



**NCCP** National Center for  
Children in Poverty

Columbia University  
MAILMAN SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH

## CHILD POVERTY IN 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY AMERICA

# Child Poverty in States Hit by Hurricane Katrina

FACT SHEET NO. 1, SEPTEMBER 2005

The aftermath of Hurricane Katrina exposed glaring truths about poverty in America. Child poverty and material hardship are not just problems experienced by the states in Katrina's path—they plague Americans around the country. Just as residents began the clean-up process, the U.S. Census Bureau released numbers showing that in 2004, the poverty rate rose for the fourth straight year in a row—37 million Americans live below the poverty line. In the wake of this national tragedy, poverty should once again become a topic of national concern. Now is the time to focus on how to make sure no more children are left behind. This series, *Child Poverty in 21<sup>st</sup> Century America*, addresses the challenge.

This fact sheet provides a portrait of poor children in the Gulf Coast states ravaged by Hurricane Katrina. New Orleans and the surrounding region have long been home to some of the poorest children in the country. Over 13% of children in Louisiana live in extreme poverty—that is, in families with incomes less than half of the federal poverty level, or \$9,675 for a family of four—compared to a national average of 7%. These children are disproportionately African American.

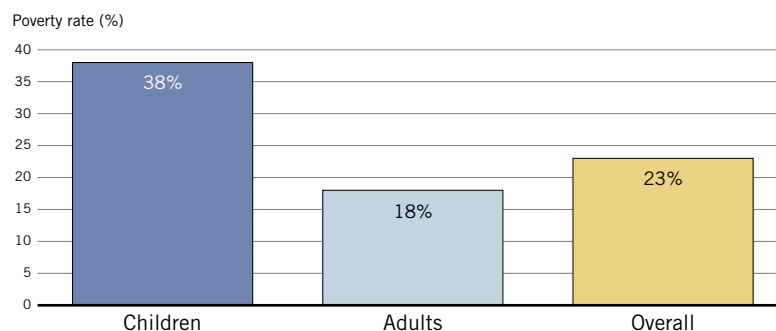
These were, and are, families left behind, physically trapped in areas of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama because they also are trapped by poverty. They had no way out because they have few resources—cash, assets, credit cards, bank accounts, cars, and more. Before Katrina, these families experienced hardship, hunger, and other circumstances that make it difficult for children to thrive. Now many face far worse conditions.

## New Orleans

**New Orleans has an extraordinarily high rate of child poverty.**

- In New Orleans, 38% of children live in poverty (17% U.S.). The federal poverty level is \$16,090 for a family of three and \$19,350 for a family of four.

**Rates of poverty in New Orleans, 2004**



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### Many New Orleans residents face economic hardship.

- One in five (21%) households in New Orleans do not have a car (9% U.S.).
- 8% of households in New Orleans have no phone service (4% U.S.).
- Over half (53%) of New Orleans' residents are renters (33% U.S.), and 41% (36% U.S.) of renting families spend more than 35% of their income on rent.

## Gulf Coast states hit hardest by Katrina: Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama

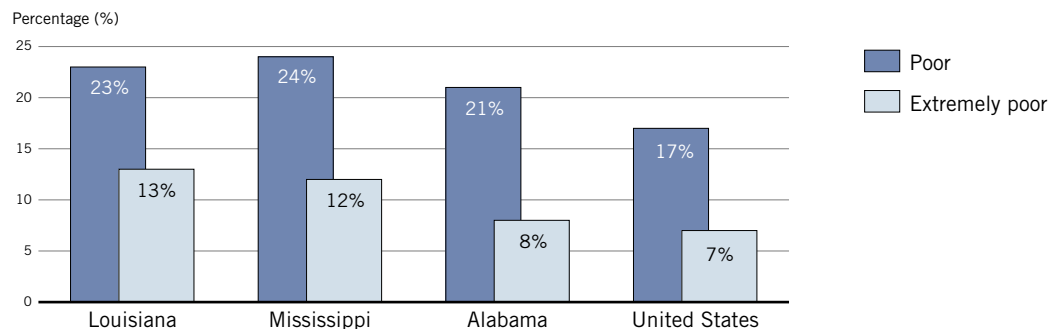
### Rates of extreme child poverty in these Gulf Coast states are among the highest in the country.

- In Louisiana, 13% of children live in extreme poverty—the second highest rate of extreme child poverty in the country.
- In Mississippi, 12% of children live in extreme poverty.
- In Alabama, 8% of children live in extreme poverty.
- Across the United States, 7% of children live in extreme poverty.

### Child poverty rates in these states are also higher than the national average.

- 23% of children in Louisiana live in poor families.
- Nearly one quarter (24%) of children in Mississippi live in poverty.
- 21% of children in Alabama live in poor families.
- Across the United States, 17% of children live in poor families

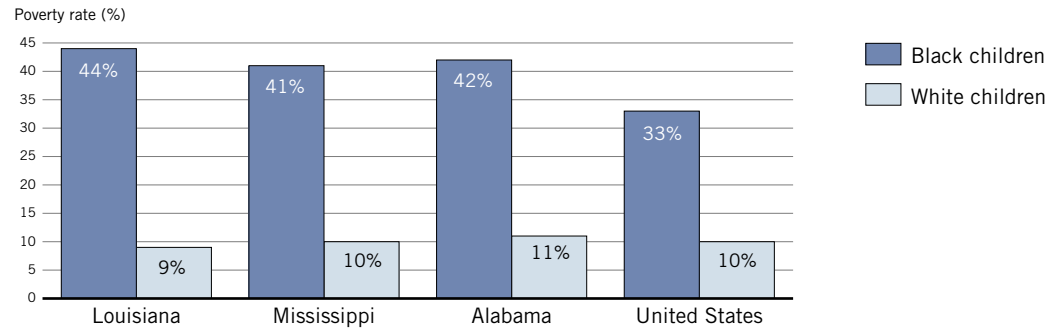
Percent of children in poor and extremely poor families, 2004



## What are the characteristics of poor children in these three Gulf Coast states?

### Black children are far more likely to live in poor families.

- In Louisiana, 44% of black children live in poor families, while 9% of white children live in poor families.
- In Mississippi, 41% of black children live in poor families, while 10% of white children live in poor families.
- In Alabama, 42% of black children live in poor families, while 11% of white children live in poor families.
- Across the United States, 33% of black children live in poor families; 10% of white children live in poor families.

**Child poverty by race, 2004****Young children are more likely to live in poor families.**

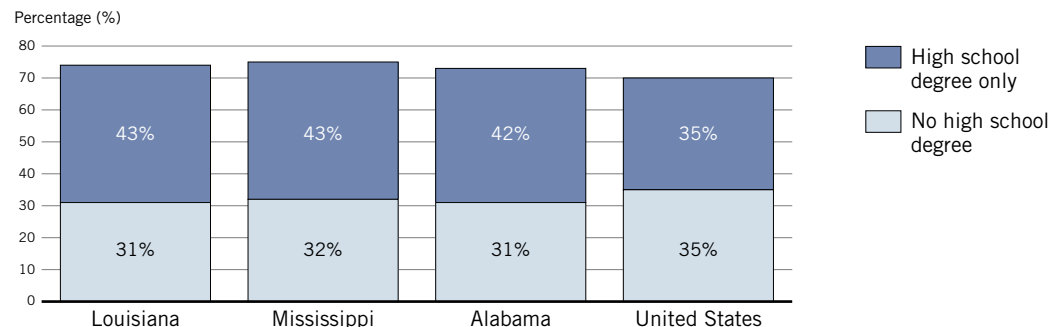
- In Louisiana, 31% of children under age 6 live in poor families; 19% of children age 6 or older live in poor families.
- In Mississippi, 26% of children under age 6 live in poor families; 23% of children age 6 or older live in poor families.
- In Alabama, 25% of children under age 6 live in poor families; 19% of children age 6 or older live in poor families.
- Across the United States, 20% of children under age 6 live in poor families; 16% of children age 6 or older live in poor families.

**Many poor children in the Gulf Coast region lack health insurance.**

- In Louisiana, 19% of poor children are uninsured.
- In Mississippi, 16% of poor children are uninsured
- In Alabama, 12% of poor children are uninsured.
- Across the United States, 19% of poor children are uninsured.

**Poor children are likely to have parents with low levels of educational attainment.**

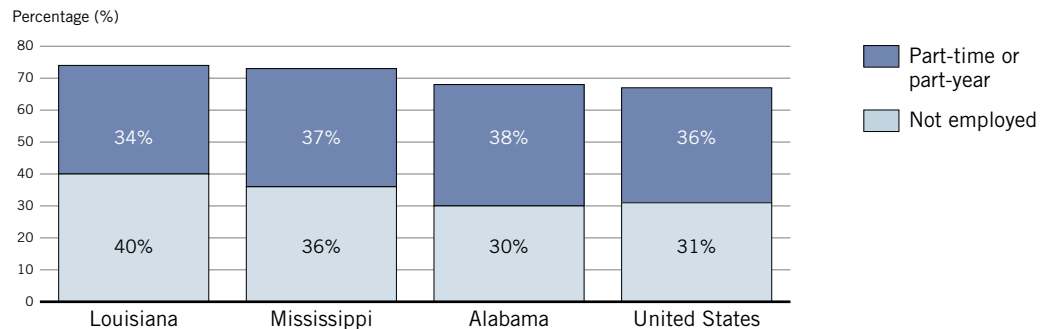
- In Louisiana, 74% of poor children have parents with a high school degree or less.
- Poor children in other states in the Gulf Coast region are likely to have parents with low levels of educational attainment (see chart below).

**Parental education level of poor children, 2004**

### Poor families experience high rates of unemployment and underemployment.

- In Louisiana, 40% of children in poor families do not have an employed parent. 34% of children in poor families have at least one parent who is employed either part-year or part-time.
- Poor families in other states in the Gulf Coast region experience rates of unemployment and underemployment higher than the national average (see chart below).

Parental employment status of poor children, 2004



### Poverty in the United States continues to rise.

Although the hurricane hit one part of America, poor and extremely poor children can be found in every state. In fact, the day after Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast, the U.S. Census Bureau released numbers showing that in 2004, the poverty rate rose again—it has risen every year since 2000. With 12 million children living in poverty across the nation, it is time to make the issue a topic of national concern.

### Notes

*This fact sheet was prepared by Sarah Fass and Nancy K. Cauthen.*

Sources: Figures for New Orleans are from the American Community Survey, 2004. State data were calculated from the U.S. Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement, March 2003, 2004, and 2005, which represents information from calendar years 2002, 2003, and 2004. NCCP averaged three years of data because of small sample sizes in less populated states. National data were calculated from 2005 data, representing information from calendar year 2004. Only children who live with at least one parent are counted. Estimates were prepared by Ayana Douglas-Hall and Heather Koball.

For state-level and national demographic data, see the National Center for Children in Poverty web site:

[www.nccp.org](http://www.nccp.org)