



1819 NEWS

Allen Mendenhall: AOC's Alabama problem

[Allen Mendenhall](#) | 06.08.26



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When Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC) recently [declared](#) (<https://www.foxnews.com/politics/aoc-tells-new-yorkers-pull-alabama-rally-speech-behind-bulletproof-glass>), that New York must “pull up” to southern states like Alabama and explain to its citizens what they had “uncorked,” she revived one of the oldest conceits in American public life: the notion that wisdom is concentrated somewhere between Manhattan and Georgetown and must periodically be exported to the provinces.

This attitude is familiar enough; denouncing Alabama is profitable. Until lately, any local scribbler, no matter how threadbare his talents, could secure applause – maybe even a Pulitzer Prize – from northern committees merely by proclaiming that our state and people were backward, ignorant, and on the wrong side of history. Such performances were often mistaken for courage when, in fact, they were merely conformity from a safe distance.

But history has a way of making fools of reformers. The amusing fact is that the economics AOC now preaches bears a striking resemblance to the old nostrums of the Deep South. One hears echoes of Georgia's [Tom Watson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_E._Watson) ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas E. Watson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_E._Watson)), Mississippi's [James K. Vardaman](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_K._Vardaman) ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James K. Vardaman](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_K._Vardaman)), South Carolina's "[Pitchfork Ben](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benjamin_Tillman)" [Tillman](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benjamin_Tillman) ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benjamin Tillman](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benjamin_Tillman)), and Arkansas's [Jeff Davis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeff_Davis_(Arkansas_politician)) ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeff Davis \(Arkansas politician\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeff_Davis_(Arkansas_politician))), (no, not the Confederate president) – a whole gallery of demagogues who promised salvation through AOC-style political management and wealth redistribution.

Meanwhile, the South she proposes to enlighten has moved in a rather different direction, pursuing growth through markets, investment, educational choice, and a legal order increasingly hostile to racial preferences of every variety. The irony is exquisite: the New Yorker arrives to rescue Alabama from ideas that Alabama itself has abandoned.

The test of a political doctrine is not the fervor with which it's preached but the results it produces. Here, the evidence becomes, well, awkward for AOC.

According to [Census data](https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2026/population-growth-slows.html) (<https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2026/population-growth-slows.html>), domestic migration gains have occurred in red states like Texas, the Carolinas, Tennessee, Florida, and, yes, Alabama, while California, Illinois, New Jersey, Massachusetts, and, yes, AOC's New York [suffer from domestic outmigration](https://alec.org/article/americans-are-voting-with-their-feet/) (<https://alec.org/article/americans-are-voting-with-their-feet/>). Americans are moving from high-tax, high-cost blue states to southern alternatives.

Unleash Prosperity [reports](https://committeetounleashprosperity.com/hotlines/since-2000-red-state-incomes-have-risen-40-faster-than-blue-states/) (<https://committeetounleashprosperity.com/hotlines/since-2000-red-state-incomes-have-risen-40-faster-than-blue-states/>), that since 2000, incomes in red states have risen roughly 40% faster than incomes in blue states. The income gap between many traditionally blue and red states has narrowed considerably over the last quarter-century.

Nor do labor markets offer much comfort to the apostles of blue-state superiority. The Bureau of Labor Statistics [shows](https://www.bls.gov/news.release/laus.nr0.htm) (<https://www.bls.gov/news.release/laus.nr0.htm>) that several conservative-leaning states – including Alabama, the Dakotas, Nebraska, Idaho, and Tennessee – maintain unemployment rates well below the national average, while heavily Democratic jurisdictions such as California, Illinois, Oregon, Delaware, and the District of Columbia post some of the nation’s highest unemployment rates.

Measures of economic dynamism tell a similar story (see [here](https://www.realclearpolicy.com/articles/2025/02/20/tax-cutting_governors_experience_growth_1092764.html) (https://www.realclearpolicy.com/articles/2025/02/20/tax-cutting_governors_experience_growth_1092764.html), [here](https://alec.org/article/americans-are-voting-with-their-feet/) (<https://alec.org/article/americans-are-voting-with-their-feet/>), [here](https://www.thecentersquare.com/opinion/article_5ac0b8d2-7546-4d1f-998b-178616ba28fc.html) (https://www.thecentersquare.com/opinion/article_5ac0b8d2-7546-4d1f-998b-178616ba28fc.html), and [here](https://www.thecentersquare.com/national/article_36350315-f48b-4138-9f64-ebb54720e9ba.html) (https://www.thecentersquare.com/national/article_36350315-f48b-4138-9f64-ebb54720e9ba.html)). States such as Utah, Tennessee, North Carolina, Texas, Florida, Indiana, and South Carolina routinely occupy the upper reaches of economic outlook and growth rankings. They are proving remarkably adept at attracting investment, businesses, and new residents. The canard that prosperity flows exclusively from the West Coast and Northeast grows less convincing with each passing year.

Even some of the regime’s friendlier observers have begun noticing the discrepancy between progressive rhetoric and progressive results. Bill Maher, hardly a spokesman for Southern conservatism, recently [expressed amazement](https://nypost.com/2026/05/30/us-news/bill-maher-blasts-californias-education-results-cites-two-surging-red-states/) (<https://nypost.com/2026/05/30/us-news/bill-maher-blasts-californias-education-results-cites-two-surging-red-states/>) that Democrats were “losing to the Waffle House, car-on-the-lawn states.” He added that black fourth-graders in Mississippi substantially outperformed their counterparts in California in both reading and math, paraphrasing information from the “[Nation’s Report Card](https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/)” (<https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/>).

The schoolmarm from Queens, armed with her X account and the solemn conviction that Providence has selected her to rescue the benighted, arrived in Montgomery to find the patient has not only recovered but is running a temperature considerably healthier than her own. The poor, ignorant Alabamian, whom she had sought to rescue, is meanwhile gainfully employed, paying modest rent, and disinclined to emigrate, which is more than can be said for the constituents she leaves behind on the sidewalks of the Bronx.

I won't weep for AOC. She chose her vocation freely, drew the attention she craves, and will no doubt continue to collect admirers among those who, having never set foot between the Appalachians and the Mississippi, know with perfect certainty what the people there require. The civilization which she pronounces salvageable only by her methods has, with characteristic rudeness, declined to be saved – and stubbornly insists, by every available statistical measure, on saving itself.

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