

SPECIAL SECTION

POST-KATRINA NEW ORLEANS: A Welcoming Community?

As we contemplated the fifth anniversary of Hurricane Katrina (August 29, 2010), it seemed to our staff that a key prism through which to view these five years was how New Orleans was or was not a welcoming community—first, to the poor, the elderly, and people of color who often were least able to weather the storm and its aftermath; and, second, how we welcomed those migrants who came to help rebuild our homes, our offices, and our communities.

On Saturday, September 11, 2010, we presented *Post-Katrina New Orleans: A Welcoming Community?* In this report, we include the presentations of our two morning keynoters, Jarvis DeBerry of *The Times Picayune* and Dr. Allison Plyer of the Greater New Orleans Community Data Center.



Changing Demographics in

By Allison Plyer, M.B.A., Sc.D., and Elaine Ortiz, M.S., Greater New Orleans Community Data Center

Hurricane Katrina and the subsequent levee failures caused perhaps the largest forced migration in the history of the U.S. since the Dust Bowl. The population of New Orleans plunged nearly overnight, but within weeks the city was reopened and residents were encouraged to return. St. Bernard and Plaquemines parishes also sustained heavy flooding resulting in significant population loss from these parishes. And Jefferson Parish experienced less severe damage but lost population nonetheless. Consequently, the demographics of the entire New Orleans area were changed. Five years later, the demographics in the city and the metro area continue to evolve as pre-Katrina residents trickle home and new residents arrive.

Diversity

According to the Census Bureau's 2010 population counts, there are 118,526 fewer African Americans living in New Orleans compared to 2000. Nonetheless, the share of the city's 2010 population that is African American—while lower than in 2000 when it was 67 percent—continues to represent the majority at 60 percent.

Orleans, Jefferson, and St. Tammany have gained more diverse populations. The number of African Americans has grown in all seven metro area parishes except Orleans and Plaquemines. There have also been notable increases in the number of Asians in St. Tammany and Jefferson. And the number of Latinos has grown in all parishes in the metro area with the exception of St. Bernard. Between 2000 and 2010, the share of Hispanics increased to 12.4 percent (+21,284) in Jefferson, 5.2 percent (+3,225) in Orleans, and 4.7 percent (+6,233) in St. Tammany. Nonetheless, at 7.9 percent, the share of Hispanics in metro area parishes is still far below the average for the United States.¹

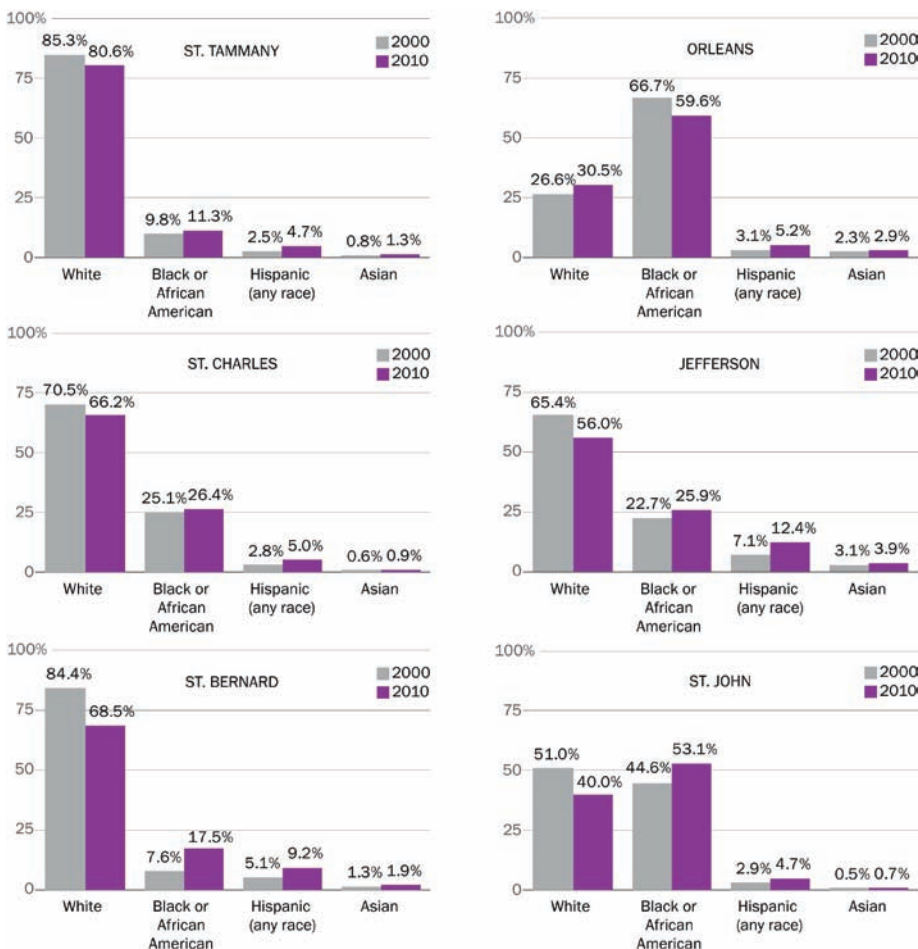
Poverty

Poverty in New Orleans has historically been high—at 28 percent in 1999 compared to 12 percent nationally. However, the poor have been among the least likely to return to New Orleans, such that poverty fell to 24 percent by 2009. Meanwhile, poverty rates held steady in Jefferson Parish at 14 percent and in St. Tammany Parish at 10 percent. In contrast, the poverty rate in the United States increased from 12 percent to 14 percent between 1999 and 2009.

Children and elderly

Among the poor who have had difficulties returning home are a very large number of children. In every parish except St. Bernard, children are now a smaller percentage of the population than in 2000. In contrast, the share of elderly is unchanged or increased in all parishes except St. Bernard, indicating that the elderly have been more likely to return than other age groups.

RACE/ETHNICITY by parish for metro area parishes



SOURCE: GNOCDC analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data from Census 2000 and 2010.

the New Orleans Area

Some factors affecting return

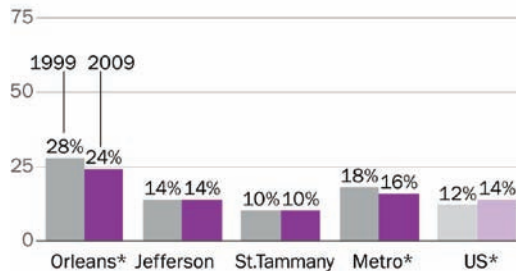
According to research from other disasters, families with children are less likely to return to or move to a disaster damaged area.² Data from Hurricane Katrina's effects certainly supports this finding. A number of factors may have contributed to this. Few schools, child care centers, and health care services were available in the first two years after Hurricane Katrina. In addition, parents might have been reluctant to re-expose their children to the hardship of periodic evacuations, and parents new to New Orleans might want to avoid living in a seemingly disaster-prone area.

High post-Katrina housing costs were also a significant obstacle to returning. In 2004, median rental costs (rent plus utilities) in New Orleans were \$643 per month, indicating that thousands of rentals were available for \$300 to \$500. But many of these non-subsidized, inexpensive rentals were destroyed by the flood. By 2009, median rental costs had risen 37 percent to \$881 per month. Renter costs are now higher than the national average in many comparable cities. Rents in Jefferson are equal to New Orleans', and even higher in St. Tammany.

Homeowner costs (including mortgage payments, taxes, insurance, and utilities) also increased post-Katrina, although not as much as rental costs. As a result, the share of renters has fallen from 54 percent in 2000 to 49 percent in 2009 in the city of New Orleans, and from 20 percent to 18 percent in St. Tammany.

The biggest obstacle to bringing home previous residents and attracting new residents will likely be the economy. Although the New Orleans area has weathered the recession relatively well, losing only 1.4 percent of all jobs between the third quarter of 2008 and 2009 compared to the national loss rate of 4.7 percent, the recession has stalled local jobs recovery. The metro area now has only 15,100 more jobs than at the lowest point of the 1987 oil bust. Both the pre-Katrina residents who want to return and new prospective residents will be hesitant to move to New Orleans without job prospects.

POVERTY RATE in the three most populous parishes, the metro, and the United States



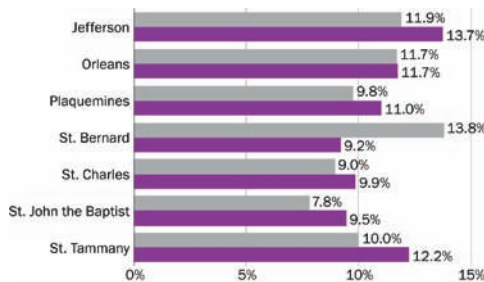
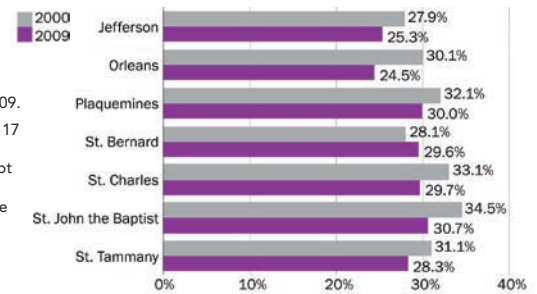
SOURCE: GNOCDC analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data from Census 2000 and American Community Survey 2009.

* Difference between 1999 and 2009 significant at 95% confidence interval.

PERCENT CHILDREN 19 years and younger

SOURCE: GNOCDC analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data from Census 2000 and Population Estimates 2009.

NOTES: Census 2010 data on percent of population 17 years and younger validate that there have been declines in the share of children in every parish except St. Bernard Parish. The 2009 estimates for the population 19 years and younger are presented to be consistent with the 2009 estimates available for the population 65 years and older.



PERCENT ELDERLY 65 years and older

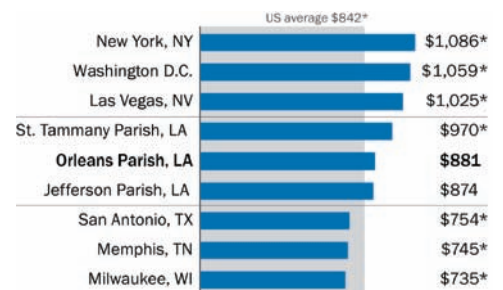
SOURCE: GNOCDC analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data from Census 2000 and Population Estimates 2009.

NOTES: Census 2010 data on percent of population 65 years and older is not yet available, but will be released in the summer 2011.

RENT COMPARISON across cities median gross monthly housing costs for rentals of any size, 2009

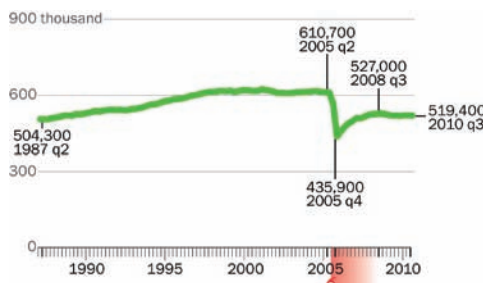
Source: GNOCDC analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data from the American Community Survey 2009.

* Statistically different from Orleans Parish at 95% confidence interval



ENDNOTES

- Census 2010 counts of the population by ethnicity are not yet available for the United States. However, the Census Bureau estimate of the share of Hispanics in the United States was 15.8 percent for 2009.
- Kirschenbaum, A. 1996. "Residential Ambiguity and Relocation Decisions: Population and Areas at Risk." *International Journal of Mass Evacuation and Disasters* 14(1):79-95.



JOBS

Non-farm, New Orleans metro

Sources: GNOCDC compilation of data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and Moody's Economy.com Database (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics: CES, QCEW).

Notes: Data is seasonally adjusted.



Suffering in the Land of Plenty

by Jarvis DeBerry, Editorial Writer and Columnist for *The Times-Picayune*

If we accept Reinhold Niebuhr's claim that it's inevitable that man will sin but not necessary that he does, then it should be easy enough to accept a similar premise regarding poverty: We will always have the poor among us, although there's no legitimate reason that we ever should.

That wasn't always clear to me at first. In Jesus' oft-quoted remark to his disciples, "The poor you shall have with you always," I heard a certain defeatism, a divine declaration that poverty is a problem so intractable that working for its eradication is futile. I didn't know that Jesus was himself quoting Scripture. *Deuteronomy 15*. In the fourth verse of that chapter, we're told that there is to be no poverty in the land. Seven verses later: "There will always be poor people in the land."

We are not supposed to simply make note of said poverty and then focus our attention elsewhere. To the contrary. The statement that poverty will endure precedes an imperative: "Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land."

There should be no poor people in New Orleans. A drive up or down certain parts of St. Charles Avenue or Prytania Street might convince a visitor that there aren't any. But drive a few blocks away in either direction, and one not only sees the poverty, but remembers that it will always be here and that it always has.

Hurricane Katrina made much of the world more aware of the staggering poverty that characterizes much of New Orleans, but one would have to be in great denial to say the storm created that poverty. What Katrina did was make a bad situation worse. Before the storm, many were poor but the cost of living was generally low. Since the storm, the cost of living has skyrocketed. Living here comes at a premium, which leaves so many former residents aching for home.

But it hasn't been just market forces that have kept many people from returning. Local politicians and policy makers who were hostile to the interests of the poor before Katrina have used the occasion of the city's rebuilding and recovery to amplify their expressed hatred for the poor.

In 2006, Volunteers of America proposed building a 200-unit apartment complex in Terrytown to be inhabited by the elderly. That proposal, along with any other that would seek to provide decent housing for low-income residents, was virulently opposed by Jefferson Parish Councilman Chris Roberts. He didn't want to give people who had lived in the projects in New Orleans any opportunity to move into Jefferson Parish, adding, "With the number of jobs out there, nobody should be on public housing unless you're ignorant or lazy."

In expressing support for Roberts' heartless position, a West Bank developer used the world's most transparent code language. "I would say now we're just getting a disproportionate share of the lower-income families than we had before," he said. "It's changing the whole *complexion* of the area."

Speaking of complexion, James Perry, executive director of the Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center, spoke recently about an online ad offering a rental property in the area. "Not racist," the ad read, "but whites only."

In St. Bernard Parish, the Parish Council tried to push through a blood-kin ordinance, which, generally speaking, would have barred anybody in the parish from renting to non-relatives. Giving the overwhelming percentage of white homeowners, that ordinance would have been a fairly reliable method of keeping non-white renters from moving into St. Bernard.

In New Orleans, former City Councilwoman Cynthia Willard-Lewis,

who campaigned in 2006 on the "right" of everybody to return, proved to be no different than Chris Roberts. She was opposed to tax credits being used to fund big apartment complexes in the East. She was even opposed to a plan that would build single-family homes that would average \$200K each.

Such "cheap" homes, she argued, would bring down the property values of those living in the nearby Lake Carmel neighborhood.

More recently, Gov. Bobby Jindal—in his slavish devotion to balancing the budget without raising taxes—cut funding for food pantries across the state by 90 percent: reducing its annual expenditure from \$5 million to \$500,000. That's a cut of 3.6 million meals across the state of Louisiana.

How welcoming has New Orleans been to the poor after Hurricane Katrina? Not very. And that's in direct contradiction to the imperative in *Deuteronomy 15* to be openhanded toward those who are in need.

It's distressing that such stinginess, such hardheartedness has followed a catastrophe that caused indiscriminate suffering. One may have predicted that in a city where suffering was all-inclusive that the people who remained here would have their hearts pricked, that they would be more sensitive needs of the poor. Instead, selfishness has increased, and some residents have used their own losses to justify not extending a hand to those who are worse off.

The complete eradication of poverty, therefore, seems to be impossible not because we lack the resources to make it happen but because not even a Katrina-sized catastrophe is powerful enough to universally convert hearts toward generosity.

It's inevitable that the poor will be with us, but it's not necessary that anybody suffer in a land of such plenty.