



Promoting
Prosperity
in

Mississippi

EDITED BY
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Published by the
Institute for Market Studies at Mississippi State University



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Published by the
Institute for Market Studies at Mississippi State University



The Institute for Market Studies at Mississippi State University was created in 2015 to support the study of markets in order to provide a deeper understanding regarding the role of markets in creating widely shared prosperity.

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Book design by Finney Creative, Inc. © 2018

Printed in the United States of America

ISBN 978-1-7320353-0-0

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Preface

What creates prosperity? Why are some states rich and others poor? Why does Mississippi consistently rank as one of the poorest states in the nation? Can anything be done to move Mississippi ‘out of last place’? These questions are often raised by our students and fellow Mississippians. This book addresses each of these questions by identifying areas in which Mississippi can improve its economic conditions.

In this book, we identify key areas for Mississippi economic policy reform. Twenty-one scholars, ten of which are from or work in Mississippi, have contributed original policy research. All twenty chapters were written specifically for Mississippi with a shared goal to promote prosperity in the state. While some of the chapters contain complex policy reforms, we have made every effort to present the concepts and ideas in a way that is understandable to the average citizen, the person who can benefit the most from this information.

The first three chapters of the text summarize the basic economic principles necessary to achieve economic prosperity. These three chapters present the principles behind the reforms proposed in the subsequent seventeen chapters. Each chapter was written independently and offers unique insight into different areas of state policy reform. While the topics covered range from tax reform, education reform, healthcare, corporate welfare, occupational licensing and business regulatory reform to criminal justice reform, and natural disaster recovery efforts, there is a clear unifying framework underlying the conclusions reached in each chapter. The theme throughout is that economic growth is best achieved through free market policies, policies which are based on limited government, lower regulations, lower taxes, minimal infringement on contracting and labor markets, secure private property rights, low subsidies, and privatization. Policy based on these principles allows Mississippians to have more rights and more choices in their lives.

We hope that readers come away with a better understanding of capitalism’s true potential to generate the long-run economic growth necessary to make Mississippi more prosperous, as well as ideas for policy reforms that could accomplish it in our lifetimes. This book illustrates that if Mississippi embraces economic freedom, the state will experience more entrepreneurship, increased business and capital formation, higher labor productivity and wages, and overall economic growth. Our main goal is to provide the scholarly, academic research that can inform state policy decisions and open a much needed dialogue on growth-oriented policy reform in Mississippi.

We focus on long-run policy improvements. Thus, the analysis is not an assessment of any particular administration or political party. Instead, this book can be thought of as a blueprint of possible economic reform proposals that use scientific evidence as a guiding principle. We emphasize that our unifying framework, which shapes the conclusions drawn in each chapter, is based on economic science, not politics. All authors address their respective topics by relying on academic research. Topics and policy conclusions were not based on any particular political agenda, political party, or political expediency. Instead, the authors relied on cold, hard facts and data with references to published academic literature to develop policy reform suggestions specific for Mississippi. In fact, many reforms suggested may not be politically possible.

The inspiration for this book came from *Unleashing Capitalism*, a series of books using economic logic to improve state policy in West Virginia, South Carolina, and Tennessee. We owe thanks to more people

than we could possibly list. We are indebted to our colleagues and the Finance and Economics advisory board at Mississippi State University who helped review chapters and provide invaluable feedback. We thank Ken and Randy Kendrick, Earnest W. and Mary Ann Deavenport, and the Pure Water Foundation for the funding necessary to embark on a project of this magnitude. We also thank our friends and family for their support, and for putting up with the long working hours that went into conducting this research. Most importantly, we would like to thank the staff and supporters of the Institute for Market Studies at Mississippi State University for publishing this book. Without their support, this book would not have been possible.

Let's start promoting prosperity in Mississippi!

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Learning from Disasters in Mississippi

Stefanie Haeffele and Virgil Henry Storr

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Learning from Disasters in Mississippi

Stefanie Haeffele and Virgil Henry Storr

This chapter examines disaster recovery in Mississippi and how policies that foster entrepreneurship might help spur disaster recovery and promote prosperity going forward. Based on our broader research on community recovery after Hurricane Katrina across the Gulf Coast and, specifically, in Mississippi, and after Hurricane Sandy in New York, we argue that entrepreneurs are key to disaster recovery. Entrepreneurs can spur community revival by increasing the benefits and reducing the costs associated with returning and rebuilding.

Natural disasters are no strangers to Mississippi. Indeed, Mississippi has experienced hurricanes, severe storms, floods, and tornadoes throughout its history (also see Chapter 19 for details on Mississippi's disaster history). In 1906, for instance, the Mississippi hurricane caused millions of dollars in damage to infrastructure, buildings, and cotton crops in Macon, Jackson, Brookhaven, Vicksburg, and McComb. In 1969, Hurricane Camille, a category 5 hurricane, destroyed homes along the Mississippi coastline and caused almost a billion dollars in damage throughout the state. Likewise, in 1971, a tornado outbreak along the Lower Mississippi River Valley destroyed multiple communities in Mississippi. Recently, on April 30, 2017, tornadoes and flooding caused \$5.5 million in damages to homes in Holmes and Montgomery counties.¹

In the past few decades, several disasters have severely impacted the citizens and environment of Mississippi. Hurricane Katrina made landfall on August 29, 2005, wreaked havoc on the Mississippi coastline, and then passed over the length of the state, producing heavy rainfall, high winds, and debilitating tornadoes. The storm resulted in 238 deaths in the state alone; in total, there were over 1,800 deaths

¹ Rigsby (2017)

and over \$100 billion in damage across the Gulf Coast associated with Hurricane Katrina.² The tornado outbreak on April 24, 2010, also impacted the state, resulting in ten deaths.³ Furthermore, severe flooding plagued the state in both 2011 and 2016. The storms in April and May 2011, coupled with high levels of snowmelt, caused the Mississippi River watershed to overflow, flooding communities all along the western border of Mississippi.⁴ Record levels of rainfall in March and August 2016 caused the Mississippi River delta to overflow, flooding parts of Louisiana and Mississippi.⁵

Mississippi also seems particularly vulnerable to future disasters. Based on the disasters that occurred between 2006 and 2015, leaving out the impact of Hurricane Katrina, Kiplinger and the National Weather Service identified Mississippi as the seventh most likely state in the United States to be impacted by disaster. From 2006 to 2015, 113 deaths in the state were weather-related, and there was over \$4.4 billion in disaster-related property damage.⁶ Since Hurricane Katrina in 2005, Mississippi has received 19 disaster declarations from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).⁷

These disasters caused hundreds of deaths and billions of dollars in property damage as well as emotional and physical distress. Citizens, and their communities, faced the challenge of dealing with the disasters and finding ways to return their lives to normalcy. This is, of course, no easy task. Not only does recovery depend on access to resources—such as personal savings, insurance, federal assistance, donations, etc.—to rebuild damaged and destroyed homes and businesses, but recovery can also depend on disaster victims being able to rely on their social ties for material and emotional support. These potentially disrupted social networks can also prove to be significant for recovery efforts, as families displaced by the disaster decide whether to move elsewhere or to return and rebuild.

In this post-disaster scenario, characterized with immense uncertainty, local commercial, social, and political entrepreneurs—including business owners, community organizers, and religious leaders—are essential to community rebound.⁸ In our research on disaster response and recovery after Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy, we saw that time after time, entrepreneurs played a crucial role in (1) providing the necessary goods and services after the storm, (2) restoring disconnected social networks, and (3) signaling that recovery is already taking place. These actions encourage others to return and recover from disasters by ensuring that affected residents have the material and emotional support they need as well as showing that fellow citizens are committed to rebuilding their communities. These individuals also often find novel and innovative ways to (a) encourage others to return, (b) acquire resources for the community, and (c) foster new opportunities within the community. We argue that these findings are important for understanding how policies impact disaster recovery. Policies can either hinder recovery or foster an environment where local entrepreneurs have the space and incentive to act. In order to foster entrepreneurship and promote prosperity, Mississippi should learn these lessons and implement policies that reduce uncertainty and promote community rebound.

This chapter proceeds as follows. The next section, “Entrepreneurs Drive Disaster Recovery,” examines the uncertainty of the post-disaster context and the key role that local, commercial, and social entrepreneurs, including business owners and community leaders, play in disaster recovery. Then the

2 Beven et al. (2008)

3 Potter (2010)

4 See U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (2012).

5 See Martinez, Payne and Alsup (2016) and Di Liberto (2016).

6 For more information on the Kiplinger and National Weather Service rankings, see <http://www.kiplinger.com/slideshow/insurance/T028-S001-10-states-most-at-risk-of-disaster/index.html>.

7 For a list of federal disaster declaration in Mississippi, see <https://www.fema.gov/states/mississippi>.

8 Storr, Haefele-Balch and Grube (2015)

“Looking at Mississippi Disasters” section explores several examples from Mississippi to highlight this research. The final section concludes with some policy recommendations.

Entrepreneurs Drive Disaster Recovery

The post-disaster context is characterized by extreme uncertainty for affected citizens. In some cases, citizens have evacuated and can remain displaced even after the disaster has passed as government officials assess damage, public utilities remain offline, and their neighborhoods remain uninhabitable. These displaced residents need to figure out when they are able to return home, discover what damage their house or business has sustained, and decide whether to rebuild or use the opportunity to start anew elsewhere. In other cases, citizens are not able to evacuate and, instead, must ride out the storm or shelter in place as the storm passes through. After the storm, affected citizens must deal with damage to their homes, power outages, and limited supplies. After the initial days following the disaster, they then must assess the state of their community and determine whether to rebuild or not. These decisions do not happen in a vacuum, but are dependent upon the decisions of other community members.

This sort of challenge is known as a collective action problem in economics. It is a scenario where all group members would benefit if they could cooperate, but where no individual member will contribute to the group effort until they are confident that others will contribute as well. The costs associated with repairing and rebuilding damaged buildings can be significant. Additionally, the costs of replacing damaged and destroyed automobiles, equipment, appliances, and personal items can be quite high. There are, of course, real benefits associated with reopening your damaged business and remaining a member of your community. However, those benefits are reduced if others do not rebuild and are increased if they do. If only a small portion of your neighbors return, your community will not be the same as before. If many neighbors do return, you will not only be able to stay in a community you call home, but you will also have access to economic opportunities, public assistance, and other goods and services. Garbage collection or electricity, for instance, may not return unless a certain number of neighbors are present to take advantage of the services. Community members' inability to get answers to a myriad of questions relevant to decisions regarding the rebuilding process, including questions about the decisions of other citizens and the prospects for the community after the recovery process, only exacerbate the difficulty and uncertainty inherent in the recovery process.

It is important to note that this challenge of rebuilding does not just affect residents, but also the decisions of government officials that live in the disaster area. Government officials must decide where to deploy scarce government resources. That is, they must decide where to restore public utilities, which public schools to focus on first, which roads to repair, and which neighborhoods to protect at a time when there is a great deal of pressure for public services. Moreover, government officials, police officers, and firefighters not only have to respond to the community, but they also must deal with their own personal situations.

The worse the disaster, the more difficult to it is to overcome this challenge of gaining sufficient traction to rebuild a community. Losses are more extreme, including death, property damage, lost family objects, job loss, etc. Not only are more resources required to spur recovery, but the benefits and costs of returning are even more uncertain. After a disaster, like a major hurricane that destroys whole neighborhoods, displaces residents, and damages infrastructure, it can be hard to locate and coordinate with other community members whose cooperation your successful recovery depends on.

In such a scenario, it is rational for community members to wait to see how others will respond to the disaster. It is also rational for officials to wait to see which communities are recovering before deploying scarce resources. Of course, if everyone behaves “rationally” then disaster recovery will not occur. While everyone waits for others to act first no actions occur, and no actual recovery may take place.

However, we see recovery occurring after every disaster. We argue, based on our research on Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy, that local entrepreneurs rise to this challenge and are some of the first movers to drive recovery. By doing so, they reduce the costs and increase the benefits of returning to affected communities, and increase the likelihood that other people return as well.

Our research builds off a larger project that began after Hurricane Katrina ravaged the Gulf Coast in 2005.⁹ A group of scholars, affiliated with the Mercatus Center at George Mason University, sought to understand the impact of the costliest natural disaster in U.S. history by examining the response and recovery efforts by the government (local, state, and federal), the business community, and the communities themselves. Groups of researchers analyzed macro level empirical data, conducted case studies, and went into the field and conducted in-depth structured interviews with residents, business owners, and individuals who work for faith-based groups and nonprofit organizations. In all, over 300 interviews were conducted in the Gulf Coast region (including the greater New Orleans area in Louisiana as well as in Mississippi) and 53 interviews in Houston, Texas between 2006 and 2009. Interviews focused on the state of the community before and after the storm, individuals' experiences during the storm and its immediate aftermath, the process of rebuilding (or relocating), and what people, organizations, and resources were important to or hindered recovery. This approach enabled scholars to examine the storm from multiple perspectives and attempt to understand the complex reality of disaster recovery.¹⁰

Studies on the federal government response detail both failures and successes. For instance, Sobel and Leeson examine how FEMA struggled to obtain and analyze the knowledge necessary to deliver effective disaster management, and argue that this knowledge problem is crucial to understanding the limits of centralized disaster management.¹¹ Alternatively, Horwitz analyzes the U.S. Coast Guard's response to Hurricane Katrina and determines that their approach of delegating authority to local managers led to successful response efforts.¹² Horwitz also found that Walmart engaged in a similar management approach and, as a result, proved to be helpful to the response and recovery efforts.¹³ Furthermore, local business owners played important roles in recovery either by reopening their business or by opening new businesses to fulfill unmet needs.

Similarly, Storr, Haeffele-Balch, and Grube highlighted the efforts of local gas stations in providing necessary provisions in the early stages of recovery, furniture stores providing equipment and furniture during rebuilding, and new coffee shops providing food, internet services, and social spaces for citizens to complain to one another and share their experiences.¹⁴ Indeed, studies that examined community recovery found several common themes that spurred recovery in seemingly different neighborhoods. For instance, Chamlee-Wright and Storr explore the role of collective narratives in encouraging or discouraging recovery and the importance of social capital in overcoming the collective action problem.¹⁵ Storr and Haeffele-Balch also highlight how communities with relatively loose social ties can still come together to spur return.¹⁶ Grube and Storr identify that communities that engage in organized self-governance in mundane times are more likely to rebound more quickly after disaster.¹⁷

9 For a summary on the broader project, see <https://medium.com/mercatus-scholar-commentary/10-years-later-katrina-and-the-political-economy-of-everyday-life-6722ab3c3258>.

10 See a list of research that came from this project here: https://ppe.mercatus.org/expert_commentary/mercatus-disaster-recovery-research.

11 Sobel and Leeson (2007)

12 Horwitz (2009a)

13 Horwitz (2009a), (2009b)

14 Storr, Haeffele-Balch and Grube (2015)

15 Chamlee-Wright and Storr (2011)

16 Storr and Haeffele-Balch (2012)

This research was later expanded to include the response and recovery of Hurricane Sandy, the second-costliest disaster in U.S. history. Specifically, we interviewed members of the Orthodox Jewish community in Rockaway, New York over the summers of 2013 and 2014. 16 in-depth, structured interviews were conducted, following the same interview structure and methods as those conducted after Hurricane Katrina. Similar patterns and themes emerged from examining this community, including the importance of social capital and local leaders in driving community rebound.

After years of conducting fieldwork and research on natural disasters, including studying the costliest and most-complex disasters in U.S. history, we have found that community leaders and local entrepreneurs are vital to response and recovery in state after state and neighborhood after neighborhood.¹⁸ While the details of each community are different, entrepreneurs in each community find unique ways to fulfill three major roles: 1) providing necessary goods and services after the storm, 2) restoring disconnected social networks, and 3) signaling that recovery is already taking place. These actions encourage others to return and recover from disasters by showing that fellow citizens are committed to rebuilding their communities.

Three examples from our research highlight the key role that entrepreneurs, in particular commercial and social entrepreneurs, play in spurring recovery. After Hurricane Sandy, in the Orthodox Jewish community of Rockaway, New York, for instance, Rabbi Bender, the founder and president of the Achiezer Community Resource Center,¹⁹ and his network of rabbis were able to provide one of the most important goods and services needed after a disaster: monetary assistance.

Achiezer is a social organization aimed at helping members of the community navigate health issues and other personal crises. While not an official disaster relief center, Achiezer is also the place people call when they are in need, including in the lead up to and aftermath of Hurricane Sandy. They sent out email updates to around 10,000 individuals, and their hotline received around 1,500 phone calls a day, with people asking for updates on the storm, evacuation options, and available resources. They also received phone calls about sending supplies and money to the community, and soon became a hub for donations.

In order to process and distribute the influx of monetary donations, Rabbi Bender worked with the Davis Memorial Fund to reinstitute the Community Assistance Fund (CAF). CAF was originally used to provide small amounts of funds to community members in need during the recession, and became the mechanism for distributing aid after Sandy. A board of trustees was created, and rabbis in the Orthodox Jewish community on the Rockaway Peninsula helped spread the word, take applications, and assess needs.

CAF was distributed in three phases, with graduated applications and assessments to ensure the funds were going to credible needs: 1) \$2,000-3,000 for emergency needs; 2) \$10,000 for quick repairs, like pumping out water, clearing mold, and repairing walls; and 3) major financial assistance for substantial home repairs. As Storr, Haeffele-Balch and Grube summarize,

Overall, over \$11 million was raised, and CAF helped more than 1,000 families in the Orthodox Jewish community on the Rockaway Peninsula. Less than a year after the storm, Rabbi Bender expressed pride in his team's ability to raise and distribute the funds quickly and efficiently, "The staggering fact from this, which I am extremely proud of, and I want you to watch the media and the Attorney General speaking about the fact that a lot of places who raised money for Sandy, but it still didn't [get] out. We raised it, \$11 million, and we gave out \$11 million and there was no overhead costs." (2015, 84)

¹⁷ Grube and Storr (2014)

¹⁸ Storr, Haeffele-Balch and Grube (2015)

¹⁹ For more information on Achiezer, see <http://www.achiezer.org>.

The resources available through the CAF were critical in helping the community recover.

After a disaster, citizens are dispersed, and communication networks are overwhelmed, making it difficult to connect with loved ones, employers, neighbors, etc. This may seem even more daunting in a diverse neighborhood, with loose social ties. However, in the diverse neighborhood of Broadmoor in New Orleans, residents were able to communicate with one another and band together to ensure rebuilding after Hurricane Katrina by using the information and structure of their neighborhood association, the Broadmoor Improvement Agency (BIA).²⁰

Broadmoor suffered severe flooding after Katrina, with an average of eight feet of water. Every home in the neighborhood sustained damage. In early 2006, when few residents had returned to the area, the first New Orleans redevelopment plan was released, part of the Bring New Orleans Back (BNOB) Commission. The BNOB plan called for Broadmoor to become green space. Residents were shocked. In order to keep their homes, communities would have to prove that at least 50 percent of their populations would return. The president of the BIA, LaToya Cantrell, knew she had to do something to rally the neighborhood and called for a meeting, reaching out to residents through the BIA's preexisting records. The meeting was widely attended and resulted in the creation of website, a marketing campaign for the neighborhood, and a strategy for contacting and tracking residents. These efforts were successful because of the vast skills within the community. As Storr, Haeffele-Balch and Grube note,

... the BIA used the skills and tools available in the diverse community to prove viability, highlighting the ability of private citizens to effectively tap into dispersed knowledge and use it to their advantage during recovery. Maggie Carroll articulated this nicely, "We've realized that we have such capacity here, and it already exists. People have so much expertise, and we're just able to really hone in and use those skills for the betterment of the entire neighborhood." (2015, 92)

Their efforts paid off. Broadmoor was not only intact in subsequent versions of the redevelopment plan, but subsequent versions also included Broadmoor's own community driven post-disaster development plan. Cantrell and the BIA were able to utilize their preexisting social networks to contact and band together residents; furthermore, they used their diverse skillsets to not only prove community vitality but to also spur recovery.

Lastly, after Hurricane Katrina, Father Vien of the Mary Queen of Vietnam (MQVN) Catholic Church in New Orleans East went above and beyond his role as religious leader in order to signal that recovery was underway.

The MQVN community was badly damaged after Katrina, with flood waters of five to twelve feet deep. After the storm, Father Vien travelled the country visiting displaced parishioners, encouraging them to return. He also started holding church services only six weeks after the storm. As such, when he petitioned the utilities company to turn electricity back on, he was able to share his knowledge of the commitment of his parishioners to return as well as show pictures of residents who promised to return.

The displaced members of the MQVN community did, indeed, return. Father Vien, then, worked to get FEMA trailers for elderly members of the community and led petitions when city officials planned to build a landfill nearby. Father Vien not only worked hard to ensure his community rebounded but encouraged others to actively participate in recovery, including creating their own development corporation that focused on bringing a charter school, retirement center, and health clinic to the area. Father Vien also

²⁰ For more information on the BIA, see <http://www.broadmoorimprovement.com>.

rallied youth in the community to be politically active, and they created the Vietnamese-American Youth Leadership Association (VAYLA). As Storr, Haeffele-Balch and Grube observe,

It is clear that Father Vien acted as a focal point for community rebound and spokesperson for the MQVN community after Hurricane Katrina... Had Father Vien not acted, the dynamic in the MQVN community would likely have been very different. Fortunately, Father Vien did act and spurred a rapid recovery for the MQVN community. Less than two years after Katrina, the overwhelming majority of his parishioners had returned, most of the businesses they owned had reopened, and the community was well on its way to being rebuilt. In fact, by the summer of 2007, about 90 percent of the residents had returned to the MQVN community while the repopulation rate in New Orleans overall was only 47 percent. By expanding his role from spiritual leader to community spokesperson and political activist, Father Vien ensured the MQVN community returned and was taken seriously by the political actors in charge of the overall recovery of New Orleans. (2015, 110)

As multiple members of the MQVN community suggested, the neighborhood would not have bounced back so quickly without Father Vien's efforts.

After a disaster, entrepreneurs often find novel and innovative ways to a) encourage others to return, b) acquire resources for the community, and c) foster new opportunities within the community. For instance, Rabbi Bender was able to repurpose a community fund, CAF, that ensured that monetary donations were processed and distributed appropriately and quickly. LaToya Cantrell and the BIA were able to tap into local talent and find unique solutions to prove vitality and spur recovery. Finally, Father Vien ignited his parishioners, both young and old, to become politically active and take control of the fate of their community. These local entrepreneurs were essential to community rebound.

Looking at Mississippi Disasters

Like we found in multiple neighborhoods after Hurricanes Katrina and Sandy, the people of Mississippi are proud of their community, their skills, their hardworking attitude, and their resilience. As one person we interviewed in Waveland, Mississippi noted after Katrina,

We just get up and do it again. You know, you just do it. I mean you just do it. And maybe it's because our hearts are big. I don't know. We just do it. We got up, pulled up our bootstraps and just went to work. You do that, because you see your friends and neighbors and they're in need ... and in some ways, they might not be able to provide for themselves. So, you gotta help them and provide.

Likewise, Carpenter analyzed four communities along the Mississippi coast and found that the two that rebounded quickest, Waveland and Ocean Springs, were composed of citizens with strong social ties and networks. Carpenter concludes that, "strong local networks of support and a varied built environment tend to be associated with higher community resilience" (2013, 1). Smith also argues that the people of Mississippi were their own source of resilience and recovery, and also highlights issues with public assistance.²¹

Mississippi's experience provides similar evidence toward the importance of community leaders and local entrepreneurs for disaster rebound. Faith-based groups and religious leaders have played important

21 Smith (2012)

roles in spurring recovery after disasters in Mississippi. Like Father Vien, pastors throughout the Gulf Coast sought to signal recovery after Katrina. For instance, Reverend Edward Murphy of Bay St. Louis, Mississippi worked hard to get his church open for services, noting that “Virtually everybody who comes into Bay St. Louis comes by this church ... I want it to be a shining light.”²² Rev. Murphy recognized that in order to restore his community meant a need to restore the spiritual and social center as well. Likewise, the editor of the *Baptist Record* stated that “We need to get these houses of worship in order as soon as possible before more people drift away.”

Nonprofits and businesses also worked together to get employees back to work or in new jobs after Hurricane Katrina. For instance, Oreck Corp. reopened its vacuum cleaner plant quickly after the storm, using generators and providing shelter for workers.²³ United Way helped set up job fairs for evacuees who settled in northern Mississippi after the storm.²⁴

Furthermore, nonprofits in Mississippi have weathered hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, and oil spills, and are finding ways to learn from these experiences, collaborate with one another, and better serve citizens in need.²⁵ Consider, for instance, the efforts of The Carpenter’s Helper, a United Way agency that works to correct poor housing conditions, especially for the elderly, or those with disabilities or low incomes.²⁶ The Carpenter’s Helper helped to repair homes in Hattiesburg after several recent tornadoes and floods.²⁷

Nonprofits are also finding ways to utilize the contacts they created in the wake of past disasters, allowing them to better serve their clients. For example, as Wallace reported in *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, “When Vietnamese-speaking shrimpers lost their main source of income after the BP spill, a local nonprofit group—the Mississippi Center for Justice—knew just where to turn: to a Vietnamese-American group of lawyers in California who had volunteered their services to help homeowners resolve rebuilding disputes after Katrina and Rita.”²⁸

If religious leaders, business owners, and nonprofits find unique ways to deal with disasters and learn from past experiences, Mississippi policymakers can and should as well.

Policy Recommendations and Conclusion

Based on our research, we argue that local entrepreneurs matter for disaster recovery. This understanding of the role of entrepreneurs in disaster recovery has implications for the types of disaster-related policies that Mississippi should implement. If we are correct that entrepreneurs are key drivers of post-disaster recovery, officials should develop policies that ensure that entrepreneurs have the space to act in the wake of disaster. Moreover, officials should avoid policies that can hinder recovery by (1) stalling recovery efforts through introducing excessive bureaucratic processes and red tape in applying for assistance or petitioning for resources and (2) introducing uncertainty that exacerbates the collective action problem and discourages activities of disaster recovery.

22 Byrd (2006)

23 Horsley (2005). While the vacuum cleaner plant has since left the area, its efforts after Katrina provided employment and a commitment to return.

24 Seid (2005)

25 Wallace (2010)

26 For more information, see <https://www.unitedwaysems.org/carpenters-helper>.

27 See WDAM (2016).

28 Wallace (2010)

First, some policies that might be appropriate during regular times can unintentionally hinder entrepreneurial activity and stall recovery after a disaster. Such policies include zoning laws, building codes, occupational licensing, and changing procedures and eligibility of assistance.²⁹ Zoning laws aimed at separating residential and commercial property can limit the availability of goods and services in the post-disaster environment. After a disaster, for instance, communities may need access to health care, food services, and community spaces. However, zoning laws often restrict these entities from forming. For example, when a nurse from the Ninth Ward in New Orleans attempted to open a clinic in order to provide low-cost medical care to residents, zoning restrictions delayed its opening for months since the donated building was a residence before the storm. Building codes may also prevent businesses from operating and providing necessary goods to the community. While building codes might ensure safety in mundane times, allowing a hardware store to open up while repairs are being made would allow for people to buy the supplies needed to rebuild their homes and businesses. Likewise, occupational licensing rules can hamper recovery by restricting the ability of outsiders to provide construction, plumbing, and electrical services. Skarbek examines how Florida relaxes licensing requirements after hurricanes, and argues that such activities quicken recovery without increased safety or fraud.³⁰ Sutter, in chapter 19, also examines the negative effects of building codes, zoning laws, and occupational licensing, as well as other regulations that impact disaster recovery.

Second, policies can introduce uncertainty into the post-disaster environment, even when designed and implemented with the best intentions. Chamlee-Wright calls this type of hindrance “signal noise.”³¹ Signal noise occurs when the policy space is changing rapidly and when policies and government programs have vague eligibility requirements or unclear benefits. For instance, after a disaster, flood maps are often found out of date and require updating before flood insurance benefits are allotted. Residents waiting to find out if their home or business are covered in the new flood maps are unsure whether to go about rebuilding or to wait. Likewise, after a disaster, federal and state governments often implement tax breaks for individuals and businesses impacted by the storm. Such tax breaks can give citizens access to needed resources for rebuilding. However, the programs are often not announced or implemented until months after the storm and after rebuilding is already underway. These programs give resources back to citizens, but often not when they are needed most (in the immediate aftermath of the storm).

Major redevelopment planning efforts can also introduce signal noise into the recovery process. Often the intent is to engage in a robust planning effort that ensures that cities rebound, that building practices help mitigate future disasters, or that new and better urban planning principles are implemented. However, redevelopment planning efforts can take months or years to complete, and go through several iterations before being finalized. Planners must negotiate between differing goals and interests, and settle on a set of plans for the entire community. In the case of post-Katrina New Orleans, the city went through multiple planning commissions and a handful of drafts over the years after the storm.³² With each iteration, local residents felt undermined or neglected. Both Broadmoor and New Orleans East, mentioned above, had been identified as potential green space in the initial redevelopment plans and had to prove that the residents would return and that demolishing their neighborhood was not a vital option. Evans-Cowley and Gough examined the redevelopment planning process in Mississippi and noted that resources were not directly provided for county-level planning. They argued that large-scale planning should build community trust and can benefit from an experienced team of outsiders to facilitate the

29 For an in-depth look at policies and regulations for insurance, price-gouging laws, and occupational licensing, see Chapter 19.

30 Skarbek (2008)

31 Chamlee-Wright (2010)

32 Storr, Haeffele-Balch and Grube (2015)

conversation and community buy-in. In Harrison County, for instance, citizens decided on their future with the help of a planning team from Ohio State University.³³

In all these examples, signal noise adds uncertainty to recovery. Individuals and communities must try to estimate what policies will impact them and be ready to adapt when policies change, instead of being able to primarily focus on actual recovery.³⁴

In order to foster entrepreneurship and promote prosperity, Mississippi should learn from these lessons and implement policies that reduce uncertainty and promote community rebound. In order to do this, we provide three major policy recommendations: 1) temporarily suspend policies that hinder recovery, 2) articulate simple and predictable policies that reduce signal noise, and 3) devise a disaster policy framework before a disaster starts. This broad framework, in many ways, complements the specific policy recommendations in Chapter 19, including suspending or altering zoning laws, price gouging laws, and occupational licensing.

First, we recommend that Mississippi, and the counties and cities within the state, temporarily suspend policies that hinder entrepreneurial action, including zoning laws, building codes, and occupational licensing. By allowing citizens to quickly reopen their businesses, even if they are in bare-bones structures or minimally staffed, can provide goods and services that enable others to return and rebuild. For instance, allowing the hardware store to open even while it is still under repair means that residents are able to start their recovery process much sooner. Additionally, relaxing the teacher-student ratio required for day-care services would mean that children are not spending their day on a construction site but at a day-care facility. In a study of the tornado outbreak in 2011, Smith and Sutter compared the policy environment for businesses in Joplin, Missouri and Tuscaloosa, Alabama and found that Joplin, which relaxed requirements and expedited processing, recovered more quickly.³⁵

Second, we recommend that Mississippi develop simple and predictable policies for disaster recovery in a timely manner. Such policies reduce signal noise because they are easier for citizens to understand and comply with. For example, if tax breaks will be offered for individuals and business owners, they should be announced quickly after a disaster with clear eligibility requirements and details. Likewise, assistance programs, programs that buy-out destroyed homes, and flood insurance metrics should be written in plain language, have clear eligibility requirements, and a simple process for applying and receiving assistance. Not only will such policies reduce signal noise, but they will also ensure that vulnerable populations—that often lack resources and the social and political capital needed to navigate the bureaucratic red tape—can take advantage of the aid.³⁶

Third, we recommend that Mississippi takes the time to develop a policy framework that consists of suspending policies that hamper recovery and establish simple and predictable programs before the next disaster strikes, rather than devise a new framework after each time a disaster strikes. By having the

33 Evans-Cowley and Gough (2008)

34 Smith (2012) also highlights stalled recovery efforts in Mississippi, specifically detailing issues with housing programs and the hindrance of bureaucratic red tape.

35 Smith and Sutter (2013)

36 Several critiques of federal and state programs have identified that the most vulnerable are often the least likely to get assistance. While clear language and simple processes may help, policymakers should also aim to design programs that help those who need it most. For a discussion on how housing programs in Mississippi after Katrina neglected renters and low-income residents, see Jopling (2008) and Lowe (2012). For an in-depth study on several differences and vulnerabilities in Mississippi disaster recovery post-Katrina, see Cutter et al. (2014). For an analysis of how post-Katrina planning allowed for politically-advantaged groups to reform policy in ways that neglected minorities and the poor, see Derickson (2014). Further, Weber and Hilfinger Messias (2012) argue that front-line aid workers in Mississippi, who are well-suited to match vulnerable populations and with needed assistance, felt hindered in their efforts and had disaster-fatigue after Katrina. Empowering those aid workers to be entrepreneurial could provide aid to those in need.

plan written out ahead of time, policymakers can quickly pull it off the shelf and implement policies that encourage recovery. This quick, visible action will show that policymakers care about their citizens and are taking steps to empower entrepreneurs to spur rebound.

In summary, community leaders and local entrepreneurs help solve the challenges inherent in the post-disaster context and spur recovery. To promote prosperity, Mississippi should recognize the lessons from our research and implement policies that empower entrepreneurial activity in the wake of disasters leading to the fastest possible recovery for disaster stricken communities

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Summary of Chapter Conclusions

PART 1. Introduction: The Role of Government and Economic Growth

Chapter 1: The Case for Growth—Russell S. Sobel, The Citadel, and J. Brandon Bolen, Mississippi State University

- Mississippi is the poorest state in the United States in terms of per capita income. Mississippi underperforms economically relative to all of its bordering states.
- Focusing on policies that generate economic growth is the most viable pathway to alleviating Mississippi's weak economic condition.
- Very small changes in economic growth rates may yield vast positive changes in the quality of life for Mississippi residents within as little time as one to two generations.
- Focusing on economic growth does not mean that other important policy goals such as improving health and education and reducing crime are neglected.

Chapter 2: The Sources of Economic Growth—Russell S. Sobel, The Citadel, and J. Brandon Bolen, Mississippi State University

- The economic activity of a state necessarily occurs within that area's institutional context, including the legal, regulatory, and tax environments, as well as the degree of private property rights. The quality of these institutions affects the output of economic activity.
- Capitalism is an economic system based on the private ownership of productive assets within an economy.
- Abundant evidence demonstrates that areas with institutions that allow capitalism to thrive experience much higher levels of prosperity relative to areas that do not rely upon capitalism.

Chapter 3: Why Capitalism Works—Russell S. Sobel, The Citadel, and J. Brandon Bolen, Mississippi State University

- The prosperity of an area is determined by the total quantity of production and quality of goods and services that individuals value. This prosperity is influenced by factors such as the degree of specialization of labor, capital investment, and entrepreneurship.
- Capitalism is an economic system that generates prosperity because its decentralized nature supports the specialization of labor, capital investment, and entrepreneurship.
- Government policies, even when well-intentioned, often create harmful unintended consequences. This is often due to the more centralized nature of government decisions.

PART 2: Promoting Prosperity One Issue at a Time

Chapter 4: Why are Taxes so Taxing? —Brandon N. Cline and Claudia R. Williamson, Mississippi State University

- High taxes can be extremely costly. In addition to the cost of the tax itself, taxes create indirect costs including enforcement costs, administrative costs, and costs incurred from distortions of the market economy.
- Mississippi has a higher tax burden compared to its bordering states. This may negatively affect the location decisions of businesses and individuals, causing them to leave the state.
- Empirical evidence demonstrates that high tax rates significantly dampen rates of economic growth.

Chapter 5: Make Business Taxes More Competitive—Brandon N. Cline and Claudia R. Williamson, Mississippi State University

- State and local taxes represent a significant cost for businesses. These tax costs affect the location decisions of businesses and deter them from operating in Mississippi.
- In addition to corporate income taxes, there are a myriad of other taxes businesses pay, such as property taxes and inventory taxes. Some taxes such as the inventory tax and intangible property tax do not exist in the majority of other U.S. states.
- To generate more prosperity within the state, Mississippi should consider reducing its tax burden upon businesses.

**Chapter 6: “Selective Incentives,” Crony Capitalism and Economic Development—
Thomas A. Garrett, University of Mississippi, and William F. Shughart II,
Utah State University**

- This chapter evaluates the costs and benefits of targeted tax incentives designed to lure new private business enterprises to Mississippi.
- Our analysis demonstrates that Mississippi is poorer, not richer, by funding incentive programs.
- Reasons that incentive packages fail include no new employment since many individuals hired were previously employed, the additional tax cost to accommodate the new population growth, and resources allocated to funding the subsidies could have been spent on better schools, roads, or used to finance a reduction in tax rates for all.
- The funds now being spent to benefit a handful of private business owners could be used to finance broad-based reductions in tax rates and lightening the regulatory burden on all Mississippians.

**Chapter 7: Incentive-Based Compensation and Economic Growth—
Brandon N. Cline and Claudia R. Williamson, Mississippi State University**

- Incentive based compensation is a payment method where an individual’s pay is in some way tied to their performance. Economic literatures studying incentive based pay for executives show that use of incentive based pay improves company performance and by extension state economies.
- Empirical data shows that firms in Mississippi use incentive-based compensation less than similar firms in other states.
- Mississippi can help improve its economic position by restructuring parts of its tax code to allow for greater use of incentive based executive compensation.

**Chapter 8: Mississippi Shadow Economies: A Symptom of Over-Regulated
Markets and Measure of Missed Opportunities—Travis Wiseman,
Mississippi State University**

- This chapter discusses Mississippi’s regulatory environment and the state’s cumbersome habit of maintaining outdated and burdensome regulation, far longer than other states.
- Several sensible and low-cost reforms are introduced that can help curtail unwanted shadow economic activity, and promote prosperity in Mississippi.
- A case study of one industry that Mississippi over-regulates – the brewing industry – is discussed.

Chapter 9: Occupational Licensing in Mississippi—Daniel J. Smith, Troy University

- Occupational licensing, the regulation of individual entry to a profession, enables industry practitioners to restrict entry to their profession and raise prices on consumers.
- The effects of occupational licensing fall heaviest on low-income residents who must pay higher prices or resort to lower-quality home-production or black market provision.
- Mississippi has at least 118 different occupational categories with licensing, representing nearly 20 percent of Mississippi's labor force.
- The total estimated initial licensing costs in Mississippi exceed \$48 million and the estimated annual renewal costs add up to over \$13.5 million.
- Mississippi policymakers can promote prosperity in Mississippi by removing unnecessary and overtly burdensome licensing laws.

Chapter 10: Prosperity Districts: A Ladder Out of Last Place—Trey Goff, Out of Last Place Alliance

- Prosperity districts are geographically self-contained areas that reduce or eliminate unnecessary government restrictions on business activity, including regulation, taxation, and private subsidization
- Prosperity districts can be a unique and promising solution to the state's economic woes by allowing specific areas to be exempt from unproductive policies.
- Prosperity districts allow experimentation to determine which policies work best.
- Real world examples of the potential success of prosperity districts can be seen in the closely related concept of special economic zones, which have seen tremendous economic growth and development in places such as Singapore.

Chapter 11: Promoting Prosperity in Mississippi through Investing in Communities—Ken B. Cyree, University of Mississippi, and Jon Maynard, Oxford Economic Development Foundation

- We investigate the impact of investing in community livability and the relation to the change in total employment to promote prosperity in Mississippi.
- We document the decline in Mississippi employment, on average, from 2007-2016, and especially the decline in manufacturing employment.
- Our analysis shows that increased employment is significantly related to better school rankings, higher changes in wages, and higher changes in per capita retail sales. New business creation is not statistically related to employment.
- Our results suggest that in order to promote prosperity in Mississippi, we should invest in quality of life for the community.

**Chapter 12: Local Governments Run Amok? A Guide for State Officials
Considering Local Preemption—Michael D. Farren, George Mason
University, and Adam A. Millsap, Florida State University**

- Local governments sometimes implement regulations and ordinances that stifle economic growth.
- Preemption is a legal doctrine asserting that state law takes precedence over local law. In some cases it should be used by state governments to overrule local governments.
- State officials should consider preemption when local rules violate the principles of generality or free exchange. Such policies often involve barriers to entry, price controls, or business practice mandates.
- Violations of generality and free exchange harm economic growth because they inhibit economic activity and the efficient allocation of resources. Conversely, preempting such policies promotes economic growth.

**Chapter 13: School Choice: How To Unleash the Market in Education—
Brett Kittredge, Empower Mississippi**

- The United States has fallen behind other countries in K-12 education. One study found that American students ranked 38th out of 71 countries when tested in math, reading, and science.
- A government monopoly has existed in our delivery of education in the United States. Students are assigned to a school based on their zip code and the year they were born.
- Because students are assigned to a school based on a district line, real estate prices naturally rise in neighborhoods within a desirable school district. This has the effect of pricing out many families and forcing them to live in areas with less desirable schools.
- To improve quality, our education system should be student centered and market based. Parents should have options available to craft a custom education for their child based on their specific learning needs.
- The legislature can adopt a market based education through a universal school choice program that has broad eligibility, autonomy for all schools, and level funding across the various educational sectors.

**Chapter 14: Medicaid: A Government Monopoly That Hurts the Poor—
Jameson Taylor, MS Center for Public Policy**

- State health care policy revolves around Medicaid, which is a government-subsidized insurance program consuming one-third of Mississippi's budget.
- Health outcomes for Medicaid insurance patients are very poor; patients with no insurance at all fare better.
- Medicaid's number one problem, like that of many American insurance plans, is that it incentivizes the over utilization of health care while insulating recipients from the financial consequences of poor lifestyle choices.

- Medicaid is crowding out the development of innovative products and policy ideas.
- Reforms aimed at unleashing the power of health care pricing including large HSAs, direct surgical care, and comparative shopping incentives can begin to disrupt Medicaid's monopoly.

**Chapter 15: Tipping the Scales: Curbing Mississippi's Obesity Problem—
Raymond J. March, San Jose State University**

- Widespread obesity has serious health and financial consequences in Mississippi.
- Government policy, although well intended, is associated with increased levels of obesity especially for lower-income households.
- State-led efforts to reduce obesity are costly and unlikely to succeed because they fail to address the underlying causes of why less healthy food options are consumed.
- Private and local solutions are more effective in promoting health and reducing obesity.
- The most effective way to combat widespread obesity is the market, not the government.

**Chapter 16: Criminal Justice Reform in Mississippi—Trey Goff,
Out of Last Place Alliance**

- Despite decreasing rates of both violent and property crime since 1996, Mississippi incarceration rates have steadily increased.
- Mississippi has an incarceration rate that is among the highest in the world, most due to incarcerating non-violent crimes.
- The economic drain from this level of mass incarceration is extremely detrimental for the state economy in terms of both the cost of maintaining incarceration and the negative effects of incarceration upon individuals in the labor market.
- Reevaluating and restructuring the criminal justice system in Mississippi to reduce incarceration rates would be an extremely effective tool to increase the economic strength and wellbeing of the state.

**Chapter 17: Property Takings: Eminent Domain and Civil Asset Forfeiture—
Carrie B. Kerekes, Florida Gulf Coast University**

- Secure private property rights provide incentives for individuals to undertake investments and make capital improvements to their property and businesses. To promote prosperity, Mississippi policy makers should continue to improve laws and policies to restrict property takings.
- Following reforms passed in 2011 to protect against development takings, property owners in Mississippi are reasonably protected from eminent domain takings.
- Citizens are significantly less protected in the case of civil asset forfeiture. Civil asset forfeiture laws in Mississippi provide incentives for law enforcement agencies to seize private property.

Chapter 18: The Small-Dollar Loan Landscape in Mississippi: Products, Regulations, Examples, and Research Findings on Interest Rate Caps—Thomas (Tom) William Miller, Jr., Mississippi State University

- The best fuel for economic growth and prosperity is free market prices, including interest rates.
- Despite the goal of improving consumer welfare, interest rate caps often harm the very people legislatures intend to help—especially users of small-dollar loan products.
- Despite their well-known harmful effects on consumers, laws continue to fetter consumer credit markets with interest rate caps.
- Setting good rules governing how legitimate businesses provide access to consumer credit is important for everyone living in Mississippi.
- The Mississippi legislature can greatly help consumers by eliminating, or greatly raising, interest rate caps in all small-dollar loan markets.

Chapter 19: Natural Disasters and Prosperity in Mississippi—Daniel Sutter, Troy University

- Extreme weather poses a severe financial risk for a state economy. Mississippi is particularly exposed to the threat of damage from natural disasters.
- Free market practices often perform better at meeting the challenges posed by natural disasters rather than government policies. Removal of harmful policies such as occupational licensing and building codes during disaster may better allow the market to speed disaster recovery.
- Some government policies such as flood and wind insurance may exacerbate exposure to natural disasters. Other policies slow recovery time by creating uncertainty after the occurrence of a natural disaster.

Chapter 20: Learning from Disasters in Mississippi—Stefanie Haeffele and Virgil Henry Storr, George Mason University

- This chapter examines disaster recovery in Mississippi and how policies that foster entrepreneurship might help spur disaster recovery going forward.
- Entrepreneurs can spur disaster recovery by providing needed goods and services, restoring disrupted social networks, and acting as focal points around which other residents can coordinate their recovery efforts.
- To promote prosperity in Mississippi, officials should develop policies that ensure that entrepreneurs have the space to act in the wake of disaster.

About the Institute for Market Studies at Mississippi State University

The Institute for Market Studies (IMS) at Mississippi State University, created in 2015, is a nonprofit research and educational organization conducting scholarly research and providing educational opportunities to advance the study of free enterprise.

The IMS's mission is to support the study of markets and provide a deeper understanding regarding the role of markets in creating widely shared prosperity. This includes advancing sound policies based on the principles of free enterprise, individual liberty, and limited government. The IMS pursues its mission by bringing together leading scholars to conduct timely research on current economic and financial issues.

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