



ALABAMA AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY

BEYOND

THE BOOK

THE ALABAMA BICENTENNIAL COMMISSION
AFRICAN AMERICAN HERITAGE COMMITTEE



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BEYOND THE BOOK

In 2019, The Alabama Bicentennial Commission African American Heritage Committee published ***The Future Emerges from the Past: Celebrating 200 Years of Alabama African American History and Culture***. This book highlights the history, people, events, institutions, and movements that contributed to the Great State of Alabama, the nation, and world during the state's first 200 years.

The **Alabama African American History Beyond the Book website** continues the journey and goes beyond what could be included in the book's 244 pages. On a monthly basis this site will not only highlight past Alabama African American history makers and events, it will also contain present day icons, unsung sheroes/heroes, and current events. Short articles along with links to videos, photos, reference material, and additional information will be uploaded monthly for all to enjoy.

The website's goal is the same as the book's: to inspire the young and young at heart to dream big and never allow obstacles to stop their march toward achieving those dreams.



The Alabama Black Belt

Fertile soil of slavery . . . foundation for civil rights

ALABAMA'S BLACK BELT

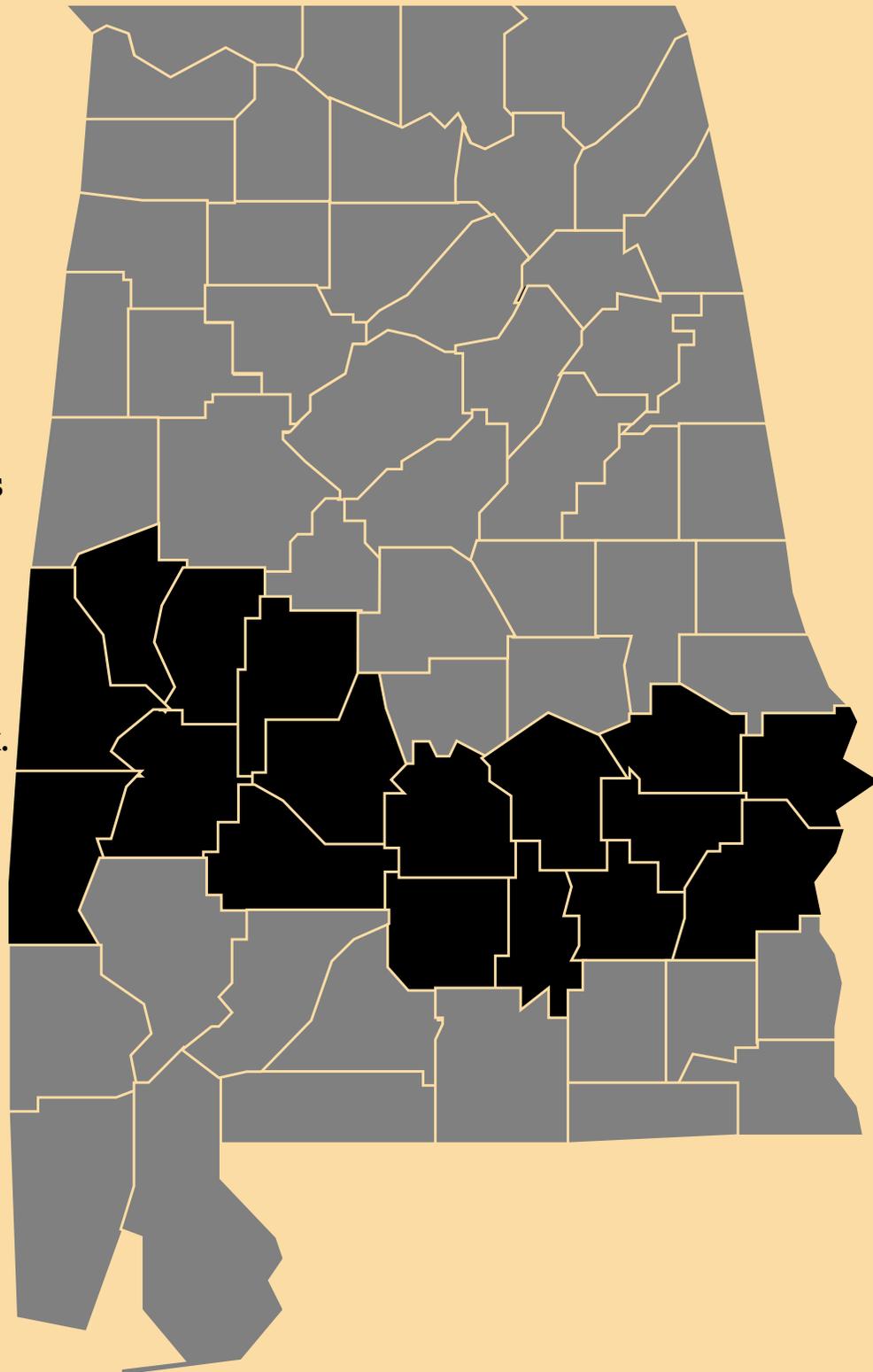
is part of the larger, national Black Belt region that stretches from Texas to Virginia.

Geologically, the Alabama Black Belt is a wide swath of dark, nutrient-rich, land that stretches across south-central Alabama between the Georgia and Mississippi state lines.

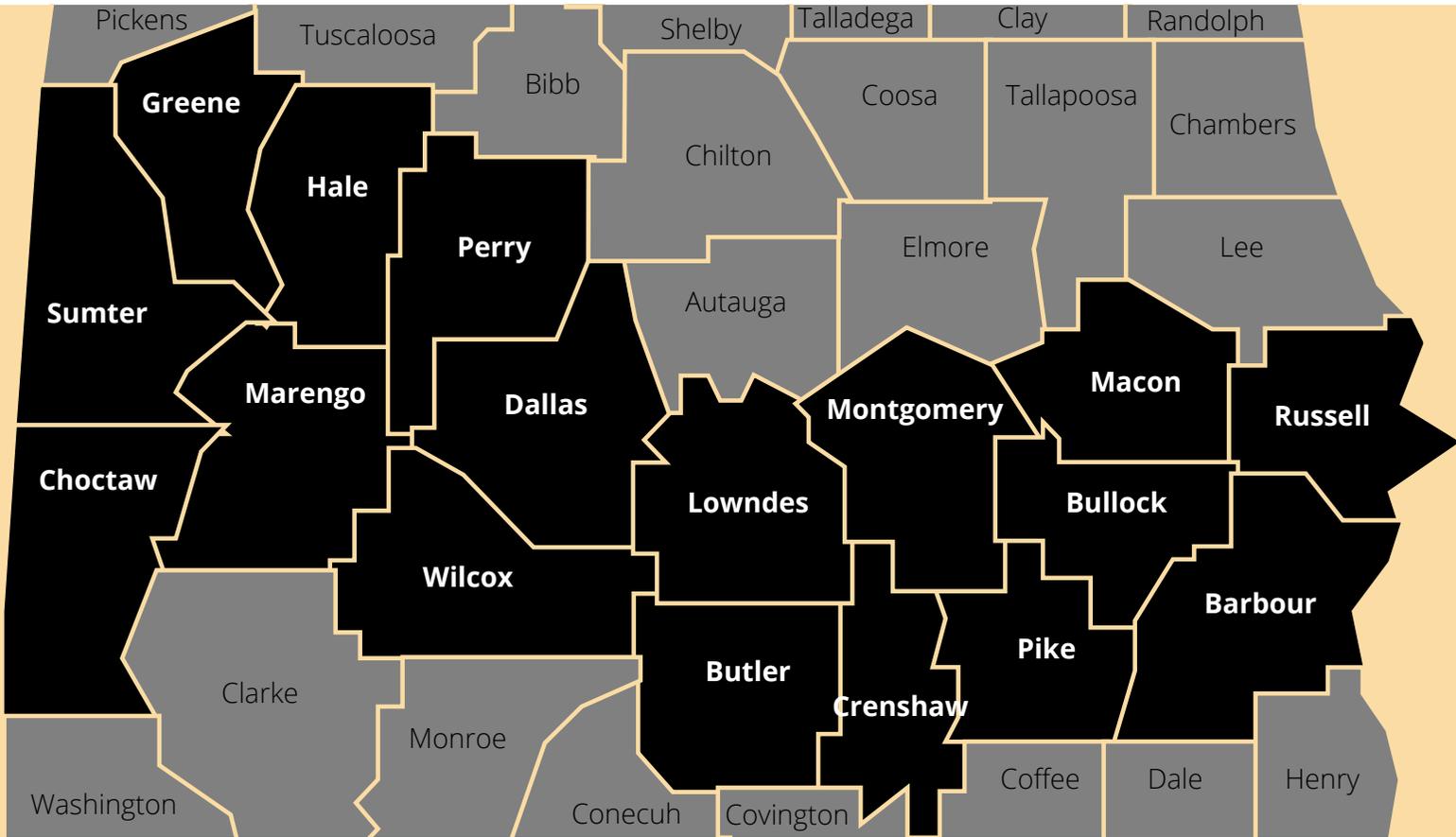
Historically, 17 Alabama counties are included in the region:

Barbour, Bullock, Butler, Choctaw, Crenshaw, Dallas, Greene, Hale, Lowndes, Macon, Marengo, Montgomery, Perry, Pike, Russell, Sumter and Wilcox.

Prior to the Civil War, half of Alabama's slaves were held captive within the Black Belt where the fruits of their labor made this one of the richest regions in the United States.



The Alabama Black Belt



When cotton was king, the wealth generated from this fertile land was one of the contributing factors that led to the secession movement in Alabama and the decision to join the Confederacy in 1861.

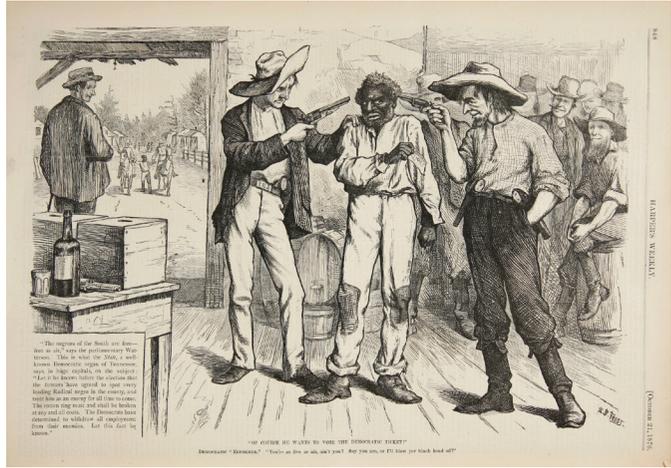


When Alabama became a state in 1819, there were about **38,000 slaves**, more than **30 percent** of Alabama's approximately **128,000** inhabitants.

By secession in 1861, Alabama was home to more than **435,000 slaves**, **45 percent** of the total population. Most of those slaves were concentrated in the state's Black Belt plantations.



For a short period following the Civil War, African Americans were granted the right to vote and held several positions of power. However, when Reconstruction ended, once again wealthy land-owners took control of the region and African Americans were denied the right to vote and stripped of every position of power they held.



Left: Benjamin S. Turner served in the U.S. House of Representatives representing Alabama's 1st Congressional district from 1871-1873. Right: Cartoon from Harper's Weekly, 1876, depicting an example of intimidation of Black voters during the Reconstruction period.

In the early 1900s, after years of poor land management, natural disasters, the Great Migration, and economic changes, the once wealthy and powerful Alabama Black Belt became one of poorest regions in the country. Many parts of the region are still struggling with excessive poverty today.

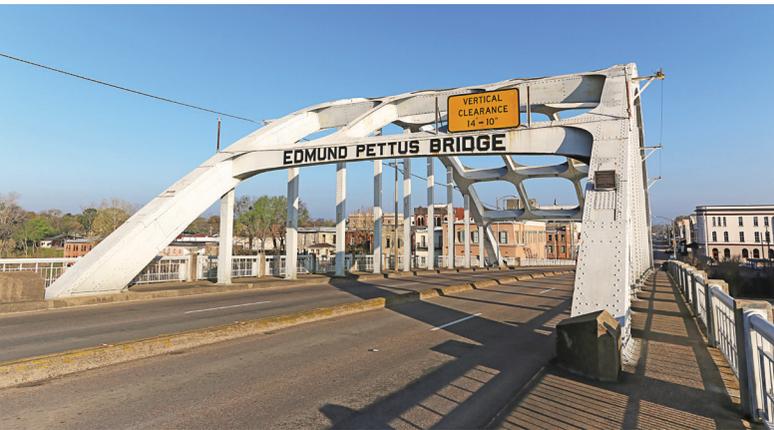


Above: Depression era Black Belt family, Gees Bend, Wilcox County, 1930s. (Arthur Rothstein/Library of Congress)
 Below right: Modern day poverty in Selma, Alabama, 2017 (Peter Gabel/Medium)



In the 1950s and 1960s the social justice tipping point occurred in the Black Belt. The oppressive Jim Crow laws and violent acts inspired disenfranchised African Americans to begin the Modern Civil Rights Movement.

Towns and cities within the Black Belt such as Tuskegee, Marion, Selma, Hayneville, Eutaw, and Montgomery became flashpoints that led to the fall of segregation and many of the repressive laws enacted to suppress African American progress within the state.



Left: Edmund Pettus Bridge, Selma, Alabama (Alabama Tourism Department)

Right: Alabama State Capitol Building (left), Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, Montgomery, Alabama (Alabama Tourism Department)

Two momentous Civil Rights events which drew international attention occurred in the Black Belt region:

The Montgomery Bus Boycott, December 1955 - December 1956

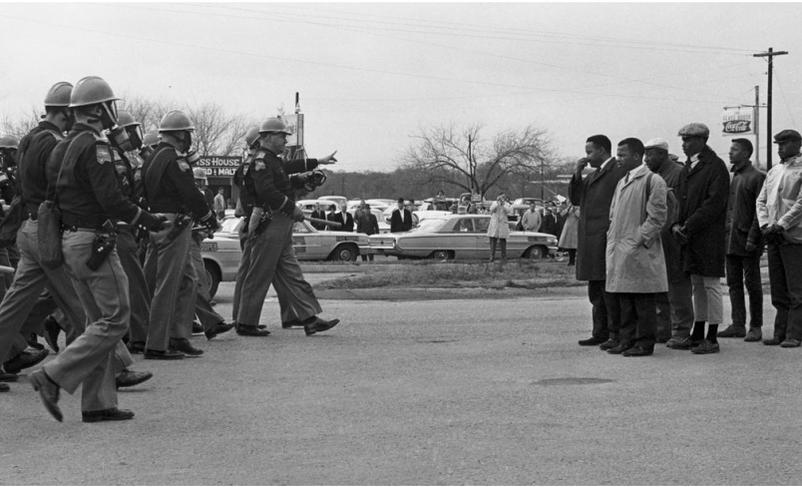


Left: Jo Ann Robinson's booking photo at the outset of what would become a year-long boycott of the city of Montgomery bus system, 1955.

Right: Rosa Parks is fingerprinted following her arrest for refusing to give up her seat on a Montgomery city bus to a White passenger, 1955.



The Selma to Montgomery March (Bloody Sunday), March 1965



Left: Voting rights marchers are met by state troopers as they attempt to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge “Bloody Sunday,” March 7, 1965, Selma, Alabama.



Right: Martin Luther King Jr. (center) leads marchers into Montgomery, March 1965. (Spider Martin)

Despite slavery, restrictive laws, and numerous obstacles placed before African Americans in the Black Belt, many successfully pushed through these barriers and blazed a trail for all.

A few notable individuals and groups include:



Joanne Bland
Civil rights activist, educator and historian; one of the youngest persons jailed during the movement.



Rev. Ralph Abernathy,
Co-founder, Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)



Rosa Parks
Civil rights activist, best known for her pivotal role in the Montgomery bus boycott.



Coretta Scott King
Civil rights activist and author.



Nat “King” Cole
Musician was first African-American man to host an American TV series.



Jimmy Lee Sudduth
Self-taught folk artist and musician.



The Tuskegee Airmen
The first African-American military aviators in the U.S. Armed Forces.



The Gee’s Bend Quilters
Their folk art creations have been exhibited in art museums across the U.S.



Additional resources

<https://southernspaces.org/2004/black-belt/> - Southern Spaces

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Belt_\(region_of_Alabama\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Belt_(region_of_Alabama))

http://www.uaced.ua.edu/uploads/1/9/0/4/19045691/about_the_black_belt.pdf

<http://encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-2458>



<https://www.alabamalegacy.org/the-black-belt/>