b>
Alabama	1,877	307	16.7%	142	588	179	31.2%	86
Florida	5,003	711	14.5%	324	973	241	25.6%	117
Louisiana	4,469	851	19.6%	408	1,462	511	36.6%	256
Mississippi	2,845	548	19.9%	250	1,042	348	34.9%	165
<b>Hardest hit-counties: eligible</b>								
<b>for aid to individuals</b>	<b>5,780</b>	<b>1,043</b>	<b>18.6%</b>	<b>493</b>	<b>1,909</b>	<b>625</b>	<b>34.0%</b>	<b>305</b>
Alabama	771	130	17.2%	60	231	75	33.5%	35
Florida	0	0	0.0%	0	0	0	0.0%	0
Louisiana	3,110	559	18.4%	272	998	331	34.5%	167
Mississippi	1,899	355	19.3%	161	680	219	33.6%	103
New Orleans metropolitan area	1,317	237	18.3%	120	496	159	32.9%	83
<b>New Orleans city</b>	<b>485</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>27.9%</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>328</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>34.9%</b>	<b>59</b>

\* Percentage poor equals column 2 divided by the population for whom poverty status is determined.

This may not equal column 2 divided by column 1.

\*\* Includes counties eligible for assistance to individuals as well as a broader group of counties eligible only for assistance to public agencies. For Louisiana and Mississippi, this includes all counties in the state. For Alabama and Florida, only selected counties are included.