

About the Alabama Black Belt

The **Black Belt** is a region of the State of Alabama, and part of the larger Black Belt Region of the Southern United States, which stretches from Texas to Maryland. The term originally referred to the region underlain by a thin layer of rich, black topsoil developed atop the chalk of the Selma Group, a geologic unit dating to the Cretaceous Period. The soils have been developing continuously at least since the Pliocene Epoch.

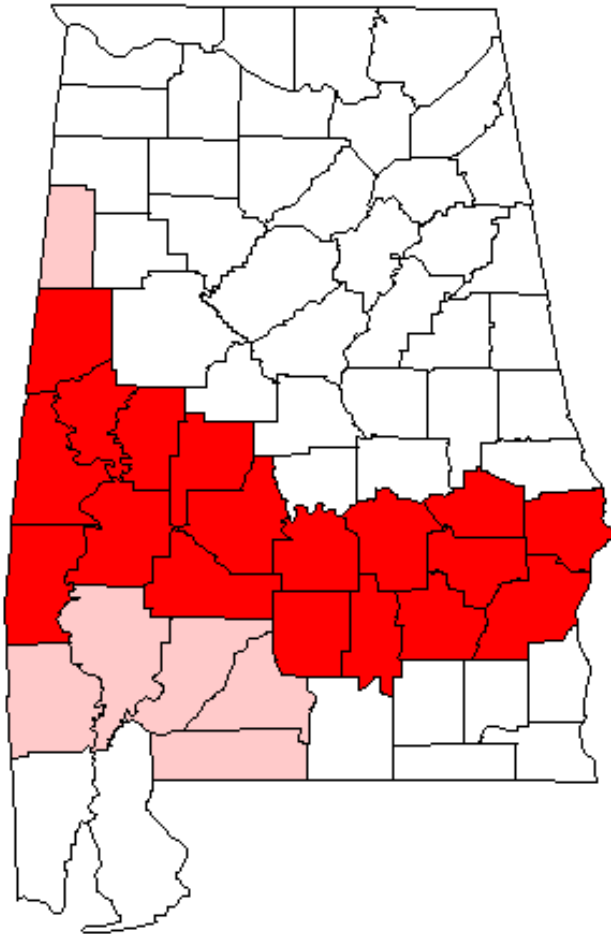
Counties highlighted in red are historically considered part of the Black Belt region. Counties highlighted in pink are sometimes considered part of the region.

The Black Belt region of Alabama is one of the most unique regional areas in the U.S. Stretching across the lower central portion of Alabama from the Mississippi to the Georgia border, the 18 counties of the Black Belt region sustain an abundance of natural resources, historical roots, cultural diversity and recreational activities valued by residents and sought by tourists.

The region is part of a larger, geographical Black Belt region that stretches from Texas to Virginia. This region has historically been home to “the richest soil and the poorest people” in the United States, as noted by Arthur Raper in his 1936 study, *Preface to Peasantry*. “From DeSoto’s meeting with Tuscaloosa to the birth of the Confederacy and the civil rights struggles of the mid-twentieth century, it was here that some of the nation’s most significant historical events occurred.”

Originally the term “Black Belt” referred to the exceptionally fertile black soil that encouraged early pioneers in the 1820’s and 1830’s to settle Alabama and construct a network of cotton plantations supporting half of Alabama’s enslaved population.

During this time, the region was one of the wealthiest and most politically powerful regions in the U.S. Its commerce elevated Montgomery, Selma and Cahamba into some of the most affluent towns in the country.



Civil Rights Champions

When the Civil War began in the early 1860's, Montgomery was chosen as the first capital of the Confederacy. In recent decades the region has been known for the birth of the civil rights movement initiated by the large population of African American residents in the region. In the 1950's and 1960's, long-oppressed African American residents of the Alabama Black Belt, aided by Supreme Court decisions and congressional actions, transformed small towns such as Tuskegee, Marion, Selma, Hayneville and Eutaw into scenes of some of the most critical moments of the modern American freedom struggle.

Many visitors associate Alabama with its pivotal role in the civil rights movement. Indeed, many of the movement's historic events occurred on Black Belt soil, including the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the Selma to Montgomery March and the creation of the Black Panther party. These events and others changed America and inspired landmark national legislation including the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 that continue to impact American citizenship today.

Black Belt Counties

The list of counties comprising the Black Belt is often dependent on the context but historically includes 18 counties: Barbour, Bullock, Butler, Choctaw, Crenshaw, Dallas, Greene, Hale, Lowndes, Macon, Marengo, Montgomery, Perry, Pickens, Pike, Russell, Sumter, and Wilcox.

Clarke, Conecuh, Escambia, Monroe and Washington counties are sometimes included in the region, but are usually considered part of Alabama's southern coastal plain. Lamar does not meet the soil traits but is often included due to its lack of business enterprise.

Today, the area is rich in cultural, historical and natural heritage. People travel from across the globe to walk the Edmund Pettus Bridge, participate in Civil War reenactments, visit Gee's Bend quilters, marvel at Native American wonders, wander the antebellum plantations, and to enjoy the wildlife.

Source: University of West Alabama, Tuskegee University and Wikipedia