

# **A Comparison of Rural Poverty Across County Lines**

---

**How Two Southern Alabama Counties Share a  
Geographical Location but Not Much More**

A Continuation of Research Regarding Rural Poverty in the United States  
Poverty Studies Interdisciplinary Minor – Independent Capstone Research

Catherine (Casey) Spreen & Professor Jennifer Warlick



# Introduction

## Wilcox County

- Poorest county in the nation based on median household income
- Southern Alabama
- One county away from Baldwin County

## Baldwin County

- Personal Connection
- Research conducted Spring 2014 in Rural Poverty course
- BP Oil Spill, Hurricanes

# Major Towns

## Wilcox County

- Camden
- Gee's Bend

## Baldwin County

- Bay Minette
- Gulf Shores
- Orange Beach

# Culture - Wilcox County

- Racial Tensions
- Quilting
- U.S. Postage Stamp Collection, 2006
- Gee's Bend Quilt Mural Trail

**“We didn't close the ferry because they were black [. . .] We closed it because they *forgot* they were black.”**

**-Sheriff Lummie Jenkins,  
Wilcox County**



**1937 - Gee's Bend quilter Jorena Pettway sews as girls hold the fabric.**  
(Courtesy of Library of Congress)



**Gee's Bend quilters Lucy Marie Mingo, Nancy Pettway, and Arlonzia Pettway. They have toured the country exhibiting their work.**





2006 - Gee's Bend Quilts on display in the  
Museum of Fine Arts – Houston.



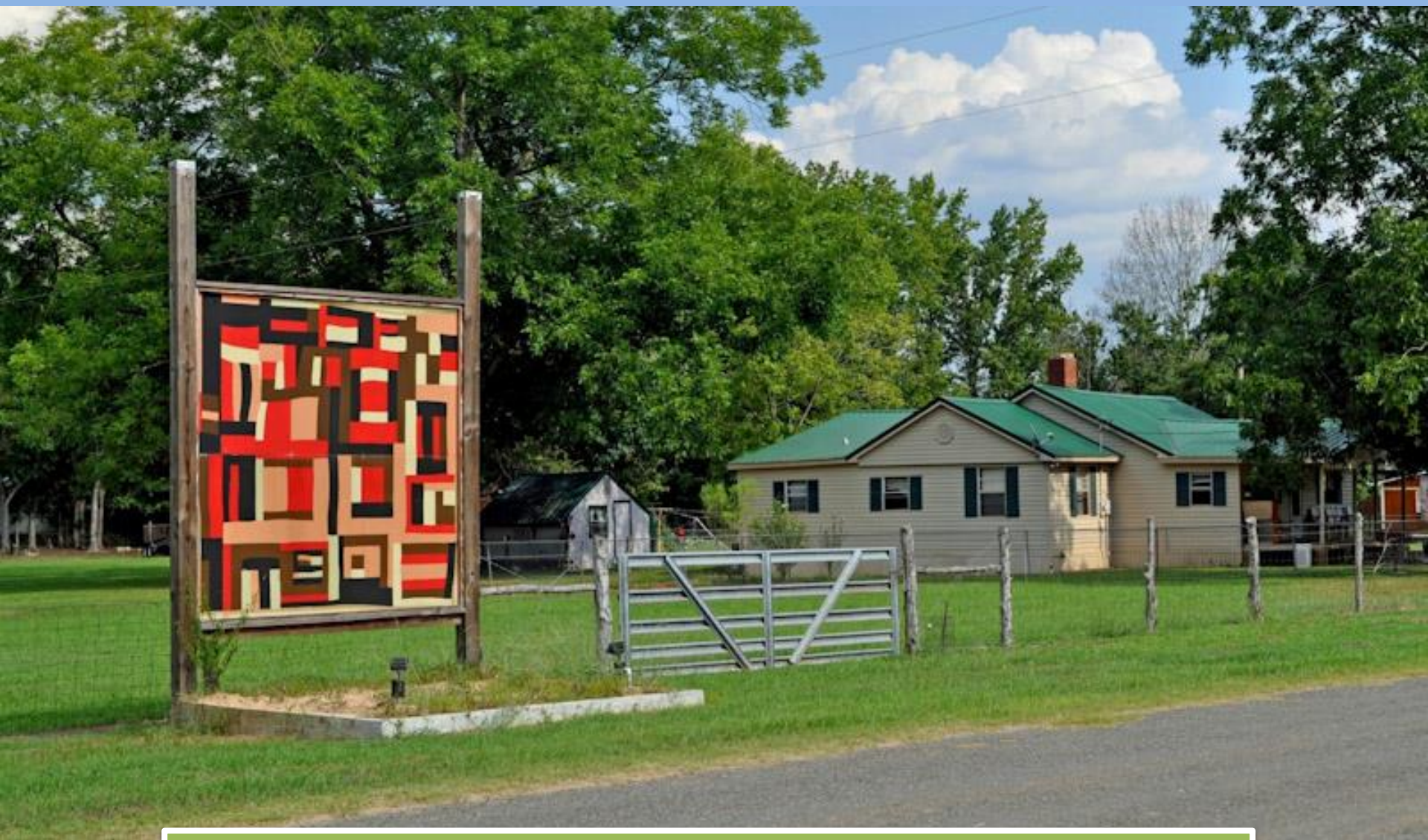
The Star Quilt was displayed in the Smithsonian, and it is reportedly worth more than \$25,000.







**Mural 6, Bars and String-pieced Columns by Jessie T. Pettway**



Mural 7, "Housetop" variation by Mary Lee Bendolph



Mural 9, "Nine Patch" by Ruth P. Mosely



**Gee's Bend Quilters Collective Building (The Old Community House) at the End of the Gee's Bend Quilt Mural Trail.**



# Culture – Baldwin County

- Small town events
- Mardi Gras – near Mobile
- Local festivals
- Beach activities



**Gulf of Mexico Coast in Gulf Shores**



**Annual Shrimp Festival in  
Gulf Shores**



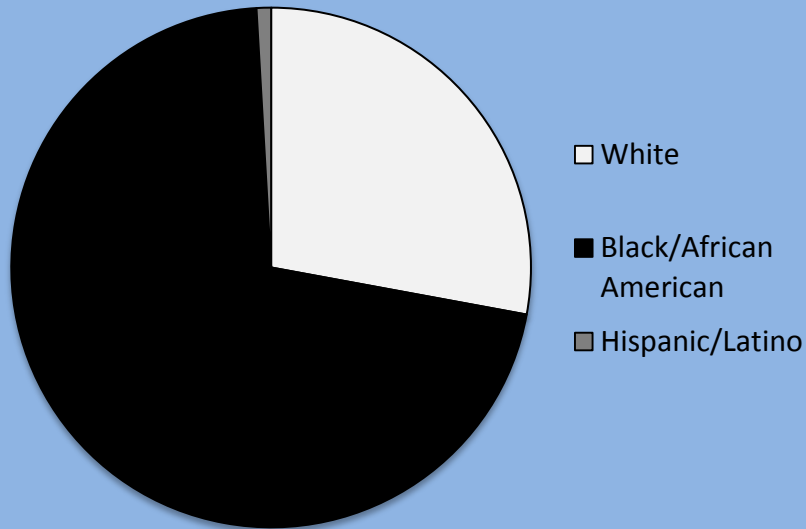
**Annual Baldwin County  
Strawberry Festival**



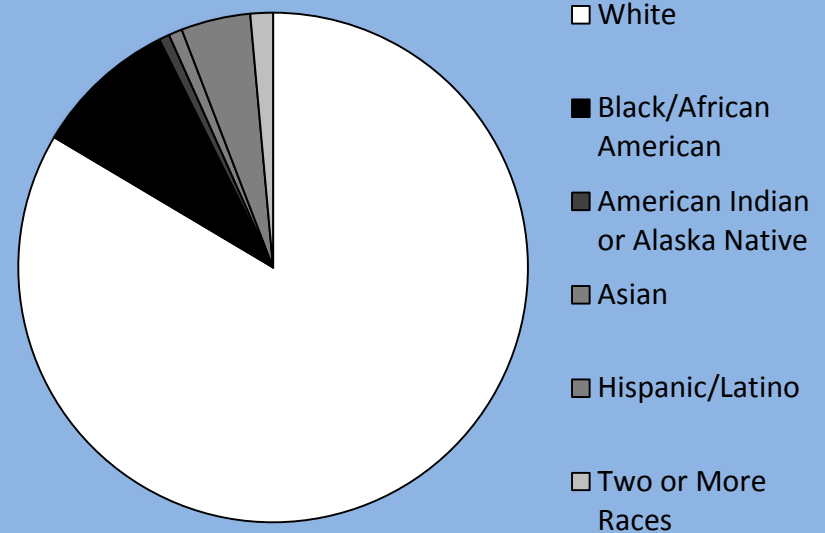
Hangout Music Festival

# Demographics

**Wilcox County, Alabama  
2013**



**Baldwin County, Alabama  
2013**



# Poverty Rate

Wilcox County

39.4%

2008-2012 ACS Survey 5-Year Estimates

Baldwin County

13.3%

2008-2012 ACS Survey 5-Year Estimates

# In Depth Look at Poverty

## Wilcox County

- **Overall: 39.4%**
  - White: 5.1%
  - Black: 51.6%
  - Hispanic: 69.2%

## Baldwin County

- **Overall: 13.3%**
  - White: 9.8%
  - Black: 36.2%
  - American Indian/Alaska Native: 32.9%
  - Asian: 28.3%
  - Hispanic: 29.5%

# Economy

## Wilcox County

- Agriculture
- Timber
- Low educational attainment
- Skills gap
- Issues applying for jobs
- Golden Dragon Copper Plant

## Baldwin County

- Agriculture
- Tourism
- Impact of BP Oil Spill
- White flight from Mobile County
- Commuters



Sales and lodging tax data collected from across the Gulf Coast show a clear pattern of winners and losers resulting from the oil spill.

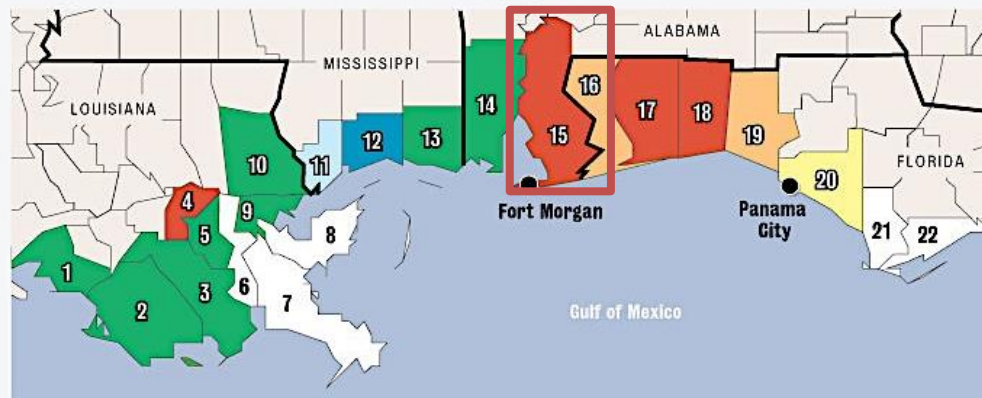


### SALES



1 St. Mary (+18.91%)	7 Plaquemines (N/A)	13 Jackson (-2.43%)	19 Walton (-7.26%)
2 Terrebonne (+0.42%)	8 St. Bernard (N/A)	14 Mobile (+7.65%)	20 Bay (-3.31%)
3 Lafourche (+3.95%)	9 Orleans (+8.33%)	15 Baldwin (-5.63%)	21 Gulf (+4.65%)
4 St. John (-41.37%)	10 St. Tammany (-2.55%)	16 Escambia (-1.48%)	22 Franklin (+4.69%)
5 St. Charles (-2.71%)	11 Hancock (-12.46%)	17 Santa Rosa (-2.44%)	
6 Jefferson (N/A)	12 Harrison (+0.74%)	18 Okaloosa (-6.34%)	

### LODGING

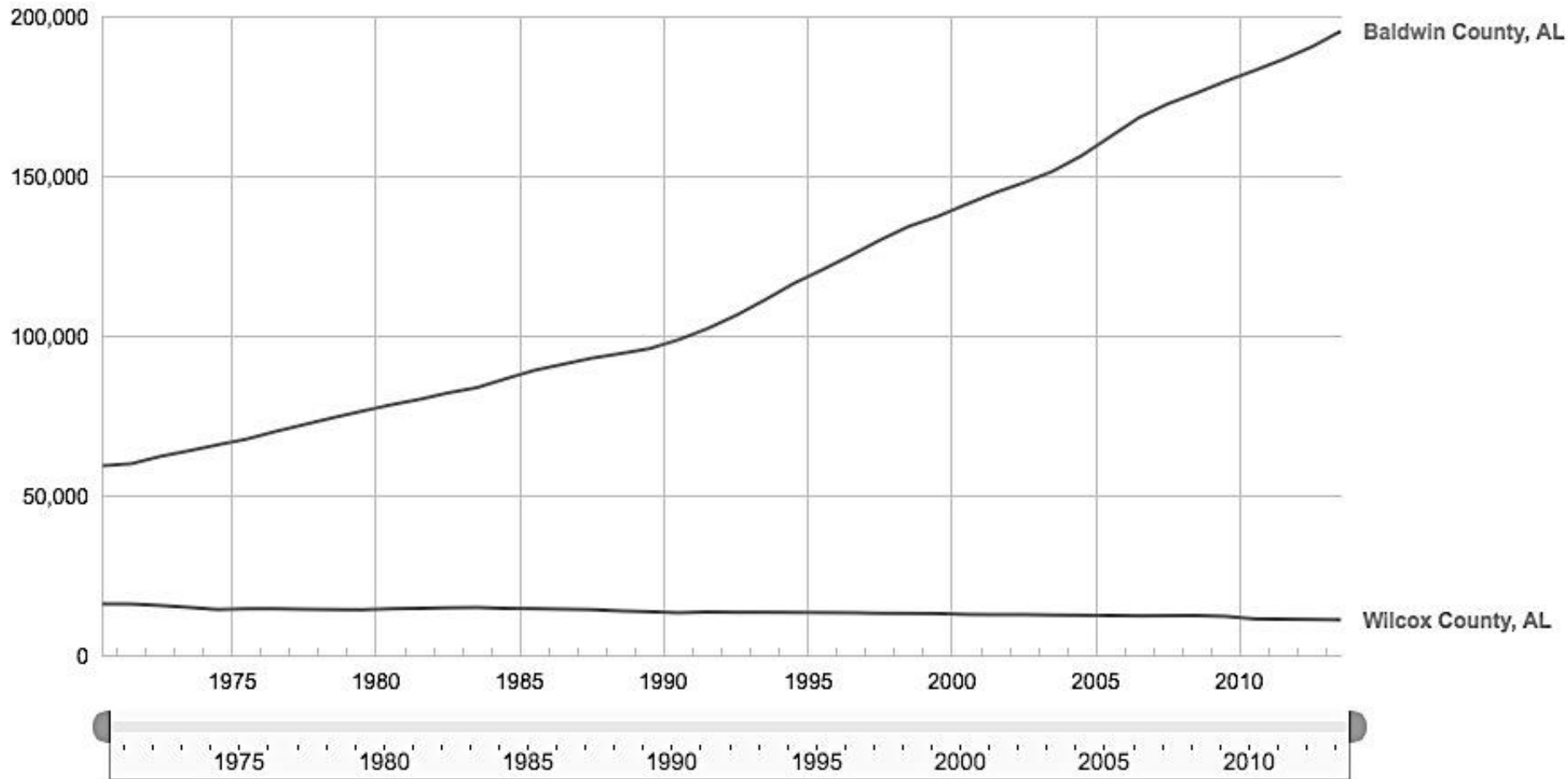


1 St. Mary (+89.85%)	7 Plaquemines (N/A)	13 Jackson (+26.99%)	19 Walton (-12.3%)
2 Terrebonne (+117.5%)	8 St. Bernard (N/A)	14 Mobile (+54%)	20 Bay (-7.4%)
3 Lafourche (+84.77%)	9 Orleans (+30.95%)	15 Baldwin (-33.2%)	21 Gulf (N/A)
4 St. John (-31.93%)	10 St. Tammany (+47.11%)	16 Escambia (-10.4%)	22 Franklin (N/A)
5 St. Charles (+38.53%)	11 Hancock (+3.14%)	17 Santa Rosa (-24.8%)	
6 Jefferson (N/A)	12 Harrison (+13.93%)	18 Okaloosa (-24.1%)	

# Population Changes

Year	State of Alabama		Wilcox County, AL		Baldwin County, AL	
	Number	Percent Change	Number	Percent Change	Number	Percent Change
1910	2,138,093	<b>126.1%</b>	33,180	<b>-65.9%</b>	18,178	<b>975.7%</b>
2010	4,779,736		11,670		182,265	
2013	4,833,722		11,307		195,540	

# Population Changes



# Health

## Wilcox County

- Life expectancy: 69.8
- Birth rate to unmarried women: 76.7%
  - National: 40.8%
- 43% of adults obese
- Employment dangers

## Baldwin County

- Life expectancy: 76.6
- Second healthiest county in Alabama
- Has one of the Nation's Top 100 Hospitals
- Employment dangers

# Economic Growth & Development

## Wilcox County

- Golden Dragon Copper Plant
- Black Belt Treasures
- Arts

## Baldwin County

- Airbus Plant
- Return of Tourism
- Cruise Ship Terminal
- Commuting on 2 Interstate Highways
- Baldwin County Economic Development Alliance

# Future

## Wilcox County

- Capitalize on the Arts
- Basic Skills Training
- Employment Centers with free access to computers, phones
- Career Fairs
- Possible Collapse

## Baldwin County

- Population increase
  - Impact on Education
- Construction
  - Job opportunities
  - Environmental Impact
- Tourism
  - Bad wages, no benefits

# Conclusion

- Southern Alabama
- Racial Tensions
- Demographics
- Different Opportunities Based on Location
- Growth and Decline