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An Income Gap in Two Counties Hit by Hurricane Katrina

by Sandra Yin and Mary Mederios Kent

(September 2005) When Hurricane Katrina pounded her way through the Gulf Coast, Orleans Parish, La., and Harrison County, Miss., were among the areas hardest hit.¹ The counties, which are home to New Orleans and Biloxi, Miss., respectively, also share other traits. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau show that with median household incomes of about \$31,000, they lag the national average of \$44,684 by 44 percent. While the population in Orleans Parish is two-thirds African American and that in Harrison County close to three-quarters white, a comparison of poverty rates by race is revealing. In both places, black people or African Americans are about three times more likely than white people to live in poverty.²

Table 1

Selected Characteristics of Counties Affected by Hurricane Katrina

	Orleans Parish, LA		Louisiana		United States		Harrison County, MS		Mississippi	
	Est.	%	Est.	%	Est.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Total Population	444,515	---	4,380,886	---	285,691,501	---	189,601	---	2,844,658	---
Median age (yrs)	34.8	NA	35.2	NA	36.2	NA	33.9	NA	33.8	NA
Under 5 years	34,494	7.8	317,270	7.2	20,008,152	7.0	13,556	7.1	204,364	7.2
18 years and over	327,597	73.7	3,221,813	73.5	212,767,197	74.5	140,213	74.0	2,069,471	72.7
65 years and over	50,023	11.3	494,278	11.3	34,205,301	12.0	21,002	11.1	343,523	12.1
One race	440,603	99.1	4,338,020	99.0	280,285,784	98.1	186,331	98.3	2,824,637	99.3
White	124,591	28.0	2,799,224	63.9	216,036,244	75.6	138,692	73.1	1,746,099	61.4
Black or African American	302,041	67.9	1,422,273	32.5	34,772,381	12.2	39,984	21.1	1,033,809	36.3
American Indian and Alaska Native	548	0.1	23,557	0.5	2,151,322	0.8	861	0.5	11,652	0.4
Asian	9,577	2.2	58,035	1.3	12,097,281	4.2	4,934	2.6	18,626	0.7
Hispanic or Latin (of any race)	14,171	3.2	118,273	2.7	40,459,196	14.2	4,910	2.6	39,569	1.4
Median household income*	31,369	NA	35,110	NA	44,684	NA	35,624	NA	31,330	NA
Per capita	10,711	NA	10,642	NA	24,020	NA	18,024	NA	15,852	NA

income	19,711	NA	19,043	NA	24,020	NA	18,024	NA	19,855	NA
Families below poverty level	NA	14.5	NA	14.9	NA	10.1	5,660	11.6	120,039	16.0
Individuals below poverty level	NA	23.2	NA	19.4	NA	13.1	26,597	14.6	548,079	19.9

*In 2004 inflation-adjusted dollars for Orleans Parish, La., and the U.S. The Mississippi data are in 1999 dollars.

Note: The ACS surveys in 2000 and 2004 are limited to the household population and exclude the population living in institutions, college dormitories, and other group quarters. Data are based on a sample and are subject to sampling variability.

Note: The most recent data available for Harrison County, Miss. are from Census 2000. For comparison's sake, the data for Mississippi are from the same source.

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2000-2004 and Census 2000 (<http://factfinder.census.gov>, accessed Sept. 2, 2005).

Table 2

A Comparison of Income and Poverty by Race

	Orleans Parish, LA	Louisiana	United States	Harrison County, MS	Mississippi
Per capita income in 1999 dollars					
White alone	31,971	20,488	23,918	20,038	19,387
Black or African American alone	11,332	10,166	14,437	12,102	10,042
Percent of population living in poverty					
White alone	11.5	11.1	9.1	10.7	11.1
Black or African American alone	35.0	36.7	24.9	27.4	34.9

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000 (<http://factfinder.census.gov>, accessed Sept. 2, 2005).

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References

1. They are among counties designated to receive both public and individual assistance from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.
2. The ratios are based on data for the white and black or African American populations whose poverty status was determined.

For More Information

U.S. Census Bureau at www.census.gov

Center for Population Studies at the University of Mississippi at www.olemiss.edu/depts/population_studies/Katrina/

Federal Emergency Management Agency at www.fema.gov

Greater New Orleans Community Data Center at www.gnocdc.org

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