

A Portrait of Louisiana is a publication of the American Human Development Project commissioned by Oxfam America and the Louisiana Disaster Recovery Foundation (LDRF).

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LDRF at 225-383-1672 or info@louisianahelp.org or
Foundation for the Mid South at 601-355-8167 or info@fndmidsouth.org

The Human Development Index for Louisiana is comprised of the following indicators:

A Long and Healthy Life is measured using life expectancy at birth. The sources are Louisiana's Office of Public Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Access to Knowledge is measured using two indicators: school enrollment for the population age 3 and older, and educational degree attainment for the population 25 years and older. Both indicators are from the American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau.

A Decent Standard of Living is measured using median earnings of all full- and part-time workers 16 years and older from the American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau.

A PORTRAIT OF LOUISIANA

Executive Summary

By Sarah Burd-Sharps, Kristen Lewis, and Eduardo Borges Martins

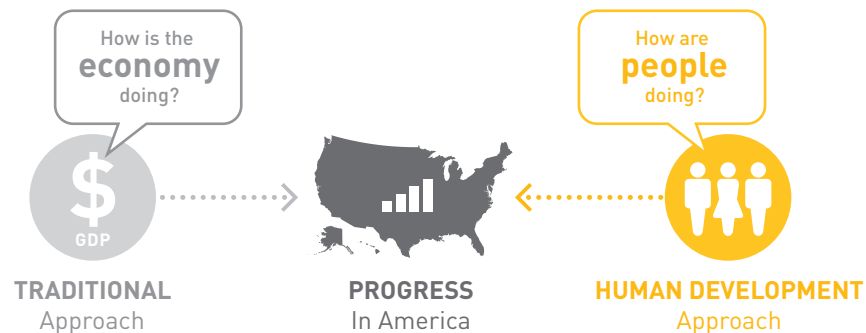
The human development level of Louisiana compared with that of the rest of the country, as well as racial and gender disparities within the state, are evidence of significant and widespread vulnerabilities. These long-standing vulnerabilities, everywhere in evidence when Hurricanes Katrina and Rita hit, persist today.

Although *A Portrait of Louisiana*, which uses official, post-Katrina data from 2007, tells a sobering tale, the human development approach and Index provide innovative tools to help overcome the challenges Louisiana faces. In over 160 countries, human development reports have proved to be powerful vehicles for identifying barriers to progress, fostering accountability, and shaping alternative solutions. It is the hope of the Louisiana Disaster Recovery Foundation, the Foundation for the Mid South, Oxfam America, and the American Human Development Project that this report can stimulate dialogue and support action to reverse the trends of the past. As recovery continues, Louisiana can draw on its unique cultural heritage, its rich natural resources, and its deeply rooted, committed, and optimistic population to create a new and better future for all.

What is Human Development and How is it Measured?

The human development model emphasizes the everyday experience of ordinary people; it is about what regular men and women can be and do. It encompasses a host of factors that shape people's opportunities and enable them to live lives of meaning, choice, and value—the capability to participate in the decisions that affect one's life, to earn a decent living, to have access to a quality education and affordable health care, to live free from fear and violence, and many more.

The approach was developed at the United Nations as a response to the failure of purely economic metrics to capture how people are faring. Its hallmark is the **Human Development Index**, a measure that reflects what most people believe are the basic ingredients of human well-being: health, education, and income. The Index combines indicators on these three areas into one easy-to-understand number, allowing for a shared frame of reference for assessing well-being and making apples-to-apples comparison from place to place and from year to year.



Key Findings on Louisiana

Who's Better Off in Louisiana?

OVERALL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

WHITE



AFRICAN AMERICAN



HEALTH

WHITE



AFRICAN AMERICAN



EDUCATION

WHITE



AFRICAN AMERICAN



INCOME

WHITE



AFRICAN AMERICAN



COMPARISONS BY PARISH

The distance separating the top and bottom on the overall Human Development Index is particularly striking because both extremes are found in the Baton Rouge area. A resident of East Baton Rouge (South)–West Baton Rouge can expect to live, on average, nearly five years longer, earns twice as much, and is three times less likely to have dropped out of high school than a resident of East Baton Rouge (North and Central). (See map).

Life expectancy by parish group spans a seven-and-a-half-year range, from just under 71 years in Orleans (East) to 78.4 years in the Vernon-Beauregard parish group, five mostly rural parishes on or near Texas's eastern border.

In education, roughly one in twelve adults in East Baton Rouge (South)–West Baton Rouge did not complete high school, compared to nearly one in three adults in the St. Landry–Evangeline parish group.

Median personal earnings range from \$16,398 in East Baton Rouge (North and Central) to double that sum—\$32,631—in East Baton Rouge (South)–West Baton Rouge.

COMPARISONS BY RACE

White Louisianans living in Orleans Southwest (including the neighborhoods of Uptown, Carrollton, Central City, and the Garden District) have an HD Index score that bests the top-ranked U.S. state of Connecticut. At the other end of the spectrum, African Americans living in rural Tangipahoa Parish have an HD Index score that corresponds to the human development level of the average American in the early 1950s. Orleans Southwest whites can expect to live, on average, a full decade longer, are more than six times more likely to have a college degree, and earn two and a half times more than Tangipahoa African Americans.

White life expectancy at birth in Louisiana today is, on average, 76.6 years, compared with 72.2 years for African Americans, a life span shorter than that of the average person in Colombia, Vietnam, and Venezuela today.

In education, racial disparities in Louisiana are significant. Nearly one in three African American adults age 25 and over has not graduated from high school.

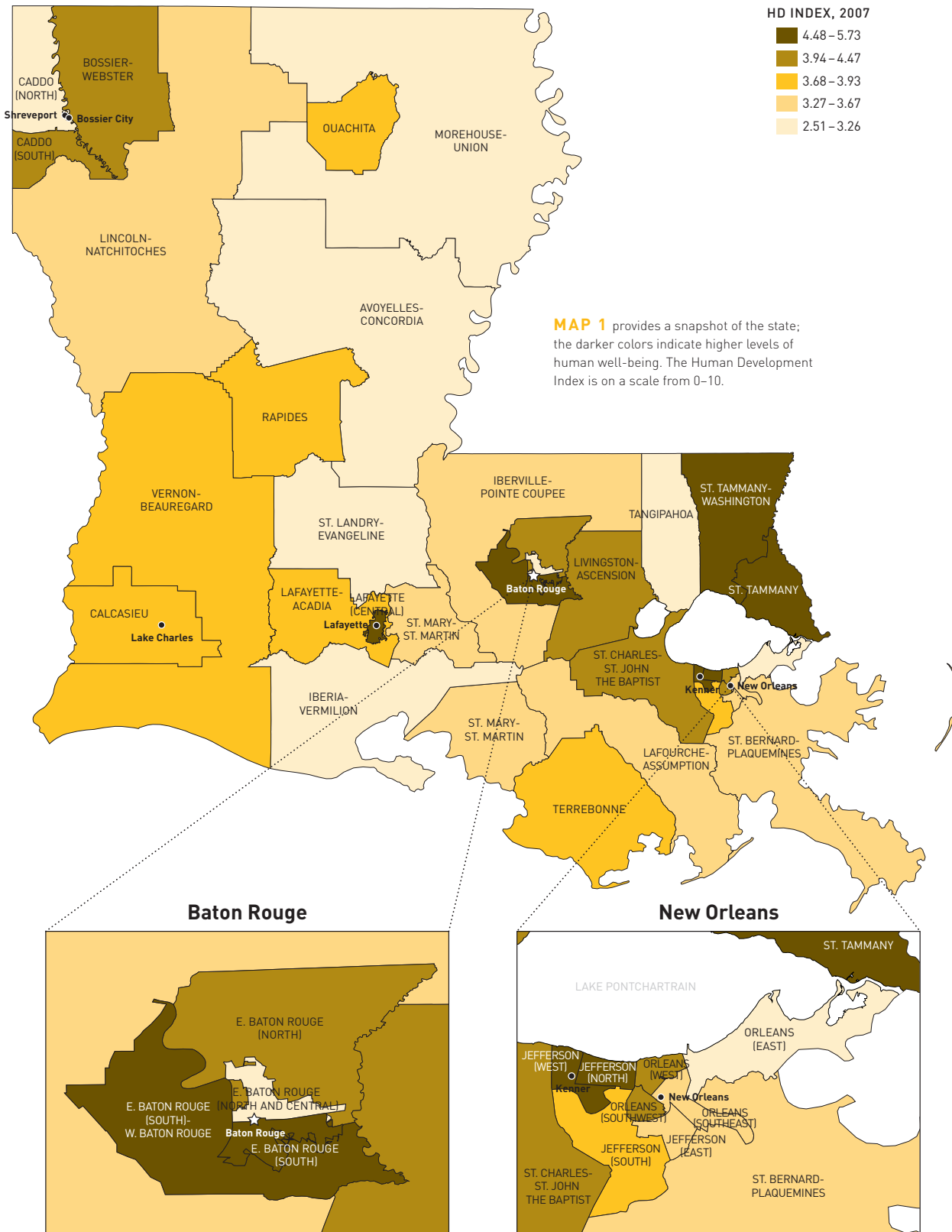
Earnings range from \$25,000 to \$37,000 for whites by parish group, while for African Americans earnings range from \$13,000 to \$25,500. Thus whites earning the least have wages and salaries on par with those of African Americans earning the most.

COMPARISONS BY GENDER

When both race and gender are taken into account, white males in Louisiana have the highest level of human development, followed closely by white females. African American women come in next, and African American men hold the last spot, with a human development level comparable to that of the average American in the late 1960s.

While the survival and educational attainment gaps between males and females in Louisiana reflect national trends, the wage gaps do not. Median earnings of white men in Louisiana were, at \$37,000, on par with U.S. earnings for white men. White women's earnings in Louisiana are a remarkable \$16,000 less than those of their male counterparts, and nearly \$3,000 below the national average for white women.

MAP 1 LOUISIANA HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX



What will it take to boost **Louisiana's** score on the American Human Development Index?

Progress depends on us all: people themselves, the public sector, the business community, civic and philanthropic organizations, religious institutions, and the media. Recovery funds coupled with stimulus monies are providing unprecedented levels of resources that, if invested in building people's capabilities, can serve to expand the choices and opportunities of current and future generations of Louisianans. Concerted actions in the following areas are vital if Louisiana's HD scores are to improve over time:

HEALTH

Improve the health of African American men.

Their premature death, often from preventable causes, is a source of heartbreak and economic distress for Louisiana families and communities.

Reduce infant mortality by improving the well-being of African American girls and women.

Risk factors such as inadequate prenatal care, teen pregnancy, and poorly treated chronic health conditions among girls and women must be addressed in order to reduce infant mortality rates in Louisiana.

Improve access to mental health services.

Critical needs to be addressed include affordable housing for mental health professionals and people with severe mental illness, improved insurance coverage rates, increased school-based mental health programs, and more employment options for those with mentally illness.

Dramatically reduce the nation's highest homicide rate.

Three proven solutions are to improve high school completion rates, to enact commonsense gun laws, and to better prepare released prisoners for a law-abiding life of dignity and opportunity after prison.

EDUCATION

Improve the quality and quantity of education in Louisiana.

Education is the engine of opportunity and a key determinant of income, health, civic participation, and crime outcomes.

INCOME

Ensure that working families can make ends meet.

Boosting incomes with programs that have worked well in other states, combating discrimination, and investing in the skills of girls and African American children are vital to enable everyone to reach their full potential and become productive citizens.

OTHER HUMAN DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES

Bring back housing and make it affordable.

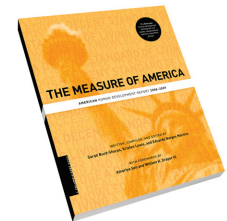
Rebuilding subsidized housing and replacing rental units, particularly near where jobs are, are critical to Louisiana's recovery.

Protect people from environmental risks and hazards.

The need to restore wetlands, address environmental injustice in the siting of polluting industries, and build the capacity of the disadvantaged to respond to severe weather events is urgent.

Improve data collection and establish clear indicators for success.

Federal hurricane recovery dollars directed to Louisiana thus far are equivalent to \$44,000 for every family. Evidence from disaster recovery around the world suggests that during the rebuilding phase, power and resources can become further concentrated in the hands of elites. Oversight and reporting on contracts and progress must be regular and transparent. Equally critical is that Louisianans raise their voices to demand accountability.



THE MEASURE OF AMERICA: *American Human Development Report 2008-2009*, released July 2008, was the first effort to use a well-honed international approach to assess the well-being of different population groups within the United States. It included a Human Development (HD) Index, a numerical measure of well-being and opportunity made up of health, education, and income indicators.

www.measureofamerica.org

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The American Human Development Project is a nonprofit initiative of the Social Science Research Council that aims to stimulate fact-based dialogue about human development issues in the U.S. *A Portrait of Louisiana* is a special report made possible with funding from Oxfam America and the Foundation for the Mid South.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Sarah Burd-Sharps and **Kristen Lewis** are co-directors of the American Human Development Project. They both previously worked on human development issues at both the community and macro levels in over 40 developing nations.

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ABOUT THE DESIGN

Humantific | UnderstandingLab is an internationally recognized Visual SenseMaking firm located in New York and Madrid.