

Alabama Black Belt Heritage Area Statement of National Significance

Addendum

Introduction: In preparing this revised Statement of National Significance for the Black Belt National Heritage Area, we have amended the following study sections:

- National Significance
- Interpretive Themes
- Inventory of supporting natural, historic, and cultural resources
- Boundary description

Overview:

In the years that mark the anniversaries of the Selma-to-Montgomery marches and the National Voting Rights Act and America's 250th, the Alabama Black Belt Heritage Area is seeking national heritage area designation to conserve, interpret, and raise appreciation for the remarkable sites and stories central to the struggle for equality throughout America's history.

National Significance:

The Alabama Black Belt Heritage Area is nationally important for its central role in the struggle for equality epitomized in the American Civil Rights Movement. Deriving its name from a slash of dark, fertile soil across Alabama's midsection, the Black Belt encompasses just 1000 square miles, yet events here have indelibly shaped our entire nation.

The apex of this struggle—the 54-mile march from Selma to Montgomery—took place here in the Black Belt 50 years ago this year—an anniversary nationally commemorated in a major motion picture, community marches, musical tributes, conferences, and more. The march culminated an epic, hundred-year journey to secure one of the most fundamental of American freedoms—the right to vote. Marchers brought the issue of voting rights to the forefront of the United States political and social agenda, and their peaceful means won broad support for their cause. Passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, five months after the Selma to Montgomery marches, secured the right to vote for all Americans, and forever changed the political life of the South and the United States as a whole.

Why did small communities in Alabama's Black Belt, such as Tuskegee, Marion, Selma, Hayneville, and Eutaw, transform into scenes of some of the most critical moments of the African American struggle for equality in the 1950s and 60s? It is not by accident that the Civil Rights Movement grew from this geographically and culturally distinct region of Alabama. The movement's origins are deeply rooted in the human history and natural landscape of Alabama's Black Belt—rooted in the rich black soil for which this region is named, which made the Black Belt a focal point for cotton growing and for the system of enslavement of Africans and African Americans that powered that industry.

While the landmark events of the American Civil Rights Movement—Rosa Parks' refusal to give up her bus seat to a white passenger, the Montgomery bus boycott, the Selma-to-Montgomery marches—are remarkable and nationally significant in and of themselves, they are far more

richly textured and nuanced when explored in the context of the place, people, and cultural traditions from which they arose. Understanding the origins, process, and outcome of this struggle for equality is central to our national identity and to the ongoing effort in our nation to secure freedom from oppression for all citizens.

Interpretive Themes:

Theme 1. The natural abundance of Alabama’s Black Belt landscape has drawn people to this region for thousands of years, at one time supporting one of the largest and most influential indigenous cultural centers north of Mexico, and later supporting the resource-intensive and slave-powered cotton industry, which planted the seeds of the struggle for equality here.

Supporting Narrative:

Alabama’s Black Belt is a fertile and abundant landscape, a quality that arises from a multitude of factors, ranging from its underlying bedrock and topography to its temperate climate. The fertility of region’s soil comes from the calcium-rich layer of chalk beneath it, formed some 65-80 million years ago when a shallow Dinosaur Era sea covered this land.

Influenced by soil, as well as by topography, moisture, periodic fire, and myriad other conditions, the Black Belt’s landscape nurtured a mosaic of distinct natural communities—rolling prairie grasslands and expansive thickets of native cane, upland pine woodlands and bottomland hardwoods. Some of the region’s plant species occur nowhere else in the South; others occur nowhere else in the world.

Through this abundant landscape flowed some of Alabama’s largest and most biologically diverse rivers—the Alabama, Black Warrior, Tombigbee, and Cahaba. Today, with most Alabama rivers harnessed for hydropower and thus ecologically transformed, the Black Belt’s Cahaba River offers a window into the former biodiversity of the region’s waterways. Alabama’s longest free-flowing river, the Cahaba is the most biologically diverse river of its size in the nation, with over 131 different species of fish, 24 species of freshwater mussels, and many endemic plant species, such as the Cahaba lily.

People have been drawn to this natural abundance for thousands of years, farming and fishing along the Black Belt’s rivers; using the abundant native cane to craft arrows, blow guns, fish traps, and dwellings; and hunting on the prairie grasslands. Indigenous culture flourished here, culminating in one of the largest and most influential American Indian communities in North America along the banks of the Black Warrior River.

From 1000 to 1500 CE (Common Era), Mississippian Indians inhabited a 300-acre site known today as Moundville. Here they built massive earthworks topped by temples, council houses, and the homes of Mississippian nobility, supporting an extended community of some 10,000 people. Today, Moundville is a National Historic Landmark and has been nominated as a U.S. World Heritage Site.

In 1540, Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto entered the region and sparked changes—

disease, warfare, and settlement—that dismantled the region’s age-old civilizations. By the early 1800s, after years of warfare between Indian tribes and US troops, Alabama Territory lay in federal hands. Settlers flooded into the Black Belt region, drawn, like the American Indians before them, by the region’s abundance, particularly its rich, black soil.

Settlers quickly discovered that the Black Belt’s soil grew cotton like no other. “Alabama Fever” brought thousands of settlers to the region in one of the first great American land booms, unrivaled until the California Gold Rush. Alabama entered the Union in 1819, with its first capital in the Black Belt at the now-abandoned town of Cahawba, which became the heart of the cotton-growing empire.

The activities of settlement—clearing, plowing, grazing of livestock—revealed the vulnerability of the region’s abundance. Its most iconic natural communities, including the canebrake, the longleaf pine forest, and the blackland prairie, came to be its most imperiled. Cotton plantations replaced native grasslands. Enslaved Africans, and their enslaved descendants, powered this cotton industry. Through their labor, the Black Belt became one of the country’s richest regions.

The Black Belt’s network of navigable rivers made the growth of this cotton empire possible. Steamboats carried cotton downstream to the Gulf of Mexico and worldwide markets and returned with goods for thriving Black Belt communities.

In the decades leading to the Civil War, the region attained its highest population density. Some of its cities became the wealthiest per capita in the nation. Cotton dominated the economy of the South, affected its social structure, and, during the Civil War, shaped the international relations of the Confederacy.

It was in the Black Belt city of Montgomery that delegates from six of the seven seceded states (the Texans arrived late) met in 1861 to draft a constitution for the Confederate States of America. And it was there that they elected Jefferson Davis the Confederacy’s president. Davis took the oath of office standing on the portico of the state capitol in Montgomery, now a National Historic Landmark.

For the next few months, Montgomery—at that time the richest city of its size in the nation and located in the heart of the Deep South’s plantation economy—served as the first capital of the Confederate States of America.

Prior to the Civil War, cotton was king in the South, and the fertile Black Belt the political and economic center of that kingdom, largely due to its abundant natural resources. The powerful legacy of oppression inherent in this slave-fueled economy planted the seeds of an equally powerful struggle for equality here.

Natural, historic and cultural resources that support Theme 1 *(Selected sites of particular significance are included below. For a complete listing of sites supporting Theme 1, see Appendix A)*

Resource	Listing	County	Description
Choctaw National Wildlife Refuge	National Wildlife Refuge	Choctaw	Choctaw National Wildlife Refuge encompasses some 4,000 acres of Coffeerville Lake, the third largest lake on the Black Warrior-Tombigbee reservoir system and the last reservoir on the Tombigbee River before it reaches the Gulf of Mexico. Established September 25, 2002 for the purpose of protecting and managing a unique section of the Cahaba River and land adjacent to it. Cahaba River NWR is home to five federally listed species including the Cahaba shiner, Goldline darter, Round rocksnail, and Cylindrical lioplax snail. The largest known stand of the imperiled Shoals lily (known locally as the Cahaba lily) also occurs within the Refuge, and restoration of native longleaf pine communities are a prime focus of Refuge management.
Old Cahawba Archeological Park	U.S. National Register of Historic Places	Dallas	For thousands of years, Native Americans inhabited this area at the confluence of the Cahaba River and the Alabama River. Following the defeat of the Creek Nation in 1814, settlers flooded into the area. Old Cahawba became Alabama's first capital in 1820. Following the Civil War, Cahawba declined dramatically and by the late 1800s, most of the buildings were in ruin. Today, the lure of this ghost town draws many visitors. A welcome center showcases Native American artifacts and memorabilia from the town's settlement heyday.
Moundville Archeological Park	National Historic Landmark and U.S. National Register of Historic Places	Hale	Moundville Archeological Park preserves 326 acres of what was once one of the largest and most powerful Native American communities in North America. From 1000 to 1500 A.D., Mississippian Indians constructed large earthworks topped by temples, council houses, and the homes of their nobility. This park contains 26 massive, flat-topped earthen pyramids arranged around a vast central plaza. Archaeological excavations continue today.
Alabama River Museum		Monroe	Perched on the banks of the Alabama River, the Alabama River Museum exhibits 60-million-year-old fossils from the famous Claiborne Bluffs. American Indian artifacts—many of which were found on site during the excavation of the Claiborne Lock and Dam—illuminate early life in the area. Exhibits include tools, clothing, weapons, and a dug-out canoe used by Native Americans in the area, as well as a small replica of the steamboat Nettie Quill.
Alabama Department of Archives and		Montgomery	Located in downtown Montgomery, the Museum of Alabama is the only destination where you can explore Alabama's past from prehistory to the

Resource	Listing	County	Description
History & the Museum of Alabama			present. The Museum is located at the Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH), the nation's oldest state-funded, independent archival and historical agency. Permanent exhibitions at the Museum of Alabama include <i>The Land of Alabama</i> , introducing the geology and natural resources that helped shape the state's history, and <i>The First Alabamians</i> , featuring artifacts, murals, and a diorama that tell the inspiring story of fourteen thousand years of Native American culture.
St. Stephens Historical Park	U.S. National Register	Washington	St. Stephens was the eastern most city of the Mississippi Territory and a very important site during the settlement of the southwestern frontier. During a brief three decades beginning in the 1790's, St. Stephens became a Spanish Fort, an American trading post, and Mississippi territorial capital as settlers streamed down the Federal Road from the Carolinas and Georgia. At its height, c. 1820, the town boasted between two and three thousand residents and 450 substantial buildings. Upon Mississippi gaining statehood in 1817, Alabama became its own territory and St. Stephens its capital. Alabama's first Governor, William Wyatt Bibb, presided over the first meeting of the Territorial Legislature at the Douglass Hotel on St. Stephens' High Street.
Black Belt Nature and Heritage Trail	State Scenic Byway	Eleven Black Belt counties	This state scenic byway combines cultural and natural heritage features of the Black Belt prairie counties. The 55 sites, arranged by counties, include food, art, natural history, plantations, and Alabama history and civil rights localities.
Bartram Trail	National Recreation Trail	Macon County	The scenic Bartram Trail is the first trail in Alabama to be designated a National Recreation Trail. The Trail runs through the Tuskegee National Forest for about eight and one half (8 1/2) miles. The Bartram Trail passes through various types of forest wildlife habitat.
Black Belt Birding Trail		Eleven Black Belt counties	The Alabama Birding Trail project is a collaborative project of the Alabama Tourism Department, The University Center for Economic Development, the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, the Birmingham Audubon Society, Chambers of Commerce across the state, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the National Forest Service.
Perry Lakes Park and Barton's		Perry	The park comprises four oxbow lakes, formed when the Cahaba River changed its course about

Resource	Listing	County	Description
Beach, Cahaba River Preserve			150 years ago. Foot trails traverse the park's mature hardwood forests and swampy lowlands.
Aliceville Lake: Tom Bevill Visitor Center and Eastbank	National Historic Landmark	Pickens	The Tom Bevill Visitor Center is a replica of a Greek Revival antebellum mansion and contains exhibitry that reveals the natural abundance and diversity of this waterway. Dry-docked nearby is the snagboat, <i>U.S. Montgomery</i> , a 180-foot steam-powered sternwheeler that removed stumps and fallen trees from inland waterways. Retired in 1982, the vessel has been restored and is a National Historic Landmark, open to visitors.
University of West Alabama Nature Trail		Sumter	This nature trail system guides visitors through restored native blackland prairie, once widespread in Alabama's Black Belt region, and interprets the restoration process, which includes prescribed burning and replanting of native species.

Theme 2. In the Jim Crow era of government-sanctioned racial oppression and segregation that followed the Civil War, the Black Belt was the site of major advances in education for African Americans, offering empowerment and hope in the struggle for equality.

Supporting Narrative:

The Civil War ended slavery, freeing some 440,000 of Alabama's people. Yet the ensuing decades revealed that freedom from slavery did not mean freedom from political, economic, and social oppression. Once the state's wealthiest region, the Black Belt began a long and precipitous decline to become the poorest region in the state with some of the poorest counties in the nation.

Amid the formidable challenges faced by Black Belt residents during and after Reconstruction, a shining light of hope and empowerment arose through the many educational opportunities for African Americans that took root and reached fruition here in the Black Belt, with far-reaching, nationwide consequences. Booker T. Washington, a former slave, emerged as an African American leader who emphasized self-empowerment. Washington wished to establish schools for African Americans based on a vocational curriculum combining basic literacy and math skills.

It was in the Black Belt community of Tuskegee that Washington founded the Tuskegee Normal School for Colored Teachers. Under his guidance, the school (later known as Tuskegee Institute and now a National Historic Site) became a leading center for African American education. He recruited the best and brightest African Americans to work with him to fulfill his education mission.

In 1896, Booker T. Washington hired George Washington Carver to teach agriculture at Tuskegee. Carver spent more than 40 years on the Tuskegee campus and influenced generations of African American students. He dedicated his research and instruction to increasing the

economic independence of African American farmers, and he carried out landmark studies on Southern crops and farming methods.

Beyond his accomplishments at Tuskegee, Booker T. Washington helped develop educational institutions throughout the South. In the early 1900s, Julius Rosenwald, CEO of Sears and Roebuck, donated money to Tuskegee to improve the quality of African American education. In 1912, Rosenwald gave Washington permission to use a portion of the funds to construct six small schools in rural Alabama. One of these six original Rosenwald Schools, Shiloh, is located in the Black Belt's Macon County. Eventually, more than 5,000 Rosenwald Schools educated African Americans throughout the South.

In 1932, more than a quarter of all black school children in the South received their education in a Rosenwald School. In total, the Rosenwald program educated 663,615 students in 883 counties of fifteen states at a cost of more than \$28 million. Despite the monumental impact of these schools on black culture at that time, fewer than 15 Rosenwald School buildings have been documented as still remaining. Several of these are located in the Black Belt.

The Black Belt's Lincoln School and Snow Hill Institute also created progressive educational programs for African American students. In 1867, just two years after the end of the Civil War, a group of former enslaved African Americans formed the Lincoln School in Marion. In 1870, the school began to offer teacher training and became known as the Lincoln Normal University for Teachers. After a fire in 1887, the school moved to Montgomery where it was called the Normal School for Colored Students, now Alabama State University.

Dr. William J. Edwards, a graduate of Tuskegee University, founded the Snow Hill Institute in Camden in 1893. Known as the Colored Literary and Industrial School, it opened as a one-room log cabin with three students. At its peak, Snow Hill Institute included 27 buildings, a staff of 35, and more than 400 students. In operation as a public school until 1973, the school continues to educate visitors as a National Historic Site.

The Black Belt once again pioneered education opportunities for African Americans at the beginning of World War II, when the U.S. military selected Tuskegee Institute as a place to train African-American pilots for the war effort. Rigorous training at Moton Field and Tuskegee Army Air Field of more than 1,000 pilots created one of the most highly respected U.S. fighter groups of World War II.

The Tuskegee Airmen proved that African Americans could fly and maintain sophisticated combat aircraft. Their achievements paved the way for full integration of the U.S. military. The outstanding performance of the more than 16,000 men and women who participated in the "Tuskegee Experience" from 1941-1949 is immortalized at the Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site and operated by the National Park Service.

Inventory of historic and cultural resources that support Theme 2 (*Selected sites of particular significance are included below. For a complete listing of sites supporting Theme 2, see Appendix A*)

Resource	Listing	County	Description
Shiloh School	Alabama Register of Landmarks and Heritage; National Register of Historic Places	Macon	Opened in 1914, Shiloh was one of the original six Rosenwald Schools—eventually, there would be more than five thousand of them across the South. Julius Rosenwald of Sears and Roebuck provided matching funds to education leader Booker T. Washington for the construction of these schools, designed primarily for rural, black children. The Shiloh Rosenwald Elementary School served several generations of Macon County residents. Some of the unwitting participants in the infamous Tuskegee Syphilis Study were picked up by bus at the corner near this school. Some are buried in the cemetery just down the road. Charlie Pollard was the first to sue the government over the study and is buried in the Shiloh Cemetery.
Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site	National Historic Site	Macon	The Visitor Center, operated by the National Park Service, interprets the story of the Tuskegee Airmen, the first African American airmen in the United States military. The Tuskegee Airmen had to battle not only enemy forces overseas but also the racist attitudes of a largely segregated society in the United States. In 1998, President Clinton approved the public law establishing the Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site at Moton Field.
Tuskegee Institute National Historic Site—Carver Museum	National Historic Site	Macon	Tuskegee Institute National Historic Site, operated by the National Park Service, is inextricably bound to the history of two illustrious men: Booker T. Washington and George Washington Carver. Both born into slavery, each achieved personal successes and left legacies that were almost unimaginable for African-Americans in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Carver, the Institute’s most celebrated professor, conducted research that reinvigorated southern agriculture. The George Washington Carver Museum celebrates Carver’s life through photographs, artifacts, and audiovisual programs.
Tuskegee Institute National Historic Site—The Oaks	National Historic Site	Macon	Also located at the Tuskegee Institute National Historic Site, The Oaks, operated by the National Park Service, was the home of Tuskegee Institute founder Booker T. Washington. The building was designed by architect Robert R. Taylor, the first black graduate of MIT and a faculty member of

Resource	Listing	County	Description
			Tuskegee Institute, who supervised the students in the building's construction. National Park Service personnel provide tours, giving visitors fascinating background information about Dr. Washington and his extended family, detailing how they lived in the home and the numerous important guests who were entertained there.
Tuskegee Human and Civil Rights Multicultural Center		Macon	The Tuskegee Human and Civil Rights Multicultural Center was established in 1997 by attorney Fred D. Gray, Sr., counsel to such famed clients as Martin Luther King, Jr., Rosa Parks, and the men subjected to the Tuskegee Syphilis Study. The Center honors the culture and contributions of Native Americans, European Americans, and African Americans and examines some of the ways in which the interactions among these peoples have affected the region's cultural history. Exhibits subjects include the Creek Indian Nation, the antebellum south, the Civil War, Reconstruction, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Tuskegee Syphilis Study.
Judson College and the Alabama Women's Hall of Fame		Perry	Alabama's only college for women, Judson College is the nation's fifth oldest women's college. The college includes the Alabama Women's Hall of Fame, which spotlights Alabama's outstanding women, including Coretta Scott King, Bess Bolden Wolcott, Vera Hall, Ruby Pickens Tartt, and Helen Keller, among many others.
Snow Hill Institute	National Register of Historic Places	Wilcox	Dr. William J. Edwards, a graduate of Tuskegee University, founded this school in 1893. Known as the Colored Literary and Industrial School, it opened as a one-room log cabin with three students. At its peak, Snow Hill Institute included 27 buildings, a staff of 35 and over 400 students. It operated as a private school for African-American children until Dr. Edwards' retirement in 1924, when it became a public school until it closed in 1973.

Theme 3. The Black Belt region was the epicenter of the American Civil Rights Movement, home to key figures and pivotal events—Rosa Parks, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Jimmy Lee Jackson, the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the Selma-to-Montgomery marches, and far more—that have become synonymous with the struggle for equality in this country.

Supporting Narrative:

The beginning of the end of segregated society in America occurred in Montgomery in 1955, when Rosa Parks' refusal to move to the rear of a city bus galvanized the black population and

sparked the Montgomery Bus Boycott. A young pastor of Montgomery's Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., stepped into a leadership role in the Civil Rights Movement during that boycott, a role he maintained until his assassination in 1968. King's wife, Coretta Scott, was a native of the Black Belt's Perry County, educated at the Lincoln School.

Events in the Black Belt in 1965 brought this region and the Civil Rights Movement to the forefront of national and international attention, and changed the history of race relations in this country. On February 1, 1965, during non-violent demonstrations attempting to register African American voters, Dr. King and 250 marchers were arrested in Selma. King's "Letter from a Selma Jail," printed in the *New York Times*, articulated the formidable obstacles to voting and the rampant discrimination that remained throughout the South, despite the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Just a few weeks later, on February 26, 1965, a young, unarmed civil rights activist, Jimmie Lee Jackson, was shot and killed by a state trooper during a demonstration in Marion while trying to shield his mother and grandfather from attack. A call to carry Jackson's body to Montgomery evolved into a memorial march from Selma to Montgomery—a march Alabama Governor George C. Wallace vowed to stop.

On March 7, 1965, some 600 marchers assembled at the Edmund Pettus Bridge which spanned the Alabama River in Selma, Alabama. They were met by Alabama state troopers who blocked their way to Montgomery. The troopers' violent attack on peaceful demonstrators was captured on film and broadcast nationally and internationally. The horrific footage of "Bloody Sunday" shocked the world.

Two days later, demonstrators again gathered at the bridge to attempt the march a second time, but King halted the march, seeking federal protection for the marchers. That night, James Reeb, a Unitarian Universalist minister from Boston who had come to Selma to participate in the march, was beaten and murdered, further fueling national and international outrage.

When the third and final march attempt began on March 21, the world was watching. Three days later, some 25,000 marchers reached Montgomery. Their steadfast intention to overcome oppression through non-violent means catalyzed passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 five months later and forever changed political and social dynamics in the South and across the nation.

Today, the Selma-to-Montgomery National Historic Trail (a designated National Scenic Byway/All-American Road) and dozens of associated historic sites throughout the Black Belt region keep this powerful story alive in our national consciousness.

Inventory of historic and cultural resources that support Theme 3 (*Selected sites of particular significance are included below. For a complete listing of sites supporting Theme 3, see Appendix A*)

Resource	Listing	County	Description
Brown Chapel A.M.E. and King Monument	National Historic Landmark	Dallas	Founded in 1787 by African-Americans, the Brown Chapel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church became the organizational base for Voting Rights demonstrations led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and served as the starting place for the Selma to Montgomery marches of March 1965. The Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail/All American Road begins at this historic church.
Edmund Pettus Bridge	National Historic Landmark	Dallas	On March 7, 1965, this bridge gained international attention when Civil Rights activists began a march from Selma to Montgomery to protest discrimination against African-Americans and the shooting death of unarmed civil rights activist Jimmy Lee Jackson by a state trooper. When unarmed marchers crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge, they were brutally attacked by state troopers. On March 21, under federal protection, marchers again crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge. Five days later they reached Montgomery, where a crowd of 25,000 joined them en route to the state capitol.
Martin Luther King, Jr. Street Historic Walking Tour		Dallas	Beginning at the First Baptist Church, the Martin Luther King, Jr. Street Historic Walking Tour. The self-guiding walking tour passes the George Washington Carver Homes, the historic Brown Chapel AME Church, and twenty memorials that tell the story of Selma's Voting Rights struggle.
National Voting Rights Museum and Institute		Dallas	Near the foot of the Edmund Pettus Bridge, the National Voting Rights Museum and Institute tells the story of the historic Selma-to-Montgomery marches through photographs and memorabilia chronicling the lives of the individuals who led or participated in the marches. The museum sponsors community events, including the annual Bridge Crossing Jubilee held in March of each year to celebrate the struggle to obtain the right to vote.
Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail	National Historic Trail, All American Byway	Montgomery	The 54-mile trail allows visitors to trace the steps of the Selma to Montgomery marchers and connect with their stories at the Selma and Lowndes interpretive centers.
First Baptist Church	National Historic Site	Dallas	During the 1960s, Voting Rights organizers used the First Baptist Church to gather and disseminate food, clothing, and other supplies to

Resource	Listing	County	Description
			Voting Rights activists. The Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. frequently spoke here during the height of the Voting Rights movement. Erected in 1894, the building was restored following storm damage, and was rededicated in 1982. A National Historic Site, it is the starting point for the Martin Luther King, Jr. Street Historic Tour.
Safe House Black History Museum		Hale	The building that houses this museum once served as a safe house for Martin Luther King during a visit to the area. After receiving word that the Ku Klux Klan planned to kill him as he drove from town, civil rights organizers brought King to this house. Two nearby black churches were burned during the night. The museum contains old tools and many slavery artifacts, from manacles to a sales notice from a slave sale, as well as extensive photographs from the civil rights struggle in the Black Belt.
Selma Interpretive Center	National Park Service	Dallas	Operated by the National Park Service, and located at the foot of the Edmund Pettus Bridge the beginning of the route of the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail, the Selma Interpretive Center shares the story of the Selma to Montgomery March.
Lowndes County Interpretive Center	National Park Service	Lowndes	Operated by the National Park Service, and located along the route of the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail, the Lowndes County Interpretive Center tells the story of the Selma to Montgomery March.
Civil Rights Memorial		Montgomery	The Civil Rights Memorial, designed by international artist Maya Lin, is a block south of the church where Martin Luther King was pastor. It honors 40 individuals who died between 1954 and 1968 and encourages visitors to reflect on the struggle for equality.
Civil Rights Memorial Center		Montgomery	The Civil Rights Memorial Center and tells the stories of some of the many individuals who participated in the Civil Rights Movement, many of whom died in the process. The "Here I Stand" exhibits chronicle important events that occurred downtown during the Civil Rights Movement.
Dexter Ave. King Memorial Baptist Church and Parsonage Museum	National Register of Historic Places	Montgomery	Shortly after marrying Coretta Scott in Marion, Alabama, 24-year-old Martin Luther King, Jr. preached his first sermon at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, a block from the Alabama State Capitol where Southern secessionists had formed the Confederacy in 1861. Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church and Parsonage are National Historic Landmarks. Visitors to the Dexter Parsonage Museum experience the actual residence where Dr. King and his young family

Resource	Listing	County	Description
			lived between 1954 and 1960; an Interpretive Center, and the King-Johns Garden for Reflection.
Freedom Rides Museum	Alabama Historical Commission	Montgomery	This museum explores the American story of 21 young people that helped change our nation’s history using nonviolent protest. Black and white, male and female, none of them were older than 21. They stepped off of a bus at this station on May 20, 1961. They knew they might be met with violence, and they were. They had written out wills and said goodbye to loved ones. Their goal was to help end racial segregation in public transportation and they did.

Theme 4. Through generations of slavery, segregation, and systemic discrimination, and in the midst of the formidable challenges of the Civil Rights Movement, artistic expression in the Black Belt —through music, stories, art, folk crafts, and architecture—expressed the breadth and depth of human experience in this region.

Supporting Narrative:

Music

“...[we] sing the freedom songs today for the same reason the slaves sang them, because we too are in bondage and the songs add hope to our determination that ‘We shall overcome, Black and white together, We shall overcome someday.’”

—Martin Luther King, Jr. *Why We Can’t Wait* (1964)

“The blues was sent down for oppressed people to ease their mind...The blues have worked miracles for me and many people.”

—Willie King, Pickens County bluesman

Martin Luther King, Jr. described songs as the soul of the civil rights movement. From long decades of slavery, through long decades of segregation and systemic discrimination, through the monumental struggles of the Civil Rights Movement, music gave outlet to emotion, strengthened resolve to persevere, gave solace, and strengthened community.

In the Black Belt, the irrepressible human spirit rang out in blues, work chants, shaped-note singing, gospel hymns, union songs, mining camp fiddle tunes, jug blowing, and hambone slapping. Some of that music originated here in the Black Belt, through such local artists as Willie King and Vera Hall. The Library of Congress holds more than 800 songs—from spirituals to blues—that arose from the musical heritage of this region.

During the Great Depression, Black Belt artist, writer, and folklorist Ruby Pickens Tartt recorded the blues, spirituals, ballads, and work songs of former slaves. Her papers are housed at the University of West Alabama in Livingston and the musical recordings are part of the collections

of the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress Collection. In her lifetime, she worked with ethnomusicologists and folklorists John Lomax, Alan Lomax, Harold Courlander, Byron Arnold, Elie Siegmeister, and B. A. Botkin.

Arts and Crafts

In folk art, imagination often entwines with necessity. With scraps of cloth and old feed sacks, women of the Black Belt stitched family stories into quilts that warmed both body and spirit. The quilting cooperative of Gees Bend in Wilcox County continues that folk tradition today, earning national and international renown for the remarkable quilts crafted by its members. Some of these quilts now hang in the Smithsonian Museum and many were featured on a U.S. postage stamp series.

The Black Belt has given rise to other renowned artists. In the late 1800s, Selma native Clara Weaver Parish designed stain glass windows for Tiffany's, and her windows grace many Black Belt churches. In Selma, artist Charlie Lucas, known as the Tin Man, creates visionary sculptures with found objects—from old tin to bicycle tires. The paintings of Pike Road native Moses Tolliver (renowned as “Moses T”) has been exhibited in the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

Storytelling

The Black Belt's deep-rooted storytelling tradition has produced some of our country's finest storytellers, in both oral and written form. African American writers influenced by their Black Belt experiences include Mobile-born Albert Murray and native Oklahoman Ralph Ellison, both of whom attended Tuskegee University. Ellison's novel *Invisible Man*, loosely based on his Tuskegee experience, is considered by many literary critics to be the first novel ever written by an African American.

Monroeville's Harper Lee offered a remarkable and enduring window into life in the Black Belt in her Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Acclaimed storyteller Kathryn Tucker Windham of Selma has penned 26 books of stories drawn from the fertile soil of Black Belt life. A rich tradition of oral storytelling continues in the Black Belt today, celebrated in such regional events as the Tale Tellin' Festival in Selma.

Telling visual stories, photographic images from the Black Belt have infused American culture. The haunting images in *Let us Now Praise Famous Men*, photographed by Walker Evans, have come to epitomize the deprivation and struggles of the Great Depression and Dust Bowl era for generations of Americans. For more than 40 years, the photography of William Christenberry has documented details of daily experience in this region.

Architecture

As our nation continues its journey toward equality for all its citizens, the long era of slavery and oppression that left indelible marks on our national identity can seem distant and difficult to imagine. Historic buildings throughout the Black Belt commemorate in wood, brick, and stone the long and challenging road to freedom for African Americans.

Antebellum architecture recalls the phenomenal wealth, fueled by slave labor, of the Black Belt’s plantation era. Nowhere else in the South, other than in the lower Mississippi Valley, does there exist such a strong architectural imprint of this southern plantation culture. Gaineswood, Kenworthy Hall, and St. Andrews Church are all National Historic Landmarks. Some of the region’s antebellum mansions are now open to the public, like the Magnolia Grove Historic House Museum in Greensboro and Kirkwood Mansion in Eutaw.

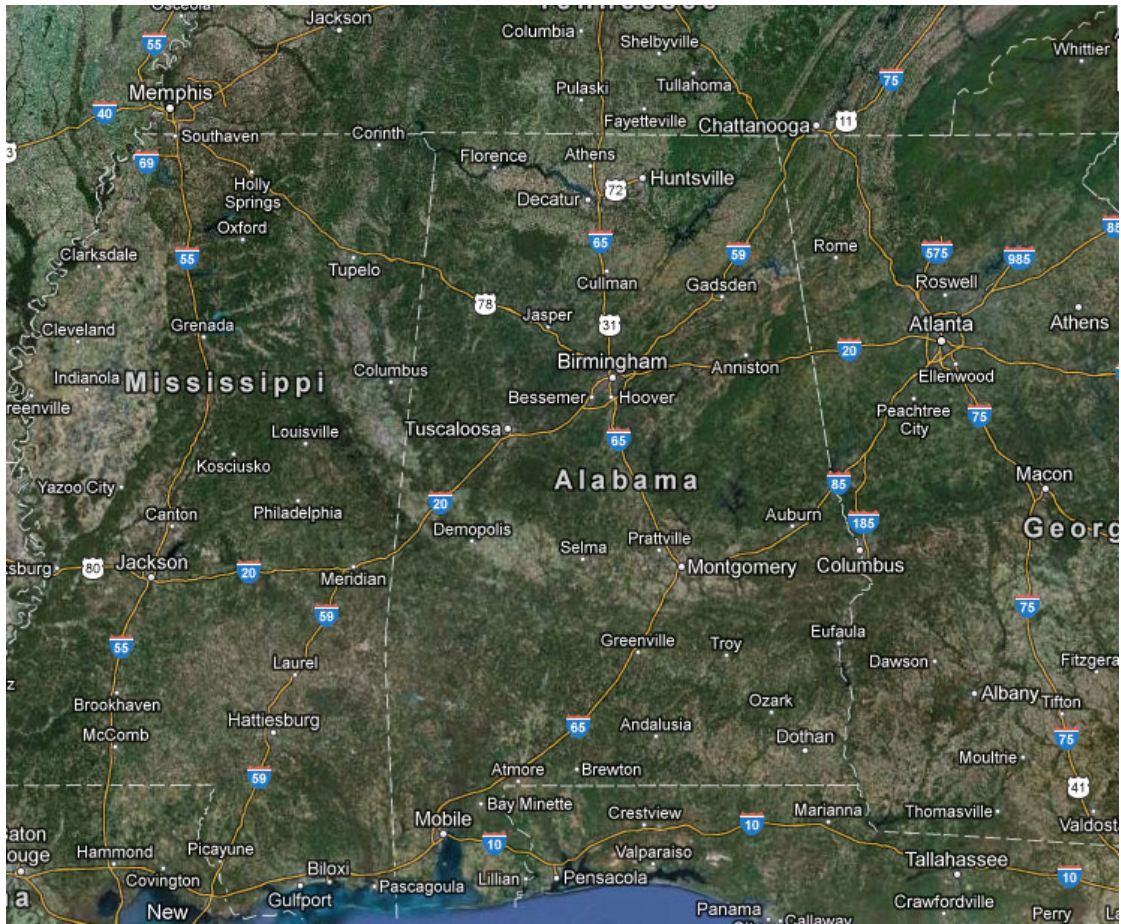
Dozens of other historic buildings throughout the Black Belt—from the Shiloh Elementary School (an original Rosenwald School) to The Oaks (home of Tuskegee Institute founder Booker T. Washington)—preserve essential pieces of this region’s nationally significant story.

Inventory of historic and cultural resources that support Theme 4. *(Selected sites of particular significance are included below. For a complete listing of sites supporting Theme 4, see Appendix A).*

Resource	Listing	County	Description
Red Door Theatre		Bullock	Located in an historic church, The Red Door Theatre , a quality regional theatre in Union Springs, celebrates its heritage, culture, & future through productions and summer camps.
Kathryn Tucker Windham Museum		Clarke	Kathryn Tucker Windham spent most of her career recording and preserving Alabama's history and folklore. Alabama Southern Community College in Thomasville opened the Kathryn Tucker Windham Museum with a celebration of her 85th birthday on June 1, 2003. The museum, housed in the college's library building, takes visitors through Ms. Windham's early childhood in Thomasville, her career as a journalist and her rise to national attention as a storyteller.
Magnolia Grove	National Register of Historic Places	Hale	Magnolia Grove, an excellent and relatively rare example of temple-style Greek Revival architecture, was built around 1840 as a town house by Isaac and Sarah Croom, whose plantations were about 20 miles south of Greensboro near Faunsdale. Since 1980, Magnolia Grove has been the property of the Alabama Historical Commission.
Rural Studio		Hale	Established in 1993, the Rural Studio is a part of Auburn University's School of Architecture. Auburn architecture students design and build homes for residents in need and plan, design, and build community projects. The Rural Studio has completed numerous projects in the surrounding communities, which visitors can view on a self-guided tour.

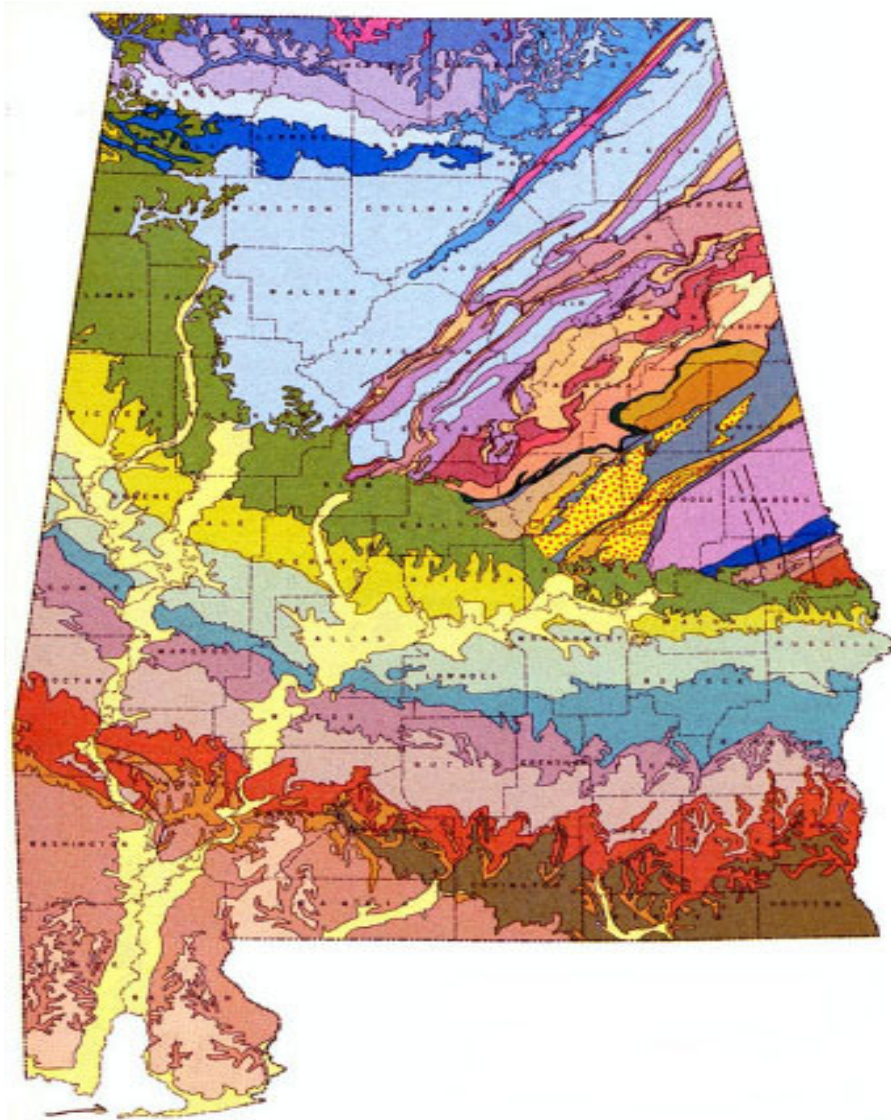
Resource	Listing	County	Description
To Kill Mockingbird Play and Monroe County Heritage Museum		Macon	<p>Monroeville, Alabama is the birthplace of Harper Lee and is generally regarded as the model for the novel's fictitious setting of Maycomb. Thousands of people from throughout the world visit the historic courthouse in Monroeville each year in search of the roots of <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i>.</p> <p>The Mockingbird Players, an amateur theater group, has performed the play by Christopher Sergel to sold-out crowds at the Old Courthouse Museum each May since 1991. The production's popularity has grown largely because it offers the audience the unique experience of an authentic hometown cast performing in the very courtroom where Harper Lee's father practiced law.</p> <p>The small town of Monroeville has produced a host of literary makers including Harper Lee, Truman Capote, and <i>Crazy in Alabama</i> author Mark Childress. Several weeks each spring, residents of Monroeville produce a two-act theatrical rendition of <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i>, performed in the same historic courtroom that inspired the sets of the Academy Award-winning 1962 movie that starred Gregory Peck.</p>
Gaineswood National Historic Site	National Historic Site	Marengo	<p>The <i>Smithsonian Guide to Historic America: The Deep South</i> calls Gaineswood "one of the three or four most interesting houses in America." Owner-architect Nathan Bryan Whitfield built the mansion over a period of eighteen years, from 1843 to 1861. The State of Alabama acquired Gaineswood in 1966, and the Alabama Historical Commission began extensive restoration. The interior is elaborate, containing many original furnishings and some of the finest plasterwork in any 19th-Century residence in the country.</p>
Black Belt Treasures Cultural Arts Center		Wilcox	<p>This non-profit gallery showcases the work of artists and craftspeople from the Black Belt region, including baskets, jewelry, decorative gourds, duck calls, sculptures, quilts, rocking horses, paintings, pottery, carved birds, furniture, literature, and specialty foods. Over 200 Black Belt artists have had their creations on display and for sale here.</p>
Coleman Center for the Arts and Culture		Sumter	<p>The Coleman Center for Arts and Culture has brought the arts to the Black Belt region since the mid-1980s, holding exhibitions, conducting workshops, and sponsoring local festivals and events. The Center's goal is to improve the quality of life in the Black Belt region by nurturing creativity and by revitalizing traditional arts,</p>

Resource	Listing	County	Description
			culture, and community. The Center sponsors Black Belt Designs, a non-profit program that empowers Black Belt residents through production of custom-designed clothing and wearable art.
Gee's Bend and Ferry Terminal		Wilcox	The Gee's Bend community has become famous for its quilts, which are now highly prized by collectors and were celebrated nationally in 2006 in a U.S. postage stamp series. Many of the Gee's Bend quilts are housed at the Community House. The Gee's Bend Ferry crosses the Alabama River several times daily, linking Gee's Bend and Camden.
Regional Folk Life Festivals		multiple	Annual festivals throughout the region celebrate local culture and history. See the attached calendar of events produced by the Alabama Black Belt Heritage Area in 2015.
Historic Districts throughout region		multiple	Communities throughout the region preserve a rich architectural heritage in historic districts, including Furman, Pine Apple, Gainesville, Uniontown, Marion, Monroeville, Demopolis, Lowndesboro, Eutaw, Evergreen, Brooklyn, Montgomery, Thomasville, and Greenville.

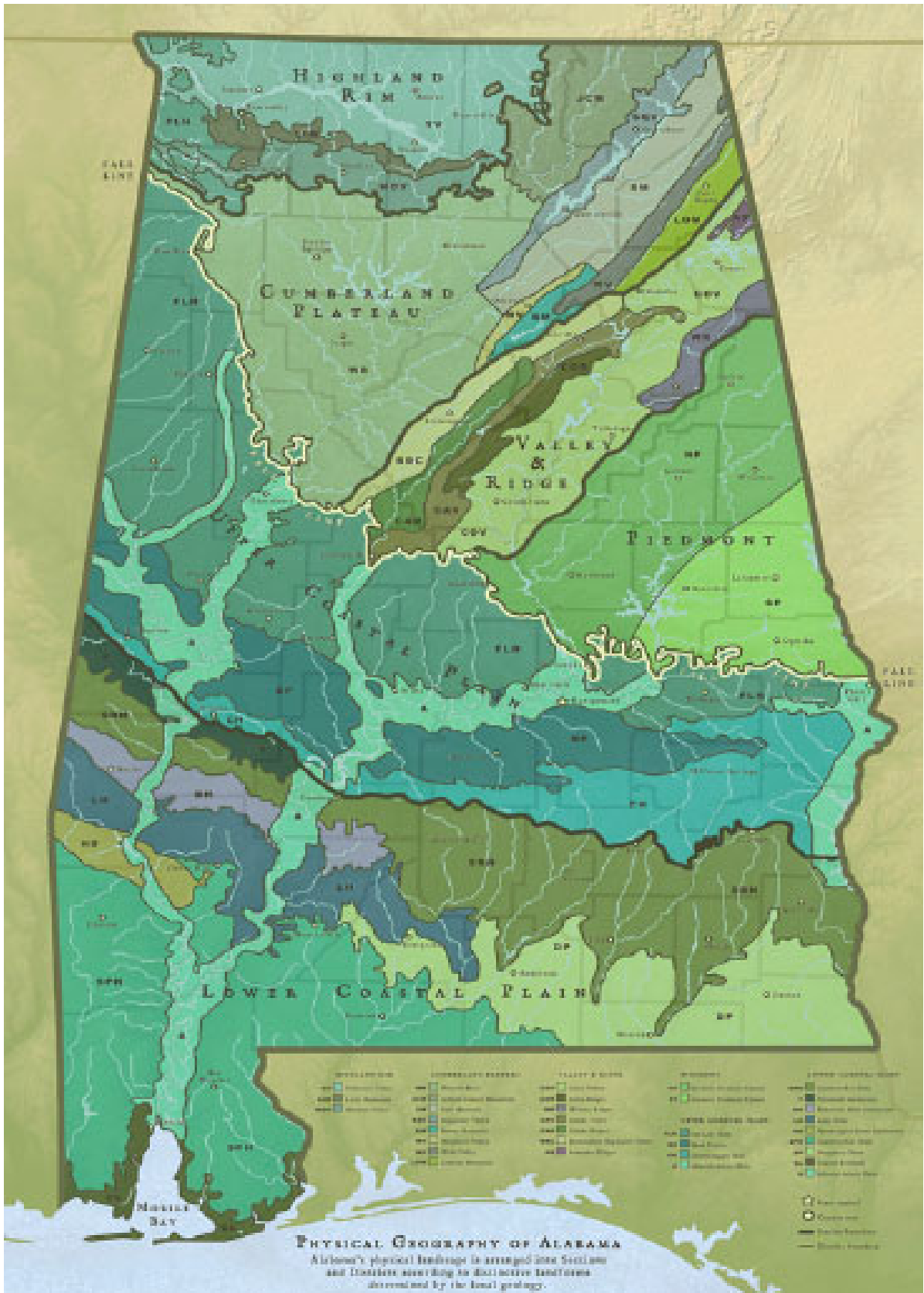


Boundary Justification:

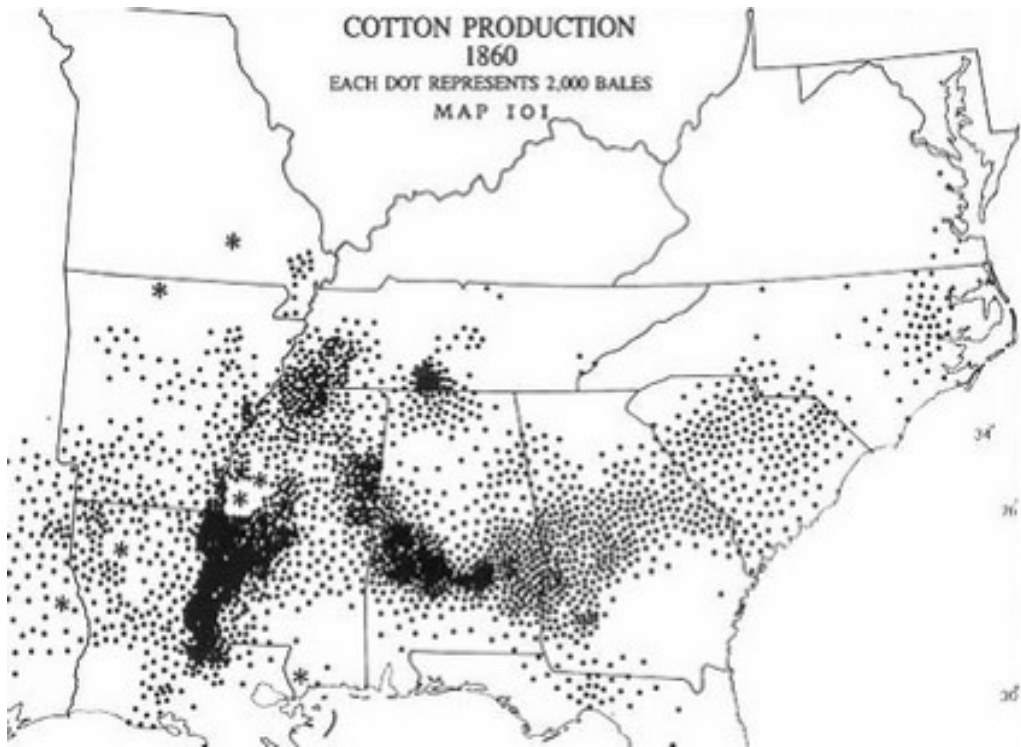
The nineteen counties in the Alabama Black Belt Heritage Area are included based on the geology and history that has transpired to create a culturally distinct and nationally significant region. Maps help support these boundary descriptions, including a satellite image that shows the region as visible from outer space.



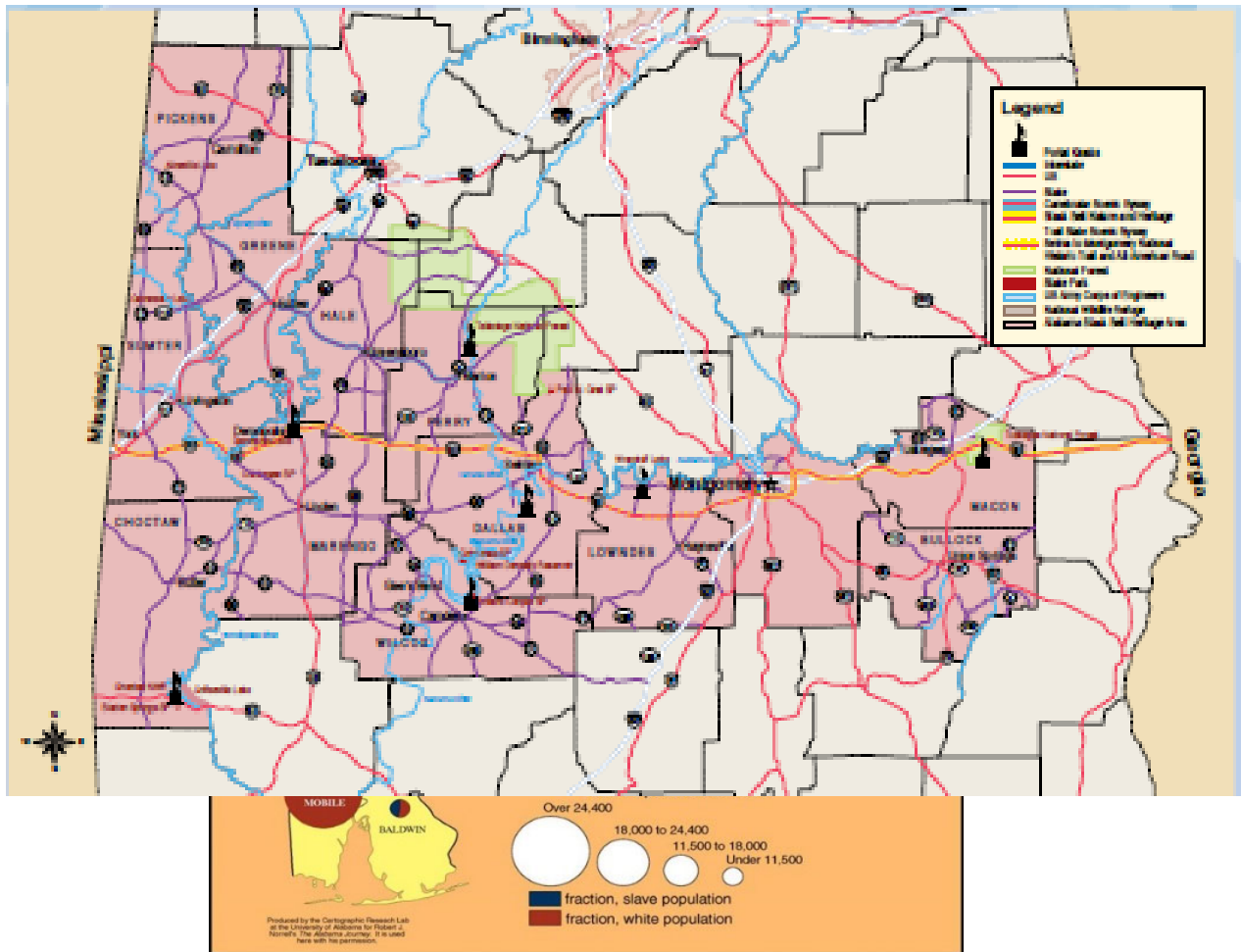
The boundary of this area can be reinforced by examining maps that highlight the blackland prairie defined by the western, central and eastern edge portions by the soil color and underlain by the unique Cretaceous (Dinosaur Age) geology, whose landscape is distinctive and which displays the dark soil and white chalk bedrock that gives the region its name and by examination of the northern and southern edges defined by maps that demonstrate their historic participation in the riverine plantation model.



Other maps that help support the boundary description include but are not limited to geological maps, physiographic maps, and population/cotton production maps from the 1860s that demonstrate a direct correlation to the region that would become known nationally and internationally for its central role in the Civil Rights Movement.



The 19 counties included in the Alabama Black Belt Heritage Area are Pickens, Greene, Sumter, Choctaw, Washington, Clarke, Marengo, Hale, Bibb, Perry, Dallas, Wilcox, Monroe, Conecuh, Butler, Lowndes, Montgomery, Macon and Bullock.



Appendix A: Associated Sites and Area Resources, by Theme

Below is a comprehensive listing of sites in the Alabama Black Belt Heritage Area related to each of the four themes identified in the Statement of National Significance.

Theme 1. The natural abundance of Alabama’s Black Belt landscape has drawn people to this region for thousands of years, at one time supporting one of the largest and most influential indigenous cultural centers north of Mexico, and later supporting the resource-intensive and slave-powered cotton industry, which planted the seeds of the struggle for equality here.

Theme 1 Resources	County
Harper Stacey Bridge	Bibb
Brierfield Ironworks Historical Park	Bibb

Theme 1 Resources	County
Oakmulgee Wildlife Management Area	Bibb, Hale, Perry
Talladega National Forest, Oakmulgee District	Bibb and Perry
Cahaba River National Wildlife Refuge	Bibb
Cahaba River Wildlife Management Area	Bibb
Blocton Coke Ovens	Bibb
Tannehill Ironworks State Park	Bibb
Three Notch Trail	Bullock
Wehle Nature Center	Bullock
Sherling Lake Park and Campground	Butler
Bladon Spring State Park	Choctaw
Canebrake Scenic Byway	Choctaw, Greene, Marengo, Sumter
Choctaw National Wildlife Refuge	Choctaw
Coffeetown Lake Service Park	Choctaw
Central Salt Works/ Upper Salt Works	Clarke
Choctaw Corner	Clarke
Clarke County Historical Museum	Clarke
Coffeetown Lock & Dam	Clarke
Federal Road Historic Trail & Driving Tour	Clarke
Fort Sinquefield Historic Site	Clarke
Heart of Clarke Mural	Clarke
Hal's Lake	Clarke
Kimbell James Massacre Site	Clarke
Old Line Road	Clarke
Old Lock One Park & Island	Clarke
Fred T. Stimpson Wildlife Sanctuary	Clarke
Scotch Wildlife Management Area	Clarke
Cahaba River Canoe Trail	Dallas
Kenan's Mill	Dallas
Old Cahawba Archeological Park	Dallas
Old Depot Museum	Dallas
Paul M. Grist State park	Dallas
Moundville Archeological Park	Hale
Warrior Lake: Jennings Ferry Campground	Hale
Holy Ground Battlefield Park	Lowndes
Lock and Damsite Eastbank	Lowndes
Lowndes Wildlife Management Area	Lowndes
Bartram Trail—Tuskegee National Forest (several other sites here as well)	Lowndes

Theme 1 Resources	County
Little Texas Tabernacle and Campground	Macon
Bigbee Bottom Trail and Lower Pool	Marengo
Chickasaw State Park	Marengo
Demopolis Wildlife Management Area	Greene, Hale, Marengo, Sumter
Alabama River Museum	Monroe
Piney Woods Driving Tour	Monroe
Perry Lakes Park and Barton’s Beach, Cahaba River Preserve	Perry and Bibb
Aliceville Lake: Tom Bevil Visitor Center and Eastbank	Pickens
U.S. Snagboat Montgomery	Pickens
University of West Alabama Nature Trail	Sumter
MOWA Indian Reservation and Museum	Washington
Old St. Stephen’s Historical Park	Washington
Roland Cooper State Park	Wilcox
Rumpt Slave Cemetery and Rosebud Lutheran Church	Wilcox

Theme 2. In the Jim Crow era of government-sanctioned racial oppression and segregation that followed the Civil War, the Black Belt was the site of major advances in education for African Americans, offering empowerment and hope in the struggle for equality.

Theme 2 Resources	County
The Bibb County Training School	Bibb
Six Mile Academy	Bibb
Camp Hugh	Bibb
Pondville Fire Tower	Bibb
C. England Farm	Bibb
Gainestown Schoolhouse	Clarke
Grove Hill Courthouse Square National Register District	Clarke
Mt. Nebo Cemetery & Death Masks	Clarke
Bookers’ Mill	Conecuh
Shark Tooth Creek	Greene
Shiloh School	Macon
Harris Barrett School	Macon
Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site	Macon
Tuskegee Institute National Historic Site—Carver Museum	Macon
Tuskegee Institute National Historic Site—The Oaks	Macon

Theme 2 Resources	County
Tuskegee Human and Civil Rights Multicultural Center	Macon
Tuskegee Heritage Museum	Macon
Marion Military Institute	Perry
Lincoln Normal Museum	Perry
Alabama Women’s Hall of Fame	Perry
Judson College Historic District	Perry
Snow Hill Institute	Wilcox

Theme 3. The Black Belt region was the epicenter of the American Civil Rights Movement, home to key figures and pivotal events—Rosa Parks, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Jimmy Lee Jackson, the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the Selma-to-Montgomery marches, and far more—that have become synonymous with the struggle for equality in this country.

Theme 3 Resources	County
Brown Chapel A.M.E. and King Monument	Dallas
Edmund Pettus Bridge	Dallas
Martin Luther King, Jr. Street Historic Walking Tour	Dallas
National Voting Rights Museum and Institute	Dallas
Selma Historic District	Dallas
Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail, All American Byway	Montgomery
First Baptist Church	Dallas
Selma Interpretive Center	Dallas
Safe House Black History Museum	Hale
Lowndes County Interpretive Center	Lowndes
Jackson Family Compound	Lowndes
Alabama State Capitol	Montgomery
Civil Rights Memorial Center	Montgomery
Dexter Ave. King Memorial Baptist Church and Parsonage Museum	Montgomery
Freedom Rides Museum	Montgomery
National Center for the Study of Civil Rights and African American Culture at ASU	Montgomery
Rosa Parks Library, Museum and Children’s Wing/Troy University	Montgomery

Theme 4. Through generations of slavery, segregation, and systemic discrimination, and in the midst of the formidable challenges of the Civil Rights Movement, artistic expression in the Black Belt —through music, stories, art, folk crafts, and architecture—expressed the breadth and depth of human experience in this region.

Theme 4 Resources	County
Ritz Theatre	Bibb
Old Bibb County Bank & Trust Building	Bibb
Romanesque Bibb County Courthouse Centerville Square	Bibb
Centerville Presbyterian Church	Bibb
Blocton Italian Catholic Cemetery	Bibb
George Stewart Cemetery	Bibb
Historic Downtown Greenville	Butler
Hank Williams Day Celebration	Butler
Watermelon Jubilee	Butler
Broadhead Memorial Park and Walking Tour	Choctaw
Ezell's Fish Camp	Choctaw
Airmount Grave Shelter	Clarke
Jackson's Fall Festival	Clarke
Loranz-McCrary House	Clarke
Josiah & Lucy Mathews Log Cabin	Clarke
Pioneer Days Festival	Clarke
Thomasville National Register District	Clarke
Kathryn Tucker Windham Museum	Clarke
Wilson Finlay House	Clarke
Castleberry Museum	Conecuh
Conecuh County Cultural Center	Conecuh
Old Town Cultural Heritage Center	Conecuh
Conecuh Sausage Festival	Conecuh
Strawberry Festival	Conecuh
Brooks-King House	Conecuh
Burnett House	Conecuh
Jay Villa Plantation	Conecuh
Asa Johnston House	Conecuh
Dr. HS Skinner Home	Conecuh
Witherington Home	Conecuh
Brooklyn Historic District	Conecuh
Castleberry Town	Conecuh
Evergreen Historic District	Conecuh
Black Belt Arts and Cultural Center	Dallas
Black Belt Research and Extension Center	Dallas
Sturdivant Hall	Dallas
Vaughn-Smitherman Museum	Dallas
Historic Water Avenue	Dallas
Black Belt Folk Roots Festival	Greene
Eutaw Historic District	Greene

Theme 4 Resources	County
The Eutaw Pilgrimage	Greene
Everhope Plantation	Greene
Kirkwood Mansion	Greene
Oakmont B&B	Greene
Twin Oaks	Greene
Magnolia Grove	Hale
Noel-Ramsey House	Hale
Rural Studio	Hale
St. Andrews Church	Hale
Lowndesboro Historic District	Lowndes
Bluff Hall	Marengo
Demopolis Historic District	Marengo
Gaineswood National Historic Site	Marengo
Rural Heritage Center	Marengo
Center for Literary Arts—Writers Fountain	Monroe
Alabama Writers Symposium	Monroe
Southwest Alabama Regional Arts Museum	Monroe
Monroe County Courthouse	Monroe
Monroeville Post Office	Monroe
Monroeville Downtown Historic District	Monroe
Faulk Property—Childhood home of Truman Capote	Monroe
Hybart House	Monroe
Burnt Corn Baptist Church	Monroe
Perdue Hill and Claibourne	Monroe
Old Robbins Hotel	Monroe
Alabama Shakespeare Theatre	Montgomery
F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald Museum	Montgomery
First White House of the Confederacy	Montgomery
Alabama Governor’s Mansion	Montgomery
Hank Williams Museum and Memorial	Montgomery
Montgomery Area Visitor Center	Montgomery
Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts	Montgomery
Nat King Cole Birthplace	Montgomery
Holmestead Plantation	Perry
Civil War Cemetery	Perry
Marion Historic Districts	Perry
Uniontown Historic District	Perry
Aliceville Museum and Cultural Arts Center	Pickens
Coleman Center for the Arts and Culture	Sumter
Gainesville Historic District	Sumter

Theme 4 Resources	County
Washington County Museum	Washington
Black Belt Treasures	Wilcox
Camden Historic District	Wilcox
Gee's Bend and Ferry Terminal	Wilcox
Furman Historic District	Wilcox
Pine Apple Historic District	Wilcox