Poverty and the Gulf South States
by the Rev. Fred Kammer, S.J., JSRI Director

One predominant characteristic of our region, despite decades of “New South” propaganda, is the reality and legacy of our poverty—of our elders, our families, our children, our education, our health status, our infant mortality, our life expectancy, and our future. Two of the five states of the Gulf anchor the bottom of the list of economic well-being—Mississippi is the poorest (50th) and Louisiana is just above it (49th). The others solidly populate the lowest segments, none rising above the median. Texas is 43rd; Alabama is 42nd; and Florida is 29th on the list of states by percentage of its people living in poverty. We get so used to being at the bottom of these kinds of lists that we seem to just ignore repeated reports, perhaps hoping that they will go away on their own.

After our introductory edition of the JustSouth Quarterly in the spring, we focused our attention on migration (summer 2009) and race (fall 2009) as ways to bring our work on research, advocacy, and popular education to a wider audience in the South and elsewhere. Now this issue’s primary attention is on poverty, the third of our focus areas as an institute. While poverty is our third key concern, it is intimately connected to both migration and race in the South.

As I discuss in my column on Catholic social teaching in this issue, since the days of the Jewish Scriptures, the emphasis of biblical justice was on widows, orphans, and strangers—groups that in current U.S. society and in our region comprise most of the poor. In contemporary societies, many women and children and today’s “strangers” (those who literally are immigrants, refugees, or who are “not like us” because of the color of their skin, their language, their disability, their tribe, or some other condition) continue to be most of the poor throughout the world. Whether I think back to Catholic Charities USA position papers on the “feminization of poverty” in the U.S. in the 1980s, discussions in international circles on the “pauperization of women and children” in the intense globalization in the 1980s and 1990s, or the realities of tens of millions of refugees worldwide and the “internally displaced people” of Katrina and Rita in this millennium, the “poor” of today and the biblical anawim look very much the same.

—Continued on back cover

POPULATION THAT LIVE IN POVERTY
Alabama ...........................................15.7%
Florida .............................................13.2%
Louisiana ........................................17.3%
Mississippi .......................................21.2%
Texas .................................................15.8%

FAMILIES PAYING MORE THAN 30% OF INCOME TOWARD RENT OR MORGAGE
Alabama ...........................................29.6%
Florida .............................................44.3%
Louisiana ........................................32.1%
Mississippi .......................................31.9%
Texas .................................................32.7%

Read Where Y’at, Fair Housing? by Alex Mikulich, page 9
Inequality in Alabama

There are a number of ways in which the poverty of some people in the state, contrasted with the resources of others, is a reflection of fundamental inequality within Alabama society. The primary inequalities often are race- and gender-based. First, in terms of income, we saw above that while 307,270 households had less than $15,000 in annual income, another 89,432 had more than $150,000 in annual income in Alabama. Women in the state make only 74.1 cents for every one dollar that men earn. In addition, in 2007, white workers’ median wages were 26% higher than those of black workers. Second, in terms of education, while 23% of the white population has completed college and only 17.6% dropped out before finishing high school, the numbers almost reverse themselves for the black population, where only 14.3% have completed college and 25.2% dropped out before finishing high school. Third, in terms of the very beginning of life, the infant mortality rate for a white person in the state born in the period from 2003 to 2005 was 6.91 per 1,000 live births, while that for black infants was 13.73 per 1,000 births. For Hispanics, it was 7.69 per 1,000 live births. Fourth, unemployment continues to impact minority workers much more acutely than white workers. Currently in Alabama, the unemployment rate is 6.8% for white workers, but for black workers it is 17.4%. By the second quarter of 2010, it is projected to be 7.6% for whites and 19.6% for blacks.
WHO ARE FLORIDA’S POOR?
- 721,284 are children (18.3% of kids)
- 323,085 are elders (10.4% of seniors)
- 1,326,439 are adults 18 – 64 (12.2% of adults)
- 810,245 are in female-headed families (26.5% of such families)

LOOKED AT ANOTHER WAY:
- 1,061,497 males are poor (12.1% of males)
- 1,309,311 females are poor (14.3% of females)
- 1,581,525 whites are poor (11.3% of whites)
- 594,297 blacks are poor (22% of blacks)
- 673,138 Hispanics are poor (17.8% of Hispanics)
- 525,783 immigrants are poor (15.7% of foreign-born)

WHAT ABOUT HEALTH AND POVERTY?
- 20.3% of people in Florida are not covered by health insurance; Florida ranks 48th among the states in health coverage.
- The infant mortality level in the state is 7.24 per 100,000 births, tied for 34th among the states in infant mortality.
- The life expectancy of a child born in 2008 was 78.5 years.
- The number of Medicaid recipients in 2005 was 3,166,000.

WHAT ABOUT EDUCATION AND POVERTY?
- 1,784,271 people did not finish high school—23.4% are poor.
- 3,714,834 people finished high school—11.9% are poor.
- 3,701,828 had some college or associate’s degree—8.5% are poor.
- 3,261,646 people finished college or more—4.9% are poor.
- The median spending per year for elementary and high school aged students: $10,065.
- There are 39,428 Head Start slots in the state.

WHAT ABOUT UNEMPLOYMENT?
Unemployment is one of the most common causes of poverty. In August 2009, there were 983,711 unemployed workers in Florida (10.7% of the workforce). This was an increase of 382,517 unemployed workers—a shocking 64% increase—since August 2008. Among women, unemployment was 8.1%; among blacks, 14.6%; and among Hispanics, 11.6%. For eligible unemployed workers in Florida, the average weekly unemployment compensation benefit is $239.70.

WHAT ABOUT HOUSEHOLD INCOME IN FLORIDA?
The median household income in 2008 was $47,778. 7.2% of households (505,874) had incomes in excess of $150,000. 906,853 households (12.9%), however, had annual incomes less than $15,000.

WHAT ABOUT HOUSING AND POVERTY?
Families are considered to be “housing burdened” when they pay more than 30% of their income for rent or mortgages. In Florida, 1,890,007 homeowners (38.8%) are paying more than 30% of their income for housing, 1,149,785 renters (57.5% of all renters) are paying in excess of 30% of household income for rent. In addition, while not always an indication of poverty, 864,591 families (9.8% of all families) are living in mobile homes in Florida. Further, 462,868 households (6.6%) have no motor vehicle.

HOUSING BURDENED:
- Homeowners: 38.8%
- Renters: 57.5%

Inequality in Florida
There are a number of ways in which the poverty of some people, contrasted with the resources of others, is a reflection of fundamental inequality within Florida society. The key inequalities often are race- and gender-based. First, in terms of income, we saw above that while 906,853 households had less than $15,000 in annual income, another 505,874 had more than $150,000 in annual income in Florida. Women in the state make only 77.9 cents for every one dollar that men earn. In addition, when compared to white workers, black workers in 2008 made only 78.6 cents for each dollar earned by whites, and Hispanics made 82 cents for each dollar earned by whites. Second, in terms of education, while 27.5% of the white population has completed college and only 10.8% dropped out before finishing high school, the numbers almost reverse themselves for the black population, where only 15.6% have completed college and 22.9% dropped out before finishing high school. For Hispanics, 21.7% completed college, but 26.5% did not finish high school. Third, in terms of the very beginning of life, the infant mortality rate for a white person in the state born in the period from 2003 to 2005 was 5.63 per 1000 live births, while that for black infants was 12.36 per 1,000. For Hispanics, it was 5.17 per 1,000 live births. Fourth, unemployment continues to impact minority workers much more acutely than white workers. Currently in Florida, the unemployment rate is 9.6% for white workers, but for black workers it is 14.6% and for Hispanics 11.6%. By the second quarter of 2010, it is projected to be 10.4% for whites, 16.9% for blacks and 13.4% for Hispanics.
Inequality in Louisiana

There are a number of ways in which the poverty of some people in the state, contrasted with the resources of others, is a reflection of fundamental inequality within Louisiana society. The primary inequalities often are race- and gender-based. First, in terms of income, we saw above that while 271,975 households had less than $15,000 in annual income, another 91,585 had more than $150,000 in annual income in Louisiana. Women in the state working full time make only 67.3 cents for every one dollar that men earn. In addition, when compared to white workers, black workers make only 67.3 cents for every dollar earned by whites. In 2008, the women in the state working full time made only 67.3 cents for every one dollar that men earn. In 2009, it is 74.0 cents for each dollar earned by whites.

Second, 58.8 cents for each dollar earned by whites.

In terms of education, while 23.4% of the white population has completed college and only 16.5% dropped out before finishing high school, the numbers almost reverse themselves for the black population, where only 11% have completed college and 30.4% dropped out before finishing high school. For Hispanics, 18.4% completed college, but 30.6% did not finish high school. Third, in terms of the very beginning of life, the infant mortality rate for a white person in the state born in the period from 2003 to 2005 was 5.65 per 1,000 live births, while that for black infants was 13.92 per 1,000 births, and for Hispanics, it was 7.04 per 1,000 live births, while that for black infants was 13.92 per 1,000 births, and for Hispanics, it was 7.04 per 1,000 live births. Fourth, unemployment continues to impact minority workers much more acutely than white workers. Currently in Louisiana, the unemployment rate is 4.6% for white workers, but for black workers it is 11.6%. By the second quarter of 2010, it is projected to be 5.7% for whites and 14.6% for blacks.
Inequality in Mississippi

There are a number of ways in which the poverty of some people in the state, contrasted with the resources of others, is a reflection of fundamental inequality within Mississippi society. The primary inequalities often are race- and gender-based. First, in terms of income, we saw above that while 223,923 households had less than $15,000 in annual income, another 44,959 had more than $150,000 in annual income in Mississippi. Women in the state working full-time make only 74 cents for every one dollar that men earn. In addition, when compared to the median for white workers, black workers make only 61.5 cents for each dollar earned by whites. Second, in terms of education, while 22.3% of the white population has completed college and only 17.5% dropped out before completing high school, the numbers almost reverse themselves for the black population, where only 11.3% have completed college and 30.6% dropped out before finishing high school. For Hispanics, 13.9% completed college, but 44.9% did not finish high school. Third, in terms of the very beginning of life, the infant mortality rate for a white person in the state born in the period from 2003 to 2005 was 6.91 per 1,000 live births, while that for black infants was 15.54 per 1,000 live births. Fourth, unemployment continues to impact minority workers much more acutely than white workers. Currently in Mississippi, the unemployment rate is 6.7% for white workers, but for black workers it is 13.2%. By the second quarter of 2010, it is projected to be 9.1% for whites and 17.9% for blacks.
WHO ARE TEXAS’ POOR?
➤ 1,497,803 are children (22.5% of kids)
➤ 287,987 are elders (12.2% of seniors)
➤ 1,974,649 are adults 18 – 64 (13.4% of adults)
➤ 1,399,592 are in single-parent families (33.7% of such families)

LOOKED AT ANOTHER WAY:
➤ 1,667,469 males are poor (14.2% of males)
➤ 2,092,962 females are poor (17.5% of females)
➤ 2,483,561 whites are poor (14.1% of whites)
➤ 605,883 blacks are poor (22.5% of blacks)
➤ 2,092,272 Hispanics are poor (24.0% of Hispanics)
➤ 824,225 immigrants are poor (21.5% of foreign-born)

WHAT ABOUT HEALTH AND POVERTY?
➤ 24.1% of people in Texas are not covered by health insurance; Texas ranks 50th among the states in health coverage.
➤ The infant mortality level in the state is 6.45 per 100,000 births, ranking 27th (tie) among the states.
➤ The life expectancy of a child born in 2005 was 77.6 years.
➤ The number of Medicaid recipients in 2005 was 3,753,000.

WHAT ABOUT EDUCATION AND POVERTY?
➤ 2,959,462 people did not finish high school—26.3% are poor.
➤ 3,718,620 people finished high school—12.5% are poor.
➤ 4,301,798 had some college or associate’s degrees—8.1% are poor.
➤ 3,808,245 people finished college or more—only 3.8% are poor.
➤ The spending per year per elementary and high school aged student is $10,059.
➤ There are 75,177 Head Start slots in the state.

HOW MANY HOUSEHOLDS GET INCOME ASSISTANCE FROM GOVERNMENT?
➤ 797,298 received Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAP)/food stamps last year; this was 9.4% of all households in state.
➤ 271,930 received Supplemental Security Income for the elderly and disabled.
➤ 131,474 received Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF, formerly AFDC).

WHAT ABOUT UNEMPLOYMENT?
Unemployment is one of the most common causes of poverty. In August 2009, there were 965,987 unemployed workers in Texas (8.03% of the workforce). This was an increase of 376,333 unemployed workers—a shocking 64% increase—since August 2008. Among women, unemployment was 6.6%; among blacks 11.8%, and among Hispanics 8.1%. For eligible unemployed workers in Texas, the average weekly unemployment compensation benefit is $330.08.

WHAT ABOUT HOUSING AND POVERTY?
Families are considered to be “housing burdened” when they pay more than 30% of their income for rent or mortgages. In Texas, 1,367,162 homeowners (25.2%) are paying more than 30% of their income for housing. 1,299,301 renters (47.7% of all renters) are paying in excess of 30% of household income for rent. In addition, while not always an indication of poverty, 715,074 families (7.4% of all families) are living in mobile homes in Texas. Further, 507,926 households (6.0%) have no motor vehicle.

HOUSING BURDENED:

Homeowners
25.2%

Renters
47.7%

Inequality in Texas

There are a number of ways in which the poverty of some people in the state, contrasted with the resources of others, is a reflection of fundamental inequality within Texas society. The primary inequalities often are race- and gender-based. First, in terms of income, we saw above that while 1,111,851 households had less than $15,000 in annual income, another 705,330 had more than $150,000 in annual income in Texas. Women in the state make only 78.3 cents for every dollar earned by whites; and Hispanics make only 64 cents for each dollar earned by whites. Second, in terms of education, while 32.4% of the white population has completed college and only 9.9% dropped out before finishing high school, the numbers are quite different for the black population, where only 18.0% have completed college and 17.3% dropped out before finishing high school. For Hispanics, only 10.3% have completed college, but an astounding 44% have not finished high school. Third, in terms of the very beginning of life, the infant mortality rate for a white person in the state born in the period from 2003 to 2005 was 5.78 per 1,000 live births, while that for black infants was 12.29 per 1,000. For Hispanics, it was 5.62 per 1,000 live births. Fourth, unemployment continues to impact minority workers much more acutely than white workers. Currently in Texas, the unemployment rate is 5.3% for white workers, but for black workers it is 11.8% and for Hispanics 8.1%. By the second quarter of 2010, it is projected to be 6.1% for whites, 13.6% for blacks, and 9.4% for Hispanics.
For Christmas 2009, please help us to shine the Light of Christ amid the darkness of poverty and hopelessness.

Please support JSRI with a year-end donation in the enclosed envelope.

Primary Sources for State Profiles


About the Jesuit Social Research Institute

The Jesuit Social Research Institute (JSRI) of Loyola University New Orleans was formally established as a collaborative undertaking of the New Orleans Province of the Society Jesus and Loyola University of New Orleans through a Memorandum of Understanding signed on November 28, 2007.

As part of the College of Social Sciences, JSRI exists to promote research, social analysis, theological reflection, and practical strategies for improving the social and economic conditions in the Gulf South with a particular focus on issues of race, poverty, and migration. The institute is intended to further the mission of the Society of Jesus to promote the faith that does justice, to apply Catholic social teaching to the concrete realities of this region, and to enhance the academic and service missions of Loyola.

In service of our mission, JSRI publishes the JustSouth Quarterly and the JustSouth E-newsletter.

Visit our website at www.loyno.edu/jsri for details about our work and how to receive our publications, or contact us:

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By the end of this summer, President Obama had publicly committed to push for the passage of an immigration reform policy as early as the fall of 2009; however, at the time of this writing, with the health reform legislation taking up the center stage in Congress, there is little hope of any immigration reform happening this year. Even so, many pro-immigration reform advocates along with the U.S. bishops are confident that reform is indeed on its way, and thus are busy at work preparing for it. They have been participating in delegations to Capitol Hill, meeting with legislators, and giving testimony to make their position known. Bishops have also been writing pastoral letters to help the church understand the relevance of immigration reform, Catholic Social Teaching on this subject, and our Catholic responsibility to stand in solidarity with the immigrant community.

At the local level, pastoral agents are encouraged to follow in the bishops’ footsteps to prepare for the day, that will certainly come, when we will collectively need to “make a loud noise unto the Lord” and before our lawmakers, to make known our support in favor of a positive, comprehensive immigration reform policy. In the coming months, Catholics and all people of good will are invited to use their privilege as citizens of a democratic nation to call upon their members of Congress and ask them to vote in favor of a comprehensive immigration reform policy.

We also invite you please to check out the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops (USCCB) Justice For Immigrants Campaign at [http://justiceforimmigrants.org/](http://justiceforimmigrants.org/) On this website, you will learn more about current immigration issues and how you can work in collaboration with your faith community to put your faith into action on behalf of a just and humane immigration policy that will reflect the strong value system of our nation whose history includes the embrace of the stranger in our midst.

Poverty and the Gulf South States from page 1

Since poverty, race, and migration in this region will be this institute’s work for years to come, it seemed best at this early point to just take a closer look at some poverty facts about our Gulf South states—who is poor, what groups are poor and poorest, how poverty and health collide, how education or the lack thereof connects to poverty, the realities of unemployment and its recent surge, household income, housing implications, and just a “dash” of inequality for good measure. Poverty statistics for each state are presented in a single snapshot, one page that could be reproduced (you have our permission!) for local community groups, for talking with legislators, for discussion in classrooms or at church, and even for prayer.

If you find it helpful, please let us know. If you have suggestions for future articles, please let us know that too.