

*Presented by the Urban League of Greater New Orleans*

# THE STATE OF BLACK NEW ORLEANS: EQUALITY INDEX



**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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## ABOUT THE URBAN LEAGUE OF GREATER NEW ORLEANS

In 1938 the Council of Social Agencies, aided by Jesse O. Thomas, founded the Urban League of Greater New Orleans (ULGNO) with the explicit aim of facilitating economic and social conditions that are conducive to self-sufficiency for blacks in the greater metropolitan area. Through advocacy, community organizing and resource mobilization as well as program services in areas of education, economic development, workforce development and family support, the League's mission remains to help individuals attain economic and social self-sufficiency. Today, 105 affiliates serve under that basic mission in partnership with the umbrella organization, the National Urban League (NUL).

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When the levees broke after Hurricane Katrina’s arrival on August 29, 2005, an international audience immediately witnessed breakdowns in emergency response management systems at all essential levels of government. For some, images of people trapped on roof tops provided a wake-up call to conditions that exist in many American cities. For others, Katrina rudely unmasked durable physical and social vulnerabilities, particularly amongst the poorest residents and the systems that serve them. Breaches in levees have made a unique stain in New Orleans’ history, but failures in these primary supports are also metaphors that can describe the state of the essential protective structures that sustain people throughout the United States.

Therefore, New Orleans recovery is not simply about a city and its leadership. People throughout the world will look to New Orleans to see how its current and former residents will remedy the man-made failures that appointed Katrina as one of the world’s greatest natural disasters.

The Urban League of Greater New Orleans (ULGNO) assumes that recovery and improvement require earnest self-effacement and rigorous assessment. In that spirit, ULGNO aims to describe the faces of New Orleans hidden behind the masks. Blacks have been and currently still are the majority racial/ethnic group in the city. ULGNO also assumes that New Orleans’ recovery is contingent upon the success of its black residents. Any serious recovery plan must take into account the development and progression of black people. However, strategies stakeholders take must be based on analyses of the extent of the problems facing blacks in New Orleans.

Each year the National Urban League issues its State of Black America Report, which is dubbed the “annual

barometer of the conditions, experiences and opinions of African Americans.” This important document uses their Equality Index, which compares blacks and whites along major socioeconomic variables. The State of Black America provides a national perspective leaving more nuanced analyses up to the local affiliates.

This summer ULGNO began collecting data and conducting analyses that will serve as a companion to the State of Black America and focus on the economic, social and political terrain that impacts blacks in New Orleans and surrounding parishes. Specifically, the State of Black New Orleans will examine economics, health, education, social justice, and civic engagement. These areas will frame the analytic questions: How are blacks doing economically, socially and medically?

The State of Black New Orleans (SBNO) uses some of the indices from the Equality Index as a guide to describing the conditions surrounding black life. SBNO augments this data with research generated by local experts. In addition, SBNO offers essays and editorials that will tell the stories behind the numbers. The State of Black New Orleans is scheduled to be released in the winter of 2007. The Executive Summary provides glimpses of some of the findings that will be presented in the text.

## ECONOMICS: A FOCUS ON AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The Economics sub-index comprises six categories: Income, Employment, Poverty, Housing and Wealth Formation. For purposes of the executive summary, only a few key indicators are highlighted to provide readers with a range of variables collected for the upcoming book.

	Source	Year	Black	White
Median Household Income (Real)	ACS	2006	26,639	56,048
Poverty Line (% Below)	ACS	2006	31%	9%
Unemployment Rate - Male	ACS	2006	11.6%	2.8%
Mortgage Application Denial	HMDA	2006	25%	13%

A significant economic gap prevents many black families from investing in New Orleans’ recovery. Black

households bring in considerably less income than their white counterparts. Black household income is almost half (48%) of whites. In addition, almost 31% of blacks in New Orleans live below the poverty line compared to 9% of whites. Much of this disparity is caused by a high unemployment rate among black males. As a group, blacks’ financial status limits their ability to compete in a frenetic and costly housing market. Blacks are less likely to attempt to purchase homes and are more likely to be denied loans.

A disproportional amount of blacks lease housing in a city with limited options and rising rents. It should come as no surprise that many blacks are dependent upon public housing to meet the post-Katrina cost of living increases. The combination of reduced public housing options, low wage jobs and high unemployment places effective housing policy at the forefront of any thoughtful economic development strategy for blacks. Effective housing policy must work in conjunction with the city’s economic development plans to help facilitate stability for black residents.

## KEY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- The State legislature and the Governor should immediately change the law to allow the State’s last resort insurer to provide insurance at a competitive rate when private insurers refuse to offer reasonably priced insurance in the State (currently the last resort insurer, Louisiana’s Citizens’ Plan must offer insurance at a rate higher than that offered by the private market).
- Federal, state and local government officials must strongly and publicly condemn housing discrimination and make fair housing a priority in appropriate program activities.
- As all Gulf Coast cities, counties and parishes rebuild and create housing opportunities, they should make fair housing a basic component of each program. The redevelopment of communities should be integrated in terms of race, national origin and economic class.
- Tax incentive and housing bonus programs that encourage home ownership among low-income workers must be legislated.

## HEALTH: CHANGING BEHAVIORS, CHANGING SYSTEMS

The Health sub-indices examine areas of death rates and life expectancy, lifetime health issues and neonatal care. The Executive summary highlights key death rates that reflect generally lower quality of life compared to whites in New Orleans.

	Source	Years	Black	White
Age-Adjusted Death Rates (per 100,000)-all causes	CDC	2004	1281.2	873.4
Age-Adjusted Death Rates (per 100,000)-Homicide Male	CDC	2004	142.8	12.6
Age-Adjusted Death Rates (per 100,000)-Circulatory Disease	CDC	2004	397.2	271.9
Ischemic Heart Disease	CDC	2004	151.1	121
Age-Adjusted Death Rates (per 100,000)-Stroke (Cerebrovascular)	CDC	2004	89.2	54.1
Age-Adjusted Death Rates (per 100,000)-Cancer	CDC	2004	299.7	198.4
Age-Adjusted Death Rates (per 100,000)-Diabetes	CDC	2004	96.7	29.9

Black New Orleanians are in much poorer health compared to their white peers. Many commonly cited health outcomes mimic what is seen throughout the United States. Blacks are more likely to die from stroke, cancer, heart disease, diabetes, AIDS and homicide. Disparities in health outcomes can be attributed to a wide range of variables including behaviors and lifestyles, access to care and delivery of services.

## KEY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

New Orleans’ high concentration of low income, uninsured consumers raises preventative and primary care high on the list of reform priorities. The Urban League of Greater New Orleans endorses many of the policy recommendations proposed by The Coalition of Leaders for Louisiana Healthcare (COLLAH) including:

- Low-income uninsured adults (those under 200% of the Federal Poverty Level) in New Orleans should be offered comprehensive health insurance coverage under the “RightCare” plan. If everyone eligible in fact enrolls, coverage would cost an estimated \$180 to \$210 million per year, depending on the final plan design. Since not everyone eligible will actually enroll, the total cost of the coverage plan will more likely be \$135 to \$160 million per year, based on other states’ enrollment experiences.
- Each patient would have a Medical Home with a community-based, personal physician

who directs a team of individuals to treat the health care needs of the whole person.

The Medical Home would arrange access to specialists and hospital-based care following well established referral channels across the care continuum. Participating providers would receive negotiated reimbursement rates that approach levels offered by Medicare.

- An independent quality oversight and support program, to be established under the auspices of the recently established Louisiana Healthcare Quality Forum (LHCQF) would, along with evidence-based clinical guidelines for treating patients and referring them to specialists, ensure the clinical integrity of care delivered through the medical home model.

## EDUCATION: YOU GET WHAT YOU PAY FOR

The Education sub-indices include: Quality, Attainment, Scores, Enrollment, as well as Student Status and Risk Factors. Because such a low percentage of white students attend public schools, comparisons between black and white students along various indicators are limited. However, the index does enable readers to see the challenges blacks face and the rationale for many of the policy recommendations. The SOBNO chapter on education stresses the connection between performance and public investment.

	English	Math	Science	Social Studies
Percent of 4th Graders who Scored Below “Basic” Levels on LEAP	20%	26%	34%	23%
Percent of 8th Graders who Scored Below “Basic” Levels on LEAP	33%	41%	43%	36%
Percent of 12th Graders who Scored Below “Basic” Levels on GEE	38%	34%	46%	65%

\*SPRING 2007

- The former seven-assessor system in New Orleans for property taxes did not accurately assess the values of homes – an essential revenue stream for public schools and city services. The 2006 tax reforms eventually

ushered property tax increases of more than 15%, which is being met with resistance from elected officials and residents.

- Before August 29, 2005, many of the 120 schools in Orleans Parish needed repairs to the primary systems that sustain buildings and their operations. School leaders could not make needed repairs from the per pupil expenditure established by the Minimum Foundation Program formula. School officials thus delayed or deferred these projects, which compounded the post Katrina assessments of damages.
- The per pupil expenditure for Orleans parish in 2005 was \$6,185. The 2007 expenditure is \$5,024. The 2007 national average is \$6,058.

## KEY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Create a capital pool adequate for financing development of new schools (not reimbursement model of FEMA, but up front capital)
- Support SB 925 – A bill to provide for funding assistance under section 406 of the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 5172) to a State or local government for the acquisition of real property for the purpose of the replacement of certain public facilities based on reasonable reliance of cost estimates provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency.
- Reestablish the concept of neighborhood schools by incrementally increasing the number of guaranteed seats for local residents in each school.
- New Orleans Public School system must mobilize the fiscal resources required to meet the basic educational needs of students and staff. Rising health care and retirement costs paired with malfeasance and poor accounting systems contribute heavily to the cost burden.

## SOCIAL JUSTICE: FINDING FAIRNESS INSIDE

## AND OUTSIDE THE COURTROOM

The Social Justice Indices include two components, Equality before the Law and Victimization. These areas pull data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) on a number of criminal justice indicators. Because BJS has not been able to collect data in New Orleans since the storm, some of the data points cannot be tabulated. Nonetheless, the SOBNO will provide local and state data, which should paint a picture of the conditions of the areas criminal justice system.

Justice issues are not limited to court rooms. Geographical racism plays a role in the likelihood of living in a low-lying area of New Orleans, waste dump placement and toxic waste clean-up. To augment the index, the State of Black New Orleans also recognizes environmental justice issues that speak to broader issues of fairness under the rule of law. Data will also include various toxicology reports conducted in New Orleans since the levees broke.

NEW ORLEANS SCHOOLS THAT EXCEED GOVERNMENT CLEAN-UP LEVELS FOR ARSENIC 2007 REPORT FROM THE NATURAL RESOURCES DEFENSE COUNCIL		
School	Arsenic Level (mg/kg)	District
McDonogh Elementary (#42)	34.4	Mid-City
Dibert	22.8	Mid-City
Drew Elementary	20.3	Bywater/ St. Claude
Craig Elementary	16.1	Mid-City
Medard H. Nelson Elementary School	12.4	Uptown/Carrollton
McMain Magnet Secondary School	12.6	Uptown/Carrollton

## KEY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

## ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

- Fully informing the public of health risks, including access to treatment and information on exposure to toxins\*
- Hold Congressional Hearings on EPA Response to Contamination in EJ Communities
- Sample at schools, playgrounds and other “hot spots” where EPA and NRDC testing has shown high levels of arsenic or other contaminants in the soil, to determine the full scope of the contamination.\*

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE

- Physical upgrade to Prosecutor’s Office - computer systems, computers, confidential spaces to interview victims and witnesses
- Staff expansion for administrative and investigative services for Prosecutor’s Office and NOPD
- Provide alternatives to incarceration programs for juvenile justice system

\*CITED IN THE 2007 ARSENIC LACED SCHOOLS REPORT FROM THE NATURAL RESOURCES DEFENSE COUNCIL

# CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: MOBILIZING CITIZENS AROUND POLICY

Democratic Progress, Community Participation, Collective Bargaining and Government Employment make up the Civic Engagement sub-index. These indices retrieve data from a number of sources including Census, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Office of the Secretary of State of Louisiana, and U.S. Department of Defense databases.

Data reveal that black New Orleanians are active according to conventional measures: voter turnout, participation in social clubs, churches and other social organizations. However, the high concentration of renters in the city as well as the erosion of the neighborhood school concept as a byproduct of closed facilities and charter schools make neighborhood based engagement more difficult. Nevertheless, blacks still possess sizable influence on election outcomes as a voting block.

### TOTAL REGISTERED ACTIVE AND NON-ACTIVE VOTERS IN ORLEANS PARISH FOR FALL 2007

	Total	Percentage
Black	176,911	63.30%
White	84,201	30.10%
	279,462	

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE OF LOUISIANA, SEPTEMBER 2007

### U.S. REPRESENTATIVE DECEMBER 9, 2006 2ND CONGRESSIONAL RUN-OFF RESULTS

	Total	Percentage
Black	185,899	68.90%
White	66,290	24.60%

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE OF LOUISIANA

## KEY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Form neighborhood association development programs that are aimed at increasing participation among renters.
- Form non-partisan think tanks that can disseminate information to the public on issues critical to blacks in New Orleans.
- Use the renewal of the Voting Rights Act as an agenda item to increase community awareness and participation.
- Fund voter education clubs and leadership institutes dedicated for younger African Americans.



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