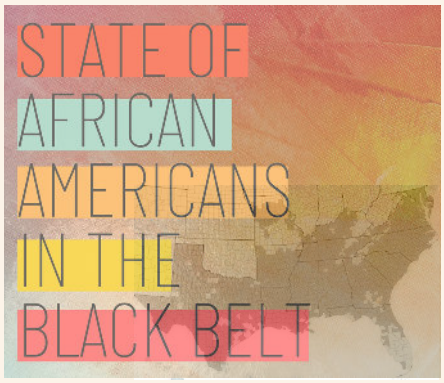


SAABB

QUARTERLY BRIEF

March 2022

Authors: Gloria Bromell Tinubu, Kourtney Sherrod, Monyai Chavers, Jerry Pennick, and Raymon Shange

SAABB CALLS FOR EQUITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The State of African Americans in the Black Belt (SAABB), a yearly report founded by Tuskegee University and the Federation of Southern Cooperatives/Land Assistance Fund, is a project of the **Carver Integrative Sustainability Center (CISC)** and is funded by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. CISC is a science-based research and resource center that focuses on technologies and policies that impact underserved farmers, ranchers, landowners and the communities in which they live. According to Dr. Raymon Shange, CISC Director, "CISC is dedicated to using innovative and creative methods of improving the condition of men, women and children farthest down."

SAABB is designed to address the issues specific to the Black Belt Region while at the same time have national impact. It is a partnership of 1890 Land Grant Universities (LGUs), Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and community-based organizations led by the Federation. SAABB's goal is to provide policy makers, community leaders and citizens with research-based information that leads to just and equitable policies that could drive the region's economic development and create an environment that encourages and supports innovation and sustainability. The primary focus areas are agriculture, business/cooperatives, education, employment, food security, health, infrastructure, and land tenure.

MESSAGE FROM THE SAABB EDITOR

Our Vision for the Back Belt Region is that it will be transformed into a region that enjoys comprehensive community controlled sustainable economic development. Key to achieving that vision is access to data driven information that can help citizens, policy makers and advocates develop and implement effective strategies (including equitable policies) that could move the region forward. SAABB intends to be a leader in providing that information, monitoring its effectiveness and making adjustments to meet the ever changing political, social and economic needs of the region.

The bulk of our work will be communicated through the yearly report. However, the political and economic environment is constantly changing and too often these changes keep many African-Americans in a constant state of struggle. No place is this more true than in the Black Belt Region of the United States. The ability to adapt to or influence those changes requires access to timely and up to date information that is rooted in research and in-depth analysis. With that in mind, SAABB will supplement its yearly report with quarterly briefs. These briefs will focus on current issues, concerns, resources, and other matters that require immediate attention. We will provide the public with information on what is and what has the potential for impacting the region. Our analysis will always be accompanied by research based recommendations for improvement.

Jerry Pennick

THE BLACK BELT REGION REDEFINED

The term "Black Belt" has an extensive history going back to Booker T. Washington's response when he was asked to define the term over 120 years ago:

> **So far as I can learn, the term was first used to designate a part of the country which was distinguished by the colour of the soil. The part of the country possessing this thick, dark, and naturally rich soil was, of course, the part of the South where the slaves were most profitable, and consequently they were taken there in the largest numbers.[1]**

Over the years, the Black Belt has been defined variously as: 1) 25% - 50% or more Black population; 2) higher than Black population in the rest of the United States; 3) high persistent poverty counties; 4) counties with insignificant levels of urbanization; and 5) soil coloration (Austroriparian Zone).

SAABB draws from Booker T. Washington, and employs a two-pronged approach in an effort to both honor and center our definition of the Black Belt Region around the bodies and humanity of the enslaved Africans who numbered in the millions and labored under the harshest conditions known to humankind. The United States was founded and built on over four hundred years of systemic economic inequities with respect to people of African descent including uncompensated forced labor, federally sanctioned Jim Crow laws, and racial inequities nationally and particularly within the 15 slave states that would come to be known as the Black Belt (see Figure 1).[2] In this 15-state region, the Constitution sanctioned enslavement of people of African descent and federally enforced it at every level of government. Hence, we consider this region to be the parent/mother of all other regions with high concentrations of people of African descent, and SAABB considers this region to be "the more definitive and historic" Black Belt Region.

Figure 1: Slave States in 1860

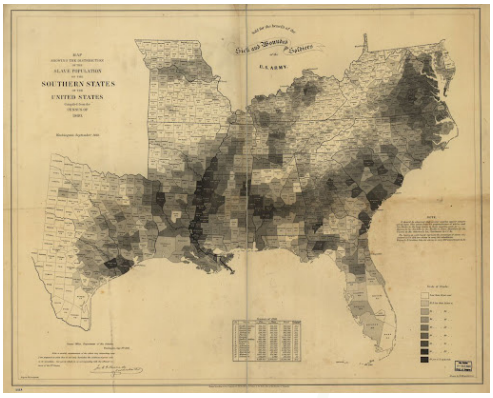
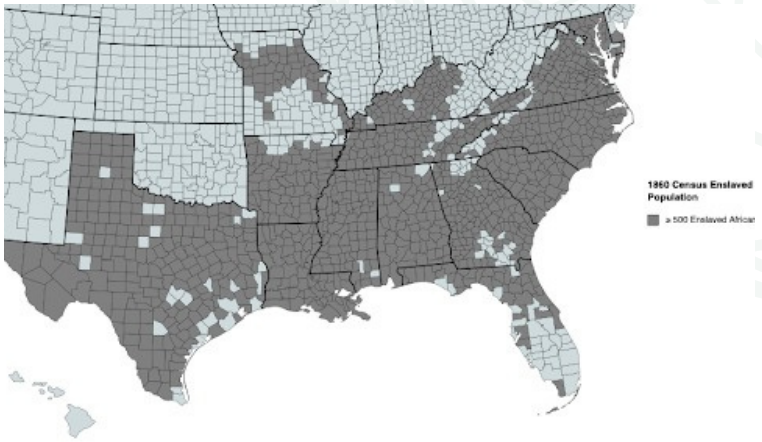


Figure 2: Black Belt States and Counties as Redefined by SAABB



Once the states were determined, the next step was to identify the Black Belt counties within those states. Using the standard criteria employed today to differentiate large businesses from small businesses,[3] counties with 500 or more enslaved Africans working for free in 1860 would have been considered very large enterprises of their day. Using this criteria, it was determined that there are 926 counties (note the number of counties changed since 1860) within the 15-state region that should be categorized as "historic" Black Belt Counties (see Figure 2).[4] While some counties have understandably experienced a decline in Black population, they are still considered to be historically a part of the Black Belt Region.

[1] Booker T. Washington. Up From Slavery: An Autobiography (1965, orgional 1901). New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company.
[2] Library of Congress.
[3] Small Business Administration (SBA) uses a standard of 500 or more employees for large businesses.
[4] 1860 Census: Population of the United States

In 1850, the number of enslaved Africans in the 15-state region was 3,286,240 representing 92% of all Africans in the United States (see Table 1).[5] According to the pre-Civil War census of 1860, the number of enslaved Africans had grown to 3,950,511 and constituted 89% of all people of African descent in the United States. The first census after the Civil War saw an increase in the number of African descended people living in the region, while the actual percentage experienced a modest decline to 83%. With their new found freedom, descendants of formerly enslaved Africans migrated to other parts of the country by the millions during the periods of 1916 - 1930, and 1940 - 1970, known as the Great Migration(s). Notwithstanding, today the 15-state region is still the home of the majority of the people of African descent with a Black population of 23,889,479 (58%).

Table 1: Black Population in Slave States from 1850 to 2020, United States Census.

STATE	ENLAVED BLACKS 1850 CENSUS	ENLAVED BLACKS 1860 CENSUS	BLACK POPULATION 1870 CENSUS	BLACK POPULATION 1910 CENSUS	BLACK POPULATION 1930 CENSUS	BLACK POPULATION 1970 CENSUS	BLACK POPULATION 2020 CENSUS
VIRGINIA	472,328	490,865	512,841	671,093	650,165	861,368	1,607,581
GEORGIA	381,682	462,198	545,142	1,176,987	1,071,125	1,187,149	3,320,513
MISSISSIPPI	389,878	436,631	444,201	1,009,487	1,009,718	815,770	1,084,481
ALABAMA	342,844	435,080	457,510	908,282	944,834	930,000	1,296,162
SOUTH CAROLINA	384,984	402,406	415,814	835,843	793,681	789,041	1,280,531
LOUISIANA	244,869	331,726	364,210	713,874	776,326	1,086,832	1,464,023
NORTH CAROLINA	288,548	331,059	391,650	697,843	918,647	1,126,478	2,140,217
TENNESSEE	239,459	275,719	322,331	473,088	477,646	621,261	1,092,948
KENTUCKY	210,981	225,483	222,210	261,656	226,040	230,793	362,417
TEXAS	58,161	182,566	253,475	690,049	854,964	1,399,005	3,552,997
MISSOURI	87,422	114,931	118,071	157,452	223,840	480,172	699,840
ARKANSAS	47,100	111,115	122,169	442,891	478,463	352,539	453,783
MARYLAND	96,378	87,189	175,391	232,250	276,379	699,479	1,820,472
FLORIDA	39,316	61,745	91,680	308,669	431,828	1,041,651	3,494,615
DELAWARE	2,290	1,798	22,794	31,181	32,602	78,276	218,899
TOTAL BLACK	**3,286,240**	**3,950,511**	**4,459,489**	**8,610,645**	**9,166,258**	**11,699,814**	**23,889,479**
U.S. Total	3,561,680	4,441,106	5,392,172	9,827,763	11,891,143	22,580,289	41,104,200
% U.S. Total Black Pop	92%	89%	83%	88%	77%	52%	58%

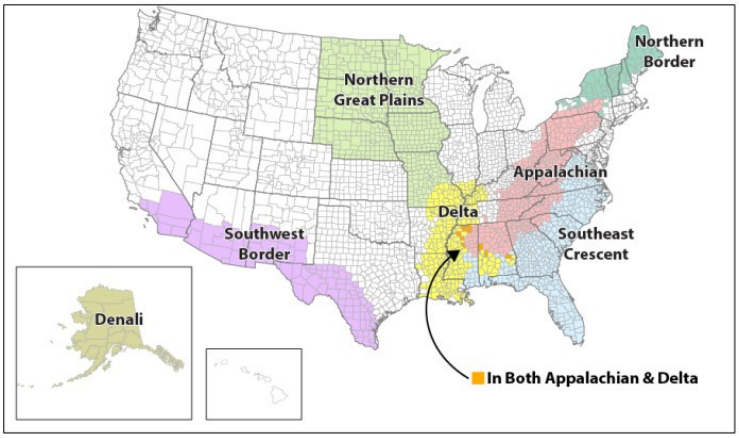
FEDERAL REGIONAL COMMISSIONS AND AUTHORITIES IN THE BLACK BELT REGION

The Black Belt Region is home to five federal commissions, namely, the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), the Delta Regional Authority (DRA), the recently activated Southeast Crescent Regional Commission (SCRC), the inactive Southwest Border Regional Commission (SBRC), and the defunct Northern Great Plains Regional Authority (NGPRA). Federal commissions were created as a partnership between the federal government and state governments for the purpose of economic development and planning on regional and local levels (see Figure 3).[6]

Of the 15 Black Belt states, two are a part of three commissions, seven are a part of two commissions, and five are a part of one commission, and one has no commission affiliation (see Table 2). The oldest federal commission, the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), was created in 1965, while the most recently activated federal commission, the Southeast Crescent Regional Commission (SCRC), was created in the 2008 Farm Bill.[7] For more information: https://www.arc.gov/; https://dra.gov/; or https://scrc.gov/.

[5] Campbell Gibson, by, & Jung, K. (1990). and By Hispanic Origin, 1970 To 1990, for the United States. Regions, 56, 1790.
[6] Federal Regional Commissions and Authorities. https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R45997.
[7] SCRC was recently activated with the confirmation in December 2021 of President Biden's appointee as the Federal Co-Chair, Dr. Jennifer Clyburn Reed. It took 31 years after SCRC was first proposed for it to become activated, while it took ARC less than two years.

Figure 3: National Map of the Federal Regional Commissions and Authorities by County



Source: Compiled by CRS using data from the various commissions and authorities and Esri Data and Maps 2019.

Table 2: Regional Commissions within the Black Belt Region

STATE	Regional Commission
VIRGINIA	ARC, SCRC
GEORGIA	ARC, SCRC
MISSISSIPPI	ARC, DRA, SCRC
ALABAMA	ARC, DRA, SCRC
SOUTH CAROLINA	ARC, SCRC
LOUISIANA	DRA
NORTH CAROLINA	ARC, SCRC
TENNESSEE	ARC, DRA
KENTUCKY	ARC, DRA
TEXAS	SBRC
MISSOURI	DRA, NGPRA
ARKANSAS	DRA
MARYLAND	ARC
FLORIDA	SCRC
DELAWARE	NONE

ADVANCING EQUITY

Presidential Executive Order 13985: Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities through the Federal Government

On January 20, 2021, the day of his inauguration, President Joe Biden issued Executive Order 13985 which called for the federal government to "pursue a comprehensive approach to advancing equity for all. The Order asserts that the "Federal Government's goal in advancing equity is to provide everyone with the opportunity to reach their full potential. Consistent with these aims, each agency must assess whether, and to what extent, its programs and policies perpetuate systemic barriers to opportunities and benefits for people of color and other underserved groups." For more information: https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2021-01-25/pdf/2021-01753.pdf.

USDA Equity Commission

The USDA Equity Commission (EC), established under the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 to advance equity within the Department of Agriculture and to advise the Secretary of Agriculture, **is now seeking nominations for membership on the Rural Community and Economic Development (RCED) Subcommittee**. While EC's recommendations are solely advisory and non-binding, it addresses "policies, systems, structures, and practices - internal, external, discretionary, and statutory - that contribute to barriers to inclusion or access, system discrimination, or exacerbate or perpetuate racial, economic, health, and social disparities." EC held its inaugural meeting on February 28, 2022. Its interim report is due to the Secretary of Agriculture by September 2022, while its final report is due by the summer of 2023.

EC is organized around two 15-member subcommittees: 1) Agriculture, formed at the time of the Commission's establishment; and 2) Rural community Economic Development (RCED) Subcommittee, currently being formed with **applications due by May 6, 2022**. Nominations should be submitted to Cecilia Hernandez, Designated Federal Officer (DFO), Office of the Deputy Secretary, Department of Agriculture, 1400 Independence Avenue SW, Room 6006–S, Washington, DC 20250; or sent by email to: equitycommission@usda.gov.
For more information: telephone: (202) 913–5907 or https//www.usda.gov/equity-commission.

The 15-member commission is co-chaired by Dr. Jewel Bronaugh, USDA Deputy Secretary and Arturo S. Rodriguez, United Farm Workers President Emeritus. Members from the Black Belt Region are as follows:

Equity Commission Members

Hazell Reed, Arkansas
Ronald Rainey, Arkansas
Shirley Sherrod, Georgia
Derrick Johnson, Mississippi
Rick Smith, Missouri
Shorlette Ammons, North Carolina
Elizabeth Lower-Basch, Virginia
Charles Rawls, Virginia

Subcommittee on Agriculture Members

Gina Eubanks, Louisiana
Savonala Horne, North Carolina
Jennie Stephens, South Carolina
Alexis Racelis, Texas
PJ Haynie III, Virginia
Michelle Hughes, Virginia

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