



**LOUISIANA DISASTER
RECOVERY FOUNDATION**
Louisiana's Fund for Louisiana's People

For Immediate Release—

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**NEW STUDY SHOWS MAJOR DECLINE IN MEDIA COVERAGE OF GULF COAST
POVERTY SINCE HURRICANE KATRINA**

**POST-KATRINA POVERTY OFF OF NEWSPAPER PAGES, REPLACED BY SPORTS
AND CELEBRITIES**

NEW ORLEANS LEADERS FEAR IT'S A FORGOTTEN ISSUE

Newspaper coverage of the relationship between Gulf Coast poverty and the effects of Katrina on local communities decreased by 83 percent over the past three years, according to a study released today by the non-profit Louisiana Disaster Recovery Foundation (LDRF) in cooperation with *Spotlight on Poverty and Opportunity*, a foundation-led antipoverty forum.

Entitled *A Forgotten Crisis?*, the study, written by Freedman Consulting, LLC, shows that print media coverage of the relationship between poverty and the aftermath of Katrina decreased from 4,737 articles to 826 articles over only three years.

According to the study, the issue receives a fraction of the ink spilled over celebrities and local sports teams.

Between December of 2005 and May of 2009, there was four times more coverage of celebrities like Paris Hilton and Miley Cyrus than of Gulf Coast poverty in the wake of Katrina.

Over the same period, newspapers ran almost six times as many stories about New Orleans sports teams.

“It’s troubling to learn that the struggles faced by people trying to rebuild after Katrina are falling off of newspaper pages,” said Flozell Daniels, Jr., President and CEO of LDRF. “Poverty in Gulf Coast communities continues to be a serious issue, and we need our nation’s newspapers to report on it.”

In a survey of 25 of the top newspapers ranked by circulation, coverage decreased by 90 percent.

“Despite persistent poverty in communities struck by Katrina, it has become an almost forgotten issue,” said Ambassador James A. Joseph, Chairman of the LDRF Board of Directors and a native of Opelousas, La.

“This study shows that LDRF has an important mission not only helping these communities rebuild, but also raising awareness around the country about the problems that still plague the Gulf Coast region.”

Low media coverage of poverty on the Gulf Coast comes despite widespread economic deprivation in the areas hit hardest by Katrina.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 19 percent of Louisiana residents live in poverty, including 22 percent of those under the age of 18. The U.S. averages for overall and youth poverty are six and four percentage points less, respectively. Only Mississippi, another state affected by Katrina, has higher percentages of either overall poverty or poverty among youth.

For Orleans Parish, which contains the city of New Orleans, the percentage of all residents in poverty and percentage of youth in poverty, respectively, climb to 27 and 36 percent.

Robert Mann, author and Manship Chair in Mass Communication & Senior Public Policy Fellow at Louisiana State University, remarks that “Louisiana’s recovery and renewal requires that our state and nation engage seriously with issues of poverty and inequity. Poverty oppressed too many of our people before Katrina and Rita; almost four years later, many of the problems associated with poverty have worsened, while the news media gradually loses interest in covering the issue.”

“The trend in this study is distressing, but it can change. People who care about poverty can make a difference. If we demonstrate our interest and demand more in-depth reporting about these issues, the news media will follow.”

Jessica McKelvie Kemp, Director of Communications at LDRF, added that “Especially as poverty becomes an increasingly dire issue in the wake of the nation’s economic downturn, it is critical for us to understand the causes of poverty as well as possible solutions. Because of our intense recovery work over the past four years, Louisiana offers many lessons learned on both counts—the news media can help us share those lessons with the rest of the nation.”

The Louisiana Disaster Recovery Foundation (LDRF) is a private foundation established by former Governor Kathleen Babineaux Blanco on Sept. 6, 2005 and the recipient of the \$24.4 million Bush-Clinton Katrina Fund in Louisiana. LDRF’s mission is to transform the disaster caused by hurricanes Katrina and Rita into an unprecedented opportunity for a new Louisiana – providing resources for the relief, recovery and betterment of all its people by ensuring access and opportunity in rebuilding their communities and culture.

Spotlight on Poverty and Opportunity is a foundation-led, non-partisan initiative aimed at ensuring that our political leaders take significant actions to reduce poverty and increase opportunity in the United States. It brings together diverse perspectives from the political, policy, advocacy and foundation communities to engage in an ongoing dialogue focused on finding genuine solutions to the economic hardship confronting millions of Americans.