

## A PORTRAIT OF MISSISSIPPI

# Executive Summary

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

While the last two decades have seen modest gains in life expectancy and educational attainment in Mississippi, on the state Human Development Index ranking, Mississippi ranked poorly. The state had the lowest life expectancy, the highest rate of adults 25 and older who have not completed high school or earned a high school equivalency degree, and very low levels of personal earnings from wages and salaries.

These findings spurred the Mississippi State Conference NAACP and Oxfam America to commission *A Portrait of Mississippi*. The analysis shows that Mississippi faces serious challenges in terms of human well-being and the choices and opportunities available to its people. In addition, within the state, there are significant disparities, particularly based on race. Some Mississippians enjoy high levels of human development, while others are experiencing levels of well-being typical of the country as a whole three decades ago.

## 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, such as 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 practice one's religious beliefs, to enjoy cultural liberty, to live free from fear and violence—and many more.

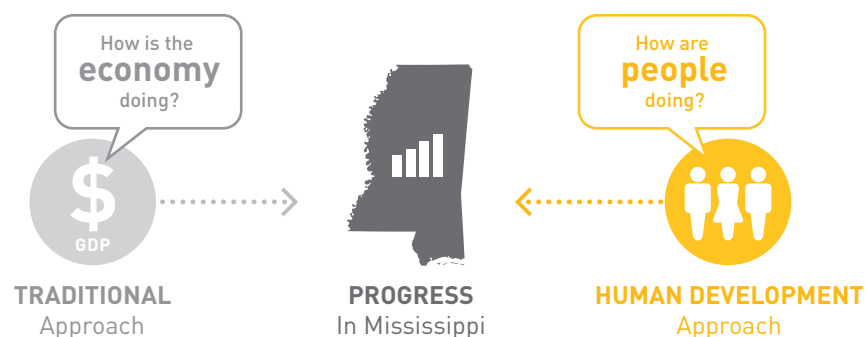
The approach was developed at the United Nations as a response to the failure of purely economic metrics to capture how people are faring. It was first introduced to the world in the 1990 Human Development Report and gained recognition as a useful tool for analyzing well-being. In addition to the annual global UN Human Development Report, more than five hundred national and regional reports have been produced, with an impressive record of spurring fact-based public debate and political engagement.

**The Human Development Index was constructed using the following indicators, which were then combined into a single number that falls on a scale from 0 to 10, with 10 being the highest:**

**A Long and Healthy Life** is measured using life expectancy at birth, calculated from mortality data from the Mississippi State Department of Health, and population data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), 2007.

**Access to Knowledge** is measured using two indicators: school enrollment for the population age three and older, and educational degree attainment for the population twenty-five years and older. Both indicators are from the American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau, 2007.

**A Decent Standard of Living** is measured using median earnings of all full- and part-time workers sixteen years and older from the American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau, 2007.



*A Portrait of Mississippi* is a publication of the American Human Development Project commissioned by the Mississippi State Conference NAACP. Read the full report at [www.measureofamerica.org](http://www.measureofamerica.org).

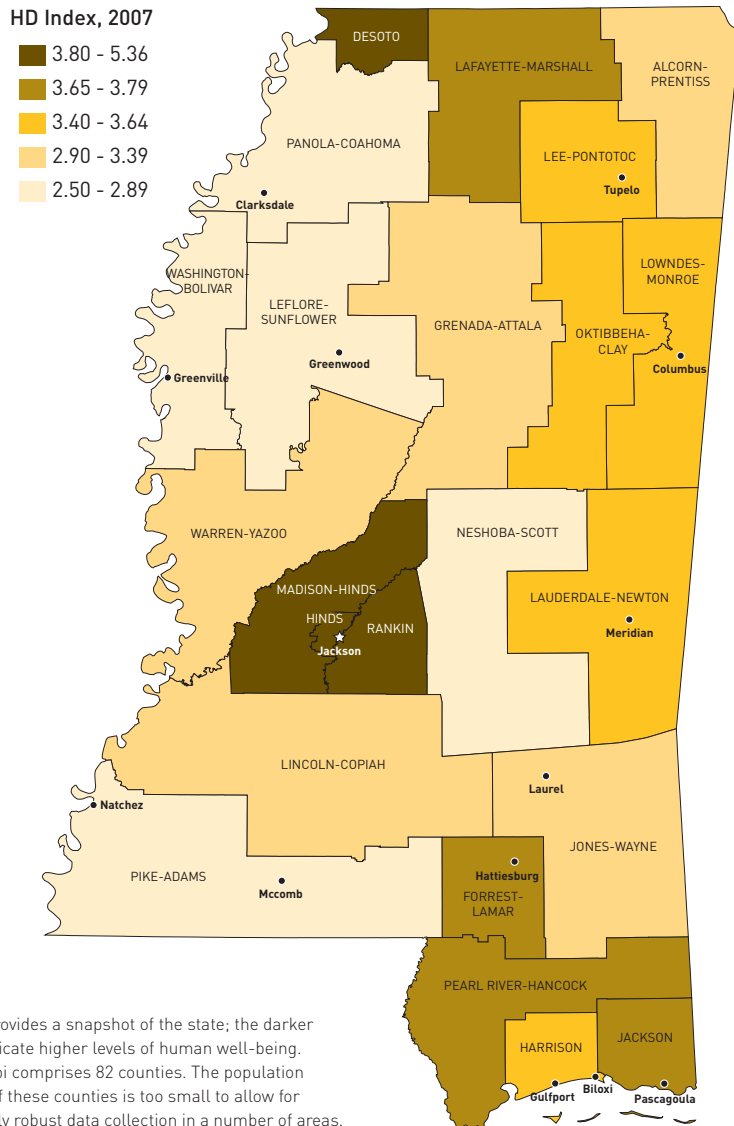
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# Key Findings on Mississippi

## COMPARISONS BY COUNTY

A resident of top-ranked Rankin County lives, on average, six years longer than a resident of the Panola-Coahoma area, is almost twice as likely to have completed high school and three times more likely to have completed college, and earns over \$12,000 more. Mississippians living in Panola-Coahoma have a human development level similar to that of the average American in 1975, more than thirty years ago.

**MAP 1** Where in Mississippi are people's choices and opportunities greatest?



**MAP 1** provides a snapshot of the state; the darker colors indicate higher levels of human well-being. Mississippi comprises 82 counties. The population of many of these counties is too small to allow for statistically robust data collection in a number of areas. Therefore, the U.S. Census Bureau presents data by groups of counties. Mississippi has 23 of these official groupings; each one contains at least 100,000 people.

## Top 3 County Groups

The top three county groups are well ahead of the rest of the state in well-being, with a human development level around the U.S. average.

- 1. RANKIN** has the highest HD Index (**5.36 out of 10**) and the highest life expectancy (**78.2 years**).
- 2. MADISON-HINDS** has the highest earnings (**\$31,511**), the lowest percentage of adults without a high school diploma (**12.4 percent**), and the highest percentage of college graduates (**35.2 percent**).
- 3. DESOTO** scores well across the board—second in life expectancy (**76.7 years**), third in earnings (**\$31,000**), and fifth in education.

## Bottom 3 County Groups

At the other end of the spectrum are three county groupings in the Mississippi Delta. These three Delta county groups are among the four with the highest poverty levels in Mississippi.

- 21. WASHINGTON-BOLIVAR** has the lowest life expectancy (**72.2 years**) in the state.
- 22. LEFLORE-SUNFLOWER** has the lowest earnings (**\$16,676**) and the worst level of educational attainment in the state.
- 23. PANOLA-COAHOMA** has the lowest HD Index (**2.50 out of 10**) in the state.

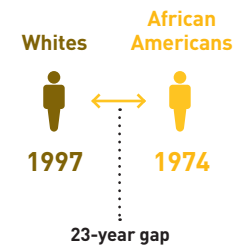
## COMPARISONS BY RACE

Whites in Mississippi today have a human development level comparable to that of the average American circa 1997. African Americans in the state, on average, experience the level of access to choices and opportunities of the average American in 1974—a 23-year gap between the two groups.

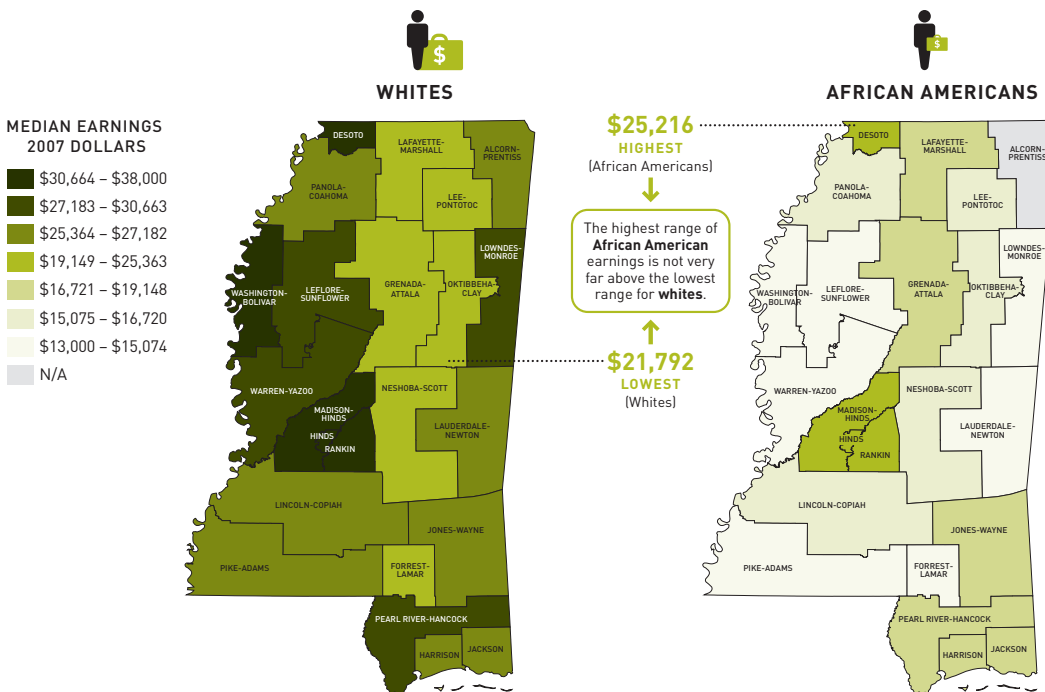
When geography and race are combined, the gap nearly triples. White Mississippians living in Hinds County have a human development level roughly comparable to that of top-ranked Connecticut. African-Americans living in Pike-Adams have human development level of the average American circa 1960.

While the range of earnings for whites in all county groups spans from \$22,000 to \$38,000, for African Americans, the earnings range is \$13,000 to \$25,000. In other words, whites who are worst off in the state in terms of income are still better off than the majority of African Americans.

### Comparison of Human Development Levels by Race



MAP 2 White and African American earnings by county groupings, 2007



## COMPARISONS BY GENDER

Women and girls in Mississippi have a higher Human Development Index than do men and boys, despite the fact that they earn 33 percent less, because women live over five years longer than men, on average, and have a substantially higher school enrollment ratio.

White men in Mississippi earn, on average, about \$5,000 more per year than the typical American worker today, at \$33,390. But white women today have median personal earnings about equal to what typical Americans earned in 1980, \$21,453.

The median earnings of African American men, \$20,368, are comparable to those of the typical American in 1970. African American women have median earnings of \$ 14,915 – less than the earnings of the typical American in 1960.

### Who's Better Off in Mississippi by Gender?

#### OVERALL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT



#### HEALTH



#### EDUCATION



#### INCOME



# What will it take to improve Mississippi's ranking on the American Human Development Index?

For individuals, health, education, and a decent standard of living are critical ingredients of a life of choice, value, and dignity. These basic capabilities allow people to invest in themselves and their families and to reach their full potential. But investing in people is not just good for individual Mississippians. It is also necessary for the economic growth and future competitiveness of Mississippi in the fast-changing, knowledge-based global marketplace of tomorrow.

It is clear from the analysis that **concerted actions** in the following areas are vital if Mississippi's Human Development scores are to improve over time.

## INCOME

### Ensure that working families can make ends meet.

White men in Mississippi are, on average, earning about \$5,000 more per year than the typical American worker across the nation today. But other wage earners are doing considerably less well. Other states help working families meet a basic monthly budget with a state earned income tax credit, state minimum wages, affordable housing, affordable healthcare options for all, and subsidized childcare.

## HEALTH

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

Against a backdrop of steady declines in infant death rates overall in the U.S, there is a worrisome rise in several states. Mississippi's infant mortality rate is about 50 percent higher than the national average. In the majority of cases, infant death stems from preterm birth, which is in turn related to the health and well-being of the mother. The solution lies in ensuring that women have access to quality medical care and that girls grow to adulthood in an environment that supports them to eat a nutritious diet, get adequate exercise, manage chronic conditions like diabetes and HIV, cope with stress, and enjoy overall mental health.

### Improve the health of African American men.

An African American baby boy born today in Mississippi can expect to have a lifespan shorter than that of the average American in 1960. In Mississippi, the premature loss of African American men is a source of both economic distress in African American communities and emotional distress in African American families.

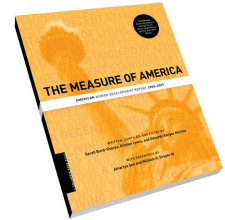
## EDUCATION

### Improve the quality of public education in Mississippi.

Mississippi has some of the worst scores in the nation on most measures of K-12 educational quality. For the state to make accelerated economic progress, the future workforce must have the opportunity to develop basic skills as well as the higher order skills needed to obtain better-paying jobs, such as independence of thought, communications skills, interpersonal skills, problem identification, and media and technology literacy.

### Connect at-risk boys to school.

Alarming high numbers of African American boys are leaving high school without graduating. Without a high school diploma, prison becomes a far likelier destination than college. The high rate of juvenile detention in Mississippi, especially for non-violent offenses, is a worrisome impediment to long-term ability of African American boys to become productive members of society and to lead fulfilling lives of choice, freedom, and dignity.



**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](http://www.measureofamerica.org)

#### ABOUT THE PROJECT

The **American Human Development Project** is a nonprofit initiative that aims to stimulate fact-based dialogue about human development issues in the U.S. *A Portrait of Mississippi* is a special report made possible with funding from Oxfam America.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Sarah Burd-Sharps** served as the deputy director of UNDP's Human Development Report Office until September 2006.

**Kristen Lewis** was a lead author of the water and sanitation report of the UN Millennium Project, led by Jeffrey Sachs, and writes extensively on development, gender, and the environment.

**Eduardo Borges Martins** was coauthor of the pathbreaking Atlas of Human Development in Brazil.

#### ABOUT THE DESIGN

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