



Briefing Paper

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The Women of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast: Multiple Disadvantages and Key Assets for Recovery Part I. Poverty, Race, Gender and Class

Part I of a 2-Part Series

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Hurricane Katrina dealt a devastating blow to America's Gulf Coast region and in the process exposed the legacy of race and class disadvantage in America—a disadvantage that for far too many, resulted in danger, uncertainty, suffering, or even death both as the hurricane approached and after it left. In the weeks that have followed, which included another major but less devastating hurricane, Rita, it has become exceedingly clear that the problem of poverty in the United States must be acknowledged, understood, and effectively addressed. Any sound anti-poverty policy for the future of the Gulf Coast region and the nation must address the particular needs of those most likely to be poor—women, and in particular, women of color. This Briefing Paper, the first in a two-part series addressing the needs of the women of the Gulf Coast region, uncovers the multiple disadvantages experienced by women who lived in the areas affected by both the hurricanes, Katrina and Rita, and in many of the communities to which the evacuees are moving. It also outlines policy alternatives to help rebuild their lives in a way that will allow them to ultimately leave poverty behind. At the same time that women in the region grapple with disadvantages, their work is key to recovery efforts and to the economic health of areas where many have resettled. Like women elsewhere, women in this region participate in the labor force in large numbers and are the vast majority of teachers, nurses, and sales and office workers. Women's labor will provide a key asset for recovery, whether in their temporary communities or in their old or new homes. In Part II, IWPR will provide an overview of women's roles in the labor market in these same areas.

As our nation rebuilds the Gulf Coast region and begins a more frank national debate about racial and economic inequality, it is critical to look at women's unique circumstances and strengths. The women in the three metropolitan areas devastated by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, like many women in the South, face multiple disadvantages, all of which must be understood in developing effective services and economic development strategies in the region. They are more likely to be poor and to lack health insurance and less likely to earn good wages than women elsewhere in the United States. They are also disproportionately African American and experience discrimination based on both race and sex.

Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas rank in the bottom 10 among all the states in the nation on many of the indicators of women's status calculated by the Institute for Women's Policy Research. Like women elsewhere, women in New Orleans, the Biloxi-Gulfport-Pascagoula area, and the Beaumont-Port Arthur area are more likely than men to live in poverty, to be primary caregivers in single-parent families, and to hold low-paying jobs.

This Briefing Paper presents recent data from federal government sources on poverty among women and people of color in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast region in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas. For New Orleans, data are available for both the city

of New Orleans and the larger MSA (metropolitan statistical area). It also draws upon IWPR's series of reports on the status of women in all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

Poverty

“After seeing who escaped the flood and who remained behind, it’s impossible to ignore the shocking breadth of the gap between rich and poor. It’s as if we don’t even see poor people in this country anymore, as if we don’t even try to imagine what their lives are like...To be poor in America was to be invisible, but not after this week.”

—Eugene Robinson, *The Washington Post*, September 9, 2005.¹

Many people are shocked by the images they have seen on television of thousands of poor people living in New Orleans who had no means of evacuation before Hurricane Katrina landed and waited vainly to be rescued from the flooded and devastated city after it left. Many residents of the city’s most impoverished areas suffered for days without supplies of food or water or basic provisions for health and public safety. Many of the neglected New Orleanians are African American—the poor are disproportionately African American in New Orleans, and throughout the United States.

In 2004, African Americans were almost three times more likely than whites to live in poverty in the United States, with 24.7 percent of African American people (or 9.0 million) compared with 8.6 percent of white, non Hispanic people (or 16.9 million) living in poverty. Hispanic men and women also face high poverty rates, with 9.1 million people, or 21.9 percent of the Hispanic population living below the federal poverty line.²

Demographics of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast Region

The New Orleans metropolitan area was occupied by 1,314,000 people, 52.4 percent of whom were

women of all races and 37.8 percent of whom were African Americans of both sexes. In Mississippi, 364,000 people lived in the Biloxi-Gulfport-Pasagoula metropolitan area, 51.0 percent of whom were women and 22.9 percent of whom were African Americans of both sexes. In Texas, 366,244 people lived in the Beaumont-Port Arthur metropolitan area, with women of all races comprising 51.8 percent of the population and African Americans of both sexes comprising 24.3 percent of the population (see Table 1).

As Tables 1 and 2 show, these areas are similar in percent female and in median age of men and women to the national figures, except that the New Orleans area has a higher proportion of women and Beaumont-Port Arthur has a somewhat older population. All three areas have a higher proportion of African Americans than the nation as a whole, with New Orleans having more than three times the national average of 12.0 percent and the two Gulf Coast areas having double the national average. Among families with related children under 18, the two Gulf Coast regions are similar to the national average in family composition, having approximately the same shares of married couples and female-headed families³ as nationally (about 2/3 are married couples, about 1/4 are female-headed). In New Orleans, in contrast, both in the city and the metropolitan area, the share of female-headed families with children is much higher, nearly 2/5 in the metropolitan area and more than 1/2 in the city.

All three areas have lower median household income than the national median of \$44,684. New Orleans city is the lowest at \$31,369; Beaumont-Port Arthur is the highest at \$40,094. In the New Orleans MSA, median household income is \$37,246, and among the three MSA’s (see Table 2), Biloxi-Gulfport-Pasagoula has the lowest household income at \$36,812.

Women’s Poverty In New Orleans

Before the hurricane hit, women in New Orleans faced significantly higher poverty rates than their

¹ Eugene Robinson, “No Longer Invisible.”

² U.S. Census Bureau, *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2004*, Table 3.

³ Data on female-headed families or female-headed families with children refer to families with female householders whose husbands are not present and who are living with related children under age 18.

TABLE 1:**Women and Men in the New Orleans Metropolitan Area, New Orleans City, and the United States, 2004**

	New Orleans, LA MSA^a	New Orleans City, LA^a	United States
Total Population	1,313,694	444,515	285,691,501
Number of Women	687,820	237,887	145,908,683
Percent Male	47.6%	46.5%	48.9%
Percent Female	52.4%	53.5%	51.1%
Median Age of Women	37.0	36.7	37.4
Median Age of Men	35.0	32.8	35.0
Median Household Income (2004 dollars)	\$37,246	\$31,369	\$44,684
Percent of Population that is White	53.4%	25.8%	67.3%
Percent of Population that is African American	37.8%	67.7%	12.0%
Percent of Population that is Hispanic ^b	4.9%	3.2%	14.2%
Percent of Families with Related Children Under Age 18 that are Female-Headed	37.4%	56.0%	25.2%
Percent of Families with Related Children Under Age 18 that are Married Couple	55.8%	39.9%	67.5%
Percent of Population that is 65 or Older	10.9%	11.3%	12.0%
Percent of Population Aged 65 and Older that is Female	58.3%	61.1%	57.5%
Percent of Population Aged 65 and Older that is Male	41.7%	38.9%	42.5%
Percent of Women Aged 65 and Older Who are Poor	16.1%	24.3%	11.5%
Percent of Men Aged 65 and Older Who are Poor	6.9%	13.5%	6.6%

Notes:

^a Data from the American Community Survey are available by Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) and by Places (including Cities). An MSA is a geographic entity defined by the federal Office of Management and Budget for use by federal statistical agencies, based on the concept of a core area with a large population nucleus, plus adjacent communities having a high degree of economic and social integration with that core. A Place is defined as a concentration of population either legally bounded as an incorporated place, or identified as a Census Designated Place (CDP).

^b Hispanics may be of any race or two or more races. Racial categories (whites, African Americans) do not include Hispanics.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2004. Compiled by the Institute for Women's Policy Research.

male counterparts. In 2004, 25.9 percent of women of all ages lived below the federal poverty line in the city of New Orleans, compared with 20.0 percent of men. In the New Orleans metropolitan area, 17.4 percent of all women lived in poverty in 2004, compared with 12.1 percent of men. Both women and men in New Orleans city had poverty rates that were almost double the national average (see Figure 1).

Older women also face higher than average poverty rates in New Orleans, with 24.3 percent of women aged 65 and older in the city of New Orleans and 16.1 percent of women aged 65 and older in the surrounding metropolitan area living below the federal poverty line in 2004. Considering that women also comprise the majority of the elderly population in the New Orleans metropolitan area, these high rates

TABLE 2:
Women and Men on the Gulf Coast, 2004

	New Orleans, LA MSA	Biloxi-Gulfport- Pascagoula, MS MSA	Beaumont- Port Arthur, TX MSA	United States
Total Population	1,313,694	363,966	366,244	285,691,501
Number of Women	687,820	185,587	189,737	145,908,683
Percent Male	47.6%	49.0%	48.2%	48.9%
Percent Female	52.4%	51.0%	51.8%	51.1%
Median Age of Women	37.0	37.6	40.4	37.4
Median Age of Men	35.0	36.0	35.3	35.0
Median Household Income (in 2004 dollars)	\$37,246	\$36,812	\$40,094	\$44,684
Percent of Population that is White	53.4%	73.5%	63.5%	67.3%
Percent of Population that is African American	37.8%	22.9%	24.3%	12.0%
Percent of Population that is Hispanic	4.9%	2.5%	8.7%	14.2%
Percent of Women Aged 25 and Older who have a Four-Year College Degree	24.9%	18.2%	16.4%	25.6%
Percent of Men Aged 25 and Older who have a Four-Year College Degree	28.3%	18.0%	20.7%	28.6%
Percent of Families with Related Children Under Age 18 that are Female-Headed	37.4%	28.4%	23.3%	25.2%
Percent of Families with Related Children Under Age 18 that are Married Couple	55.8%	62.4%	69.8%	67.5%
Percent of Population that is 65 or Older	11.0%	11.6%	12.9%	12.0%
Percent of Population Aged 65 and Older that is Female	58.3%	55.4%	57.9%	57.5%
Percent of Population Aged 65 and Older that is Male	41.7%	44.6%	42.1%	42.5%
Percent of Women Aged 65 and Older Who are Poor	16.1%	10.2%	14.6%	11.5%
Percent of Men Aged 65 and Older Who are Poor	6.9%	5.4%	6.1%	6.6%

Note: Hispanics may be of any race or two or more races. Racial categories (whites, African Americans) do not include Hispanics.
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2004. Compiled by the Institute for Women's Policy Research.

result in more than 13,000 women aged 65 and over living below the federal poverty line in 2004 (see Table 1).

Women's Poverty on the Gulf Coast

Just to the east of New Orleans, the Mississippi coast was also devastated by Hurricane Katrina. The

186,000 women who lived in the Biloxi-Gulfport-Pascagoula metropolitan area in 2004 account for many of those displaced. Almost 23 percent of the residents of this area were African American, and 28.4 percent of families in this area were female-headed (see Table 2). Just to the west of New Orleans, the Beaumont-Port Arthur area in Texas was

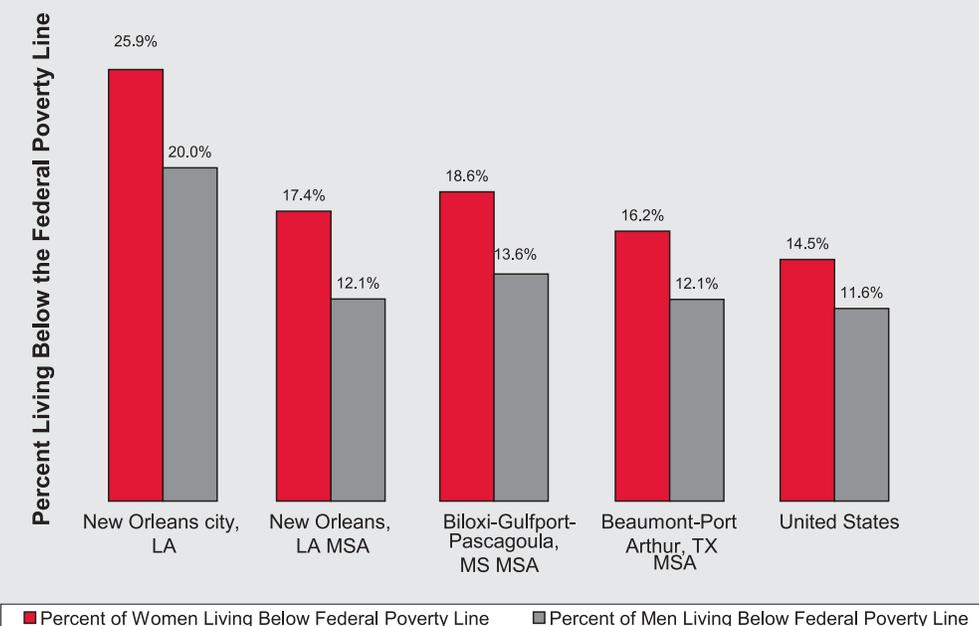
heavily affected by Hurricane Rita just four weeks later. In 2004, African Americans made up 24.3 percent of residents in the Beaumont-Port Arthur metropolitan area and 23.3 percent of families in the area were female headed (unfortunately no data are available for Lake Charles in Louisiana, also heavily affected by Hurricane Rita).

As Figure 1 shows, women and men faced substantially higher poverty rates in Biloxi-Gulfport-Pascagoula than in the United States as a whole, and somewhat higher rates than in the New Orleans metropolitan area. Women and men in Beaumont-Port Arthur were also more likely to live in poverty than in the nation as a whole, although women in the region were slightly less likely and men were equally as likely to live in poverty as women and men in the New Orleans metropolitan area.

Poverty and Family Type

Female-headed families in the Gulf Coast region faced very high poverty rates. Nearly two in every five female-headed families with children in New Orleans, both the city and metropolitan area, lived in poverty in 2004, a proportion similar to the rate for the United States as a whole (37.6 percent), compared with only 4.5 percent of married couple families. While married couples in the New Orleans MSA had somewhat lower poverty than nationally, 13.5 percent of married couple families in the Biloxi-Gulfport-Pascagoula area lived below the poverty line, nearly double the national average

FIGURE 1: Percent of Women and Men Living Below the Federal Poverty Line in New Orleans, Biloxi-Gulfport-Pascagoula, Beaumont-Port Arthur, and the United States, 2004



Source: IWPR analysis of the 2004 American Community Survey.

(6.9 percent). The poverty rate for female-headed families in the Biloxi-Gulfport-Pascagoula area was lower than the national rate. The Beaumont-Port Arthur area also had lower poverty rates for both female-headed and married couple families than the nation, but only somewhat lower at 34.7 percent and 5.8 percent, respectively (see Figure 2). In every area, the poverty rate of female-headed families is at least double that for married couples.

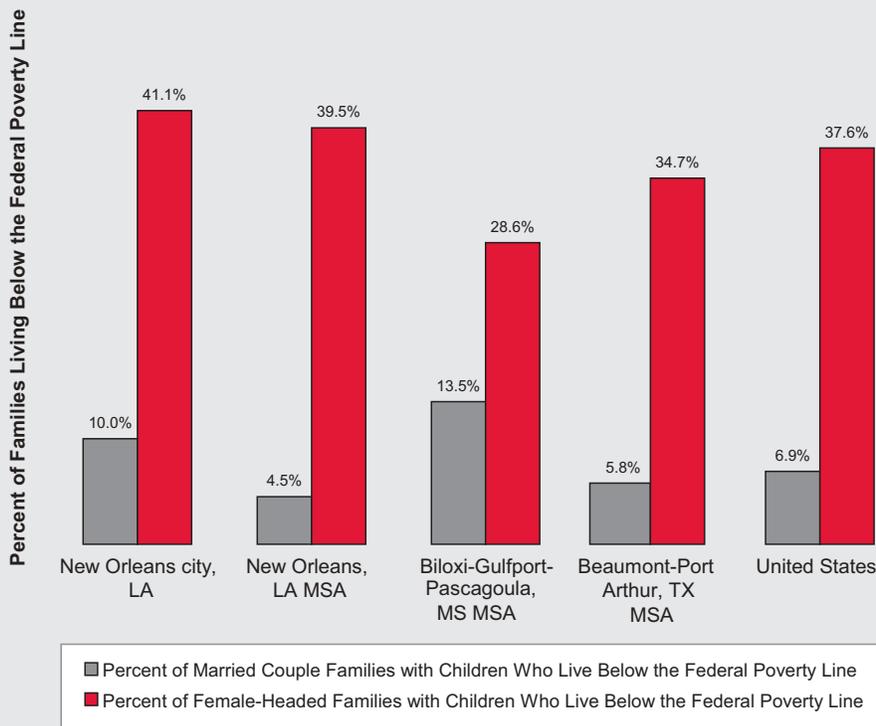
Poverty and Employment

It is also important to remember that a substantial portion of poverty in the United States is associated with low-wage jobs. Many of the poor are working poor. In 2004, 44 percent of 18-64 year-olds living below the poverty line worked.⁴ Race and sex discrimination are still found in the U.S. labor market,

⁴ This percentage includes both full-time and part-time workers; see U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement, POV22: “Work Experience During Year by Age, Sex, Household Relationship and Poverty Status for People 16 Years and Over: 2004, Below 100% of Poverty—All Races,” http://pubdb3.census.gov/macro/032005/pov/new22_100_01.htm, 2005 (calculations by the Institute for Women’s Policy Research).

FIGURE 2:

Percent of Families Living Below the Federal Poverty Line, by Family Type, in New Orleans, Biloxi-Gulfport-Pascagoula, Beaumont-Port Arthur, and the United States, 2004



Source: IWPR analysis of the 2004 American Community Survey.

and women and people of color are more likely than white men to work in low-wage jobs. A recent IWPR report found that, for prime age workers (26-59 years of age), more than 90 percent of those who average low earnings across 15 years are women.⁵ The higher poverty rates of female-headed families occur at least partly because they have only one adult who can work and that adult typically faces a labor market dominated by low-wage jobs.

A Glance at the South Central Region⁶

The women of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast region are not alone in the South in being disproportionately poor and disadvantaged. As shown in Table 3, all eight states in the South Central Region rank among the bottom third of all 50 states and the District of Columbia for the percent of women living

above the federally-defined poverty level for their family size; Mississippi ranked 51st, Louisiana ranked 47th, and Texas ranked 44th. At 36th, Kentucky was the highest ranked state in this region on this indicator of women's status.

A second indicator drawn from IWPR's *Status of Women in the States*, the percent of women with health insurance, shows this region performing only slightly better than it does on women's poverty. As shown in Table 3, health insurance coverage is low in this region: 77.1 percent have health insurance from any source, including Medicaid, compared with 82.3 percent nationwide in 2002. Texas ranked worst in the region and the nation with 28.3 percent uninsured. Louisiana

ranked 49th with 25.8 percent uninsured. A few states in this region do better. With 12.4 percent uninsured, Tennessee ranks first in the region and 13th in the nation, in the top third of all states. Alabama (30th) and Kentucky (31st) rank in the middle third of all states. The rest of the states in this region fall in the bottom third nationally, including Mississippi, which ranks 43rd nationally and 4th regionally.

In 2004, all eight states in this region ranked in the bottom third of all states on IWPR's composite index measuring women's social and economic autonomy, the index that includes the poverty and health insurance indicators. Six of these eight states ranked among the worst seven states overall, based on the five composite indices IWPR calculates. These six states (Arkansas, Kentucky, Mississippi, Oklahoma,

⁵ Stephen J. Rose and Heidi Hartmann, *Still A Man's Labor Market: The Long-Term Earnings Gap*, Institute for Women's Policy Research, Washington, DC, 2004.

⁶ The South Central Region includes Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Texas, as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau. Please note that this region includes both the East South Central Region and the West South Central Region, which were reported separately in the *Status of Women in the States* 2004 reports.

TABLE 3:
How the South Central Region Ranks for Women's Poverty and Health Insurance Coverage

State	Percent of Women Living Above Poverty, 2002			Percent of Women Aged 18 to 64 with Health Insurance, 2002		
	Value	National Rank	Regional Rank	Value	National Rank	Regional Rank
Alabama	83.7%	45	5	84.0%	30	2
Arkansas	82.1%	48	7	78.3%	46	5
Kentucky	86.5%	36	1	83.7%	31	3
Louisiana	82.6%	47	6	74.2%	49	7
Mississippi	79.8%	51	8	79.5%	43	4
Oklahoma	85.6%	41	2	78.2%	47	6
Tennessee	85.5%	43	3	87.6%	13	1
Texas	85.3%	44	4	71.7%	51	8
8 State Average	84.6%	N/A	N/A	77.1%	N/A	N/A
U.S. Average	87.9%	N/A	N/A	82.3%	N/A	N/A

Notes:

Regional rankings are of a maximum of eight and refer to the states in the South Central Region (AL, AR, KY, LA, MS, OK, TN, and TX). National rankings include the District of Columbia, for a total of 51.

The eight state average is a weighted average of the values for each of the South Central states.

See Appendix II of *The Status of Women in the States 2004* for methodology.

Source: Misha Werschkul and Erica Williams, *The Status of Women in the States*, Institute for Women's Policy Research, Washington, DC, 2004. Data based on 2002-03 Current Population Survey Annual Demographic Files (March), for the calendar years 2001-02, as tabulated by the Urban Institute.

Tennessee, and Texas) rank in the bottom half of all states on all five composite indices in *The Status of the Women in the States* reports. Mississippi has been the worst state for women four times in a row (1998, 2000, 2002, and 2004).⁷

Two of the eight states in this region, Alabama and Louisiana, did not rank among the worst states for women in 2004.⁸ In 2002, because of a lower ranking on the political participation composite index, Alabama was one of the worst states for women.⁹ Despite low rankings in all other areas, Louisiana earned a high ranking, 9th of all 50 states, for women's political participation in 2004.¹⁰

Women of color are particularly disadvantaged in the southern states. In the South Central Region

⁷ States were included among the worst states for women if they appear in the bottom ten of all states on at least one composite index and below the midpoint of all states on all five composite indices developed by the Institute for Women's Policy Research. See Appendix II of *The Status of Women in the States*, national overview report, by Misha Werschkul and Erica Williams (Washington, DC: IWPR, 2004) for more on the methodology for ranking the states and for source information.

⁸ Misha Werschkul and Erica Williams, *The Status of Women in the States*, Institute for Women's Policy Research, Washington, DC, 2004.

⁹ Amy Caiazza, ed., *The Status of Women in Alabama*, Institute for Women's Policy Research, Washington, DC, 2002.

¹⁰ Misha Werschkul and Erica Williams, *The Status of Women in the States*, Institute for Women's Policy Research, Washington, DC, 2004.

overall, 27.1 percent of African American women and 24.0 percent of Hispanic women lived in poverty in 1999, compared with only 10.9 percent of white women (see Table 4). Louisiana ranks worst in the region and in the nation for poverty among African American women, and Mississippi ranks next to last both regionally and nationally. In Louisiana, more than 35 percent of all African American women aged 16 or older lived in poverty in 1999, compared with 12.6 percent of white women (based on 2000 Census data). Mississippi's figures are almost identical. Texas ranks best in the region

for the poverty of African American women, but still has 23.0 percent of African American women living in poverty (compared with 8.8 percent of white women).

A Note on the Black Middle Class in New Orleans

While the face of Katrina on television screens following the disaster was largely that of poor African Americans stranded in the wake of the storm, it is important to recognize that Blackness is not synonymous with poverty. Although the city of New Orleans, like inner cities across the nation, was home to a concentration of African American poverty, the breadth of the African American community also

TABLE 4:
Percent of Women Aged 16 and Older Living Above Poverty in the
South Central Region, 1999, by Race and Ethnicity
Based on Data from Census 2000^a

State	White Women			African American Women			Hispanic Women ^b		
	Value	National Rank (of 51)	Regional Rank	Value	National Rank (of 43) ^c	Regional Rank	Value	National Rank (of 48) ^c	Regional Rank
Alabama	88.5%	41	2	68.7%	40	5	75.6%	37	5
Arkansas	87.2%	48	7	67.1%	41	6	72.6%	44	8
Kentucky	84.8%	50	8	72.0%	35	3	78.3%	26	2
Louisiana	87.4%	46	5	64.4%	43	8	80.3%	17	1
Mississippi	87.3%	47	6	65.3%	42	7	77.6%	29	3
Oklahoma	87.7%	45	4	72.0%	35	3	73.6%	43	7
Tennessee	88.2%	44	3	75.2%	26	2	76.1%	34	4
Texas	91.2%	20	1	77.0%	18	1	75.3%	39	6
8 State Average	89.1%	N/A	N/A	72.9%	N/A	N/A	76.0%	N/A	N/A
U.S. Average	91.0%	N/A	N/A	75.9%	N/A	N/A	77.5%	N/A	N/A

Notes:

Regional rankings are of a maximum of eight and refer to the states in the South Central Region (AL, AR, KY, LA, MS, OK, TN, and TX). The eight state average is a weighted average of the values for each of the South Central states.

^aThe numbers and rankings presented here are based on 2000 Census data for the year 1999. They differ from those based on the 2003 Current Population Survey data (for the year 2002) presented in Table 3.

^bHispanics may be of any race or two or more races. Racial categories (whites, African Americans) do not include Hispanics.

^cStates where sample sizes were insufficient to reliably estimate poverty rates were not included in these rankings.

Source: Misha Werschkul and Erica Williams, *The Status of Women in the States*, Institute for Women's Policy Research, Washington, DC, 2004. Calculated by the Institute for Women's Policy Research based on 2000 Decennial Census data.

TABLE 5:
Educational Attainment and Employment in Managerial and Professional Occupations in New Orleans
City and the United States, by Race
Based on Data from Census 2000

	United States	New Orleans City, Louisiana
Percent of All Women Aged 25 and Older with a Four-Year College Degree or More	22.9%	24.9%
Percent of All Men Aged 25 and Older with a Four-Year College Degree or More	26.1%	26.8%
Percent of White Women Aged 25 and Older with a Four-Year College Degree or More	24.8%	44.2%
Percent of White Men Aged 25 and Older with a Four-Year College Degree or More	29.3%	51.1%
Percent of African American Women Aged 25 and Older with a Four-Year College Degree or More	15.2%	15.0%
Percent of African American Men Aged 25 and Older with a Four-Year College Degree or More	13.1%	11.4%
Percent of Women Employed in Management, Professional, and Related Occupations	36.2%	36.3%
Percent of White Women Employed in Management, Professional, and Related Occupations	38.7%	52.4%
Percent of African American Women Employed in Management, Professional, and Related Occupations	29.7%	28.5%

Note: Racial categories (whites, African Americans) do not include Hispanics.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census 2000. Compiled by the Institute for Women's Policy Research.

includes the African American middle class, and New Orleans is no exception to that rule. The city of New Orleans nearly matches the national average for the percent of African American women and men with a four-year college degree or more¹¹ and the percent of women employed in professional and managerial occupations (see Table 5), thus outpacing the South Central Region as a whole which ranks below the national average on indicators of education and employment in professional and managerial occupations.

In 2000, 15.0 percent of African American women in the city of New Orleans had a four-year college degree or more, compared with 15.2 percent of African American women nationwide. The skills and talents of these African American women constitute a key asset that will contribute to the success of any rebuilding effort. While all residents and evacuees have a role to play in rebuilding these stricken areas, it is important to recognize that communities of color have a variety of assets to bring to the table, including cultural sensitivity that will be critical to any successful rebuilding effort.

More information and additional statistics on women's education and employment will be included in the second briefing paper in this series, Part II: Education, Earnings, and Occupations.

Leaving New Orleans and the Gulf Coast

Unfortunately, many of the cities where the displaced people from New Orleans and the Gulf Coast region have headed share the same problems of poverty and low earnings. Table 6 shows that a number of the cities and metropolitan statistical areas where evacuees have relocated have high poverty

TABLE 6:
A Comparison of Southern Cities and Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs)

Geography	Poverty Rate for All Women	Poverty Rate for Female-Headed Families with Related Children Under Age 18	Median Earnings of African American Women who Work Full-Time, Year-Round
<u>Places</u>			
Atlanta City, GA	29.2%	65.6%	\$27,312
Charlotte City, NC	12.9%	34.7%	\$27,823
Dallas City, TX	23.5%	43.1%	\$28,176
Fort Worth City, TX	18.7%	39.6%	\$24,217
Houston City, TX	21.1%	41.3%	\$29,892
San Antonio City, TX	21.8%	48.4%	\$30,929
New Orleans City, LA	25.9%	41.1%	\$19,951
<u>MSAs</u>			
Atlanta, GA MSA	13.7%	33.9%	\$31,372
Baton Rouge, LA MSA	18.0%	37.6%	\$21,770
Charleston-North Charleston, SC MSA	16.7%	39.6%	\$20,766
Dallas-Fort Worth, TX MSA	13.6%	32.7%	\$29,925
Jackson, MS MSA	21.7%	43.9%	\$21,891
Lafayette, LA MSA	22.1%	55.9%	\$15,131
Lexington, KY MSA	18.6%	49.6%	N/A
Little Rock-North Little Rock, AR MSA	18.1%	44.8%	\$26,110
Mobile, AL MSA	17.1%	43.3%	\$17,412
Nashville, TN MSA	12.4%	36.8%	\$31,152
Oklahoma City, OK MSA	13.2%	34.3%	\$27,448
Richmond-Petersburg, VA MSA	7.9%	20.4%	\$29,473
Savannah, GA MSA	12.5%	28.7%	\$22,025
Shreveport-Bossier City, LA MSA	24.4%	55.4%	\$20,897
Beaumont-Port Arthur, TX MSA	16.2%	34.7%	\$21,552
Biloxi-Gulfport-Pascagoula, MS MSA	18.6%	28.6%	N/A
New Orleans, LA MSA	17.4%	39.5%	\$20,798

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2004.
Compiled by the Institute for Women's Policy Research.

¹¹ It is worth noting here that New Orleans is home to three Historically Black Colleges or Universities (HBCUs) which may account, in part, for the proportion of college degree holding African Americans in the city. These universities include Dillard University, Southern University at New Orleans, and Xavier University of Louisiana.

rates for women or female-headed families or low earnings for African American women. For example, several destinations such as the metropolitan areas of Jackson, Mississippi; Baton-Rouge, Louisiana; Little Rock, Arkansas; and Mobile, Alabama, have higher poverty rates for women or female-headed families than does the New Orleans MSA or, like the New Orleans area, have especially low earnings for African American women (see Table 6).

A few southern cities or MSAs stand out for low poverty rates or better earnings, for example, Charlotte, North Carolina, and Richmond-Petersburg, Virginia.

What Can Be Done?

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita have made the prevalence of poverty in the South Central Region painfully evident, galvanizing support for relief efforts. Attention must, however, extend beyond the immediate disaster relief and reconstruction. This is the time to re-evaluate past policies and advance new strategies to improve the status of women in the South Central Region and in the nation as a whole. The poor status of women and women of color across the South Central Region is not inevitable. Both Charlotte, North Carolina, and Nashville, Tennessee, for example, have better economic outcomes for women and women of color in terms of poverty rates for all women and median earnings of African American women (see Table 6). A number of policies could help women in the Gulf Coast region achieve the best possible economic outcomes moving forward:

➔ Provide employment with living wages.

Employment and education are crucial for rebuilding lives in the Gulf Coast region and for ensuring women's long-term economic success. Hurricane Katrina led to the formation of several new assistance programs including Disaster Unemployment Assistance, Worker Recovery Accounts, and the Emergency Training Agency Fund.¹² These efforts

will provide important immediate relief to many job seekers. Additional efforts are needed, however, to promote the economic well-being of those affected by the hurricanes. For example, rebuilding contractors should make every effort to hire local workers. Additionally, the Davis Bacon Act should be reinstated, thus requiring contractors to meet or surpass prevailing wage conditions, including local living wage laws, in reconstruction contracts.¹³ An increase in the federal minimum wage, long overdue since the last increase was in 1997, would help all low-wage workers in the region. To effectively address the poverty problem while rebuilding the areas devastated by the storms, workers must receive decent wages.

➔ Provide women with the training necessary for engagement in the rebuilding process.

Increased funds available for job training and education in the Gulf Coast region can be used to effect long-term change. Quality job training and education targeted toward living wage jobs is particularly important for low-income women and women of color. Training women in non-traditional occupations (eg. construction, police, fire) often enables women to earn wages that allow them to escape poverty. Also, the expanded availability of Workforce Investment Act funds may be instrumental in helping women enter living wage jobs. To make sure that the relief efforts result in a permanent improvement in women's economic well-being, women must comprise a representative share of fund recipients. Now is the time to strengthen, not drop, affirmative action policies.

➔ Make public assistance available to those in need.

Providing adequate welfare benefits to women in this region is critical. In Louisiana, as of January 2002, 21,396 families had reached the state or federal time limit for TANF benefits.¹⁴ This was the third largest number of families to reach the time limit of

¹² Department of Labor, (Training and Employment Guidance Letter No. 5-05), <<http://www.doleta.gov/Katrina/docs/tegl%205-05.swf>> (September 21, 2005), 2005.

¹³ Center for Law and Social Policy, "Hurricane Katrina: Implications in Your State," Audio Conference, September 16, 2005.

¹⁴ Dan Bloom, Mary Farrell, and Barbara Fink, with Diana Adams-Ciardullo, *Welfare Time Limits: State Policies, Implementation, and Effects on Families*, 2002.

any state, after New York and Connecticut. While the state does provide extensions for a number of reasons, including being a victim of domestic violence, lacking child care or other support services, or recent job loss, over half of these families (11,138 families) had their TANF case closed immediately after reaching the time limit. The TANF Emergency Response and Recovery Act, passed by the U.S. Congress on September 15, 2005, and signed by the President on September 21, 2005, in response to Katrina, extends 1996 welfare reform through December 31, 2005, and provides extra assistance to states affected by Hurricane Katrina or hosting evacuees from those states. It will also reimburse states for TANF benefits provided to evacuees. This is an important step in the right direction, but the legislation does not provide benefits to those who had timed-off welfare prior to Katrina and does not extend coverage to legal immigrants affected by the storm. It remains important to waive work requirements and time limits to assure that low-income women receive the necessary assistance to support themselves and their families while they get resettled and begin their lives anew. Finally, despite the quick extension of welfare reform in the aftermath of Katrina, the extension is only temporary and the threat of severe budget cuts remains. States need guarantees of federal funds to ensure that low-income women in the region continue to receive adequate welfare benefits and the affected states can engage in long-term planning to meet the needs of those affected by the storms.¹⁵

Meet basic needs for food and health care.

To meet the basic needs of the individuals and families displaced by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the federal government should provide supplemental funding for food stamps for all needy households and increased levels of housing assistance. Immediate disaster relief demands expanded coverage and a streamlined application process, in accordance with

the USDA's National Enhanced Policy for Evacuees. For instance, waiving some income and eligibility requirements can help applicants receive assistance more quickly. It is also crucial that additional funds be made available for WIC for low-income women and their families. Assuring that all affected persons receive necessary health care requires expanding Medicaid coverage, including coverage to childless adults. It is a particularly inopportune time to consider cutting the Medicaid program.

In rebuilding neighborhoods, respect communities.

The reconstruction effort must focus not just on constructing houses, but on rebuilding communities. It is important to strive to maintain and rebuild pre-existing community networks and relations while improving and diversifying areas that were previously underserved. By maintaining close working relationships with active civic groups, such as women's and religious groups, reconstruction efforts are more likely to achieve this aim.¹⁶

Make child care available for those seeking to reestablish their lives.

Quality child care is very important for evacuees seeking employment, particularly given that many affected children were traumatized and need high quality support. One immediate option is to organize displaced caregivers so that they may provide childcare for other evacuees seeking employment. Government subsidies to fund child care providers' professional development and training would offer a longer-term solution. In addition, given the current availability of funds for entrepreneurship, it may be possible to direct a portion of funds toward establishing high quality child care centers. Although the hurricanes have intensified the need for child care assistance among victims and relief workers, child care was an often overlooked but nonetheless crucial need for low-income women prior to Katrina and

¹⁵ Chioma Adaku, "Poverty is a Condition, Not a Choice," <TANFroses@yahoo.com> (September 21, 2005), September 16, 2005.

¹⁶ When establishing relations with such civic groups, it is important to recognize that key populations, including low-income women, may not be represented in their ranks and that builders and planners must take additional steps to assure that they are included in the planning process.

Rita, and will continue to be important after reconstruction is completed. Again, this is an important opportunity to re-evaluate past policies and make positive targeted changes.

➔ Include women at all levels in the rebuilding process.

Women often constitute the backbone of communities and this is particularly common within low-income communities. To make sure the needs of women are adequately addressed in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast region, women should be represented among the urban and regional planners included in the rebuilding efforts. Their perspectives will provide critical insights that might otherwise go unrecognized—such as making sure, for example, that child care locations are convenient to public transportation. From planning to the nuts and bolts of construction, the representation of women is critical for New Orleans and the Gulf Coast region to be reborn better and with a stronger workforce than ever before.

➔ Begin a more serious dialog about poverty that includes discussion of the gender and race dynamics of poverty.

One key outcome of Katrina and Rita must be a renewed discussion of poverty and homelessness in the United States, including the gender and racial dynamics of poverty. Such ills plagued American cities and towns before Katrina brought them to the forefront, and to continue to ignore these issues and address only the evacuated populations would be to fail to truly learn from the disaster. At a time when poverty and homelessness are extremely visible and their costs painfully clear, it is time to reconsider what level of poverty, hunger, and homelessness we are willing to tolerate while still laying claim to the ideals of a good and just society. It is also a time to reconsider how low the low-wage labor market in the United States should be allowed to fall and how to best supplement inadequate earnings when necessary to allow those who work to live above poverty. This is a time that demands new policy strategies that can address fundamental issues including combating race- and gender-based discrimination in the labor market and elsewhere and ensuring equal opportunity in education and housing. The issue before the nation is one not only of immediate disaster relief, but of mounting an aggressive fight against longstanding poverty, homelessness, and lack of employment in our cities, towns, and neighborhoods.

For More Information

To read more about the status of women in the United States, please visit
<http://www.iwpr.org/States2004/PDFs/National.pdf>

To read more about the economic status of women in the United States, please visit
<http://www.iwpr.org/States2004/index.htm>

To read more about the best and worst states for women, please visit
http://www.iwpr.org/States2004/SWS2004/best_worst.htm

Moving Ideas continues to update its guide with the most up-to-date policy proposals and actions related to Hurricane Katrina
http://www.movingideas.org/content/en/katrina_policy_action.htm

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IWPR is a scientific research organization dedicated to informing and stimulating the debate on public policy issues of critical importance to women and their families. The Institute works with policymakers, scholars, and public interest groups to design, execute, and disseminate research that illuminates economic and social policy issues affecting women and their families, and to build a network of individuals and organizations that conduct and use women-oriented policy research. IWPR's work is supported by foundation grants, government grants and contracts, donations from individuals, and contributions from organizations and corporations. Members and affiliates of IWPR's Information Network receive reports and information on a regular basis. IWPR is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization that also works in affiliation with the women's studies and public policy programs at The George Washington University.

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