



The
Black Population in Alabama

A Socio-Demographic Portrait

Yanyi K. Djamba



center for
Demographic Research
Information for a Better Society

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank several individuals and agencies who helped in the preparation of this report. Special thanks to Dr. Kalai Mugilan, mortality analyst with the Alabama Department of Public Health, who contributed in the writing of the section on health and mortality. Dr. Mugilan also reviewed the entire manuscript of this report and provided very useful comments and suggestions. Dr. Larry Mullins, professor of sociology and former dean of the School of Liberal Arts at Auburn University Montgomery reviewed the final draft of this report and gave very useful advice and suggestions.

Many thanks to Ms. Christina L. Robinson, the Program Assistant at the Center for Demographic Research, who compiled most of the data, prepared all the charts, and reviewed the manuscript. Mr. Kevin Johnson, graduate research assistant at the Center for Demographic Research, also assisted with data collection and other tasks in the preparation of this report.

Most of the data used here came from several agencies, including the Census Bureau, the Alabama Department of Public Health, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Alabama Criminal Justice Information Center. We are very grateful to these agencies for making the data available to users.

Notes to users and suggested citation

The information contained in this report may be freely used or reproduced, provided that appropriate credit is given to the author and to the Center for Demographic Research. The suggested citation is:

Yanyi K. Djamba. 2008. *The Black Population in Alabama: A Socio-Demographic Portrait*. Center for Demographic Research, Auburn University Montgomery, Alabama, USA.

The Center for Demographic Research welcomes the comments and advice of its data and report users. All questions, comments, or requests for additional copies of this or other publications should be sent to:

Center for Demographic Research, Auburn University Montgomery, P.O. Box 244023, Montgomery, Alabama 36124-4023, voice 334-244-3463 (TDD 334-244-3800), fax: 334-244-3443, cdr@aum.edu, www.demographics.aum.edu.

Executive summary

The size of the Black population in the state of Alabama did not particularly change during the last 70 years. Accounting for slightly over one million people now, the Black population represents 26 percent of the state population. This is a relative decline from 36 percent of the Alabama population in 1930. However, there have been major changes in the composition and socio-demographic characteristics of the Black population during the last decades.

Black Alabamians are now more urban, more educated, financially better off, and they live longer than their parents and grandparents. However, these gains are offset by a multitude of factors that continue to keep Black people behind their White counterparts. This report shows that Blacks are less likely to get married, more likely to have unintended births, more likely to be an offender and a victim of violent crimes, and more likely to die at very young age than Whites.

Black males, in particular, rank lower on the majority of socio-demographic indicators used in this report. They remain less educated, more likely to be sentenced for homicide, and they have shorter life span than both Black females and Whites. This combination of unfortunate circumstances leads to both an actual and social shortage of Black males. As a result, the majority of Black children continue to be raised by their mothers alone.

Nonetheless, there are two main socio-indicators for which Blacks rank better than Whites. First, Blacks are less like to commit suicide, and this is consistent regardless of sex. Second, Blacks have a lower general mortality rate than Whites. This report describes these discrepancies by race and sex in order to understand the socio-demographic conditions of the Black population in Alabama.

Introduction

Twenty years ago the Center for Demographic Research published “The Black Male in Alabama: A Demographic Portrait.” This 1988 report has become one of the most requested documents in the Center. Even today, we continue to receive many requests from news reporters and the public who want to know what has changed in the Black population of Alabama, especially at this particular moment in history, which coincides with the 40th anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

This report shows the demographic characteristics and socio-economic conditions of the Black population in the state of Alabama today. Unlike the 1988 edition which focused only on Black males, the present report presents the socio-demographic portrait of Black males and Black females in comparison to their White counterparts. The topics covered include historical changes in the size of the Black population, geographic distribution, age and sex composition, marriage and family patterns, educational attainment, health and mortality, income and poverty, and crime and delinquency.

Most of the data used in this report came from the U.S. Census Bureau and Alabama Department of Public Health. As such, we use their racial classification definition wherein Blacks represent those individuals who self-reported their race as Black, regardless of their national origins, or Hispanic statuses.

Historical changes

During the last seventy years, the Black population of Alabama increased slightly from 944,834 in 1930 to 1,155,930 in 2000. The growth has been more significant for the White population whose size increased from 1,700,844 to 3,162,808 during the same period (see Figure 1).