Guide to the History of the Alabama Democratic Party Collection
MSS.3025
Finding aid prepared by James N. Gilbreath

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October 14, 2010
Describing Archives: A Content Standard
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## Summary Information

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<tr>
<th><strong>Repository</strong></th>
<th>W.S. Hoole Special Collections Library, The University of Alabama</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Creator</strong></td>
<td>Alabama Democratic Party .</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Title</strong></td>
<td>History of the Alabama Democratic Party Collection</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Date</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Extent</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Language</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Abstract</strong></td>
<td>Letters, poll lists, and ephemera relating to the Democratic Party of Alabama.</td>
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### Preferred Citation note

History of the Alabama Democratic Party Collection, W.S. Hoole Special Collections Library, The University of Alabama.
The Alabama Democratic Party has existed for almost as long as Alabama has been a state. It was the strongest party within Alabama for most of the state's history. During the roughly 50-year existence of the "solid, one-party, South," the Democratic Party was the political party of Alabama. In recent decades, a more competitive, two-party, politics has emerged within the state, lessening Democratic Party dominance in Alabama politics.

As a formal organization, Alabama's Democratic Party, first known as the Democratic-Republican Party, initially appeared in the state during the 1830s. Between 1820 and 1860, the Democratic Party often faced stiff opposition but still carried the state in each pre-Civil War election for governor and president. In the 1845 contest for governor and the 1860 presidential race, however, splits within the party resulted in an "independent" Democrat winning over the "regular" Democratic candidate.

Prior to the Civil War there was considerable overlap, as there is today, between Democrats and their opponents in terms of social and geographic characteristics. There was substantial overlap in issue opinions between Democrats and their opposition in the pre-Civil War years. Democrats generally saw themselves as supporters of small farmers, merchants, and laborers who were concerned with maintaining individual rights and opposing strong centralized government.

During the pre-Civil War years, Alabama Democrats fought amongst themselves and with their opponents over a wide range of issues, including the national bank, tariffs, the distribution of former Indian lands, and prohibition. The issues of slavery and secession grew in importance during this period, aided by national events, fears about the intentions of the national government, concerns about the economic impact of ending slavery, racial unity, and a weakened Whig Party. Eventually, these issues fractured both the Alabama Democratic Party and the state's politics generally. This disintegration, in turn, hastened the move toward secession and civil war.

With Reconstruction, a larger number of freed blacks entered the state's electorate and began voting for the antislavery Republican Party. The Democratic Party consequently no longer dominated Alabama's politics. Instead, Republicans, including black party members, were repeatedly elected to a wide variety of public offices in the post-war years. Meanwhile, the state's traditional, conservative, Democratic leadership fought to regain political power. They appealed to white voters on the basis of racial unity. They took advantage of divisions among Alabama Republicans and a decreased interest in southern affairs among national Republicans.

The goal of making Alabama a one-party Democratic state was aided by rewriting the state's constitution in 1901 to increase the requirements for voting. A poll tax and a literacy test were added as requirements for voting. The Democratic Party also began using another important disfranchising provision, ruling that only whites could vote in its primary elections. The political effect of these requirements was to disfranchise blacks and poor whites, leaving a smaller and more Democratic electorate. Other considerations also helped in the development of one-party Democratic politics. Party leaders and candidates frequently told voters that the maintenance of white supremacy required support for the Democratic Party.
Many factors contributed to the end of the Democratic Party's dominance in Alabama. The state's shift from an agricultural to an industrial and services-based economy resulted in a more educated, wealthier, urban, less tradition-oriented, and altogether more politically diverse electorate. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, the popularity of President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal programs undermined support for the Republican Party among African Americans.

Also, both national and state public opinion shifted in the post-World War II and Cold War years in the direction of greater support for values such as equality, liberty, and freedom. This shift made it politically difficult to defend the practices of racial segregation and discrimination found in Alabama and other southern states.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the civil rights movement pressured both national political parties to take a position supporting an end to racial segregation and discrimination. Partially as a result of events such as the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the Freedom Rides, and the demonstrations in Birmingham, the national Democratic Party, particularly under the leadership of Lyndon Johnson, became the most "liberal" party in terms of civil rights.

Alabama's Democrats continued to control Alabama's state government through the mid-1980s, in part because of the long political career of George Wallace. One of the important events of Wallace's first term as governor was the voting-rights demonstrations and marches held in Selma. Images of Alabama state troopers attacking civil rights marchers on the city's Edmund Pettus Bridge contributed to the passage of the federal 1965 Voting Rights Act. This law removed many of the barriers to voting in Alabama and other states, resulting in a substantial increase in the state's electorate.

Alabama's Democratic Party is no longer the dominant party within Alabama. Instead, the Democratic Party is now part of the state's competitive, and maybe even Republican-leaning, party system.


Scope and Contents note


Poll lists include Greene County for the 1904 election and state-wide results by county for the 1936 general election.

Election ephemera include articles, form letters, pamphlets, and a 1936 election ballot with state vote tallies.
The oversize flyer is entitled "Official Call for the Democratic Convention of the Eighth Congressional District of Alabama" for the meeting on July 15, 1896.

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**Administrative Information**

**Publication Information**

W.S. Hoole Special Collections Library, The University of Alabama 10/1/2010

**Conditions Governing Access note**

None

**Conditions Governing Use note**

None

**Provenance**

Cather & Brown, 2005

**Processed by**

James N. Gilbreath, October, 2010

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**Controlled Access Headings**

**Subject(s)**

- Alabama-Politics and government,
- Political campaigns - Alabama - History - 20th century
## Collection Inventory

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