

Local&Region

6

ALABAMA POVERTY

State is poor — but not like it used to be

BRENDAN KIRBY
BKIRBY@AL.COM

Carolyn Drinkard remembers growing up in rural Alabama in the 1950s without electricity, running water or indoor plumbing, eating vegetables her parents grew in a half-acre garden to supplement her father's income at a hardware store.

By the standards of government statisticians, she was poor. But so were most of the people she knew.

"When you're a child, you don't know what poverty is. You live in poverty, but you don't know what it is," said Drinkard, a retired educator who lives near Thomasville. "I didn't know I was poor until I got in college."

Over the years, though, Drinkard's family got electricity and plumbing. Workers paved the road in front of her house in the tiny community of Sandflat in Clarke County. Her father got a better-paying job at one of the paper mills that began to pop up. An entire generation of Alabamians rode the wave out of poverty.

It can be easy to forget how much progress the state has made over the past five decades when it perpetually sits near the bottom of national poverty rankings.

Consider, though, that U.S. Census Bureau data show that 42.5 percent of Alabamians lived below the poverty line in 1960. Every single county had a poverty rate above the national average of 22.1 per-



The poverty rate has declined dramatically across the entire country since 1960 but has fallen even more in Alabama. (File)

cent. The same was true in 1970.

It was not until 1980 that Alabama's wealthiest counties began to make real headway. Shelby County, which had the state's lowest poverty rate at 12.4 percent that year, tied the national average. Today, a half-dozen Alabama counties are doing better than the nation as a whole.

'Third World country'

Carol Gundlach, a budget analyst for the Montgomery-based Arise Citizens' Policy Project, said the contrast can be seen in the images from Robert F. Kennedy's tour of the Deep South showing barely clothed children in Alabama and elsewhere with distended stomachs from malnutrition.

"We looked like a Third World country," she said. "That's not true anymore."

Kristina Scott, executive director of the antipoverty group Alabama Possible, said suburbanization and new high-paying jobs allowed a handful of fast-growing coun-

ties to begin to pull away from the rest of the state. Shelby County became a magnet for Birmingham professionals with high incomes. Madison County grew a cluster of engineering and high-tech jobs built around its aerospace industry.

Before that transformation, those counties looked more like the rest of Alabama.

"Places like Madison County and Shelby County were completely different places than they are now," Scott said.

It is not just the highest-performing counties. The counties that are struggling the most with poverty still are much better off than they were in 1960. Many of the Black Belt counties have more than a third of their residents living in poverty. In 2013, Sumter had the highest rate — 38 percent. That is well above the 18.9 percent national average but a far cry from the 1950s and 1960s.

The 1960 census shows that 37 Alabama counties had pov-

erty rates of 50 percent or greater. In Wilcox County, 78.9 percent of residents had incomes putting them below the poverty line.

Historian Wayne Flynt gives the credit for the improvement to an improving economy and the policies of Lyndon Johnson, whose presidency ushered in an expansion of Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid. Welfare programs also grew.

"What you're looking at is a very important federal program that worked — that is the war on poverty," he said. "It's hard to find any government program other than Social Security in 1935 which raised so many people out of poverty in such a short period."

The poverty rate has declined dramatically across the entire country since 1960 but has fallen more in Alabama. The national rate dropped from 22.1 percent in 1960 to 15.8 percent in 2013. In Alabama, the rate decreased from 42.5 percent to 18.9 percent in 2013. Statewide, poverty has declined by 23.6 percentage points during that time, compared with 6.3 points nationally.

The decrease has been nothing short of miraculous in many places. The poverty rate was at least 40 percentage points lower in 2013 than it was in 1960 in Lowndes, Crenshaw, Greene, Wilcox, Henry and Hale counties.

Gundlach said she believes federal antipoverty programs during the 1960s played a large role. She noted the biggest decline in poverty rates over the past five decades occurred between 1960 and 1970. She said much of the improvement occurred between 1960 and 1970, suggesting a good chunk of the reduced poverty is the result of Social Security expansion that lifted seniors out of poverty.

The elderly poverty rate declined in Alabama at a faster clip than the overall poverty rate.

MOBILE CITY COUNCIL

'Uber' ordinance sent to public safety committee

MICHAEL FINCH II
MFINCH@AL.COM

Discussion of an ordinance amendment that would allow Uber, the app-based ride-hailing service, to operate in Mobile was cut short early Tuesday at the Mobile City Council's pre-conference meeting.

The changes put forth by Mobile Mayor Sandy Stimpson and sponsored by Councilman Levon Manzie would include so-called "vehicles for hire" in the city's code, paving the way for companies such as Uber and Lyft to do business in Mobile.

Council President Gina Gregory assigned the legislation to the council's public safety committee, "so all the details could be looked at, the issues answered, resolved prior to voting on this," she said.

That committee meeting was scheduled for June 30 at 2 p.m. The law is expected to come back before the full council on July 7.

Talks of a possible Uber launch in Mobile had been mounting for months. City officials met with representatives for Uber in April, a few weeks after the San Francisco-based company posted a jobs advertisement looking for drivers in the Mobile area.

With some fanfare, the mayor announced that Uber vehicles will be allowed to operate in Mobile last week, and drivers will be permitted, at least in the meantime, to give rides and collect fares.

Stimpson, who is away at the Paris Air Show in France with a contingent of council members, was not present to speak on the proposed law. But representatives for Uber and Mobile Bay Transportation, one of the largest transportation companies in the region, gave remarks during the regular City Council meeting.

Toby Roth, a govern-

mental affairs consultant for Uber, said the company appreciates the city's recognition that innovative business models require new and appropriate" regulations. Uber now operates in more than 300 cities internationally, and due to the efforts of the mayor's administration, Mobile may be one of them.

"Until now, Alabama was one of only three states that did not offer Uber services in any city," Roth said. "We had the dubious distinction of joining Wyoming and South Dakota as one of those three states."

The company was essentially regulated out of Tuscaloosa and Auburn after launching operations; negotiations in Birmingham collapsed over regulatory disagreements, and Huntsville passed a law Uber said contained too much red tape.

However, Huntsville Mayor Tommy Battle recently put forth a proposal that removes some of the previous barriers, sending the message to other municipalities that there could be more changes in what has been a statewide trend.

"There is a tremendous amount of interest in a lot of communities that are looking at the example, and the model that Mobile is undertaking," Roth said.

Lawmakers hoped to defer the thrust of discussion until the committee meeting, leaving many of the nuances of Uber's business model and the company's rocky history to be mulled over before it comes to the full council for a vote.

Jarrod White, an attorney representing Mobile Bay Transportation, broached one of those topics, remarking on a widely-known incident in Tuscaloosa. A driver was charged with, among other things, marijuana possession and driving with a suspended license.

"We think that gets to one of the core issues, which is the background process that Uber's proposing doesn't work," White said. Moreover, he asked the council to focus on "fairness and public safety" as it vets the new law.

PRESS-REGISTER

Subscribers

FOR A LIMITED TIME
75% OFF
ONLINE COURSES
udemy

Become a Web Developer From Scratch

Updated for 2015 and perfect for freelancers, this course will take you from beginner to master, teaching 13 web technologies and helping you build your website and personal portfolio.

Train Your Dog

Encourage good doggie manners and curb bad behaviors as you watch your pup become a model citizen..

Take Wedding Pictures

A Crash Course in Wedding Photography, turn you photography hobby into a profitable part-time money maker business.

And More! AL.com members get 75% off selected **udemy** courses like these...

Android Development	Adobe Photoshop	Food Photography	Investing Bootcamp
Web Development	Graphic Design	Body Language	Coding
Finance/Stock Trading	Mobile App Design	Speed Reading	Makeup Techniques

Public Announcement

AL Army National Guard (ALARNG) Mobile Organizational Maintenance Shop-28 (OMS-28) Administrative Record File

In 2005, site characterization and groundwater monitoring was conducted in association with an unrelated diesel underground storage tank at the ALARNG operated Field Maintenance Shop -28 (FMS-28) and a chlorinated solvents plume, primarily trichloroethylene, tetrachloroethylene and breakdown compounds, was discovered in the groundwater. Subsequent investigations were conducted between 2007 and 2013 to further characterize the soil and groundwater conditions and delineate the horizontal and vertical extent of chlorinated solvents contamination at the FMS-28 site. The source of the chlorinated solvents contamination has not yet been identified.

The FMS-28 is located in the manufacturing district of the Brookley Aeroplex in Mobile County, near downtown Mobile at 1622 South Broad Street 36615, between Interstate 10 and Mobile Bay. The ALARNG operates the FMS (formerly known as the Organizational Maintenance Shop and please note that all reports and administrative reference file will state the name of the facility as the OMS-28 as it was referred to during the findings) in the northwest corner of the Brookley Aeroplex on property owned by the Alabama Army Commission. Mobile Airport Authority owns the property directly west of the FMS-28 site, and residential property is located to the north.

The environmental investigation at the FMS-28 site is being performed by the Alabama Army National Guard, in accordance with the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA), under the regulatory oversight from the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM).

The ALARNG has set up an Administrative Record File at the following online location:
<http://www.mobileoms28.net>

The purpose of the file is to hold all information the Army uses to determine a remedial action or cleanup action. Under section 113(k) of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA), as amended by the Superfund Amendment and Reauthorization Act (SARA), 42 USC 9601et. Seq., the Army is required to establish an Administrative Record File for every remedial or removal response action and to make a copy of the file available (at or near the project).

An information repository contains current and historical information, technical reports, and reference documents concerning the ongoing environmental investigation at the site. The OMS-28 information repository is available for viewing online at the website listed above or at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Mobile District Office, 109 St. Joseph Street, Mobile, Alabama, by contacting Melissa Shirley at (251) 690-2616 or via e-mail at melissa.l.shirley@usace.army.mil.

The public is invited to review the contents of the Administrative Record File and information repository. The online information repository will continue to be updated until such time that the cleanup is complete and no further remediation is warranted. If you have any questions about the Organizational Maintenance Shop, Administrative Record File, or information repository, contact the Alabama Army National Guard, Sheri M. Festoso, at (334) 271-8183 or email: sheri.m.festoso.nfg@mail.mil or U.S. Army National Guard, Brett A. Merkel, at (703) 601-7785 or email: brett.a.merkel.civ@mail.mil.

AL-07333517-01

Become a member. It's easy and free

- 1 Visit member.al.com & Select The Birmingham News.
- 2 Click "ACTIVATE ACCOUNT" and complete the activation process.
- 3 View and redeem benefits.



Designed with you in mind.