

## **Evaluation of the Census Bureau's Vintage 2006 Population Estimates for Counties Affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita**

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In August and September 2005, the Gulf Coast was hit by two hurricanes, Katrina and Rita. The devastation caused by the hurricanes resulted in a rapid and large-scale migration from parts of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas that was unparalleled in U.S. history. To produce credible population estimates for the counties and parishes affected by the storms, the U.S. Census Bureau had to account for the impact of the hurricanes in their vintage 2006 round of population estimates.<sup>1</sup> In the vintage 2006 estimates, the Census Bureau supplemented the data typically used to measure domestic migration (i.e., data from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS)) with data from the United States Postal Service's National Change of Address file (NCOA). The Census Bureau chose to focus mainly on measuring the change in domestic migration for the hurricane-affected counties and parishes, rather than focusing on all of the components of population change. This decision was based on the fact that the time and resources available to develop the population estimates were limited and also on the assumption that migration would be the largest component of population change in these counties.

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<sup>1</sup> Every year, the Census Bureau produces population estimates for the nation, states, counties, and sub-county areas. The vintage refers to the year in which the Census Bureau begins work on a set of estimates and also to the terminal year of the estimates. Thus, the work on the vintage 2006 estimates began in the fall of 2006 and the last estimate in the time series is July 1, 2006.

This paper evaluates the Census Bureau's vintage 2006 population estimate for the hurricane-affected counties and parishes. We examine the special processing efforts (e.g., supplementing the IRS data with the NCOA data) and discuss how the additional data improved the population estimates for the counties and parishes that were severely affected by the storms. We also examine the impact that the other components of population change had on the population estimates. We present the results of the special processing by showing the population estimates and the migration flows.

In addition to the Census Bureau, several other organizations also produced population estimates for the hurricane-affected counties (e.g., Claritas, the Louisiana Recovery Authority, and RAND). These independently compiled population estimates were developed using a variety of demographic techniques and data. In this paper, we compare the methodologies for the different sets of population estimates and the data sources used in these estimates. We also compare results of the Census Bureau's official population estimates to the estimates done by these other organizations.