Alabama

1 a state of the southeastern US, on the Gulf of Mexico: consists of coastal and W lowlands crossed by the Tombigbee, Black Warrior, and Alabama Rivers, with parts of the Tennessee Valley and Cumberland Plateau in the north; noted for producing cotton and white marble. Capital: Montgomery. Pop: 4 500 752 (2003 est). Area: 131 333 sq km (50 708 sq miles) Abbreviation: Ala or with zip code AL

2 a river in Alabama, flowing southwest to the Mobile and Tensaw Rivers. Length: 507 km (315 miles)

**Summary Article: Alabama**

State in southeastern USA, bordered to the east by Georgia, to the north by Tennessee, to the west by Mississippi, and to the south by Florida and the Gulf of Mexico; area 131,426 sq km/50,744 sq mi; population (2010) 4,779,736; capital Montgomery. The state derives its name from a Chocotaw American Indian tribe which lived in the area. The nickname ‘Heart of Dixie’ refers to Alabama’s leading role in the Confederacy and ‘Yellowhammer State’ to the colourful uniforms of Confederate soldiers. The yellowhammer, a member of the woodpecker family, is also the state bird. Alabama is two-thirds low-lying coastal plain, with an 85 km-/53 mi-long stretch of coast on the Gulf of Mexico, intersected by Mobile Bay. Service industries form a major part of its economy, but oil, natural gas, marble, wood, iron, steel, aluminium, chemical, paper, and textile manufactures are also important. Livestock, poultry, peanuts, pecans, soft fruit, soybeans, and cotton are produced, and fishing is a key industry. The city of Birmingham has the largest population; other major cities include the port of Mobile, the missile and aerospace centre Huntsville, and former state capital Tuscaloosa, home to the University of Alabama. There are also large urban conurbations in Anniston, Auburn, Decatur, Dothan, Florence, and Gadsden. Historically Alabama was a cotton plantation state associated with slavery and, in the 20th century, the civil-rights movement. Alabama was admitted to the Union on 14 December 1819 as the 22nd US state.

Physical

Alabama comprises six main areas of land: the East Gulf Coastal Plain, the Black Belt, the Piedmont Plateau, the Appalachian Ridge and Valley region, the Cumberland Plateau, and an interior lowland plateau. Mobile Bay is the fourth largest estuary in the USA, reaching inland approximately 50 km/30 mi. To the north of the bay the Mobile-Tensaw Delta forms a large area of bayous, swamps, rivers, and brackish tidelands. The barrier island Dauphin Island, a designated bird sanctuary, is connected by a highway to the mainland on the southwest end of the bay. Extending from Perdido Bay on the eastern Florida border into Mobile Bay is a narrow peninsula 51 km/32 mi long, known as the Gulf Coast. Alligators, armadillos, and giant turtles, and coastal flora and fauna, including magnolia, cypress, and live oak, are all found here.

On the East Gulf Coastal Plain, the Wiregrass Region, named for its tough grass, is farmed, while a pine-forested upland is known as the Timber Belt. The Black Belt is a former cotton plantation region.
named after its sticky black clay soils. Beyond the Fall Line, where the Coastal Plain meets higher ground, the Piedmont extends into the state from the northeastern border, an undulating forested lowland of maple, pine, and flowering dogwood, with sandy eroded soils and mineral-seamed troughs.

To the northwest of the Piedmont, the mining area of the Appalachian Ridge and Valley region has dramatic limestone valleys and red clay soils rich in iron ore and coal deposits. Northwest of the Appalachian Ridge is the upland Cumberland Plateau rising to a height of 548 m/1,800 ft above sea level in the northeast.

The far northwestern corner of the state lies mostly in the valley of the Tennessee River, and forms an interior lowland plateau, important for its waterways. The Tennessee River forms a small part of the state’s northwest boundary. The highest point in the state is Cheaha Mountain, in the Tallageda range of the Piedmont, at 734 m/2,407 ft. The Chattahoochee River forms the lower half of the state’s eastern boundary. The Coosa and Tallapoosa rivers flow southwest from the Appalachians, and join in south-central Alabama to form the Alabama River, continuing southwest to Mobile Bay. The Black Warrior River flows south-southwest from the valley, joining the Tombigbee River which flows from northeastern Mississippi, to empty into Mobile Bay. A canal in northeastern Mississippi, which created the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway in 1985, provides an alternative to the lower Mississippi River for barge traffic from the Tennessee River system.

Alabama has four national forests, the Bankhead, Conecuh, Talladega, and Tuskegee, encompassing some 265,600 ha/664,000 acres of public land. There are 224 state parks throughout the state.

Although Alabama has no natural lakes, there are several important dams and reservoirs: Guntersville Lake, covering 286 sq km/110 sq mi on the Tennessee River; Wheeler, also on the Tennessee River; Martin, on the Tallapoosa River; and Weiss, on the Coosa River.

**Features** Russell Cave National Monument, near Bridgeport, has cave dwellings dating from 7000 BC, while on the Gulf Coast the Orange Beach Indian and Sea Museum details the interactions of American Indians and early Spanish explorers. The Mound State Monument, just south of Tuscaloosa, contains the remains of a 12th-century American Indian settlement, with a reconstructed temple. Horseshoe Bend National Military Park, near Dadeville, marks the site where Andrew Jackson defeated the Creek in the Battle of Horseshoe Bend (1814), killing over 800 Creek warriors.

In Huntsville, the Alabama Constitution Village is a living history museum covering Alabama’s move to statehood, with interpreters dressed in period costume. Montgomery has many pre-Civil War houses and is home to the White House of the Confederacy (1835). One of the oldest cities in the USA, and formerly the capital of the French colony Louisiana, Mobile has many notable buildings, including the restored Fort Conde (1711). Fort Morgan, on Pleasure Island in the Gulf of Mexico, was used by the Spanish in the 1500s, and was also an important Civil War battleground. On Dauphin Island, Fort Gaines fell to the Union in 1864.

The USS Alabama Battleship Memorial Park in Mobile offers a tour of the state's military history. The former steel town of Birmingham is home to the Civil Rights Institute (1992), which features the story of the civil-rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. King first preached his message of peace and brotherhood at Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church, Montgomery, and a basement mural details the key events of King's life. In Tuscaloosa, the Murphy African-American Museum has exhibits of the local, state, and national achievements of African Americans.

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Selma, known as the ‘Queen City of the Black Belt’, is steeped in history, from Victorian cottages to great ancestral homes, and in the 1960s was a focal point of the national voting-rights movement. Brown Chapel AME Church, the Edmund Pettus Bridge, the National Voting Rights Museum, and the Old Depot Museum are among the town's historic landmarks and centres. The Gulf Coast Exploreum Science Center provides a guide to the habitat and wildlife of nearby Gulf State Park, while the Estuarium on Dauphin Island highlights four key habitats of coastal Alabama. In Huntsville, the US Space and Rocket Center details the progress of aerospace technology, an important chapter in recent state history.

**Culture** Alabama has a strong southern folk culture, records of which are largely preserved by the Alabama Center for Traditional Culture, in Montgomery. Jubilee singing, graveyard decoration days, American Indian basketry, Anglo-American folk pottery, Sand Mountain saddleries, west-Alabama blues, shape-note singing, coastal fishing lore, and religious holidays are all part of Alabaman folk life. Alabama’s state history and its rise to become capital of the Confederacy are widely commemorated. Each spring the Battle of Selma re-enactment dramatizes the Confederacy’s fall, and camp dances and grand balls are common Confederate heritage festival events. ‘Homecoming’ is a custom indigenous to the Deep South, when church congregations return to their places of birth for a day of picnics, singing, and socializing. Gospel singing is also a major southern tradition, and the Stillman College Choir in Tuscaloosa is one of the foremost ensembles of its kind in the USA.

Other mainstays of cultural life include the Alabama Music Hall of Fame in Tuscumbia; the Carolyn Blount Theatre in Montgomery, home of the Alabama Shakespeare Festival; and the Mobile Opera. Birmingham hosts an annual festival of the arts and theatre called City Stages. Mardi Gras in Mobile and the Moundville American Indians’ Thanksgiving Day powwow in Atmore are other important annual festivals. Recreational activities include fishing, birdwatching, and water sports in Mobile Bay. The Bellingrath Gardens, Mobile's annual Festival of Flowers, the Chilton County Peach Festival in Clanton, and the National Peanut Festival in Dothan reflect Alabama's strong horticultural and agricultural practices. Regional cooking celebrates many southern ‘soul foods’, including grits and seafood dishes such as shrimp gumbo. A National Shrimp Festival in Gulf Shores honours the state's substantial shrimp-fishing industry.

Notable academic centres include Tuskegee University (1881), which contains a centre for the study of African-American history; the University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa (1831); and Auburn University (1856).

**Government** Alabama’s state constitution The present constitution of Alabama was adopted in 1901, with five earlier constitutions adopted in 1819, 1861, 1865, 1868, and 1875. Only the constitutions of 1875 and 1901 were submitted to the electorate for ratification. With many hundreds amendments and over 300,000 words, Alabama has one of the world's longest constitutions. The Alabama legislature writes, debates and passes laws, but its powers, under the provisions of the constitution of 1901, are but a remnant of the legislative supremacy allowed under the constitution of 1819.

**Structure of state government** The legislature is made up of a Senate of 35 members and a 105-member House of Representatives, with 35 senatorial districts electing one senator each and 105 representative districts electing one member to the House of Representatives. Senators and representatives serve four-year terms, without term limits. Alabama has nine electoral votes in
presidential elections. Two senators and seven representatives from Alabama are elected to the US Congress.

The governor of Alabama is the state’s chief executive and commander-in-chief of its military forces. Republican Robert Bentley took the governorship in January 2011. The governor is directly elected and can serve no more than two consecutive four-year terms. Other top executive officials serve four-year terms, including the lieutenant governor, secretary of state, attorney general, auditor, treasurer, and commissioner of agriculture and industries.

The state Supreme Court has a chief justice and eight associate justices, all elected to six-year terms, while the court of criminal appeals and the court of civil appeals have five judges each.

Alabama's 67 counties each has its own elected legislative branch, a board of commissioners, known officially as county commissions, of which the chief official is the probate judge, elected to a six-year term. The mayor-council form of government is the most common and Birmingham, Huntsville, Montgomery, and Tuscaloosa all have mayor-council governments.

**Economy** Service industries are the leading source of revenue in Alabama, but diverse manufacturing output remains important, based on lumber, marble, coal, oil, natural gas, iron, steel, aluminium, chemicals, textiles, plastics, and paper. Steelmaking is centred on Birmingham, Decatur, and Gadsden, while Andalusia, Bay Minette, Elba, Haleyville, Jasper, and Scottsboro are key textile and clothing producing towns. Mining and power generation are also significant, with Jefferson, Tuscaloosa, and Walker counties in north-central Alabama producing much of the state's coal. An important aerospace industry is centred in Huntsville, home of the Marshall Space Flight Center and the US Army Missile Command, with its headquarters at Redstone Arsenal.

Alabama has been the site of a fast-growing automobile industry since the early 1990s. In 2007, the German steelmaker, ThyssenKrupp, set up a large steelworks near Mobile, which was later sold to ArcelorMittal and Nippon Steel in a joint venture in 2013. Alabama is a leading producer of poultry, milk, peanuts, peaches, berries, pecans, cotton, and soybeans; shrimp fishing, catfish farming, and beekeeping are regional specializations.

**History**

**American Indian peoples and European settlement** The Cherokee, Creek, Choctaw, and Chickasaw peoples farmed the region until the European invasion of the 16th century, when Hernando de Soto claimed the region for Spain in 1540, and defeated the American Indian chief Tuscaloosa at Mobile. The French were the first permanent settlers, naming Mobile capital of the French colony of Louisiana in 1702 and constructing Fort Louis near Dauphin Island in 1717. Although Alabama remained a wilderness area, a substantial fur trade developed, centred at Saint Stephens. Mobile was captured by the English in 1763, recaptured by the Spanish in 1780, and finally taken by the USA in 1813. It formed part of Mississippi Territory until 1817, when an Alabama Territory was formed.

**Creek land and statehood** General Andrew Jackson defeated the Creek Indian Confederacy led by William Weatherford at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend in 1814. With over 9 million ha/23 million acres of Creek lands surrendered, the Alabama territory was able to organize, and drew up its first constitution, entering the Union as the 22nd state on 14 December 1819.

Wealthy settlers from Georgia and Tennessee established profitable cotton plantations on the fertile soil of the Coastal Plain. By 1860, the African American population comprised 45% of Alabama's total population of 964,000, as African slaves were imported continuously. Federal troops meanwhile drove...
the region's American Indians west beyond the Mississippi River.

**From Union to Confederacy** By the 1840s the slave-owning planters were a dominant political force and strongly urged Alabama's secession (withdrawal) from the Union. Alabama staged a Democratic 'Alabama Platform', and seceded from the Union on 11 January 1861, declaring itself the Republic of Alabama. Jefferson Davis was sworn in as the president of a new southern Confederacy, known formally as the Confederate States of America, with Montgomery as capital.

Although much of Alabama lay too far south to be heavily occupied by Union forces, northern Alabama suffered widespread destruction and starvation. The Union won a definitive victory at the Battle of Mobile Bay in 1864, when Fort Gaines and Fort Morgan were forced to surrender. On 4 May 1865, at Citronelle, Alabama, the Confederate general Richard Taylor surrendered Alabama, Mississippi, and East Louisiana. This included the remaining troops in Alabama. Alabama ratified the Thirteenth Amendment to the US Constitution in 1865, which abolished slavery, but refused to ratify the Fourteenth Amendment (1868), which granted US citizenship to African Americans, and the state was placed under military rule in 1867. It was readmitted to the Union in 1868.

**Reconstruction** The state faced financial ruin during Reconstruction and was largely controlled by northern carpetbaggers (entrepreneurs and politicians) and southern scalawags (Republican supporters), but conservative southern Democrats eventually rose to power, instituting a new constitution that was ratified by the electorate in 1875.

**From industrialization to Depression** Alabama flourished during the Industrial Revolution in the USA, owing to its plentiful natural resources of iron ore, coal, and limestone, and a major iron and steel industry developed during the 1880s, centred on the city of Birmingham. Railroads and improved transport further contributed to the state's growing urbanization. Lumber and textile manufacturing industries developed, and new shipping facilities at Mobile improved trade with other countries.

In the Depression following the Wall Street Crash of 1929 the threat of state bankruptcy loomed, but federal aid and the construction of dams in the 1930s greatly improved the state's ability to recover, and Alabama's hydroelectricity sources allowed the economy to expand considerably during World War II. The government established the Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville in 1941, laying the foundations for a modern aerospace industry and the Marshall Space Flight Center in the 1960s.

**Civil-rights movement** The cotton industry never fully recovered from the ravages of boll weevil plague in the early 1920s and the Depression, and although agriculture in Alabama gradually diversified, many former farm workers and rural dwellers migrated to urban centres or out of the state to the northern cities of Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, Philadelphia, and New York. African Americans remaining in Alabama found themselves denied full suffrage (voting rights), however, and were subject to harsh racial-segregation laws. An African-American civil-rights movement grew out of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery and, from 1955 to 1956, the church's minister, Martin Luther King, Jr, organized a year-long non-violent boycott against the racially segregated Montgomery bus system, pioneering the non-violent tactics of the civil-rights movement that were to define many protests of the 1960s.

Alabama's governor George C Wallace personally defied and resisted federal desegregation laws by banning black students from the Foster Auditorium at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa and from public elementary and secondary schools in several cities; on both occasions US president John F Kennedy was forced to call in the National Guard. In March 1965, Martin Luther King, Jr protested

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Against voter registration discrimination with a five-day march from Montgomery to Selma, and in August 1965 a Voting Rights Act was finally passed in Congress making Alabama's African Americans eligible to vote at last. Governor Wallace's popularity remained undimmed and he was re-elected a further three times in 1970, 1974, and 1982.

Contemporary Alabama During the 1980s Alabama changed from Democrat to conservative Republican control, as occurred in other neighbouring southern states. The state's first elected Republican governor, Guy Hunt (1933–2009), who was elected in 1986, was removed from office for diverting inaugural funds to pay personal debts; he was pardoned in 1998. Forrest Hood 'Fob' James, who was a Democrat governor of the state 1979–83, switched parties in 1994 and was elected governor as a Republican. The Democrats, under the leadership of Don Siegelman, won back the governorship in 1998, with 57% of the vote, including 90% of the votes cast by African Americans. Siegelman introduced the Alabama Reading Initiative, an early education literacy programme that was copied by several other states, and secured agreements from Japanese and South Korean automobile manufacturers to set up plants in the state. He was narrowly defeated by the Republican, Bob Riley, in the 2002 governorship election. In 2006, a Federal jury convicted Siegelman on corruption charges during his period as governor, and he was sentenced to seven years in prison.

In 2000, for the first time since the end of racial segregation in the USA, the city of Selma elected an African-American mayor – James Perkins, an IT consultant, defeated Joe Smitherman, who had been mayor since 1964.

Since the 1970s Alabama has concentrated on diversifying its manufacturing industries, building its technology, and striving to attract new industry and growth. In 1997 the German company Mercedes-Benz opened its first passenger vehicle plant outside Germany, in Tuscaloosa; the US aircraft manufacturer Boeing built a $400 million rocket plant in Decatur in 1999.

Famous people


the arts W C Handy (1873–1958), composer; Tallulah Bankhead (1903–1968), actor; Nat King Cole (1919–1965), singer and entertainer; Hank Williams (1923–1953), recording artist; Harper Lee (1926– ), writer

society and education Helen Keller (1880–1968), educator for the disabled and writer; Rosa Parks (1913–2005), civil-rights activist

politics and law William Weatherford (1780–1824), Creek leader; George C Wallace (1919–1998), state governor.

documents

Folsom, James: Christmas Message

weblinks

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