

Demographic and Socio-Economic Change in Relation to Gender and Hurricane Katrina¹

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New Orleans was ranked the 38th largest city in the United States (population estimate 454,863) by the U.S. Census Bureau on July 1, 2005. One year later, the city was ranked 82nd, with a population estimate of 223,388, a loss of approximately 50 percent. By November 2007, the population of New Orleans had reached 70.5 of its pre-Katrina level. However, the city's growth slowed somewhat with repopulation now at 74 percent of its pre-Katrina level as of December 2008.² Many have struggled to return, and many are still struggling, particularly low-wage workers unable to find jobs that pay a living wage, affordable housing, adequate transportation, and/or childcare. In this chapter, we examine several demographic factors such as sex, age, race and ethnicity, marital status, birth rate, and poverty, to determine how the demographic profile of New

Orleans women has changed post-Katrina, and what factors might account for the change.³

Sex and Gender. Table III-1 presents data on the New Orleans population by sex, age, and race/ethnicity pre- and post-Katrina. As can be seen, on average, the population loss in Orleans Parish has been greater for females than for males (-45.2 for females and -40.2 percent for males between 2005 and 2007). Given that recovery from disasters requires the type of physical labor traditionally associated with the male role, it was expected that men would return to New Orleans in greater numbers. Men did return in greater number, particularly in the months immediately following the storm, but leveled off within the year as more women returned to the city. However, repopulation by males, coupled with the immigration of males,

Table III-1. Sex by Race/Ethnicity of the New Orleans Population: 2005, 2006, 2007 and Percent Change

	2005	2006	2007	% Change 2005-07**
TOTAL POPULATION	437,186	223,388	239,124	- 45.3
• Male	203,902	102,463	111,171	- 40.2*
• Female	233,284	120,925	127,953	- 45.2*
Female as % of Total Population	53.4	54.1	53.5	
Population White (%)	122,622 (28.)	82,107 (36.8)	79,633 (33.3)	- 35.1*
• White Female (%)	61,374 (50.1)	41,872 (51.0)	40,451 (50.8)	- 34.1*
Population Black/African American (%)	295,259 (67.5)	131,441 (58.8)	145,000 (60.6)	- 50.9*
• Black/African American Female	162,571 (55.1)	74,070 (56.4)	80,892 (55.8)	- 50.2*
Population Hispanic/Latino	13,679 (3.1)	9,139 (4.1)	10,757 (4.5)	- 21.4
• Hispanic/Latina	6,809 (49.8)	5,064 (55.4)	5,377 (50.0)	- 21.0*

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005, 2006, and 2007 American Community Survey. Data Profiles: New Orleans city, "General Demographic Characteristics: 2005 (2006, 2007)"; "Demographic and Housing Estimates 2006"; Orleans Parish, Detailed Tables B01001 A-I, "Sex by Age"; B01002 A-I, "Median Age by Sex."

* Indicates statistical significance at a 90% confidence level

**The formula used for percent change is: Current (2007) or Time 2 minus Past (2005) or Time 1; divided by Time 1, times 100.

led to a slightly greater growth of the male population than female population between 2006 and 2007 (8.5 percent increase for males vs. 5.8 percent increase for females).

As shown in Table III-1, despite the greater growth of the male population, the proportion of women in the total population has remained relatively stable at approximately 53 to 54 percent. Compared with pre-Katrina population estimates, the proportion of women within each race/ethnic demographic group also remained relatively stable with only slight fluctuations between 2005 and 2006, and 2006 and 2007. The greatest change was an approximate increase of 5 percent in the proportion of Hispanic/Latinas from 2005 to 2006, which could be due also to the under-reporting of Hispanic/Latino males. In 2007, Black/African American women comprised 55.8 percent of the Black/African American population; White females 50.8 percent of the White population; and Hispanic/Latinas 50 percent of the Hispanic/Latino population. In summary, women have been, and continue to be a numerical majority of the New Orleans population, as well as half—or the majority—within each demographic group. This fact is an important consideration for disaster management as well as for social, economic and political re-building.

Race and Ethnicity. As noted in most post-Katrina reports, the racial and ethnic composition of the New Orleans population has changed as a result of the storm. Population loss among Black/African Americans has been greatest. In 2005, approximately 68 percent of the city was Black/African American compared with 59 percent in 2006 (Table III-1). Repopulation by Blacks/African Americans rebounded slightly in 2007, increasing to 61%. In contrast, a post-Katrina immigrant wave of Hispanic/Latinos contributed to a population increase of Hispanics/Latinos. While the Census Bureau estimates the Hispanic/Latino population experienced a non-statistically significant increase from 3.6 percent to 4.1 percent of the total population in

2006, to 4.5 percent in 2007, the extent of the Hispanic/Latino presence does not appear to have been well captured in official reporting systems, possibly due to the large numbers of undocumented workers, largely male, who are employed in the construction trades helping to rebuild the city.

Age. Table III-2 demonstrates there was also a shift in the age of the New Orleans population with younger women tending to be less likely than older women to return to the city. In fact, the greatest recorded loss for both males and females between 2005 and 2007 was in the youngest age group, those under-18 years of age (60.7 percent for girls; 61.6 percent for boys [not shown]). As a result, between 2005 and 2007, the median age for all women increased: White women increased from 44.1 to 46.7 years; Black/African American from 34.1 to 39.6 years; and Hispanic/Latinas increased from 41 to 44.7 years.⁴ This “aging” of New Orleans women was due largely to the decrease in the population of girls under-18, and secondarily to the smaller loss of women over-65 years of age.

While the total female population declined by 45.2 percent between 2005 and 2007 (Table III-1), the population of women 65 years and over declined by just 36.5 percent (Table III-2). In general, older women increased slightly as a percent of the total female population. However, this increase was due primarily to White and Hispanic/Latina women—the number of Hispanic/Latinas actually increased 36 percent, while the proportion of older White women dropped 23.6 percent. In contrast, the proportion of Black/African American women over-65 years dropped 44.4 percent from 2005 to 2007. Thus, Black/African American women over-65 years, although still larger in number than White or Hispanic/Latina women over-65, decreased substantially as a percent of the over-65 female population. As life-expectancy is greater for women than for men, we would expect

Table III-2. Sex by Age and Race/Ethnicity of the New Orleans Population: 2005, 2006, 2007 and Percent Change

	2005	2006	2007	% Change 2005-07
Female under-18 Yrs (% female pop.)	55,084(23.6)	25,964 (21.5)	21,623 (16.9%)	- 60.7*
• White	8,440 (15.3)	5,094 (19.6)	3,190 (14.8)	- 62.2*
• Black/African American	44,559 (80.9)	19,952 (76.8)	17,163 (79.4)	- 61.5*
• Hispanic/Latina	1,306 (2.4)	1,147 (4.4)	492 (2.3)	- 62.3*
Female 18 Yrs and Older (% female pop.)	178,200 (76.4)	94,961 (78.5)	106,330 (83.1)	- 40.3*
Female 65 Yrs and Older (% female pop.)	29,673 (12.7)	19,712 (16.3)	18,837 (14.7)	- 36.5*
• White	12,025 (40.5)	9,570 (48.5)	9,190 (48.8)	- 20.4*
• Black/African American	16,746 (56.4)	9,773 (49.6)	9,317 (49.5)	- 41.6*
• Hispanic/Latina	1,074 (3.6)	808 (4.1)	1,461 (7.8)	+ 36.0
Median Age Female	36.8 Yrs	42.1 Yrs	41.1 Yrs	
• White	44.1	46.4	46.7	
• Black/African American	34.1	41.0	39.6	
• Hispanic/Latina	41.0	29.4	44.7	

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. 2005, 2006, and 2007 American Community Survey. Data Profiles: New Orleans city, "General Demographic Characteristics: 2005 (2006, 2007)"; "Demographic and Housing Estimates 2006"; Orleans Parish, Detailed Tables B01001 A-I, "Sex by Age"; B01002 A-I, "Median Age by Sex."

* Indicates statistical significance at a 90% confidence level

the over-65 female population to be larger than the over-65 male population. However, given that the narrative experiences of older women spoke of great loss and dislocation as a result of the storm, coupled with the high storm-related morbidity rate of women ages 61 and over, it is noteworthy that so many survived the ordeal.⁵ Despite their resilience, this is a group that requires additional assistance both prior to and following a disaster and their higher proportion would indicate a greater need for services for the elderly.

Marital Status. Table III-3 presents an account of marital status, births and family households in New Orleans, pre- and post-Katrina. As can be seen, the marital status of women changed little in the year following the storm. However, there was a statistically significant jump in the proportion of never-married women between 2006 and 2007, from 30.7 percent to 45.5 percent; and a decline in the percent of married women, from 36.1 percent to 27.5 percent.

This may be due to the greater liberty and fewer impediments of unattached women to return or move to a city with a damaged infrastructure. The increase in never married women from 2006 to 2007 might also signal the return of single mothers as indicated in Table III-4. Overall, however, the changes observed in women's marital status from 2005 to 2007 are slight relative to other changes and do not alone appear to have a significant bearing on the repopulation of women to New Orleans.

Households. With respect to family and non-family households, New Orleans' has had significantly fewer family households than the average nationally. In 2005, approximately 55 percent of all New Orleans households were family households (90,461 of 163,334 households), compared to a national average of 67 percent.⁶ Additionally, compared to the nation as a whole, a much larger percent of New Orleans family households were female-headed. In 2005, more than twice

as many New Orleans family households were headed by women as nationally (41 percent compared to 18.8 percent respectively). One year after the storm, the number of female-headed households dropped to 31 percent of all New Orleans family households, and then increased slightly to 34.6 percent of all family households in 2007, marking a sizeable decrease over pre-Katrina levels but still among the highest urban levels in the United States. As would be predicted, the largest decrease in female-headed households was among households with children under-18 years of age, declining by 61.2 percent in 2007 from the pre-Katrina level. This significant drop in female-headed households will be difficult to reclaim given the continued shortage of city resources, yet the slight increase in female-headed households between 2006 and 2007 seems to indicate that some single mothers have found the means to return home.

Grandparents. Households in which grandparents were responsible for grandchildren under-18 also declined more than did family households overall, dropping by 65.2 percent in 2006 and rebounding slightly in 2007 to record a 58 percent decline from 2005. At the same time, the percent of grandmothers who had responsibility for their grandchildren has increased over time from 73 percent in 2005, to 85 percent in 2006, to 90 percent in 2007.⁷ These facts again highlight the barriers preventing the return of women with children to New Orleans and point to the fragmentation of family households.

Births. Table III-3 also provides data on the birthrate. The year following the storm marked significant changes in births among women of childbearing age, defined as ages 15 to 50. The overall birthrate was down 45.1 percent with the largest drop recorded among women under-19 years of age (-20 births per 1000 women in 2006). This reduction in births to teenagers would be predicted based on the lower number of young women returning after the storm [Table III-2]. However, it also indicates

that those young women who did return were much less likely to give birth than older returning women. The reduction in births to teen mothers may be one of the few positive outcomes of Hurricane Katrina as teen mothers tend to drop out of high school prior to graduation.

In contrast to the decline in births to teenagers, there was a very significant bump in babies born to women in the 20-34 year age group (+ 43 per 1000 women), validating a common assumption among New Orleanians of the existence of a cohort of infants known as “Katrina babies.” There is evidence also of a “Katrina baby” phenomenon statewide. In 2005, with a birth rate of 56 per 1,000 women, Louisiana was ranked 26th among the states in births to women aged 15 to 50 years old. In 2006, Louisiana jumped to 13th place with a rate of 59 births per 1,000 women 15 to 50 years old.⁸

In 2007, however, the decrease in babies born to teen mothers and the increase in babies born to mothers in the 20-34 year old age group reversed, and births to women in all age groups assumed rates more similar to birthrates pre-Katrina. There is an interesting exception. Table III-3 shows there was a spike in the rate of births to unmarried women in 2006 (+24.4 percent), which dropped slightly but continued high in 2007. This increase in births to unmarried mothers would not be predicted given the significant drop in female-headed households post-Katrina. While results related to birthrate lack statistical significance, giving birth and caring for an infant place women, particularly single mothers, in a particularly vulnerable position. Thus disaster planning needs to take into account the specific needs of women who are pregnant, or become pregnant, to monitor their changing needs for health-care, employment, and housing.

Poverty. As noted in Chapter I, New Orleans continues to be among the nation’s most impoverished cities. New Orleans’ inner city poverty has strong race and gender dimensions that are intensified by

Table III-3. Marital Status, Births, and Family Households: 2005, 2006, 2007 and Percent Change

	2005	2006	2007	% Change 2005-07
Marital Status—Female	2005			
• % Never Married	40.3	38.7	45.5	+5.2*
• % Married	31.6	30.7	27.5	-4.1
• % Separated	3.0	2.1	2.6	-0.4
• % Widowed	11.3	15.1	11.8	+5
• % Divorced	13.8	13.4	12.7	-1.1
Total Households	163,334	73,516	80,039	- 51.0*
Family Households	90,461	40,134	44,205	- 51.1*
• Family Households-Female Head (%)	36,686 (40.6)	12,523 (31.2)	15,309 (34.6)	- 58.3*
• Female Head with Children under-18 Years (%)	20,505 (55.9)	5,101 (40.7)	7,947 (51.9)	- 61.2*
• # Grandparents Responsible for Grandchildren	5,816	2,024	2,437	- 58.1*
% Grandparents Female	72.8	85.0	90.1	+ 17.3
# Women, 15-50 Yrs Giving Birth	3,969	2,179	2,265	- 42.9
• Births Per 1000 Women 15-19	33	13	28	- 5 Br
• Births Per 1000 Women 20-34	43	86	50	+ 7 Br
• Births Per 1000 Women 35-50	24	15	19	- 5 Br
• % Unmarried Gave Birth	49.8	74.3	69.1	+ 19.3

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. 2005, 2006, and 2007 American Community Survey. New Orleans, city. "Selected Social Characteristics in the United States: 2005" (2006, 2007); 2005 Community Survey. U.S. and New Orleans, city. "General Demographic Characteristics: 2005"; Table R1303, "Women 15 to 50 Years Old Who Had a Birth in the Past 12 Months (Per 1000 Women): 2005" (2006, 2007).

* Indicates statistical significance at a 90% confidence interval.

the South's weak economy, a history of discrimination, and sex segregation in the work force. Table III-4 presents data on women and female-headed families living below the poverty level in the 12 months preceding data collection for New Orleans and the United States. In 2005, while 14.8 percent of U.S. women had incomes below poverty level, the overall rate for New Orleans women was almost twice that, 26.5 percent—and nearly one-third of African American women had incomes below poverty. Similarly, more women over 65 years of age were poor in New Orleans than nationally: 17.2 percent in New Orleans versus 12 percent nationally (data for age by race/ethnicity are not shown).⁹

As indicated in Table III-4, approximately 42 percent of all New Orleans female-headed families lived in poverty in 2005, compared to 29.4 percent nationally. In 2007, the number of New Orleans female-headed families in poverty

decreased to 32.8 percent, but remained unacceptably high and well above the national average. Female-headed families with children under 18 years were especially vulnerable to poverty both pre-and post-Katrina with approximately half of all female-headed households with children falling below the poverty level before the storm and decreasing to just 43.4 percent in 2007. Moreover, grandparent households became more vulnerable, as pre-and post-Katrina the percentage of grandparents below the poverty level who had responsibility for their own grandchildren increased from 25.9 percent to 40.8 percent, again, well above national figures. Although the statistics for grandparents in poverty include both males and females, it was noted in Table III-3 that 90 percent of the grandparents with responsibility for their own grandchildren are grandmothers.

While poverty among women and female headed families in New Orleans

appears to have decreased post-Katrina— at the same time remaining relatively stable nationwide—the overall pattern of the feminization of poverty in New Orleans was not altered by the storm and continues as a critical economic and social issue. The decreases observed in poverty rates among women and female headed households between 2005 and 2007, do not reflect a healthier post-Katrina economic or social environment (see Chapter IV), but rather confirm the lack of services and governmental support for poor women struggling to return to the city.

In summary, contrary to the majority of post-Katrina reports that focus on demographic change in the racial composition of New Orleans, this report focuses on demographic change and continuity among women. These findings demonstrate that pre-Katrina, New Orleans had a higher rate of vulnerable women than the U.S. in general, even more than are found in most metropolitan regions. The findings also show that the picture has changed only slightly post-Katrina. On average, the determining factor in a family’s decision to return, and their ability to do so, appears

to have centered around the presence of children. Taking into account race/ethnicity, age, marital status and family composition, the greatest demographic change in the New Orleans population from 2005 to 2007 was the loss of the population under-18 years of age and the loss of female-headed families—especially ones with children and those in poverty. With fewer financial and physical resources, and often with greater responsibility for children, families in poverty, especially female-headed households with children under five years of age, tended to be more vulnerable to disasters, and also less able to return home. The data also suggest that families post-Katrina have become more fragmented and that older women may be increasingly vulnerable as they face the dual burden of declining economics and increasing responsibility for dependents.

Given that women were the majority of the New Orleans population pre-Katrina, and remain so post-Katrina, we must ask: What services have been offered, and what services are being offered to assist women at each stage of disaster planning and recovery?

Table III-4. Percent of New Orleans and U.S. Women and Families with Female Householders in Poverty: 2005 and 2007

	2005		2007	
	Orleans	U.S.	Orleans	U.S.
Females with Incomes in past 12 Months below Poverty	26.5 %	14.8 %	21.6 %	14.3 %
Families in Poverty	21.8	10.2	15.3	9.5
Families with Female Householder No Husband Present	40.6	18.9	34.6	18.7
• Families with Female Householders in Poverty	41.8	29.4	32.8	28.2
• Families with Female Householder with Children under-18 in Poverty	50.6	37.7	43.4	36.5
• Families with Female Householder with Children under-5 in Poverty	64.1	47.4	33.5	44.8
Grandparents Responsible for own Grandchildren under-18 in Poverty	25.9	20.2	40.8	19.2

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. 2005 and 2007 American Community Survey. U.S. and Orleans Parish. Table C17001 “Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months by Sex by Age”; “Selected Economic Characteristics: 2005” (2007); “Selected Demographic Characteristics: 2005”; “Selected Social Characteristics: 2007”; Table B10059 “Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months of Grandparents Living with Own Grandchildren under 18 Years by Responsibility for Own Grandchildren.”

Endnotes

1 Methodological note: The analyses in this chapter are based largely on the Census Bureau's annual nationwide sample survey, the American Community Survey (ACS) for 2005, 2006, and 2007—available at <<http://factfinder.census.gov/>>. The 2005 ACS provides demographic data of the New Orleans area pre-storm. The 2006 ACS was released in September 2007 and represents the official demographic data on New Orleans approximately one year after Hurricane Katrina and the subsequent levee failures. ACS data for 2007 was released September 2008.

Use of ACS data for 2005, 2006, and 2007 allows consistency of measures over time and across categories of data. Nevertheless, there is considerable controversy about the accuracy of ACS data, particularly following a large scale disaster such as Hurricane Katrina. First, the ACS is based on a sample of the population, not the entire population, and the Census figures reported are subject to varying margins of error. Second, the ability to gather accurate information is greatly compromised following a disaster as traditional methods of gathering data—door-to-door, mail, telephone surveys, or employment data—are no longer possible or available. In addition, the instability and continuing change of a community following a disaster means that it is impossible for data collected at one point in time to reflect varying processes that include in- and out-migration. Finally, there is considerable lag time between the collection of ACS data and its release; numerous changes can occur in a community that are not represented in the data presented.

“White,” “Black or African American” and “Hispanic or Latino” are categories of identity used by the U.S. Census Bureau and are used in this report for consistency. All race statistics are based on those reporting race alone. Hispanic or Latino is of any race. Detailed data for Asians are unavailable at the city level for New Orleans.

- 2 U.S. Census Bureau. 2006 and 2007 “Population Estimates. Cities and Towns: Places over 100,000: 2000 to 2005(2006).” <www.census.gov/popest/cities/SUB-EST2005.html>; Greater New Orleans Community Data Center. <<http://www.gnocdc.org>>
- 3 This report does not examine the out-migration of New Orleans residents nor the process of repopulation of the city by pre-storm residents and newcomers. Readers are referred to reports by the Greater New Orleans Community Data Center for detailed information regarding migration patterns.
- 4 The median age for all men increased from 33.6 years in 2005 to 38.9 years in 2006, and remained at approximately 38 years in 2007.
- 5 79.5 percent of the storm related deaths of women were of women 61 years of age and older compared to 61.6 percent of deceased men. “Reuniting Families of Katrina and Rita—Louisiana Family Assistance Final Report. 8/30/2006.” <<http://www.dhh.louisiana.gov/Reports.asp?ID=1&CID=32>>
- 6 Family households include married couple households as well as households headed by women with no husband present, or by men with no wife present, along with other relatives (e.g., children, brothers, sisters, grandparents) and non-relatives such as foster children, unmarried partners, and boarders. Non-family households include householders who live alone as well as householders who do not live alone and have non-relatives living with them such as roommates, foster children, boarders, or unmarried partners.
- 7 New Orleans has long had a history of extended families. Before Katrina, some 52 percent of grandparents living in a New Orleans household were responsible for grandchildren, compared to about 40 percent of grandparents nationwide (U.S. Census Bureau. 2005 American Community Survey. U.S. and New Orleans city, Louisiana. “Selected Social Characteristics in the United States.” (New Orleans)).
- 8 U.S. Census Bureau. 2005, 2006, and 2007 American Community Survey. Table R1303. “Women 15 to 50 Years Old Who Had a Birth in the Past 12 Months (Per 1,000 Women): 2005” (2006, 2007).
- 9 U.S. Census Bureau. 2005 American Community Survey. U.S. and Orleans Parish. Table C17001 “Poverty in the past 12 Months by Sex by Age.”