

**A Tricky Chessboard: Albert Rains, New Deal Liberalism, and Southern Progressivism in
Alabama**

by

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Abstract

Alabama during the post-World War II period until the late 1960s was represented by a group of Democratic congressmen that has been described as the most liberal and progressive in the nation. Collectively, they were a powerful force for organized labor, federal aid programs, affordable housing, and the rapid modernization and industrialization of the state. Albert Rains was a member of this group, serving in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1945-1965. During his tenure, he was known as one of the most powerful figures in Congress. Rains was the main force behind the passing of numerous housing laws, irrevocably shaping American housing in the twentieth century. Rains was also a leading voice for the protection and preservation of historic sites across the nation. His work on *With Heritage So Rich* encouraged Congress to pass the National Historic Preservation Act, which has left an indelible mark on American historic preservation and public history. Though he wielded tremendous influence in Congress in favor of housing, preservation, and labor, Rains remained an avowed segregationist. His belief in segregation threatened to overshadow his legislative successes and legacy. The housing bills successfully pushed by Rains created a financial climate hostile to African American homeowners and home-buyers, and his slum clearance and urban renewal programs proved calamitous to African American communities across the country. Indeed, Rains's belief in segregation seeped into his work in historic preservation as well, most noticeably in the case of Horseshoe Bend, which has been accused of whitewashing history and promoting attitudes of white supremacy. Thus, Rains has a mixed legacy as one of the twentieth century's most accomplished

congressmen, and also as the product of a segregationist South that ultimately harmed his political career, legacy, and the livelihoods of incalculable Americans.

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Introduction

Born the son of a farmer atop Sand Mountain in rural DeKalb County, Alabama, Rains's childhood was indelibly marked by poverty.¹ Largely self-taught, Rains overcame humble beginnings to become a U.S. congressman and "political giant," though the struggles of his early life permanently etched themselves into his political ideals.² As a congressman, Rains was known as a shrewd, effective politician with a gift for oration.³ He was well respected by President Dwight D. Eisenhower and a close friend of Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson. Rains served in Congress with four Presidents. Rains was seen as so indispensable that upon rumors of Rains's retirement from Congress in 1964, President Johnson remarked, "I would rather lose Alabama than lose [Albert Rains]."⁴ In Congress, Rains thrived as a member of the House Committee on Banking and Currency, as well as the Joint Committee on Defense Production. Additionally, Rains was instrumental in developing and implementing federal housing programs in the 1950s-1960s. During this period, Rains was known as "Mr. Housing USA" in the House of Representatives.⁵ He was deeply involved with the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) in shaping federal housing policy, and led the way for legislation designed

¹ Roy Moore, interview by author, February 15, 2018.

² *Gadsden Times*, March 26, 1991.

³ Rains was known by friends and colleagues alike as "the man with the silver tongue." His support, particularly his vocal support in Congress, was prized.

⁴ Lyndon B. Johnson, phone conversation with Albert Rains, February 28, 1964, accessed April 22, 2018, <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/secret-white-house-tapes/conversation-albert-rains-february-29-1964>

⁵ The designation of "Mr. Housing" was an unofficial title that highlighted Rains's interest in housing legislation. In the case of Rains, it also referred to his ability to get contested housing legislation passed.

to provide more affordable housing loans and the construction of substantially more public housing for military veterans, the elderly, and the poor. While providing housing opportunities for many, certain FHA guidelines and practices further reinforced segregation in housing, particularly in the Southeastern United States. The FHA, under the leadership of Rains, enacted legislation that worked to systematically deny African Americans adequate housing and affordable mortgages/rents.⁶

The absence of dedicated scholarship about the life and career of Albert Rains is glaring. Rains was one of the most important American politicians of the mid-twentieth century, and was paramount to passing major legislation on housing, savings and loans, the separation of church and state, and was a powerful supporter of Johnson's War on Poverty. However, Rains was a staunch opponent of the Civil Rights Movement. Rains also wrote the nation's first mass transit bill, and was instrumental in the creation of the Interstate Highway System.⁷ During his time in Congress, housing and education opportunities for African Americans across the country, and in particular the South, dwindled. His major work in housing legislation provided affordable homes to millions of poor, elderly, and disabled white Americans, yet encouraged the destruction of African American neighborhoods, the forced removal of African American residents to isolated public housing, made the acquisition of affordable housing loans difficult and/or impossible for African Americans and minorities as a whole, and further supported an intentional, technically legal, economic and educational division of black and white Americans, even as *Brown v. Board of Education* made such segregation illegal throughout the land. Albert Rains was a progressive, liberal congressman from one of the most socially conservative states in the country, and his

⁶ Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company, 2017), 47-49.

⁷ Robert McCurley, interview by author, February 17, 2018.

career encapsulates the tremendous strife found within his own home state. His mark on United States history is indelible, yet his impact largely unattributed to him.

Rains and his fellow congressmen from North Alabama, including Lister Hill, John Sparkman, Carl Elliott, and Robert Jones, were collectively acknowledged as the most progressive and liberal group from any state in the country. Rains led the way among his peers for respect and influence, and was seen as the most progressive of them all. He was a complex figure in a tumultuous time in American politics, a time that he helped define. A larger work is necessary that provides a more complete portrait of Albert Rains and accurately defines his immense role in shaping American politics and society. To achieve this, it is necessary to begin with the early life and childhood of Albert Rains, as well as his career before entering the United States Congress.

Chapter 1: A Sand Mountain Barefoot Boy

Albert McKinley Rains was born on March 11, 1902, the seventh child of Elbert and Luella Rains. Elbert Rains was a farmer and a blacksmith, whose lineage was traced back to North Carolina, and farther back still to England.¹ Luella Rains was described as of Irish descent going back several generations.² Rains's training for his future career began early, at the age of 6, when Elbert would encourage him to deliver speeches. That same year, Rains was able to successfully recite all 60 stanzas of "Why Should the Mortal be Proud?," said to be a favorite of Abraham Lincoln. The editor of the *Gadsden Times* often told a possibly apocryphal story of Albert Rains as a child being caught by a local farmer orating atop a tree stump. When asked what he was doing by the farmer, Rains simply replied, "I'm running for Congress," and resumed his speech.³ Elbert Rains died when Albert was 7 years old, though Albert would never forget his early training, and fundamentally shaped by his childhood and adolescence growing up in north Alabama.

Rains grew up in the small town of Grove Oak, Alabama, on 80-acres. His family farm was in DeKalb county in Northeast Alabama, only one county away from the Tennessee border. Like a number of north Alabama counties, DeKalb County opposed secession prior to and during the Civil War, and even contained a Union encampment. Grove Oak itself is an unincorporated

¹ United States Censuses 1900 accessed May 12 2018, <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1940/population-volume-1/33973538v1ch03.pdf>.

² Marguarite Johnston, "Congr. Albert Rains, in Capital Short Time Has Gained Wide Acclaim," *Birmingham News*, February 18, 1946.

³ Walling Keith, "Albert's Smartness is No Secret Here," *Gadsden Times*, July 2, 1967.

community surrounded by forests and farmland. One of the closest towns to Grove Oak is Rainsville, Alabama. As the name suggests, it is commonly speculated that the town is named after an ancestor of Albert Rains, who opened the first general store in the town.⁴ The town is situated atop an area that is locally known as Sand Mountain. Less a mountain than a plateau, the region is “located primarily in Jackson, DeKalb, Marshall, and Etowah counties.”⁵ The closest city of any size to Grove Oak is Gadsden, Alabama, and this is where Rains would begin his political career. Grove Oak is part of a larger collective region known as the Hill Country, which has its own distinctive culture influencing a unique political history. The Populism movement and anti-secession movements thrived in Alabama’s Hill Country, and a singular political culture grew up in and around the hills that produced Alabama’s most liberal voters and politicians, who had unrivaled support for federal aid/intervention, labor, organized agriculture, and economic liberalism as a whole.⁶

Gadsden, Alabama

While possessing certain similarities that bind it to the larger Hill Country, Gadsden, Alabama has a unique history as well. Originally part of lands that resided in the Cherokee Nation, the area experienced a massive influx of European settlement following the Indian Removal Act of 1830, which legislated the forced removal of Cherokee Indians from ancestral lands. These early European settlers came to northeast Alabama seeking land and opportunity. Most followed the path of the federal roads throughout the area, which often descended south

⁴ United States Census 1910, accessed: May 12, 2018, <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1940/population-volume-1/33973538v1ch03.pdf>.

⁵ Eddie Wayne Shell, *Evolution of the Alabama Agroecosystem: Always Keeping Up, But Never Catching Up* (Montgomery, AL: NewSouth Books, 2013), 18.

⁶ William D. Barnard, *Dixiecrats and Democrats: Alabama Politics, 1942-1950* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1974), 10-17.

and eastward from the Carolinas, to Georgia, and later to Alabama.⁷ Gadsden's original name was Double Springs, and served as a stagecoach stop between Huntsville, Alabama and Rome, Georgia. The village expanded following Cherokee removal, and the arrival of the Hughes brothers in 1840 pushed expansion further. Joseph Hughes and his brother Gabriel purchased a sizable quantity of land along the Coosa River and around Lookout Mountain. The town would be renamed to Gadsden after South Carolina Colonel James Gadsden, who is best known for leading negotiations with Mexico for the Gadsden Purchase. Gadsden's position along both banks of the Coosa River paid early economic dividends and provided advantages not enjoyed by other surrounding cities.⁸ It served as an important port for steamboats carrying passengers and freight, as the Coosa River joins the Alabama River in the south, connecting the cities of Rome, Georgia in the northeast, and then working southwards through Gadsden, Montgomery, and then Mobile.⁹

Gadsden recovered quickly after the Civil War, in large part because of the arrival of railroads in the 1870s and the establishment of manufacturing centers in the 1880s and 1890s. Steamboat traffic continued to provide an economic boon to Gadsden, but other industries served a role in Gadsden's swift recovery as well. Colonel R.B. Kyle, who opened the first Confederate recruitment office in Gadsden, became a leading entrepreneur following the Civil War. Kyle

⁷ The most well-known of the federal roads in Alabama is the Old Federal Road, which runs through former territories of the Creek Nation in central and south Alabama. The Creek Nation dominated the area that would eventually become the state of Alabama, but regions of the northeast were controlled by the Cherokee. Centered primarily in Georgia, Cherokee influence seeped outward in all directions.

⁸ Harvey H. Jackson, *Rivers of History: Life on the Coosa, Tallapoosa, Cahaba, and Alabama* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1995), 142-47.

⁹ It was a steamboat named the Coosa that first cleared the Coosa river of debris and opened it up for mercantile and passenger boat traffic, passing then Double Springs on July 4, 1845. It was originally proposed that the new town located on the old site of Double Springs be named Lafferty's Landing, after the name of the captain of the steamboat Coosa, Captain James Lafferty. Lafferty was offered choice lands if he would choose Gadsden as a landing site for the Coosa, which he accepted.

founded a number of businesses and was involved in a variety of economic initiatives that brought opportunity to Gadsden. He was instrumental in the construction of the first railroad that connected Atlanta, Georgia to Gadsden. Following this, Kyle started the Gadsden Furnace Company, which became the largest producer of coke in the southeastern United States. The Gadsden Land and Improvement Company, also led chiefly by Kyle, was successful in building construction and realty development in the city. Another early Gadsden businessman, Captain James M. Elliott Jr., founded the Elliot Car Works in 1887. This company employed over 350 residents and produced approximately 15 railroad boxcars per day.

Further economic expansion came later, in the late 1890s. In 1895, the Dwight Manufacturing Company, headquartered in Chicopea, Massachusetts, announced a new plan to construct a large cotton mill in Alabama City, Alabama. Alabama City is located a mere 2.7 miles from the Gadsden city center. Construction of the mill and an attached mill village (locally known as Dwight City) began immediately, and the first bale of cotton was produced one year later, on February 7, 1896. The new mill employed hundreds of workers, who primarily came from Gadsden. The mill proved extremely successful, and quickly doubled in size, employing over 1,000 people. It more than doubled the population of Alabama City, and became the largest employer of Gadsden residents. Following this expansion, with approximately 30,000 spindles added to a preexisting 30,000, the Dwight Mill was the largest mill in Alabama, and there were only 2 operating mills in the South that could claim to be larger.¹⁰ By the 1920s, industry and mining had also taken root. Ledbetter and Isom describe the city of Gadsden as “circled by hills brimming with iron ore, coal, and limestone – the three ingredients necessary for making

¹⁰ By the time of completion, the Dwight Mill represented an investment of approximately \$1.25 million. Construction required around 20 million bricks and 6 million feet of lumber.

steel.”¹¹ Etowah County had 4,666 wage-earners, and produced approximately \$25,426,417 worth of finished industrial materials each year. This placed Etowah County third in Alabama for both categories, behind only Jefferson County and Mobile County.¹² However, employees of the Dwight Mill worked under often harsh conditions, and following the Great Depression, conditions became even worse.

The textile industry was perhaps the hardest hit industry in the nation by the economic collapse caused by the Great Depression. To maintain profits, textile mill owners often fired workers to find cheaper substitutes. Textile mill owners in the south had no issues finding workers, as there was a steady stream of desperate farmers and laborers seeking working wages. Taking advantage of this desperation and hoping to remain profitable, mill owners sought to reduce pay, increase hours, and continue the operation of a predatory system of mill villages and mill-run shops. Workers often had very little choice but to use these shops for food and supplies because of their very low pay, or worse, payment in mill currency that could not be used outside of the bounds of the mill villages. No semblance of relief arrived until President Franklin D. Roosevelt began issuing New Deal programs. The most essential of these for textile workers was the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA). The NIRA, besides temporarily relaxing some antitrust laws to encourage industries to jointly create industry wide enforced practices and regulations, also established minimum wages and maximum allowed work hours. Just as importantly, workers won the right to join unions and to collectively bargain with industries. Union membership increased sharply statewide and nationally.

¹¹ Lilly M. Ledbetter and Lanier Scott Isom, *Grace and Grit: My Fight for Equal Pay and Fairness at Goodyear and Beyond* (New York, NY: Three Rivers Press, 2012), 66-70.

¹² United States Census 1920, accessed May 12, 2018, <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1920/state-compendium/06229686v1-7ch01.pdf>.

Even with new gains, most mills resisted following these guidelines set out by the NIRA and fairly treating workers. Escalating worker dissatisfaction with pay and conditions eventually led to a workers strike at the Dwight Mill on July 2, 1934. On July 17th, the branch of the United Textile Workers in Alabama authorized a state-wide strike in support. The statewide strike soon broadened into a national strike, further spurred on by the anti-union mills that often resorted to outright violence against strikers and unionizers. This conflict between textile workers, unions, and mill owners and their hired union busters/anti-union police is still the largest labor dispute in American history. It was a resounding defeat for the unions and the textile mill workers. Their dreams of mass unionization would not recover.¹³ Gadsden's position as the location where the strike began was not forgotten, and organized labor would remain a key issue in the city and surrounding areas, influencing a generation of politicians to be extensively more pro-labor than those who came before them. During the early twentieth century, Gadsden was called by the *Montgomery Advertiser*, "the most profoundly unionized city in America," and Rains recognized the opportunity.¹⁴ In his campaign for Congress in 1944, Rains took advantage of this history and solidly placed himself as the more pro-labor candidate against incumbent Joe Starnes, and the support of labor groups helped push him to victory. Starnes was the only incumbent to lose in that day's primary elections in Alabama, South Dakota, Indiana, and Florida.¹⁵

The unique development of north Alabama and Gadsden, besides later engendering a more pro-labor stance from local and national representatives, also encouraged sizable interest in

¹³ Janet Irons, *Testing the New Deal: The General Textile Strike of 1934 in the American South* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 155.

¹⁴ *Montgomery Advertiser*, November 5, 1959.

¹⁵ *News Herald* (Franklin, PA), May 3, 1944.

education. Gadsden's board of education, founded in 1895, grew exponentially during the early twentieth century. Local primary and high schools were constructed throughout 1900-1929, and school construction increased during the years immediately before and after the Great Depression. Faced with mounting overcrowding in its schools, the Gadsden board of education approved bond sales of up to \$250,000 in order to provide funding for new school construction in the 1920s. In 1936, construction was completed on a high school for Gadsden's African American students in West Gadsden.¹⁶ Additionally, a new elementary school was completed the same year. These post-Depression school construction programs were primarily funded by New Deal programs of the period, from which Gadsden reaped significant benefits.

Hill Country Politics

The stage for such a progressive group of Alabama representatives had been set years before, with the disastrous effects of the Great Depression and even earlier, during the brief heyday of populism in Alabama in the 1890s. Alabama's national representatives following World War II were considered unique for a number of reasons. Firstly, they were often described by contemporaries in Congress and in the press as the most progressive group collectively in the country. These men portrayed themselves as of and for the common people, much in the earlier mold of Abraham Lincoln, George Washington, or Andrew Jackson. Rains and his fellow representatives in this time seemed keenly aware of their image and of the desires of their constituencies for a common man of the people, in some ways similar to the earlier Populism movement in Alabama. Indeed, the politics of Albert Rains had roots in Populism, which had a lasting impact on the politics of the Hill Country at large.¹⁷

¹⁶ Public education in Gadsden before the *Brown v. Board of Education* 1954 decision, as throughout the rest of Alabama, was still segregated.

¹⁷ U.S. Congress, Senate, *Senator John Sparkman: A Great Alabamian, A Great American*, 32650.

The rise of populism in Alabama was preceded by mass organization of Alabama farmers in 1872, as a response to economic depression following the Civil War. During this period, yeomen farmers struggled mightily to fully adapt to a New South economy that saw planters, merchants, and some businessmen thrive. The arrival of the Patrons of Husbandry group, or the Grange, spurred on participation in organized farming as a way to counterbalance or counteract economic regression. The Patrons of Husbandry sought to alleviate the burdens of farmers by encouraging participation in larger collective purchasing schemes, and provided members with various benefits, such as education. While providing concrete benefits to members, the Grange came up short in fully representing those engaged in agriculture that were not descended from the elite planter class. The Grange was strongly connected to the Democratic party as well, which was also commonly portrayed as the “white man’s party” and received wide support from wealthy whites across the state. Thus, poorer farmers, particularly those from north Alabama, split off and formed less conservative organizations such as the Farmers’ Alliance, Colored Farmers’ Alliance, and the Agricultural Wheel. Some even began distancing themselves from the Democratic party, and interest and support for the Greenback-Labor Party swelled in 1878.¹⁸

Their ascendancy was short lived, with much of their support essentially dissolved by the 1880s, along with the Patrons of Husbandry.¹⁹ The more radical and progressive of the offshoot groups of farmers’ organizations continued to seek political and economic redress, and north Alabama increasingly saw the politicization of agriculture and labor. North Alabama proved especially fertile ground for organized agriculture because of multiple reasons. Firstly, north

¹⁸ Daniel Letwin, *The Challenge of Interracial Unionism: Alabama Coal Miners, 1878-1921* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 57.

¹⁹ William Warren Rogers, *The One-Gallused Rebellion: Agrarianism in Alabama, 1865-1896* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970), 68-69.

Alabama lies largely outside of the geographic area known as the Black Belt, and thus the soil is not as rich as the lands that run through central Alabama.²⁰ As a result, north Alabama counties were not as conducive to large scale cotton plantations. This meant that there were less slaves in north Alabama, and more small farmers, or yeomen farmers, that had less ability to absorb losses. Additionally, these farmers were more vulnerable to predatory loans. Because of these factors, yeomen farmers were far more reliant on a booming, agriculture friendly economy, and postbellum regression amidst a burgeoning New South economy was felt to the core.

These groups became more politicized as time went on, particularly after the increased disfranchisement of African Americans following the constitutional convention of 1901, which Paul Pruitt in *Taming Alabama: Lawyers and Reformers, 1804-1929*, claims purged “nearly all black voters and a significant number of lower-class white voters” from voting lists.²¹ Many members of the 1901 constitutional convention sought to appeal to the xenophobia and paranoia of poor whites, while at once fighting for the return of legalized white paternalism.²² The 1901 Constitution was a direct response to the Reconstruction Constitution of 1868 and the expanded rights it granted to African Americans and whites who did not own property.²³ Groups of poor farmers now saw themselves as existing outside of a political economy that had left them behind. Proposed economic changes to ameliorate the hardships of post Reconstruction era farming now

²⁰ The region of north Alabama is commonly referred to as the Hill Country due to the rocky terrain. This area falls in the geographic areas of the Cumberland plateau and along the ridges and valleys formed by the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains.

²¹ Paul M. Pruitt, *Taming Alabama: Lawyers and Reformers, 1804-1929* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2010), 91.

²² Glenn Feldman, *The Disfranchisement Myth: Poor Whites and Suffrage Restriction in Alabama* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 76-79.

²³ Michael W. Fitzgerald, *Reconstruction in Alabama: From Civil War to Redemption in the Cotton South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2017), chapter 12.

took on renewed urgency as farmers began seeking ways to increasingly influence politics. Coinciding with the economic and political organization of farmers was widespread organization of laborers. North Alabama again proved to be of central importance to this development, as a number of industries, particularly mining, were centered in the northern areas of the state. Organized farmers and organized laborers seemed unnatural political allies, but the two were firmly brought together by shared interests in economic revitalization of the poor and working classes. Matthew Hild argues in *Greenbackers, Knights of Labor, and Populists: Farmer-Labor Insurgency in the Late-Nineteenth-Century South* that because of this political alliance, “Northern Alabama was the heart of the state’s Greenback and Independent movements,” and saw wide support in the counties of Etowah and DeKalb, later influencing the politics of the Hill Country.²⁴ North Alabama would remain driven by the interests of labor and agriculture for the better part of the twentieth century, and would be the group that propelled Albert Rains into national office.

Even before the convention of 1901, farmers and laborers in Alabama began the process of forming their own, more representative third party. Delegates from farming and labor groups met in 1888 to discuss the creation of the Union Labor Party, later called the Labor Party of Alabama. This new party won some local elections in 1888, primarily in north Alabama counties such as Cullman, Shelby, and Chilton, with support in Gadsden and Etowah County as well. Shortly after this, the Farmers’ Alliance consolidated with the Agricultural Wheel, growing membership to approximately 120,000 across the state of Alabama. Including members of Colored Alliance as well, these organizations could now boast around 200,000 members in

²⁴ Matthew Hild, *Greenbackers, Knights of Labor, and Populists: Farmer-Labor Insurgency in the Late-Nineteenth-Century South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 31-33.

Alabama. These larger groups now expanded their political platform, and supported government regulated rail roads, farm credits, and a move away from the gold standard and an increased use of silver coinage. Additionally, this cooperative supported increased federal involvement in perishable crop storage and price setting standards, with farmers given loans with low interest rates factored on excess stored crops. The Labor Party of Alabama participated in their most ambitious election yet in 1890, when they threw their support behind Reuben F. Kolb to be the next governor of Alabama. Kolb was the State Commissioner of Agriculture, and had significant support among farmers. However, this new third party still faced a number of challenges, especially from the Democratic party. Even with the introduction of a seemingly viable, common man's party, nominees of the Democratic party still won the lion's share of elections throughout the state.²⁵

The Populist Party

Sensing that a change was needed, 1,400 representatives from the labor and farming groups met in Cincinnati in 1891, to try again to create a viable third party that would have greater appeal for those traditionally loyal to the Democratic party. This new party was initially known as the People's Party, though it later became known as the Populist Party. Before the end of the year, this new party would be endorsed by the Knights of Labor and by Farmers' Alliance chapters in Marshall county, Calhoun county, DeKalb county, and Etowah county, all counties within the Hill Country region.²⁶ All but one of these counties, Calhoun county, were in Rains's 5th congressional district. Indeed, the "revolt against the Democratic party" in northern Alabama

²⁵ James D. Thomas and William Histaspas Stewart, *Alabama Government and Politics* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), 18.

²⁶ Marshall county and Calhoun county are directly adjacent due North and South of Etowah county, which is the home county of Albert Rains. Additionally, this area makes up a significant portion of the fifth congressional district, which was the district that Rains represented in Congress.

was “very intense.”²⁷ Shortly after this, in 1892, Samuel M. Adams, the president of the Alabama Farmers’ Alliance, called for a conference of organized farmers and labor to decide the greater platform of the Populist Party. This led to the first state delegation of the Populist Party on June 23, 1892.

The Populist platform was largely derived from the original platform of the Farmers’ Alliance, with some key additions focused more towards labor reform. While the Populist Party proved more popular initially than the Greenback-Labor Party, many Democrats still resisted, as loyalty to the Democratic party in Alabama and across the Southeastern United States was also tied into views on supposed racial lines.²⁸ The majority of voting African Americans in this period still voted primarily for Republican candidates. Due to Democratic Party loyalty, instead of breaking completely from the party, some Democrats formed the Jeffersonian Democratic Party.²⁹ However, this offshoot proceeded in lockstep with Alabama’s Populist Party, with a similar agenda and supporting the same candidates.³⁰ The Populist Party was able to secure two congressional seats in 1894, in the northern 7th district and 5th district, which decades later would be the congressional district that elected Albert Rains, who took advantage of the remaining popularity of pro-labor and pro-farmer politics, even following the collapse of Populism.

²⁷ Lewie Reece, “Creating a New South: The Political Culture of Deep South Populism,” in *Populism in the South Revisited: New Interpretations and New Departures*, ed. James M. Beeby (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), 157.

²⁸ Michael Perman, *Pursuit of Unity: A Political History of the American South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 143.

²⁹ Samuel L. Webb, *Two-Party Politics in the One-Party South: Alabama's Hill Country, 1874-1920* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997), 133.

³⁰ Jason Morgan Ward, *Defending White Democracy: The Making of a Segregationist Movement and the Remaking of Racial Politics, 1936-1965* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 3-18.

The Populist Party met its end after an ambitious political strategy to ticket-share with the different parties on the national and local levels. Nationally, the Populist Party sought to share a ticket with Democrats, supporting Democratic presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan. On the state and congressional level, Populists threw their support behind Republican candidates. However, Populist candidates on all levels failed to win elections. After the constitution of 1901 disenfranchised thousands of African American and poor white voters, the Populist Party became obsolete by the turn of the twentieth century.

The majority of Populist Party voters seemingly switched back to voting Democrat following the Populist collapse. However, the region of the Hill Country remained pro-labor and pro-farmer, though more heavily influenced by the larger Democratic Party platform of the period. In fact, Democrats in this region perhaps developed uniquely from their Black Belt counterparts, so much so that this group could best be labelled their own offshoot of the Democratic party in this period. They will henceforth be referred to as Hill Country Democrats.³¹ Many of these Democrats, though not necessarily direct descendants of populists, would nevertheless act as spiritual successors to some of populism's main tenets, and would go on to be described as progressive politicians and Democrats by state and national media.

The Great Depression

Arguably more influential on the development of mid-twentieth century progressive Democrats from Alabama (particularly, once again, from north Alabama) were the effects of the Great Depression. Still reeling from being economically displaced by a New South economy, and disenfranchised by the constitution of 1901, many poor whites were ill prepared to deal with

³¹ Bailey Thomson, "Introduction," in *A Century of Controversy: Constitutional Reform in Alabama*, ed. Bailey Thomson (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2002), 8-20.

the economic collapse brought by the Great Depression in 1929. Alabama was especially hard hit, as the economic collapse caused by the Great Depression was exacerbated by pre-existing conditions in the state. Prior to 1929, agriculture prices, and most detrimental of all cotton prices, had been in decline since 1921. Struggling farmers could no longer afford to purchase consumer goods, harming Alabama's industry. The result was an already fragile, relatively undiversified economy that was especially vulnerable to an economic downturn. Levels of unemployment skyrocketed, and the economy all but ground to a halt in certain areas. The state experienced these effects unsparingly, though some regions felt these impacts more sharply than others. Etowah County was "one of the hardest hit areas of Alabama."³²

During the first years of the Great Depression, agriculture was hit first and hardest. Poor farmers in the Hill Country flocked to Birmingham hoping to find work as laborers. When the dark tides of the Depression began wreaking a heavy toll on Alabama industry as well, many of these farmers were forced to return to the countryside, surviving in abject poverty. Worse, many former laborers began an exodus from Birmingham and other larger towns/cities as well, in the hope that their salvation lay with surviving off of the natural landscape as tenant farmers or sharecroppers. Ill-prepared for life in the countryside, beset by crashing agricultural prices, and attempting to work with already exhausted farmland, these laborers found little respite in more rural areas.³³

Gadsden's textile mills did not escape the calamitous effects of the Great Depression, though they did fare far better than most other industries. This was in large part due to the ability of textile mill owners and operators to more fully control the hours and wages of mill employees.

³² State Department of Pensions and Security, *Alabama Social Welfare* 40-41 (1975-1976): 236

³³ Adam Haslett, "A Poet's Brief," in *Cotton Tenants: Three Families*, ed. John Summers (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House, 2013) preface.

Additionally, mill owners/operators enjoyed more latitude in being able to hire unemployed men, women, and children to often unskilled labor. While escaping some of the more disastrous results of the Great Depression, employer abuse of textile workers led to organized strikes in the 1930s.³⁴ The first such textile strike from this period occurred in Albert Rains's home base of Gadsden, Alabama in 1934. The strike took place at the Dwight Manufacturing Company, and in 1943 was described by the Textile Workers Union of America's Committee on Organization as one of their "most significant" victories.³⁵

Desperate for relief, Gadsden residents and politicians (particularly those located in the northern part of the state) began to seek alleviation from the effects of the Great Depression through political means. At this stage, there was a tremendous lack of federal aid programs designed to lessen the burden of those afflicted. Local and state governments struggled mightily to provide for their citizens. Indeed, most aid came from charitable organizations and not from government sources or initiatives. Residents pushed their local, state, and national representatives for increased government aid as public and private services became severely threatened or outright starved. The election of Benjamin Meek Miller to governor in 1930 reflected the desires of the public for answers at the state level. Miller was known for his fiscal frugality, and vowed to reduce government spending on frivolous expenses.³⁶ Once in office,

³⁴ Janet Christine Irons, *Testing the New Deal: The General Textile Strike of 1934 in the American South* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 103-07.

³⁵ Beth Anne English, *A Common Thread: Labor, Politics, and Capital Mobility in the Textile Industry* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 153-58.

³⁶ Albert Rains and Benjamin Meek Miller shared some striking similarities before their time in public office. Both were successful in school, both became high school principals in their early 20s, both attended the University of Alabama school of law, and also served in the Alabama House of Representatives. However, Miller was from Wilcox county in southwest Alabama where his family owned enormous tracts of land, instead of northeast Alabama and a relatively humble background like Rains. Miller represented a politician grasping at solutions to an economic depression that he did not seem to understand the true bounds of. Rains, who entered office later, was in ways shaped by the depression where Miller seemed obstinate to it.

Miller was faced with how dire things had truly become across the state, and was forced to borrow hundreds of thousands of dollars and to implement a state income tax in a desperate attempt to raise state revenue and to relieve a state treasury that had become “exhausted.”³⁷ These efforts proved to be ineffective, and strikes, school closings, and business closings ensued. Nevertheless, as Samuel Webb and Margaret Armbruster write in *Alabama Governors: A Political History of the State*, “in that difficult era, the man and the times did not perfectly meet,” and Miller proved ill-suited to leading Alabama out of crippling economic depression.³⁸ Miller did establish the Alabama Relief Administration, which distributed funds brought by New Deal programs. However, Miller was hesitant to spend all of the federal New Deal money, and funds were typically not given to African Americans, poor whites, or workers that were members of a union. These largely excluded groups began to seek further aid from the federal government, and to seek out alternative political solutions to economic woes. While Populism in Alabama had become defunct by the 1930s, ideas of organized labor and agriculture remained relevant in north Alabama, and the Hill Country in particular remained known for its “political independence.”³⁹

During the 1930s, North Alabama and Rains’s Hill Country sought new solutions to economic crises. The Communist party proved popular in the region, and membership in Alabama saw a marked upsurge during the 1930s. The American Communist Party experienced particular support, much like the Populist Party, in north Alabama, due to long established

³⁷ Edwin C. Bridges, *Alabama: The Making of an American State* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2016), 186.

³⁸ Samuel L. Webb and Margaret E. Armbruster ed., *Alabama Governors: A Political History of the State* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2014), 209.

³⁹ Paul Edgar Alyea, Karl Andrew Bosworth, Roscoe Coleman Martin, Charles William Smith, “Tennessee Valley County: Rural Government in the Hill Country of Alabama,” *University of Alabama Bureau of Public Administration* 4-7 (1941): 14.

traditions of organized agriculture and labor. Besides this, the presence of Birmingham, Alabama's industrial heart proved influential and a center of Communist Party activity in the state. The American Communist Party went so far as to open a local chapter in Birmingham that attempted to unite industrial workers in Birmingham and farmers in areas throughout the surrounding regions.⁴⁰ However, communism failed to take significant hold in Gadsden. Communists in Gadsden experienced extreme opposition, despite the fact that the city was another industrial capital of Alabama, much like Birmingham. Robin Kelley, author of *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression*, has described Gadsden as "a unique case" for communists, in that CIO and United Rubber Workers of America (URWA) efforts were often labelled communist by anti-union interests, even though "the vast majority of rubber workers were white and none of its organizers appeared to have been Communists or even sympathetic to the Left."⁴¹ Charges of communism against labor in Gadsden was seen as a red herring designed to break unions, and these tactics were effective until early 1943, when Goodyear signed a contract with the URWA after years of resistance. With the implementation of federal New Deal programs, support for the Communists party in north Alabama plummeted.

While not an overnight fix, New Deal initiatives like the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and Skyline Farms provided much needed relief and renewed hope in politics and a revived Alabama economy. David Bibb Graves, a progressive Democrat who was opposed to the constitution of 1901, won election as governor, after previously serving before Miller. Flynt has called Graves "one of the most important and controversial Alabama governors of the twentieth

⁴⁰ Robin Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 230-250; Flynt, *Alabama in the Twentieth Century*, 58.

⁴¹ Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*, 141.

century,” and though his connections to the Ku Klux Klan helped get him elected, those connections “tarnished the reputation he later earned as a liberal.”⁴²

The New Deal

As governor during his first term, Graves’s administration enacted an ambitious agenda. Graves ended the convict-lease system, which was largely used as another tool to enforce Jim Crow laws on southern African Americans and provide free labor to large farmers.⁴³ Furthermore, Graves greatly expanded the amount and quality of Alabama’s roads and highways, spending millions of dollars to do so. After the Depression struck, and during his second term in 1934, Graves again adopted a progressive agenda and was a strong supporter of President Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal programs. Though originally from Montgomery and having grown up primarily in Texas, Graves set the mold for later national representatives from the state such as Albert Rains. In his second term, Graves created the Alabama Department of Labor, and was decidedly pro-union.⁴⁴ Coupled with this, Graves also supported education and women’s rights. He enacted the Minimum Foundation Program, the aim of which was to provide textbooks and equal education to students throughout the state, and made his wife a senator by appointing her to Supreme Court Justice Hugo Black’s vacated seat. Graves even signed into law the first state sales tax to further fund these educational initiatives.

⁴² Wayne Flynt, “Bibb Graves, 1927-1931, 1935-1939,” in *Alabama Governors: A Political History of the State*, eds. Samuel L. Webb and Margaret E. Armbruster (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2014), 201-02.

⁴³ Douglas A. Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II*, (New York: Random House Inc., 2008), 284-296.

⁴⁴ Alabama’s unions in this period had grown more powerful than in any earlier time. While it could be argued that Graves siding with them was political expediency, his overall record proves that he was previously pro-labor and progressive.

Despite being a segregationist, Graves won the support of African Americans and poor whites throughout the state by successfully pushing his New Deal progressive agenda. However, Graves remained closely tied to the Ku Klux Klan throughout his tenure, and his election in 1926 represented a “pinnacle” for the Klan in Alabama politics.⁴⁵ Graves failed to support an end to segregation or racial inequality. In fact, Graves resisted efforts by Democrats outside of the South to organize meetings involving poor whites and African Americans, though throughout his tenure he continued to “exchange the Klan’s worldview for that of the New Deal.”⁴⁶

In a bit of foreshadowing for the Democratic party, Graves, described by Glenn Feldman as “a dyed-in-the-wool New Dealer,” and many of his supporters felt that this was a step too far taken by non-southerners in a threat to the status quo.⁴⁷ This political combination of a staunchly progressive platform coupled with an equally staunch pro-segregation stance on the state-level proved to be a continuation of the mold of some of Alabama’s earlier national representatives, such as the powerful Bankhead family.⁴⁸ Rains was certainly influenced by labor-friendly, liberal, but segregationist politicians such as Graves.⁴⁹ This combination of economic liberalism and pro-segregation inspired him and others in the group of southern liberals that came later. He was also heavily influenced by the social, economic, and “dynamic” political climate of the Hill

⁴⁵ Jeff Frederick, *Stand up for Alabama: Governor George Wallace* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2007), 3-5.

⁴⁶ Paul M. Pruitt Jr., *Taming Alabama: Lawyers and Reformers, 1804-1929* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2010), 107-09.

⁴⁷ Glenn Feldman, *The Irony of the Solid South: Democrats, Republicans, and Race, 1865-1944* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2013), 142-45.

⁴⁸ Walter Judson Heacock, *William Brockman Bankhead: A Biography* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1952), 23.

⁴⁹ Wayne Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama’s Poor Whites* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1989), 354.

Country and north Alabama prior to his entering public office.⁵⁰ On a deeper level, Rains and his political philosophy were a more focused reflection of the history and conditions of his home city of Gadsden, Alabama.

Rains and his north Alabama political peers were indelibly shaped by economic struggles in their region during the Great Depression, which played an important role in shaping a generation of powerful southern progressives. Rains passed the bar exam the year before the Great Depression struck, and served as Gadsden's city attorney through the peak years of economic struggle, and a significant part of the heyday of southern liberalism in Alabama between 1935-1944. Rains and this group saw the Hill Country resurrected in this period by New Deal federal aid programs and federal contracts that saved the South. According to Anthony J. Badger in *New Deal/New South*, "relief and public works programs rescued the South's education system."⁵¹ In north Alabama and the Hill Country, and particularly in Rains's 5th district, the New Deal allowed for the construction of airports, roads, shipping ports, hydro-electric dams, hospitals, schools, developed waterways along the Coosa river crossing through Gadsden, and factories.

Rains, Sparkman, Graves, Carl Elliott, and to a lesser extent Lister Hill had unwavering support for President Franklin D. Roosevelt and such programs as the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), because after the Great Depression, they learned that the federal government could save the South, and that "the South could not prosper on its own."⁵² Indeed, the degree of Alabama's liberalism on a national stage in this period

⁵⁰ *Anniston Star*, July 16, 1946.

⁵¹ Anthony J. Badger, *New Deal/New South: An Anthony J. Badger Reader* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 2007), 63.

⁵² Badger, *New Deal/New South*, 64-65.

surprised many. Stewart McClure, chief clerk of the Senate Committee on Labor, Education, and Public Welfare during this period, reflected this surprise. When asked about Alabama's liberal politicians in Congress, McClure stated "I don't understand it, really, except that the time they were elected, the issues in the South were economic, pulling themselves up, needing federal help, public works, and other things. These men knew how to get it and could work up there effectively."⁵³

The Education and Early Life of Albert Rains

Rains's education formerly began in local DeKalb County schools, a result of these earlier programs and among this complex political, social, and regional history. He first went to the Pinegrove School, which had one teacher and at times upwards of 100 students, an unusually high number for the period when white classes in Alabama typically held 27.3 students.⁵⁴ He stayed in the seventh grade for three years, as "the school didn't go any higher."⁵⁵ In school, Rains never made below an A, and preferred History and English over other subjects. At the age of 16, he began attending Snead Seminary and Junior College in Boaz, Alabama. Shortly after this, Rains became a teacher. He excelled as an educator and experienced a meteoric rise. In his first year and while still a teenager, he became the principal of Langston Junior High. In his second, at the age of 20, he became principal of the Pisgah High School. His third year teaching saw him become the principal of Ten Broeck High School.⁵⁶ Rains's rapid rise to principal at such an incredibly young age is often remarked upon by those who knew him as an early sign of

⁵³ Deondra Rose, *Citizens by Degree: Higher Education Policy and the Changing Gender Dynamics of American Citizenship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 55-56.

⁵⁴ Robert A. Margo, *Race and Schooling in the South, 1880-1950: An Economic History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 27.

⁵⁵ Ibid

⁵⁶ Mike Goodson, *Gadsden: City of Champions* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2002), 131.

his later success and will to better himself. Certainly, as a teacher and principal Rains was able to hone many of the skills that would make him such a powerful politician.

After working as a principal for three years, Rains had earned enough money to afford to begin attending State Teachers College, later Jacksonville State University, in Jacksonville, Alabama. While at Snead Seminary, he frequently engaged in oratorical contests and was undefeated. Later, at State Teachers College, he also engaged in debate. It was at a debate between literary societies that he would meet Allison Blair, who became his wife ten years later. Rains did not receive a degree, but did go on to attend the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa to study law, while studying with his brother William Rains, already a practicing lawyer, in the summer months.⁵⁷ Rains did not complete his law degree, an uncommon route to becoming a lawyer, particularly for a student of the University of Alabama law program in this period.⁵⁸

Rains stood for the bar exam in July 1928 and was one of 13 that passed out of a pool of 66. Of those 13, Rains was the sole non college graduate. After passing, he began practicing law alongside his brother William Rains, as they formed the firm of Rains and Rains located in Gadsden, Alabama. During this period, he acted as deputy solicitor in Etowah County, and then after four years practicing law, was elected to serve as the city attorney of Gadsden for nine years, from 1935 until 1944. During this period, Rains served as the keynote speaker at a number

⁵⁷ While at the University of Alabama, Albert Rains was allegedly part of the Machine. The Machine has been described as a coalition of fraternity and sorority leaders at the University of Alabama who formed what has been called a secret society in order to influence campus and state politics. A number of prominent Alabama politicians were members of the Machine, including senators John Sparkman and Lester Hill, John Bankhead, Governor Don Siegelman, and many others. The Machine produced a number of figures that would go on to shape Alabama politics for nearly a century.

⁵⁸ Robert McCurley, interview by author, February 27, 2018.

of Gadsden political events, and was a “prominent attorney” in the city.⁵⁹ As city attorney, he tried over 10 murders in one session.⁶⁰

Entry into Politics

Rains later became interested in pursuing a political career, and ran for the State House of Representatives in 1942. Rains was described by the *Anniston Star* as a “Gadsden attorney who is well known throughout Alabama for his civic enterprises,” prior to his 1942 campaign, and adroitly used his political and civic connections during the race.⁶¹ Rains ran as a Democrat and won the democratic nomination. The Democratic party dominated Alabama politics in this period, and Rains faced an easy road to election, as it was noted by the *Montgomery Advertiser* following his nomination that it was “tantamount to election in almost every Alabama county, the list of nominees may be considered as virtually a House membership roll.”⁶² Rains received 1,995 votes, and his election bid was successful.⁶³ He served in the State House from 1942 - 1944. While in that office, Rains served as attorney for the Alabama League of Municipalities, a voluntary organization established in 1935 to serve as lobbyists and representatives for the member municipalities to state and national government entities. Rains was the floor leader for the cities and towns of Alabama. By 1944, the Alabama League of Municipalities had over 200 member municipalities, making Rains a powerful and visible figure within various levels of government.⁶⁴ He was also chairman of the committee on municipal government, and

⁵⁹ “Rains to Address Elks at Barbecue,” *Anniston Star*, June 12, 1940.

⁶⁰ Robert McCurley, interview by author, February 27, 2018.

⁶¹ “Dies will address Americanism Rally,” *Anniston Star*, January 23, 1941. 11

⁶² “Ed Taylor lists nominees for Lower House,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, June 28, 1942.

⁶³ “A Proclamation by the Governor,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, November 16, 1942.

⁶⁴ “Rankin File,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, April 12, 1953.

additionally served on committees for temperance, the judiciary, banking, and revision of law. However, it was argued that he became a “dry” for primarily political reasons.⁶⁵ Rains led the way in efforts to increase the use of state funds for education, and according to the *Birmingham News*, this Legislature “voted more money toward education in Alabama than any one yet.”⁶⁶ Rains also supported the Beebe Plan, which allowed for the increased use of tax dollars to be spent on education and school construction.⁶⁷ Partly because of this record of success, Rains was one of four representatives to be elected to oversee the state war emergency fund, which at that time had a surplus of \$13,000,000.

Following Rains’s time in the State House of Representatives, he decided to run for the United States Congress in 1944. This was not Rains’s first attempted entry into national politics; he ran for United States Congress in 1936, narrowly losing to one term incumbent Representative Joe Starnes. Starnes was a virulent, unapologetic racist, anti-Semite, and anti-communist. Starnes was also anti-union, and saw unions as a vehicle for communist incursions into American industry. Ironically, like Rains, Starnes began his career in national politics as a supporter of the New Deal. However, as his political career progressed, Starnes became increasingly conservative, openly racist/anti-Semite, white supremacist, pro-states’ rights, and anti-federal government, transitioning to what Feldman describes as a “Bourbon Democrat.”⁶⁸ Starnes, also described as a “Corporation Conservative,” eventually served as the vice chairman

⁶⁵ *The Montgomery Advertiser*, September 21, 1944.

⁶⁶ Margarite Johnston, “Congr. Albert Rains, in Capital Short Time Has Gained Wide Acclaim,” *Birmingham News*, February 18, 1946.

⁶⁷ “Sullivan Amendment Killed,” *Alabama Journal*, June 23, 1943.

⁶⁸ Feldman, *The Irony of the Solid South*, 185-189.

for the House Committee on Un-American Activities.⁶⁹ During a hearing in 1938, Starnes had an infamous exchange with Haddie Flanagan, the director of the Federal Theatre Project (FTP), in which Starnes accused playwright Christopher Marlowe of being a communist. National and local newspapers had a field day with this allegation, as Marlowe died in 1593, over two hundred years before Karl Marx was born.⁷⁰

Rains won three counties, and lost his home county of Etowah by only 204 votes. However, in 1944, results would be much different. Rains used his skills as a “brilliant orator” to inspire support prior to the election.⁷¹ Rains had “acquired experience, a following and an issue,” and garnered significant support from farmers and labor.⁷² Once again his intended seat was Alabama’s 5th Congressional District, which was already occupied by an incumbent in Starnes. Rains was able to capitalize on Starnes’s public embarrassment, anti-union stance, and denouncement of New Deal programs to win over factory workers, laborers, and farmers in the 5th district. During this campaign, Rains argued for the need of a congressman that was “active, alert, and aggressive,” and that did not “play politics,” or claim “credit for what somebody else has achieved.”⁷³ Rains described his platform as promising to “champion the rights of agriculture,” “the continuation of the TVA,” and “to provide Federal funds for the use of public schools,” describing federal funding as “the only hope for Alabama schools.”⁷⁴ Rains was also

⁶⁹ *Anniston Star*, July 16, 1946.

⁷⁰ Robert Davis, “Is Mr. Euripides a Communist? The Federal Theatre Project's 1938 Trojan Incident,” *Comparative Drama* 44-45 (2010): 457-476.

⁷¹ “Alabama’s City Officials Found in Hill’s Camp,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, November 19, 1943.

⁷² *Courier-Journal*, April 20, 1944.

⁷³ “To the Voters of the Fifth Congressional District of Alabama,” *Gadsden Times*, May 5, 1944.

⁷⁴ “Brief Summary of the Platform of Albert Rains,” *Gadsden Times*, May 5, 1944.

seen as a more natural ally of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's economic plans, which were still well-liked in Alabama's 5th district, despite Starnes's stance. Despite his thorough platform, Rains was seen as the underdog by many political observers. During the race, Atticus Mullin, political reporter for the *Montgomery Advertiser*, "was surprised to find that Congressman Starnes had serious opposition," and had "little doubt that he (Starnes) will win." Starnes, for his part, "did not appear worried in the least."⁷⁵

Elected to Congress

Rains went on to win in the election by a significant margin, largely due to his support among industrial workers in Gadsden and across north Alabama; Starnes was frequently and publicly opposed by the AFL-CIO for his anti-labor stance, who had significant membership and power in Gadsden and throughout the fifth district. During the campaign Rains was described as a "labor attorney."⁷⁶ Backed by the CIO-Political Action Committee, Rains won 5 out of the 8 counties in his district.⁷⁷ In the rematch, Rains won by 1,698 votes in Etowah County.⁷⁸

Following his defeat, Starnes reenlisted in the military, serving as a colonel. Rains faced no Republican opponent, and entered the 79th Congress in January 1945. The *Montgomery Advertiser* described the race as "warm," but nevertheless predicted "the re-nomination by good majorities of all Alabama congressmen," and only predicted that Rains "would get up some interest against Starnes."⁷⁹ Rains's victory certainly "puzzled analysts," and was seen as "unexpected," but Rains's support from labor in a "new or expanded industrial" area was seen as

⁷⁵ "Starnes-Rains Race Close in Fifth District," *Montgomery Advertiser*, April 17, 1944.

⁷⁶ "Alabamians in Congress Laying Lines," *Montgomery Advertiser*, October 23, 1945.

⁷⁷ *Owensboro Messenger*, May 9, 1946.

⁷⁸ "Hill is victorious in balloting here," *Anniston Star*, May 3, 1944.

⁷⁹ "Warm Contest Developing in Fifth District," Atticus Mullin, *Montgomery Advertiser*, March 18, 1944.

his key to victory.⁸⁰ Following Rain's victory, the *Montgomery Advertiser* described Rains as having the "backing of 99 percent of the big organized labor vote in the district," and that "he was the recipient of votes of labor out to get Congressman Starnes."⁸¹

In this earliest period of his time in the House, Rains's reputation as a southern liberal became established, though his liberal and progressive positions were not universally popular throughout the state, as he was seen by Conservative commenters as voting "anti-South," and was described as a "bleeding heart" and a "deserter," primarily because he voted for the expansion of federal committees, such as the Rules Committee, that some southerners felt would allow the federal government to pass "racial force bills" without the South's consent, threatening the "traditional South."⁸² Indeed, Rains's "liberal tendencies" did not endear him to Central and South Alabama, and Alabama's national representatives did not always vote in a unified bloc, with Rains voting less with his fellow Alabamians in Congress than most.⁸³ In this period, "south Alabama's congressional delegation was as conservative as north Alabama's was liberal."⁸⁴

William G. Carleton, in "The Southern Politician--1900 and 1950," stated that Rains and his fellow north Alabama congressmen were "New Dealers and the Fair Dealers on economic questions and most social questions," but were "liberal on every issue except the racial one."⁸⁵ Alabama, particularly North Alabama, was called a "liberal oasis," and became known for what

⁸⁰ *The St. Louis Star and Times*, May 4, 1944.

⁸¹ Atticus Mullin, "Hand of CIO Seen in Three District Races," *Montgomery Advertiser*, June 1, 1944.

⁸² "Alabama Editors on the Rules Fight," *Montgomery Advertiser*, February 4 1961.

⁸³ "Wives in Politics," *Montgomery Advertiser*, March 23, 1964.

⁸⁴ Flynt, *Alabama in the Twentieth Century*, 69.

⁸⁵ William G. Carleton, "The Southern Politician--1900 and 1950," *Journal of Politics* 13, no. 2 (May 1951): 221.

Feldman calls a certain kind of “class-based progressivism that avoided explicit mentions of race.”⁸⁶ Rains served alongside fellow congressmen Carl Elliott and Bob Jones, and Senators John Sparkman and Lister Hill. John Sparkman, following his death in 1985, was described by the *Birmingham Post-Herald* as “a progressive, even a liberal,” and was certainly no exception among this group.⁸⁷ These men were shaped by an earlier era of Alabama politics in a profound way. To the layman, it is perhaps surprising that a group of Alabama representatives would be described as progressive and liberal. However, the political foundations had been laid in Alabama, particularly north Alabama, well before “the South’s most liberal Congressional delegation” took office.⁸⁸

Rains was not alone in this period as being described as a “southern liberal.” Many of his contemporaries in politics, especially those from North Alabama such as John Sparkman, Lister Hill, Carl Elliott, Hugo Black, and Bob Jones, also shared the moniker of “southern liberal.” Rains, Jones, and Elliott were elected to Congress in 1944, 1946, and 1948 respectively. Sparkman moved to the Senate from the House in 1946 as well. One of the most prominent men who held this title was the 42nd Governor of Alabama, Jim Folsom. Though Folsom was from south Alabama, he moved to Cullman, Alabama in the northern part of the state, and more closely represented those residents. All these men shared political similarities. Firstly, all attempted to “build a liberal coalition based on north Alabama’s white farmers and augmented

⁸⁶ Glenn Feldman, *The Great Melding: War, the Dixiecrat Rebellion, and the Southern Model for America’s New Conservatism* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2015), 166-68.

⁸⁷ U.S. Congress, Senate, *Senator John Sparkman: A Great Alabamian, A Great American*, 131st Cong., 1st sess., November 20, 1985.

⁸⁸ Wayne Flynt, *Alabama in the Twentieth Century* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2004), 62-63.

by black and white working-class people.”⁸⁹ Secondly, Flynt argues “the New Deal component from north Alabama – Albert Rains, Carl Elliott, Kenneth Roberts, Bob Jones, George Huddleston Sr., and Luther Patrick – was consistently pro-labor.”⁹⁰

Southern liberalism, then, was defined by the New Deal as largely economic liberalism, with the emphasis on job creation, social safety nets, and federal involvement, and a reliance on support from labor and agriculture. This particular brand of liberalism truly thrived in the 1930s-1940s in Alabama, prior to race becoming such a polarizing issue in national and state politics. Kari Frederickson, in *The Dixiecrat Revolt and the End of the Solid South: 1932-1968*, identified this group as “New Deal Liberals,” and it is an apt description, though the particular blend of economic liberalism and dogged anti-Civil Rights rhetoric that would come to dominate among southern liberals such as Albert Rains, Lister Hill, and John Sparkman ultimately “triumphed over” the more Civil-Rights friendly liberalism espoused by James Folsom.⁹¹ As northern liberals and southern conservatives increasingly focused on race, the southern liberal base became fractured.⁹²

Surrounded by supportive liberal colleagues, Albert Rains quickly made a favorable impression on his fellow representatives in Congress, and especially in Alabama. Rains represented a “fresh hope” for “progressive-minded southerners” in the postwar period.⁹³ Because of his prior record on education, the House committee on education would seem to be a

⁸⁹ Flynt, *Poor But Proud*, 354.

⁹⁰ Flynt, *Alabama in the Twentieth Century* 68.

⁹¹ Kari Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt and the End of the Solid South: 1932-1968* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 95.

⁹² Flynt, *Poor But Proud*, 345-57.

⁹³ Robert H. Zieger, *For Jobs and Freedom: Race and Labor in America Since 1865* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 159.

natural fit. Other Alabama congressman, such as Sparkman, felt he had a chance at something more, as relatively early in Rains's political career he was "universally recognized as a gifted orator and strong campaigner."⁹⁴ The 79th Congress was dominated by a Democratic majority, holding 242 seats to 191 for the Republican party.⁹⁵ Southern Democrats also held significant influence, with a southern Democrat in Sam Rayburn as Speaker of the House, and southern Democrats positioned as both Democratic Whips, Democratic Caucus Chairman, and serving on a number of critical committees.⁹⁶ Additionally, the party had a Democratic president incoming in Harry S. Truman, and the departing Democratic president Franklin D. Roosevelt.

As a freshman congressman, Rains was pushed by the Alabama delegation to replace the late Representative Henry Steagall on the House Banking and Currency Committee, which is acknowledged as one of the more important committees in Congress and one that "considers legislation of great importance to the farmer, the veteran, to labor, business and industry."⁹⁷ Rains had experience with city finances and municipal government as a city attorney, and in particular had been very successful raising funds for the party. Etowah County, with Rains as the local party chairman, doubled their expected quota for funds in 1944.⁹⁸ Additionally, Rains was seen as a potentially effective force when the committee was to do work between sovereign nations. He had already made his interest in foreign affairs known, and had served as a keynote

⁹⁴ *Montgomery Advertiser*, "Rains, Green Wish Sparkman Godspeed," August 24, 1952.

⁹⁵ U.S. Congress, House, Statistics of the Presidential and Congressional Election of November 7, 1944, 79th Cong., March 1, 1945.

⁹⁶ "Congress Profiles," 79th Congress (1945-1947), Office of Art and Archives, accessed January 5, 2018, <http://history.house.gov/Congressional-Overview/Profiles/79th/>.

⁹⁷ *Guntersville Gleam*, April 5, 1946.

⁹⁸ "3 Big Counties Hold Up Party Finance Appeal," *Montgomery Advertiser*, November 5, 1944.

speaker on issues of war debt and loans at numerous events.⁹⁹ The Alabama delegation was successful, and Rains was appointed to the committee, becoming just one of four freshman congressmen to be appointed to an exclusive committee, and was the most recently joined member of the 27 on the committee.¹⁰⁰

This political domination by Democrats was in large part due to the continued political aftershocks of the Great Depression, which was blamed on Republican President Herbert Hoover and the Republican controlled Congress. Riding a surge of support from labor and taking advantage of voter distrust of Republicans, the Democratic party was “revived” in the 1930s as a majority party, instead of the party of the South only.¹⁰¹ The major issue of the day was World War II, and Rains quickly became involved.

One of the first major pieces of legislation that Rains became involved with was the Bretton Woods agreement in 1944, which became closely linked to the larger Marshall Plan following World War II. The Bretton Woods agreement (later called the Bretton Woods system), was first crafted by 730 delegates from the 44 allied nations during the United Nations Monetary and Financial Conference, which was held in July 1944, in the Bretton Woods, New Hampshire. The system was seen by its proponents as “the key to expanding postwar foreign trade.”¹⁰² The system established international monetary and commercial guidelines among affiliated nations (Japan, Canada, Australia, United States, and Western Europe) in an effort to support economic and financial recovery following World War II. Among other things, the Breton Woods system

⁹⁹ “Albert Rains to Talk Peace,” *Anniston Star*, November 14, 1944.

¹⁰⁰ U.S. Congress, House, Official Congressional Directory, 79th Cong., 1st sess., February, 1945.

¹⁰¹ Lance Selfa, *The Democrats: A Critical History* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2008), 93.

¹⁰² *Louisville Courier-Journal*, February 11, 1945.

was the first set of fully negotiated monetary standards between such a multitude of independent nations. Additionally, Armand van Dormael, in *Bretton Woods: Birth of a Monetary System*, describes the system set and regulated international monetary standards, and would hinder international financial institutions from gaining “huge profits while at the same time causing economic convulsions” across the world.¹⁰³ The United States pushed for a standard centered on and anchored by gold and the US dollar.¹⁰⁴

In an address at the Thomas Jefferson Day dinner in Montgomery, Alabama on April 13, 1945, Rains declared that it would be “foolish” to “oppose entry of the United States into this program for world collaboration and for the perpetuation of the peace, when the war in which we are now engaged is costing us approximately a half billion per day. If we are to fail in our efforts at world peace, it is of little consequence as to whether we have prosperity or depression, whether we have a balanced budget or an unbalanced budget,” as another war would mean “the complete destruction of our nation, the obliteration of the world, and a total blackout for civilization.”¹⁰⁵

The system was opposed by a number of international and domestic banking institutions, who feared the establishment of a world bank as outlined in the Bretton Woods system.¹⁰⁶ In fact, bankers were often noted as the strongest critics of the system, who “turn away in revulsion

¹⁰³ Armand van Dormael, *Bretton Woods: Birth of a Monetary System* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1978), 260-74.

¹⁰⁴ The United States possessed 2/3 of the world’s gold supply in this period.

¹⁰⁵ U.S. Congress, House, Appendix to the Congressional Record, *Extension of Remarks of Hon. Brooks Hays (Arkansas)*, 79th Cong., April 23, 1945, A1964-A1966.

¹⁰⁶ *Lansing (MI) State Journal*, March 24, 1945.

and disgust” at the mere mention of the proposed system.¹⁰⁷ The Bretton Woods system also faced opposition from Congress, though critics were typically reserved due to the sheer length and complexity of the legislation. The most vocal opposition came from Senator Robert Taft (R., Ohio). Taft opposed both an international bank and an international monetary fund, both core tenets of the Bretton Woods system. He argued that the system would not remove pre-war trade restrictions, but would instead encourage them, as the United States of America would no longer have their most important bargaining chip in forcing international markets open; money and loans.¹⁰⁸ In particular, Taft felt that the system’s proposed \$9,000,000,000 expenditure would only harm American markets and trade negotiation. Taft used what he perceived as Great Britain’s continued reliance on restrictive international trade agreements as an example of other foreign markets taking American loans without following the guidelines of the Bretton Woods system and creating a less restrictive, tariff-heavy international trade market.¹⁰⁹ The more conservative elements in opposition characterized supporters of the plan as “wild-eyed theorists and impractical do-gooders,” and vocalized a desire for American isolationism that harkened back to the days before World War I.¹¹⁰

Perhaps predictably, the Soviet Union refused to support this system, and representatives of the Soviet Union described the new proposed system as little more than an extension of Wall

¹⁰⁷ “World Becoming Afraid: America’s Postwar Plans Smack of Spree,” *Tennessean* (Nashville, TN), March 26, 1945.

¹⁰⁸ Benn Steil, *The Battle of Bretton Woods: John Maynard Keynes, Harry Dexter White, and the Making of a New World Order* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 212-14.

¹⁰⁹ “America’s Bargaining Position,” *Baltimore Sun*, July 18, 1945.

¹¹⁰ “Notable Endorsement for Bretton Woods,” *Courier Journal*, March 21, 1945.

Street.¹¹¹ Simply too many alterations to the system had to be made to make the system palatable to the Soviet Union. Their delegation at the Bretton Woods conference was described by Giles Scott-Smith and J. Simon Rofe in, *Global Perspectives on the Bretton Woods Conference and the Post-War World Order*, as “obstructionist,” and “within less than a year the Soviet Union would depart from its arrangements and begin to solidify its own, alternative path for international economic and financial management.”¹¹² Nevertheless, the U.S. dollar, partially backed by gold, became the central currency used in the Bretton Woods system. One of the more important results of the new system put in place was the creation of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The IBRD is one of five members of the larger World Bank Group. Initially, the IBRD’s stated goals were the recovery of Europe following World War 2. Following the achievement of this, the IBRD changed focus to increased international economic development outside of Europe. The IMF was created “to ensure the stability of the international monetary system---the system of exchange rates and international payments that enables countries (and their citizens) to transact with each other.”¹¹³

Throughout negotiations, Rains displayed unerring support for and interest in the Bretton Woods system. In comments to Congress on June 6, 1945, Rains argued that the Bretton Woods agreements were “an essential part of a program for the establishment and maintenance of an

¹¹¹ Edward S. Mason and Robert E. Asher, *The World Bank Since Bretton Woods: The Origins, Policies, Operations and Impact of the International Bank for Reconstruction* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution, 1973), 29.

¹¹² Giles Scott-Smith and J. Simon Rofe, ed., *Global Perspectives on the Bretton Woods Conference and the Post-War World Order* (New York: Springer Publishing, 2017), 9-11.

¹¹³ “Why the IMF was Created and How it Works,” accessed November 28, 2016, <http://www.imf.org/en/About>.

enduring peace,” and that “without a sound economic foundation,” a lasting peace “may completely fall.”¹¹⁴ He was chosen to travel to England as part of a group of U.S. congressmen in order to meet with English experts and Parliament in order to advise on the drafting of the legislation that would eventually be presented to the governments of both the United Kingdom and the United States. Rains considered the legislation critical, and viewed it as the decisive factor between depression and prosperity in Europe following the war. Rains was confident it would pass. In 1946, when asked by a reporter in London about the possibility of the legislation passing, Rains responded, “the opposition does not have a chance.”¹¹⁵

Rains’s trip to England proved eventful and unforgettable for reasons besides the proposed legislation. When the Buchenwald concentration camp was first opened for viewing following the war’s end, Rains and other congressman were invited to Germany to inspect the site.¹¹⁶ The horrors of the camp, the dead and dying, made a deep, lasting impression on Rains. Conditions in England also deeply affected Rains, and he returned to the United States committed to establishing a lasting peace through congressional legislation, as well as the belief that the United States must maintain our position as a moral and financial force.

His first speech recorded in the *Congressional Record* centered around his staunch support of the Bretton Woods system, where he argued that “civilization can not survive another war,” and that for a lasting peace, there was a “need and necessity for the full cooperation of all

¹¹⁴ Representative Lemke, speaking on *Bretton Woods Agreements Act*, HR 11790, 79th Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record*, Wednesday (June 6, 1945): 5657-5659.

¹¹⁵ *Guardian*, January 31, 1946.

¹¹⁶ The Buchenwald concentration camp was created by Nazi Germany to house all those deemed as a threat to the Nazi government. The camp operated from 1937 until 1945. Thousands of prisoners were killed, including Jews, prisoners of war, and political dissidents. For more information, see: Gedenkstätte Buchenwald, ed., *Buchenwald Concentration Camp, 1937-1945: A Guide to the Permanent Historic Exhibition* (Frankfurt: Wallstein Verlag, 2004).

nations in the Bretton Woods Agreements.”¹¹⁷ Rains helped the legislation pass by the House committee on banking and currency.

By 1946 and after two years in Congress, Rains had compiled a noteworthy record, and was recognized as “one of the South’s greatest orators.”¹¹⁸ In particular, Rains involved himself in legislation effecting labor, unions, job creation, veteran affairs, and agriculture. Rains was one of 15 southerners to vote against the May-Arends Bill in 1945, which would have instituted harsh punishments for or outright suspension of labor unions that violated “no strike” pledges. The May-Arends Bill was considered anti-union/anti-labor, and would have lost Rains valuable support among his base. In particular, the CIO, whose support was critical for Rains’s election, was opposed to the bill and “opposed to all pending legislation” with any remotely anti-union or anti-labor bias.¹¹⁹

Labor remained a powerful force in Rains’s district, and he could not risk losing their support. The bill was named and introduced by Illinois congressman Leslie Arends and Kentucky congressman Andrew May. Only two other Alabamians; Luther Patrick and John Sparkman, opposed the bill.¹²⁰ Besides this, the bill would have put increased restrictions on the use of union money towards elections. By 1946, Rains was labeled “one of Alabama’s most progressive representatives,” and had “carried the ball for labor on most issues,” in a Gadsden district where “labor and agriculture make up the voters.”¹²¹ Up for re-election in 1946, Rains

¹¹⁷ U.S. Congress, House, Appendix to the Congressional Record, *Extension of Remarks of Hon. Brooks Hays (Arkansas), Address Delivered by Hon. Albert Rains, Member of Congress, Fifth Alabama Congressional District, to the Alabama Baptist State Convention, 79th Cong., April 23, 1945, A5731.*

¹¹⁸ “Rains to Speak at Chest Event,” *Anniston Star*, September 26, 1950.

¹¹⁹ Representative Roe, speaking on *Norris-LaGuardia Act*, HR 5262, 79th Cong., 2nd sess., *Congressional Record* (February 1, 1946): CR-1946-0201.

¹²⁰ “Fights Bullwinkle Bill,” *Anniston Star*, December 16, 1945.

¹²¹ “Housing Lobby Exposed,” *Anniston Star*, March 10, 1946.

won another term in Congress, again against Joe Starnes, “by an overwhelming majority.” largely based upon his record of support for labor, farmers, business, and veterans.¹²²

Supporting labor, agriculture, and education were mainstays of Rains’s congressional career and proved a foundational trait of his political career. Rains and his Alabama colleagues in Congress, particularly from the northern part of the state, soon proved to be one of the most progressive collectively from any other state up to and during that time.¹²³ According to Robert A. Garson and Stuart S. Kidd in *The Roosevelt Years: New Perspectives on American History, 1933-1945*, though “progressive politicians,” Alabama’s representatives “had to play on a tricky chessboard,” and their brand of liberal and progressive politics “never was the kind of go-for-broke liberalism, especially on civil rights.”¹²⁴

Considered to be economically liberal, Rains and Alabama’s other national representatives were also tied together by social conservatism and all were avowed segregationists, further reflecting the majority of their white political base. The stark duality of fiscal liberalism in concert with social conservatism evolved and took form in these men who went on to shape state and national public policy in their image. Their unique blend of politics is particularly highlighted in some of Rains’s most prominent congressional achievements, such as housing legislation, the Horseshoe Bend bill, and his seemingly doomed attempts to balance progressive economics and federal government intervention with small government rhetoric and anti-Civil Rights dogma.

¹²² *Guntersville Gleam*, April 9, 1948.

¹²³ Robert A. Garson and Stuart S. Kidd, *The Roosevelt Years: New Perspectives on American History, 1933-1945* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 122.

¹²⁴ U.S. Congress, House, Congressional Record Daily Edition: Extension of Remarks, *Twilight of a Southern Liberal-Carl Elliott: Flat Broke and Nearly Forgotten*, 101st Cong., 1st sess., April 18, 1989. Read into the record from *The Boston Globe*, February 28, 1989.

Chapter 2: The Quintessential Congressman

Throughout his congressional career, Albert Rains proved one of the most pivotal figures in the development and nourishment of historic preservation efforts in the United States. Along with critical grassroots campaigner Judge Clinton Jackson “Jack” Coley, Rains drove Congress towards the establishment of Alabama’s only National Military Park, the site of the Battle of Horseshoe Bend.¹ Rains also acted as chairman of the International Study Group on Historic Preservation, for whom he published *With Heritage So Rich*, a classic work on historic preservation and the inspiration for the establishment of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) in 1966. The NHPA became the first large-scale national initiative aimed at preserving America’s historic homes, forts, cultural heritage sites, and museums. Various state organizations created as a result of the NHPA remain relevant in Alabama today, such as the Alabama Historic Commission, and have since been very successful in preserving, maintaining, and rehabilitating landscapes, structures, and artifacts across the nation. Efforts were further aided by the establishment of later programs, such as the National Register of Historic Places and the Section 106 Program. With Rains taking a leadership role, Congress passed acts designed to stem a distressing crisis of cultural heritage loss spurred on by the rapid destruction of historic sites and properties. Rains’s most prominent work on the matter, *With Heritage So Rich*, remains a founding and definitive text in the field.²

¹ It is difficult to overstate the importance of Coley in the establishment of Horseshoe Bend National Military Park. Coley was the primary grassroots organizer and campaigner, and his correspondence arguing for Horseshoe Bend is immense. It was Coley that first convinced Rains to participate.

² Albert Rains and Laurance G. Henderson, *With Heritage So Rich* (New York: Random House, 1966).

Rains's motivations for championing historic preservation legislation were complex, and partly molded by popular attitudes in the South at the time of southern heritage, narratives of a lost cause, manifest destiny, and white supremacy.³ Certainly, Rains had an undeniable respect and admiration for historic sites, particularly in the Southeastern United States. However, Rains was also staunchly against the passing of the Civil Rights Act and supported continued segregation and what he viewed as potential threats to white southern hegemony.⁴ These attitudes are reflected in part through his public history program efforts. What is clear is that Rains and other prominent Alabamians in positions of power attempted to control the shaping of public knowledge of southern history by selective commemoration of certain carefully selected sites. This was particularly true of the initial stages of the historic preservation movement. These efforts were at least in part conceived as a way to wrest historic agency away from minority groups. In the age of "new history" and a growing body of work on the numerous social and political complexities of American history, Rains idealized a simpler version of the past, one dominated by paternalists and almost exclusively white Christian men who trumpeted God, family, and States' rights.

Historical American narratives which reinforced white triumph and domination were particularly valued for their symbolism by white southerners. This is evidenced by the construction of hundreds of Civil War monuments and commemorations during the latter nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a period described by Timothy B. Smith as "the Golden

³ W. Stuart Towns, *Enduring Legacy: Rhetoric and Ritual of the Lost Cause* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2012), 116-146; Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 130-186.

⁴ Letter from Albert Rains to Unknown Constituent, 1964.

Age of battlefield preservation.”⁵ These monuments were often meant to convey a physical, as well as psychological, manifestation of white domination. In an era of Jim Crow laws, widespread voter suppression, a racially motivated convict-lease system, and rampant, sweeping systemic racism and segregation, monuments and pseudo-historical interpretations of history that deified “white history,” were partly meant to serve as reminders for black and white citizens of the realities of disparate power dynamics still existent in the South. Besides reinforcing racist dogma, these monuments also served as a way for southerners to reshape history as they saw fit. With this in mind, it is no surprise then that, as Brundage states, “it was not coincidental that urban renewal swept through the South in the years prior to grassroots black political organization.”⁶

Early historic preservation efforts were aimed at commemorating and rescuing sites that were seen as significant by the white community and white leadership, and for winning the war over national public memory. In this period, a narrative of the Civil War as a lost cause (with attendant traditional attachments, such as “noble,” and “valiant”) experienced a resurgence, and as Blight argues, memory of the war became increasingly “depoliticized,” as it was “cleansed of any lessons about the war’s unresolved legacy of racial strife.”⁷ White citizens, particularly “organized white women,” became “engaged in a frenzy of monument building.” Some of the first projects enacted by preservationists in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s included the restoration and safeguarding of sites seen as being representative of the Civil War. Other protected sites

⁵ Timothy B. Smith, *The Golden Age of Battlefield Preservation: The Decade of the 1890s and the Establishment of America’s First Five Military Parks* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2008), 11-30.

⁶ William Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 72.

⁷ David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 389.

were similar. One of the earliest, Horseshoe Bend National Military Park, opened officially in 1956. Civil War commemoration took a number of forms throughout the twentieth century. Hundreds of schools throughout the country, with a majority found in the South, adopted the names of prominent Confederate figures, such as Robert E. Lee and Jefferson Davis. Commemoration was not limited to school names only. A multitude of monuments and statues were also constructed, again with the vast majority located in the South. Gaines M. Foster, in *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South*, defines this period of rapid monument construction as the “Monument Movement.”⁸

The construction of Civil War memorials and monuments came in broadly three significant waves during the twentieth century. These waves align to periods in which the South was threatened by the possibility of great change, whether that be social, political, or economic. More critically for the purposes of inspiring commemoration efforts in the early twentieth century, the film *Birth of a Nation* was released in 1915. *Birth of a Nation* was wildly successful, even earning high praise from President Woodrow Wilson.⁹ The film is set during the Civil War, and takes particular ghoulish delight in scenes that cast African American soldiers as primitive, highly sexualized beings solely motivated by the pillage of plantations and the brutal rape of white women.¹⁰ The nominal heroes of the film are hooded members of the Ku Klux Klan, who are cast as saviors of the South, and especially of the purity of white women.¹¹

⁸ Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 128-32.

⁹ John Milton Cooper, Jr., *Woodrow Wilson: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009), 271-73.

¹⁰ Robert Lang, ed., *The Birth of a Nation: D.W. Griffith, Director* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 17-20.

¹¹ Melvyn Stokes, *D.W. Griffith's Birth of a Nation: A History of the Most Controversial Motion Picture of All Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Birth of a Nation was financially successful and extremely influential in defining and reinforcing ideals of southern honor in this period. After the release of the film, membership in the Ku Klux Klan grew exponentially.¹² It defined the Civil War in the popular imagination, especially for southerners, as a noble lost cause, in which the South valiantly engaged in a heroic effort to maintain their liberty in the face of “northern aggression.”¹³ Interest in memorializing the Civil War in this image intensified during this period, and monument creation and memorialization underwent its greatest expansion at any point in the nineteenth or twentieth century, as many white southerners sought to define and take ownership of civil war memory.¹⁴ Civil War memorials were not meant to be lifeless, static depictions. They were often intended to be active manipulators of public memory, negotiating for agency in real time. White supremacy, or the domination of American history by whites, was a continuous, ever-present theme of these Civil War monuments.

Southern politicians, such as Albert Rains, would have grown up around these monuments and around the story they told of valiant white men bringing civilization to the savage, and fighting for their God given rights to freedom and liberty. In Gadsden, Alabama, a monument dedicated to Emma Samson’s aid of Nathan Bedford Forrest was erected in 1907, and stands in front of city hall.¹⁵ Though a commemoration of actions during the Civil War, the

¹² Glenn Feldman, *Politics, Society, and the Klan in Alabama, 1915-1949* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1999), 117-121.

¹³ Caroline E. Janney, *Burying the Dead but not the Past: Ladies’ Memorial Associations and the Lost Cause* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 236-38. For more on monument creation and memorialization of the Lost Cause by southern women, see *Monuments to the Lost Cause: Women, Art, and the Landscapes of Southern Memory* eds. Cynthia J. Mills and Pamela H. Hemenway (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003).

¹⁴ James Michael Martinez, William Donald Richardson, and Ron McNinch-Su, *Confederate Symbols in the Contemporary South* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000).

¹⁵ Mike Goodson, *Gadsden: City of Champions* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2002), 111.

construction of the monument was quite progressive, as it was one of the first in the nation to depict a woman. Not just portrayed as a hero of the Civil War, Emma Samson was propped up as an ideal example of southern womanhood, particularly in the face of strife and struggle.¹⁶ By preserving and celebrating the Battle of Horseshoe Bend site, Rains likely hoped to mimic the effectiveness of these other monuments, to commemorate a major Anglo-American victory over Native American forces, to glorify white southern heritage, and to argue for Alabama's importance to national history. The Creek War, and more specifically the Battle of Horseshoe Bend, represented in the minds of Rains and others the ultimate triumph of the United States of America, and intended supposed whiteness, over the forces of supposed savagery as represented by the defeated Creek Indians. These men, as Justin Scott Weiss articulates in *The Ghosts of Horseshoe Bend: Myth, Memory, and the Making of a National Battlefield*, "seized upon the Jacksonian propaganda of the late 1820s and the era of Indian removal, refashioning savage Indians into Communist 'Reds' while glorifying the white pioneer as the epitome of human freedom and Christian morality."¹⁷ These tactics and motivations were more obvious with later projects, as Civil War commemoration efforts increased exponentially across Alabama and the South following the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, as segregation came increasingly under threat by federal legislation.¹⁸

The most well-known Alabama site that benefited from Albert Rains's interest in and support of historic preservation was the location of the Battle of Horseshoe Bend. The battle took

¹⁶ Thomas Owen, "Emma Samson, an Alabama Heroine," May 14, 1902, accessed October 12, 2017, <http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/owen/sansom/sansom.html>.

¹⁷ Justin Scott Weiss, *The Ghosts of Horseshoe Bend: Myth, Memory, and the Making of a National Battlefield* (Master's Thesis, Arizona State University, 2014), 4.

¹⁸ R. Volney Riser, *Defying Disfranchisement: Black Voting Rights Activism in the Jim Crow South, 1890-1908* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 215.

place in Tallapoosa County on March 27, 1814, as the culmination of the Creek War. There were two principal sides in the struggle; the American forces, aided by the Creek National Council, and the Upper Creeks, who were popularly known as the Red Sticks.¹⁹ The war was originally a civil war between the Creek National Council and the Upper Creeks. The Upper Creeks primary lands were located more northward, along the Tallapoosa, Alabama, and Coosa rivers. They were led militarily by Chief Menawa. The Creek National Council, aided by federal Indian agent Benjamin Hawkins, began expanding their power and influence in the region. The Red Sticks viewed this as a direct attack on their autonomy and as an intrusion by American influences. The United States, embroiled in the War of 1812, feared an uprising by the large Southeastern tribes, such as the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, and in particular in this period the Creek. American forces, hoping for an opportunity to permanently remove the Creeks as a formidable threat, allied themselves with the Creek National Council, and what was once a civil war ballooned into an international conflict. Hoping to prove their continued loyalty to the American forces, groups of Cherokee and Choctaw warriors joined the American assault upon the Red Sticks.

American forces became more directly involved in the Creek War during 1813 at the Battle of Burnt Corn Creek in south Alabama. Victory in the war became more paramount in the public imagination after the Fort Mims Massacre. Following the Fort Mims Massacre, Jackson was ordered to crush the Red Sticks. He departed for the Mississippi Territory on October 10, 1813, with a force of 2,500 men, consisting primarily of Tennessee volunteers. On March 27, 1814, Jackson and his forces made ready for a final confrontation, marching towards the Red

¹⁹ Robert M. Owens, *Red Dreams, White Nightmares: Pan-Indian Alliances in the Anglo-American Mind, 1763-1815* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015), chapter 17. For more information on Indian relations during the conflict, see: Kathryn E. Holland Braund, *Deerskins and Duffels: The Creek Indian Trade with Anglo-America, 1685-1815* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993).

Stick stronghold located at a bend in the Tallapoosa River known as Horseshoe Bend. Jackson's forces lost a total of less than 50 men, while out of 1,000 warriors of the Red Sticks that participated in the battle, 800 were killed. The Battle of Horseshoe Bend decimated Creek power in the Mississippi Territory, and the Creeks never again posed such a significant threat to the United States government or American expansion in the Southeastern United States. Chief Menawa, wounded in battle, nevertheless survived and led the 200 remaining Red Stick warriors to retreat, where he eventually joined forces with the Seminole in Florida.

On August 9, 1814, the Creek Nation signed the Treaty of Fort Jackson, bringing the Creek war of 1813-1814 to a close. By the stipulations of the treaty, the Creek Nation forfeited over 22 million acres of land to the United States government, including from Jackson's Upper Creek allies. Access to these new lands sparked a land rush throughout the Mississippi Territory and the land that would become the state of Alabama, which was established from these seized lands and the eastern portion of the old Mississippi Territory, on December 14, 1819. The United States was seized by "Alabama Fever."²⁰ The population of the new state boomed as cheap lands in Alabama, particularly along the Black Belt, were turned towards large scale cotton production.²¹

The Indian Removal Act is most well-known for its aftermath, the forced removal, often aided by the military, of the major Native American tribes in the Southeastern United States, including the Creek, Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Seminole. Jackson's former Creek, Cherokee, and Choctaw allies saw no special advantage, and were forced out along with those

²⁰ Harriett E. Amos Doss, "The State of Alabama," in *The United States: Alabama to Kentucky* ed. Benjamin F. Shearer (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2004), 38.

²¹ Daniel S. Dupre, *Transforming the Cotton Frontier: Madison County, Alabama, 1800-1840* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 40-44.

tribes that resisted the United States Government during the war.²² The removed tribes were forced to march out West, to the Oklahoma territory, where land would be set aside for the Native Americans in 1834 by the Indian Intercourse Act. Thousands died upon the forced marches westward, and evicted families often carried all they owned on their backs, and walked along trails with military escorts. The land of their new settlements was much drier and arid than their territories in the southeast. Their traditional forms of agriculture and hunting proved all but impossible. Andrew Jackson was able to effectively use his military record in the Creek War and the War of 1812 to win the presidency and become the seventh President of the United States. As President, Jackson signed into law the Indian Removal Act, on May 28, 1830. Because of his involvement during the Creek War in breaking Creek strength in the region, and then later his actions as President, Andrew Jackson is often credited for clearing the way for the expansion of American settlement, and for encouraging the American sense of manifest destiny that is so often cited as one of the more pivotal forces behind the shaping of American history.²³

Under the influence of men like Jackson, the victory over the Red Sticks at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend took on the aspects of a larger cultural and racial struggle. It was commonly cast as a moral victory of the Christian Anglo American over the Native American savage, which cemented the supposedly destined, rightful domination of the region by whites.²⁴ The symbolism around the battle, largely fabricated to fit a neat narrative of the inevitability of American

²² Susan M. Abram, *Forging a Cherokee-American Alliance in the Creek War: From Creation to Betrayal* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2015), 100.

²³ Howard Jones and Donald A. Rakestraw, *Prologue to Manifest Destiny: Anglo-American Relations in the 1840s* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1997), 222-224.

²⁴ Richard Kluger, *Seizing Destiny: The Relentless Expansion of American Territory, How America Grew from Sea to Shining Sea* (New York: Random House, 2007), 315-320.

triumph and domination of the continent from coast to coast, held great appeal for early pioneers and proponents of American public history, preservation, and commemoration, including Albert Rains.

Efforts to commemorate the Battle of Horseshoe Bend began years before Albert Rains entered Congress. Initial drives to establish Horseshoe Bend as a historic site were led by Thomas Owen in 1898. Thomas Owen was an influential figure in Alabama history, and served as the first director of the Alabama Department of Archives and History. Owen and his wife, Marie Bankhead Owen, have left an indelible mark on the fields of historic study, archaeology, and historic preservation in Alabama. Following the death of Thomas Owen, Judge Jack Coley became the most energetic and often influential figure pushing the establishment of Horseshoe Bend National Park. It was Coley that recruited influential politicians like Albert Rains and prominent businessmen like Thomas Martin to his cause. Coley's efforts were so fundamental to the bill getting passed that Albert Rains sent him the pen used by the President to sign the bill into law.²⁵ Coley first became involved after becoming Judge of Probate of Tallapoosa County in 1946. In this position, he "tirelessly advocated for the creation of the national park at Horseshoe Bend," and "contacted numerous public officials across Alabama trying to spark renewed interest in the project."²⁶

Coley went on to recruit Thomas Martin, another figure who proved instrumental in establishing Horseshoe Bend as a national park. Martin was born in Scottsboro, Alabama on August 13, 1881. Martin originally trained to be a lawyer at the University of Alabama school of law. Martin became the personal retainer of James Mitchell in 1911, who went on the next year

²⁵ Albert Rains, letter to Judge Coley, September 10, 1956.

²⁶ Keith S. Hebert and Kathryn H. Braund, "*We Are Still Here:*" *Horseshoe Bend National Military Park Administrative History* (Auburn University: Draft Submitted, August 2018), 57.

to buy out William Patrick Lay to become the owner of the Alabama Power Company. Martin served as general counsel for Alabama Power from 1912 until Mitchell's death in 1920, when Martin took over as the company president. Under Martin's leadership, Alabama Power expanded rapidly, constructing four dams across the state in the next ten years, launching a program to bring electricity to rural areas, building a hydrology laboratory, funding research at Alabama Polytechnic University (later renamed Auburn University), and spearheading initiatives to further draw big business and industry to Alabama.²⁷

Alabama Power, with Martin at the helm, bought huge tracts of land throughout the state, and he was deeply involved with local, state, and national politics through his programs, land purchases, as well as dam and plant construction. Inspired by Coley, after learning that the proposed construction of a new dam along the upper Tallapoosa River would flood the site of Horseshoe Bend, Martin moved to purchase the dam site to prevent later construction by another company, and built the dam instead along Cherokee Bluffs, saving the site.²⁸ This dam, later named Martin Dam, was expanded so that a second proposed dam on the Tallapoosa River was unnecessary. Martin began an extensive writing campaign as early as 1940, sending correspondence to representatives from all levels of government and seeking supporters for the project.²⁹ Additionally, Martin employed European historians and archivists, such as Vera Ledger, to find any information they could about the potential significance of the Battle of

²⁷ James L. Noles Jr., *Alabama Power Company* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2001), 9-14, 69-72. For further information on the history of Alabama Power Company, see: Leah Rawls Atkins, "*Developed for the Service of Alabama*": *The Centennial History of the Alabama Power Company, 1906–2006* (Birmingham: Alabama Power Co., 2006).

²⁸ Thomas W. Martin, *The Story of Horseshoe Bend National Military Park* (New York: Newcomen Society in North America, 1960), 9.

²⁹ Thomas Martin, letter to John H. Bankhead, March 8, 1940.

Horseshoe Bend. This information was eventually compiled and sent to a number of prominent figures in government, the park service, and private enterprise to highlight just how important the Battle of Horseshoe Bend was to the development of American history.

Albert Rains, also recruited by Coley, became involved with efforts to create a national historic site at Horseshoe Bend as early as 1950.³⁰ Albert Rains's support was critical because of the role of Congress in designating areas for National Park status. Congress is the "maker of public land policy," and national parks can only be created through an act of Congress.³¹ Thus, the role of Congress was "critical," and men like Coley and Martin needed effective representation in Congress to have any chance of establishing Horseshoe Bend as a national park.³² After receiving the essay by Thomas Martin, and talking to Probate Judge Coley continuously about the site, Rains threw his unwavering support behind the proposal.³³ Indeed, so swayed was Rains by the Martin and Coley essay that he sent copies of Martin's essay to a number of congressman from across the United States, hoping to win support for the project. Inspired by Martin's work and continuously encouraged by Coley, Rains composed an essay of his own, detailing the history of the battle, the site, and of its importance. Rains, Martin, and Coley routinely cited the involvement of Andrew Jackson as one of the most important reasons for the preservation of the site. They argued that Jackson was a great American hero, who paved the way for American expansion and sovereignty by defeating the Red Sticks and forcibly

³⁰ Albert Rains, letter to Judge Coley, July 7, 1951.

³¹ Lary M. Dilsaver, ed., *America's National Park System: The Critical Documents* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016), 373.

³² Dwight F. Rettie, *Our National Park System: Caring for America's Greatest Natural and Historic Treasures* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 205.

³³ Judge Jack Coley, from Tallapoosa County, was one of the main correspondents with Albert Rains throughout the project, providing updates on local conditions.

removing the other tribes of Southeastern Indians. Jackson is also credited with securing American independence, by defeating the British at the Battle of New Orleans. Coley, Martin, and Rains worked closely throughout the process, and had deeper connections than the Horseshoe Bend project. Martin, as president of the Alabama Power Company, was an important figure in Gadsden and the surrounding areas. Alabama Power, under Martin, invested millions in dam sites along the Coosa River, bringing increased prosperity to Gadsden. It was even said that “the Alabama Power Company was born in Gadsden.”³⁴

Certainly, it was in the interests of these men to portray Jackson as such an important figure, worthy of praise and celebration, because it helped their case for the preservation of Horseshoe Bend. Relying on the power of Jackson’s mythos to establish the argue the importance of Horseshoe Bend on a national scale was an effective strategy in Congress, and certainly a good plan of action against a doubtful NPS. However, their accounts routinely return to themes of cultural and racial victory over the “red man,” and supposed savagery. The Fort Mims Massacre is a central component of the narrative, and is typically used as an example of Native American brutality and the necessary defense of white womanhood. Instead of being properly contextualized as a response by the Red Sticks to the attack at Burnt Corn Creek and earlier atrocities, it is instead characterized as a seemingly random, opening attack that really began the Creek War, and as Waselkov states, “the memory of the massacre of innocents on the Tensaw forever served to cast Indians in the role of savages, and to justify the removal of the Creeks and other Indians from the Southeast and the appropriation of their lands by white

³⁴ Library History Committee, *Gadsden Public Library: 100 Years of Service* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2008).

Americans.”³⁵ Contrasted with the brutal Indian, Jackson and his forces are regarded as supposed saviors of the white settlers, white culture, and American expansion into the south and west.³⁶

In the early 1950s, Rains, Coley, and their allies increased efforts to establish Horseshoe Bend as a national park, though they did not experience much great initial success. In 1950, the Department of the Interior, using the partial justification that a memorial monument had already been constructed on the site in 1918, replied to Rains’s robust and thorough packet detailing the significance of the site at Horseshoe Bend bluntly:

In regard to the proposal to preserve the site of the Battle of Horseshoe Bend...A careful study of the significance of the Battle of Horseshoe Bend, utilizing the valuable data you submitted on April 3 and other material, was completed by the Advisory Board and the following resolution was adopted...Resolved, that the Advisory Board does not recommend the site of the Battle of Horseshoe Bend, March 27, 1814, as being of national significance. It is the view of the Board that the Federal Government’s participation in the commemoration of this site was adequately accomplished by the erection there in 1918 of the memorial monument authorized under the Act of April 2, 1914 (38 Stat. 311), which provided that the future care and maintenance of this memorial was to be borne by the State of Alabama. The Advisory Board encourages the continued preservation of the battlefield which is included in the present state historic site, in which is also situated the memorial monument. In these circumstances we regret to say that the National Park Service will not be able to participate in the preservation of this site, except in an advisory capacity.³⁷

At every step, Albert Rains was instrumental in getting HR-11766 passed.

Nevertheless, Rains and supporters experienced an early partial victory by getting the Horseshoe Bend site recognized for its historic importance in 1951, with the dedication of an historical marker at the site, and Martin and Coley invited a number of prominent businessmen, politicians,

³⁵ Gregory A. Waselkov, *A Conquering Spirit: Fort Mims and the Redstick War of 1813-1814* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006), 177. For more information, see: and Mike Bunn and Clay Williams, *Battle for the Southern Frontier: The Creek War and the War of 1812* (Charleston, The History Press, 2008).

³⁶ Thomas W. Martin, *The Story of Horseshoe Bend National Military Park* (New York: Newcomen Society in North America, 1960).

³⁷ Department of the Interior, letter to Albert Rains, Jun 1, 1950.

and government employees to the event, although Albert Rains could not attend.³⁸ Coley engaged in numerous speaking engagements and gave a number of speeches to promote the site across the state. Rains increased efforts to win over other members of Congress. Martin proved to be one of Rains's most valuable allies throughout the attempt to pass the Horseshoe Bend Bill.³⁹ Rains would later lead a delegation from Alabama, including representatives from Alabama Power, to push for the construction of four hydroelectric dams along the upper Coosa river, greatly expanding the capabilities of Alabama Power in the region.⁴⁰ However, despite this early victory, there remained more hurdles to clear to establish Horseshoe Bend as a national park, and the group still had not won the support of NPS or the Department of the Interior, which was critical if they were to ever be successful.

While “greatly disappointed” by the decision by the Department of the Interior and the National Park Service to not participate, Rains was further inspired to continue efforts “to secure federal participation.”⁴¹ Proving national importance to the members of Congress, National Park Service, and the Department of the Interior was the first major hurdle, but not the only one. Rains made attempts to frame the Battle of Horseshoe Bend as paramount to American history, military history, as well as the history of Alabama and the Southeastern United States. However, Rains's compiled materials and statements, as well as Martin's widely disseminated essay and Coley's

³⁸ Albert Rains, letter to Judge Coley, June 14, 1951.

³⁹ Besides providing the land and research needed for the passage of the bill, Martin and Alabama Power donated countless hours and potentially millions of dollars throughout the effort. Rains enjoyed a productive relationship with Alabama Power, and the two worked in concert to expand hydroelectric infrastructure throughout the state, and especially along the upper Coosa River, which happened to partly run through Rains's district.

⁴⁰ U.S. Congress, House, Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, *State of Honorable John Sparkman, Public Works Appropriations for 1960*, 86th Cong., 1st sess., 1959, 1368.

⁴¹ Albert Rains, letter to Judge Coley, June 2, 1950.

tireless efforts, made it very clear that in their estimation, a central component of the historical significance of the Battle of Horseshoe Bend was the defeat of the Creeks, and how this allowed for the domination of the region by white settlers. Rains concluded his compiled materials making a case for the significance of Horseshoe Bend with this quote from a James Parton's biography of Andrew Jackson, published in 1859:⁴²

It was not only the power of the Creeks that was broken at the Horseshoe Bend, on the 27th of March, 1814, but the power of the red man in North America. We have since that day, and shall have for many years to come, occasional encounters with Indians. But never since has there been in arms against the white man any force of Indians large enough to excite anything like general or serious apprehension, or to task the power and resources of the United States, or of any single state, and there never will be. At Tohopeka the scepter was finally snatched from the red man's hands; at Tohopeka the long struggle for the possession of the Western world was ended and a continent changed owners.⁴³

Another attempt by Rains in 1953, HR-4989, also failed because of staunch resistance from the Department of the Interior and National Park Service, who challenged the significance of the site and noted the undue strains already existing on their budgets.⁴⁴ Donald R. Belcher, Assistant Director of the Department of the Interior, felt it was "unwise" to establish Horseshoe Bend as a national park, as the National Park Service had been "having troublesome manpower and budgetary problems in managing and maintaining existing areas under constantly increasing visitor loads."⁴⁵ He felt that adding the duties of maintaining and administering the Horseshoe Bend site would be an undue burden to the NPS. Because of the lack of support from the Department of Interior and Insular Affairs Committee, H.R. 288, introduced in 1955, also

⁴² James Parton, *Life of Andrew Jackson, Volume 1* (New York, NY: Mason Brothers, 1859), 526.

⁴³ Albert Rains, letter to Judge Coley, April 1, 1950.

⁴⁴ United States Department of the Interior, letter to Albert Rains, June 1, 1950.

⁴⁵ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, *HR 11766: Providing for the Establishment of the Horseshoe Bend National Military Park, in Alabama*, 84th Cong., 1st sess., 1956, 3.

initially failed to meet the approval of the NPS. However, so sure was Alabama Governor John Patterson of the legislation's success, that prior to its delays in Congress he created the Horseshoe Bend Battle Park Association (HBBPA). Coley, appointed association secretary, remained the association's "unofficial leader."⁴⁶

Efforts to establish Horseshoe Bend as a national park continued unabated. However, as the Department of the Interior noted, the National Park Service had already funded the erection of a monument memorializing the battle in 1918. By this time, there was also a new battle dedication completed in 1951. The National Park Service wondered openly about the need for increased commemoration efforts at Horseshoe Bend, and the motivations for such.

In response to NPS resistance against H.R. 288, Rains set about addressing all weaknesses of the bill and opposition to it Rains proposed a different version of the plan, HR-11766, that same year, and set about winning support from the Department of the Interior and Congress. Rains had been steadily working to further cultivate allies for the plan on various congressional committees. In a letter to Judge Coley dated October 7, 1955, Rains's secretary wrote, "in looking over the members of the Interior Insular Affairs Committee, I note that many of these are Albert's close friends, even some of the Republicans, with the exception of Adam Clayton Powell, who is the colored gentleman from New York."⁴⁷ He won the support of Clair Engle, Chairman of the U.S. House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, who assured Rains that he and Coley had "the best presentation that had been made before his Committee, in support of any National Park."⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Hebert and Braund, *We Are Still Here*, 60.

⁴⁷ Secretary of Albert Rains, letter to Judge Coley, October 7, 1955.

⁴⁸ Albert Rains, letter to Judge Coley, June 15, 1956.

This success is due in part to the massive letter writing campaign that Rains undertook among his fellow congressmen, as always with the support and encouragement of Coley. In January 1956, Rains sent letters to over fifty fellow congressmen urging them to support the designation of Horseshoe Bend as a national military park.⁴⁹ Rains included a booklet about the Battle of Horseshoe Bend, echoing again the battle's importance in expanding the nation and preparing the Southeastern United States for Anglo American domination. Specifically, it argued that the Battle of Horseshoe Bend was "famous in the annals of history not only because it was the decisive stroke that ended the Creek War, but also on account of the famous Americans who participated in the battle," and also noted that it "broke the war power of the Creek Nation."⁵⁰ Another major theme of this work repeated from earlier materials was the central importance of the battle to Andrew Jackson and his effect on the development of the United States. By this period, Jackson had taken on a near messianic aspect in Rains's effort to win support for national park designation. Indeed, most of the replying congressman specifically mention their desire and interest in seeing "Old Hickory," and his "exploits against the Creeks," deservedly memorialized.⁵¹ Taking advantage of this, Rains astutely includes the memorialization and celebration of Andrew Jackson as a major justification for the opening of Horseshoe Bend

⁴⁹ This collection of letters can be found at the Alabama Department of Archives and History, in the Horseshoe Bend Papers collection.

⁵⁰ Thomas W. Martin, *The Story of Horseshoe Bend National Military Park* (New York: Newcomen Society in North America, 1960), 2.

⁵¹ Jim Wright, letter to Albert Rains, January 13, 1956.

National Military Park when he introduced HR 288 in January, 1955.⁵² On the floor of Congress, it became known as the “Horseshoe Bend Bill.”⁵³

These letters also provide a fascinating glimpse into the reputation of Albert Rains throughout Congress. While there is certainly some political hyperbole involved, every return letter expresses respect and admiration for Rains. South Carolina congressman William Jennings Bryan Dorn went so far as to “immediately quit everything else and read the booklet on the Battle of Horseshoe Bend,” when he saw that Albert Rains was the one who introduced the legislation. Arkansas congressman Jim Trimble wrote about the bill “even if it was not a meritorious bill, I would have to be for HR 288 on account of [Albert Rains].”⁵⁴ However, getting Horseshoe Bend accepted by the National Park Service was far from assured.⁵⁵ In a letter to Rains, Texas congressman Joe M. Kilgore noted “how difficult it was to get a National Military Park designation,” but gave his Rains his support, and told him “just holler and I’ll come running.”⁵⁶ So well established was Rains’s reputation in Congress as a writer and introducer of successful legislation, that some replying congressman accepted Rains’s eventual success out of hand.

⁵² U.S. Congress, *Journal of the House of Representatives of the United States*, 84th Cong., 1st sess., January 5, 1955, 23.

⁵³ Albert Rains, letter to Judge Coley, September 10, 1956.

⁵⁴ Jim Trimble to Albert Rains, January 13, 1956.

⁵⁵ Albert Rains, letter to Judge Coley, July 12, 1956.

⁵⁶ Joe M. Kilgore, letter to Albert Rains, January 18 1956.

Speaker of the House John William McCormack replied to Rains on January 23, 1956:

I do not know anything about the bill which you sent to me, but I do know plenty about Albert Rains, and I would find it most difficult to be opposed to any bill in which Albert Rains is interested. So far as H. R. 288 is concerned, because you have introduced it and you are especially interested in it, I am for it.⁵⁷

Additionally, Rains also increased efforts to “get some national publicity” for the park as well, television, radio, and print advertisements.⁵⁸ Rains worked tirelessly to promote the bill, and felt that the establishment of the park would finally place Alabama in its rightful place as a centrally important area to United States history.⁵⁹ Besides this, Rains proposed that Horseshoe Bend would attract thousands of tourists annually.

Rains was able to secure the support of a great many congressmen. One of Rains’s biggest obstacles in getting the Horseshoe Bend Bill remained the National Park Service (NPS), Department of Interior, and private land owners around the proposed site. Prior to the passing of the bill, the NPS routinely questioned the national importance of the Battle of Horseshoe Bend and the attendant site. Indeed, NPS administrators represented likely the largest obstacle that these supporters of the park commemoration efforts faced. The NPS in this period took an “adverse position” against the establishment of the Horseshoe Bend National Military Park.⁶⁰ The National Park Service in this period was reeling from “antagonism” from those that were against the expansion of the park system.⁶¹ Because of this and further neglect, the NPS “was in serious trouble,” and “years of wartime abandonment were followed by neglect and

⁵⁷ John W. McCormack, letter to Albert Rains, January 23, 1956.

⁵⁸ Albert Rains, letter to Judge Coley, July 4, 1955.

⁵⁹ Weiss, *The Ghosts of Horseshoe Bend: Myth, Memory, and the Making of a National Battlefield*, 93-94.

⁶⁰ “Horseshoe Bend,” *Alabama Journal*, June 13, 1956.

⁶¹ Dilsaver, *America's National Park System: The Critical Documents*, 149.

underfunding as Congress grappled with ominous international events.” Annual maintenance of trails and facilities lagged, and many features fell into serious, even dangerous, disrepair.”⁶² The nation’s parks would not find relief until the enactment of Mission 66 in 1956, an ambitious plan to pour more than \$1 billion into increasing and modernizing visitor facilities and accommodations. ⁶³

Besides budgetary considerations, the issue of proving national significance, and general issues faced by the organization after WWII, the NPS wanted to ensure that the land immediately surrounding the proposed site would also not be commercially developed in such a way as to decrease “the esthetic value of the park.”⁶⁴ As of 1956, that detail had not yet been fully addressed by the supporters of Horseshoe Bend, though Martin promised the donation of an additional 1,000 acres to the Federal Government if necessary.⁶⁵ However, his failure to adequately evaluate the cost of the land for and around the site proved a point of contention within Congress.⁶⁶ Rains, Coley, and supporters were required to prove to a national audience why the Horseshoe Bend site was significant to the history of the United States, not just Alabama or the South. This proved an arduous task, with much of the grassroots work done by Coley. Multiple efforts to prove this national importance of the site failed one after another. The most glaring examples of these failures occurred during the early 1950s, after numerous materials were gathered in order to prove this stated narrative of Horseshoe Bend that it profoundly altered

⁶² Ibid, 150.

⁶³ Ibid, 171.

⁶⁴ U.S. Congress, House, Subcommittee on Public Lands of the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, *Hearing on H.R. 288: A Bill to Provide for the Establishment of Horseshoe Bend National Military Park, in the State of Alabama*, 84th Cong., 2nd sess., June 18, 1956.

⁶⁵ Ibid

⁶⁶ Hebert and Braund, *We Are Still Here*, 69.

the direction of American history. This included personal missives and historical studies by Rains himself. Nevertheless, these actions still failed, as when brought before Congress and proposed to the Department of the Interior, the arguments concerning Horseshoe Bend's importance to the United States of America were often rejected out of hand and the bills "hard-pressed by all concerned."⁶⁷

Public hearings on the proposal were scheduled for June 13, 1956, before the Public Lands Subcommittee of the House Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs. Rains called up four witnesses for the hearings, including Martin and Coley. Prior to this hearing, the National Park Service's Advisory Board had "not endorsed the bill."⁶⁸ Now described as a "clean bill," the Department of the Interior now recommended the passing of the bill.⁶⁹ Before Congress, he argued that "if Andrew Jackson is of national importance, then Horseshoe Bend is of national importance, because Horseshoe Bend was the beginning of the career of Andrew Jackson," and that he was convinced that "it is one of the outstanding unmarked places in the Nation."⁷⁰ Later in the hearing, Rains described his work in convincing the NPS and Department of the Interior:

Over the years past, when I have introduced this resolution, the National Park Service has sent to this committee a turn down. It said "No, it is not of national significance." This time, after a serious effort, and after it had been turned down originally in a letter to this committee we went down and talked to the Park Service and the people at the Interior Department. We were able to get them to reconsider the adverse report made to this committee. They did reconsider it, and the copy of that letter I am sure will be introduced into the record. In fact, I will reserve the right to introduce in the record a letter from Mr. Wesley D'Ewart, who used to be with us here in the Congress who now, I believe, is

⁶⁷ *Montgomery Advertiser* August 11, 1968.

⁶⁸ J.C. Henderson, letter to Eleanor Nance, May 24, 1956.

⁶⁹ U.S. Congress, House, Subcommittee on Public Lands of the Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs, *H.R. 11766: A Bill to Provide for the Establishment of the Horse Shoe Bend National Military Park, in the State of Alabama, H.R. 11766, U.S. Statutes at Large 70 (1956): 10293.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid*

Assistant Secretary of the Interior, in which they say that they would like for it to be carried over for consideration to 1968 as a part of Mission 66.⁷¹

With the support of the NPS and the Department of the Interior, Rains then feared a direct veto from President Eisenhower, and that the bill had gained too much negative publicity in Congress and the White House. In a letter to Judge Coley dated July 15, 1956, Rains shared these concerns:

Our next point of worry and possible disappointment would be a veto by the President. If you will read the two Reports by (a) the House Committee on Interior, and (b) the Senate Committee on Interior, and note the disapproving letters by the Department of the Interior and by the Bureau of the Budget, you will see the danger. I am afraid that these two Departments will submit their views to the President in support of a Veto. And, while I do not anticipate that he would take such action, in the light of the overwhelming action on the part of the Congress, it is always possible. Therefore, I suggest that contacts be made with the White House authorities, and with the President if possible, urging that he sign the bill.⁷²

Nevertheless, Rains's fears proved misplaced, and no veto came. By the time it successfully went through Congress and was signed into law on July 25, 1956, Rains began referring to HR-11766 as "my Horseshoe Bend Bill."⁷³ The bill passed unanimously in the House of Representatives.⁷⁴ Rains, Coley, and their allies were ultimately successful in their efforts to turn the Horseshoe Bend site into a national military historic park, and in 1957, Coley was able to convince the Ways and Means Committee of Alabama to give \$150,000 to acquire more land for the park and ensure the success of future operations.

⁷¹ Ibid

⁷² Albert Rains, letter to Judge Coley, July 12, 1956.

⁷³ Albert Rains, letter to Judge Coley, August 21, 1956.

⁷⁴ U.S. Congress, *Journal of the House of Representatives of the United States*, 84th Cong., 1st sess., January 3, 1956, 624.

Initially, legislation for the Horseshoe Bend National Military Park site was starkly patriotic and unmistakably biased in favor of the American forces (and especially towards Andrew Jackson, who had taken on near demigod status in early literature associated with the site and the opening thereof). However, when the NPS took control of the site, they attempted to alter this, and NPS leaders dedicated themselves to a more nuanced and objective interpretation after 1959. The dramatic slant towards American nationalism, and especially Anglo-American history, highlighted in the legislation to establish Horseshoe Bend as a national park is evident at other early sites chosen for historic preservation and commemoration became a common theme. Some of the more popular sites designated early for preservation were battlefields, with battlefields from the Civil War proving to be the most popular within this designation. The South saw an explosion of civil war commemoration efforts, in preservation, reenactments, and holidays in the mid-1950s. Much of this activity was a result of backlash from the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, and the feeling shared by many southern whites that their traditional system was under threat of being irreconcilably overturned and altered.⁷⁵ As previously stated, these sites and others were interpreted by some as a way to reinforce white claims of superiority and in particular claims on governmental control. On a more macro level, these monuments became another physical manifestation of Jim Crow laws between 1900-1950, and “went hand in hand.”⁷⁶

The Horseshoe Bend project was far from Albert Rains’s only foray into historic preservation and commemoration efforts. Following the passing of the Horseshoe Bend bill in

⁷⁵ Robert J. Cook, *Troubled Commemoration: The American Civil War Centennial, 1961-1965* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 51; Robert J. Cook, *Civil War Memories: Contesting the Past in the United States Since 1865* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017) 164-169.

⁷⁶ Stephanie Meeks and Kevin C. Murphy, *The Past and Future City: How Historic Preservation is Reviving America’s Communities* (Washington, D.C.: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2016), introduction.

1956, Rains became known in Congress as a powerful advocate for historic preservation, and served as chairman for the Special Committee on Historic Preservation as well. Rains was appointed directly by the President. Rains felt there was now “a new awakening of interest in the preservation of our cultural and architectural heritage,” and that “never was there a greater need” for preservation efforts than now.⁷⁷ Interestingly, one of the greatest threats to the preservation of historic sites in America was urban renewal. Vast urban renewal programs, many of them written or heavily supported by Albert Rains, represented a dire threat to historic sites across the country, and many were destroyed by these programs and the expansion of housing developments in other areas, also a key component of Rains’s congressional agenda. These federal programs, as Stephanie Meeks and Kevin C. Murphy argue in *The Past and Future City: How Historic Preservation is Reviving America's Communities*, “did enormous amounts of damage to America’s historic resources,” and urban renewal in particular left scars that were “all too visible in many communities.”⁷⁸ This crisis of historic preservation came to the forefront following the “ignominious end” of Penn Station and New York’s resulting Landmarks Law.⁷⁹

The Special Committee on Historic Preservation was initially tasked with evaluating the conditions of historic sites across the country. The committee found that almost half of all the 12,000 buildings and sites listed on Historic American Buildings Survey had already been destroyed by “the ever present thrust of bulldozers and the corrosion of neglect.”⁸⁰

⁷⁷ “Rains Named to Historic Advisory Body,” *The Gadsden Times* March 2, 1967.

⁷⁸ National Trust for Historic Preservation, *Preservation Yellow Pages: The Complete Information Source for Homeowners, Communities, and Professionals* (Washington, D.C.: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1997), 8.

⁷⁹ Stephanie Meeks and Kevin C. Murphy, *The Past and Future City: How Historic Preservation is Reviving America's Communities*, 39.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

To find potential solutions to America's growing preservation crisis, the committee was sent to Europe to complete a tour of various historic sites and to learn their methods of preservation. Europe was seen as the leader in historic preservation standards at this time, and Rains and the committee learned much from them. Buoyed by lessons learned from Europe, and armed with surveys detailing the state of America's historic sites, Rains began compiling essays and information on the critical importance of sustained historic preservation efforts. This compilation, entitled *With Heritage So Rich*, was published in 1966.⁸¹

The report "had the advantage, which many reports lack, of appearing at precisely the right time for a positive political response. It was cogently argued, dramatically illustrated, and persuasive."⁸² The text included essays by Rains, writers, and historians, all making the case for the importance of historical awareness, preservation, and involvement. *With Heritage So Rich* was a dramatic success, with thousands of copies sold and multiple editions. Rains's fellow congressmen were equally swayed. The legislation "had broad congressional support," and "fit well with the Johnson administration's 'Great Society' program, especially Lady Bird Johnson's 'Preservation of Natural Beauty' initiative."⁸³

Only a few months after the release of *With Heritage So Rich*, Congress passed Public Law No. 89-665, or the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) on October 15, 1966. The NHPA was "landmark legislation," that extended "the assistance of the Federal Government to the States, local governments, private organizations, and individuals and makes possible a

⁸¹ Albert Rains and Laurance G. Henderson, *With Heritage So Rich* (New York: Random House, 1966).

⁸² J. Barry Cullingworth, *The Political Culture of Planning: American Land Use Planning in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 134.

⁸³ Scott F. Anfinson, *Practical Heritage Management: Preserving a Tangible Past* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2019), 73

creative, broadly based cooperative effort to save those tangible reminders of our past that will give meaning and continuity to our future.”⁸⁴ Additionally, the NHPA authorized “major new programs and the significant enlargement of existing programs in the field of historic preservation on behalf of the Federal Government.” While previously, “the major burdens of historic preservation [had] been borne and major efforts initiated by private agencies and individuals,” now it was “nevertheless necessary and appropriate for the Federal Government to accelerate its historic preservation programs and activities, to give maximum encouragement to agencies and individuals undertaking preservation.”⁸⁵

The NHPA granted funds for preservation, established the National Register of Historic Places, State Historic Preservation Offices, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, created the Section 106 review process, and enabled expansion of the list of National Historic Landmarks. Additionally, the NHPA provided training and information “concerning professional methods and techniques for the preservation of historic properties and for the administration of the historic preservation program at the Federal, State, and local level.”⁸⁶ *With Heritage So Rich* was instrumental in getting this legislation passed, so much so that every major recommendation of the text was adopted as part of the NHPA.⁸⁷ Albert Rains was recognized as a central figure in the establishment of American historic preservation.⁸⁸ Despite his importance in garnering

⁸⁴ U.S. Congress, House, Subcommittee on Appropriations, Department of the Interior. *H.R. 9029*, 1967.

⁸⁵ U.S. Congress, House, Department of the Interior and Related Agencies, *Appropriations for Fiscal Year 1969*, 91st Cong., 1st sess., 1968.

⁸⁶ U.S. Congress, House, Department of the Interior and Related Agencies, *Section 101 of NHPA (continued)*, 91st Cong., 1st sess., 1968.

⁸⁷ Barry Mackintosh, *The National Historic Preservation Act and the National Park Service: A History* (National Park Service, 1986).

⁸⁸ Frank Helderman, “A Book Inspired by Albert Rains,” *The Gadsden Times* May 23, 1966.

support for larger historic preservation endeavors, no definitive work on congressman Rains's tremendous impact on this field has yet been published, though *With Heritage So Rich* is often cited in modern texts on the history and development of historic preservation such as William J. Murtagh's *Keeping Time: The History and Theory of Preservation in America*, Norman Tyler, Ted J. Ligibel, and Ilene R. Tyler's *Historic Preservation: An Introduction to Its History, Principles, and Practice*, Stephanie Meeks and Kevin Murphy's *The Past and Future City: How Historic Preservation is Reviving America's Communities*, and Robert E. Stipes's *A Richer Heritage: Historic Preservation in the Twenty-first Century*.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ William J. Murtagh, *Keeping Time: The History and Theory of Preservation in America* (Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 2006), 225; Norman Tyler, Ted J. Ligibel, and Ilene R. Tyler, *Historic Preservation: An Introduction to Its History, Principles, and Practice* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2009), 338; Stephanie Meeks and Kevin Murphy, *The Past and Future City: How Historic Preservation is Reviving America's Communities* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press), 39-40; Robert E. Stipe, ed., *A Richer Heritage: Historic Preservation in the Twenty-first Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 358.

Chapter 3: A Political Giant

As a member of Congress, Albert Rains was best known for his work in creating housing legislation. Widely known as “Mr. Housing” by other congressmen, in the House of Representatives Rains “wrote practically all of the legislation on housing” that passed between 1945 and 1965, including the Housing Acts of 1949, 1954, 1961, 1964, the Housing and Urban Development Act of 1965, and the Senior Citizens Housing Act of 1962.¹ Rains was personally thanked by President John F. Kennedy for his role in shepherding the Housing Act of 1961 through the House.² Similarly, President Johnson expressed to Rains “a very special congratulations” during his remarks when signing the Housing Act of 1964, calling it “a crowning achievement for a highly constructive career of great public service.”³ His housing programs have remained effective long after his tenure concluded, and his guidance of housing legislation through the potential pitfalls of Congress set a standard for legislative stewardship.⁴

Beginning in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the federal government became increasingly concerned with urban renewal programs targeted at revitalizing urban areas. A number of federally mandated programs were proposed, but of particular interest and importance was the Housing Act of 1949, which drastically expanded the role of the federal government in the

¹ Induction of Albert Rains Into the Alabama Academy of Honor, 1972, accessed November 2, 2016: http://www.archives.alabama.gov/famous/academy/a_rains.html

² John F. Kennedy, “Remarks Upon Signing the Housing Act of 1961,” June 30, 1961.

³ Lyndon B. Johnson, “Remarks Upon Signing the Housing Act of 1964,” September 2, 1964, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=26475>.

⁴ Neal Smith, *Mr. Smith Went to Washington: From Eisenhower to Clinton* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1996), 332-33.

creation of public housing, mortgage insurance, and housing standards. The Housing Act of 1949 was an addition to the Housing Act of 1937. The Housing Act of 1937 was chiefly meant to ensure that poor families had access to adequate housing. The later act in 1949, however, was much more proactive and provided for greater federal powers in housing.

Rains made housing something of a personal crusade during his time in office, and was able to make great strides in creating better, more affordable housing for the elderly, the disabled, and military veterans. Yet, like his efforts in historic preservation, Rains's legacy in housing is complex. Many of the housing initiatives enacted and pushed by Rains maintained and enforced a racial status quo in housing that was rampant throughout the United States (and particularly the South) during the mid-twentieth century. Housing was used to keep black and white populations separate, and thus maintaining white spheres of power and influence and controlling the vote. This was especially used following the *Brown's* outcome, as many poor whites, but primarily African Americans, were forcibly removed from their homes under the guise of supposedly benevolent urban renewal. This removal also had the effect of dissolving community identity, which weakened voting blocs and made political control easier. As described by Julie Clark and Nicholas Wise in *Urban Renewal, Community and Participation: Theory, Policy and Practice*, those with a "stronger neighborhood identity were more likely to encourage residents to participate in the governing and planning process."⁵ Rains heavily pushed for increased efforts of urban renewal. Urban renewal, nominally meant to attract businesses and residents back to urban centers, in reality resulted in the creation of "Black ghettos" across the South and in other parts of the country.⁶ Rains defined urban renewal as "cities and

⁵ Julie Clark and Nicholas Wise, ed., *Urban Renewal, Community and Participation: Theory, Policy and Practice* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 184.

communities” “engaged in rebuilding and renovating their blighted areas.”⁷ Black residents were quickly priced out through a process of rent-raising brought on by re-gentrification. Additionally, some black minority residents were in no uncertain terms forced out, and pushed into housing projects located far away from white neighborhoods. Robert Culp, Toledo NAACP president, described this process not as urban renewal, but as “urban removal,” and “a conspiracy” to remove residents.⁸ All of this was achieved under the auspices of progress and early forms of urban renewal projects, with politicians like Albert Rains leading the way, and the Federal Housing Act a major force in change.⁹

In driving and implementing strategies of maintaining segregation, Albert Rains was far from alone. In Alabama, he and fellow politician John Sparkman were influential segregationists.¹⁰ On a broader scale, Rains was a member of a loose coalition of southern senators and congressmen. who banded together in order to preserve segregation in the post-Brown era. The formation of this group was largely a concerted response to the supreme court

⁷ U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Banking and Currency, Subcommittee on Housing. *Hearings*. (Date: October 22, 1963). Text in: ProQuest *Congressional Hearings Digital Collection*; Accessed: August 14, 2018.

⁸ James Roert Saunders and Renae Nadine Shackleford, *Urban Renewal and the End of Black Culture in Charlottesville, Virginia: An Oral History of Vinegar Hill* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, Inc., 1998), 107.

⁹Mary E. Triage, *Urban Renewal and Resistance: Race, Space, and the City in the Late Twentieth to the Early Twenty-First Century* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016), 6-10.

¹⁰ Sparkman, a resident of Huntsville, Alabama, was instrumental in bringing Redstone Arsenal to Huntsville, bringing thousands of federal jobs with it. This also brought some jobs to minorities. However, his support of housing legislation that limited opportunities for African Americans effects this record. Like Rains, Sparkman had a complicated relationship with Civil Rights. The *Birmingham Post-Herald*, in a tribute to Sparkman written in 1985, stated, “Sparkman came out of a political tradition that was overshadowed -- even rejected -- during the Civil Rights era. He was a progressive, even a liberal, one of many that Alabama sent to Congress before the question of race came to dominate all political issues and southern politicians began calling themselves "conservative." He believed that government should help people do what they were not able to do for themselves. Although he joined other southern politicians in opposing civil rights legislation -- to do otherwise would have ended his public service -- Sparkman was not a demagogue on the issue.” From “Tribute to John Sparkman,” *Birmingham Post-Herald*, Nov. 19, 1985.

decision which held that segregation in schools was unconstitutional. As a response to the *Brown* decision and other perceived threats to supposed traditional southern ways of life, the coalition, including Albert Rains, eventually drafted and published the “Southern Manifesto.” Written and then publicly released March 12, 1956, the “Southern Manifesto” was seen as a counter to the *Brown* decision, and as an airing of grievances for potential future attempts at ending segregation. The writers and signatories of the document argued that the *Brown* decision represented another example of unlawful and heavy-handed federal involvement in southern political and cultural affairs. Specifically, the writers of the Southern Manifesto felt that the intrusiveness of the federal government would undo generations of peaceable relations between southern whites and blacks, and that it would cultivate increased hatred and racial strife.¹¹

Albert Rains was one of the 101 signatories of the Southern Manifesto, including other Alabamians such as John Sparkman, Lister Hill, and Carl Elliott. The “Southern Manifesto” was a gambit by southern politicians to halt the advance of desegregation and eventual integration of schools under the guise of moderation, though many still viewed desegregation as ultimately inevitable. In this, the manifesto “achieved the Southern Caucus’s goals, as consensus of American public opinion embraced moderation. *Brown*’s scale implementation was delayed indefinitely.”¹² Rains’s signing was later thought to be used as partial justification for his unsuccessful bid to become Speaker of the House.¹³

¹¹ “The Southern Manifesto of 1956,” March 12, 1956, Office of Art and Archives, accessed September 25, 2016, <https://history.house.gov/Historical-Highlights/1951-2000/The-Southern-Manifesto-of-1956/>.

¹² John Kyle Day, *The Southern Manifesto: Massive Resistance and the Fight to Preserve Segregation* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014), chapter 1.

¹³ *The Town Talk*, Oct. 10, 1961.

Rains was particularly well placed to impede the progress of desegregation through his role as chairman of the Special Housing Subcommittee. Rains had "specialized expertise" in housing, and served as chairman from 1955 to 1964.¹⁴ The Subcommittee on Housing was authorized under Resolution 203, and created in June, 1955, and Rains was the first chairman. The subcommittee, including Rains, had 13 members. As a subcommittee of the powerful Committee on Banking and Currency, the Subcommittee on Housing held great influence, and was aided and legitimized by Albert Rains. In 1963, nine of the thirteen members were from northern states, and only three from states in the deep south, those being Albert Rains from Alabama, Henry B. Gonzalez from Texas, and Robert G. Stephens from Georgia.¹⁵ The creation of this subcommittee was a rarity. George Goodwin Jr., in a 1962 issue of *The American Political Science Review*, noted that it is significant, for example, that Albert Rains has been able to establish a subcommittee on housing of the House Banking and Currency Committee, when all its other subcommittees are designated by numbers and given no clear jurisdiction."¹⁶ The main goals of the subcommittee were to provide some alleviation of housing shortages across the United States. The first targeted groups to provide housing for were the elderly, the disabled, and military veterans. In this function, the committee performed admirably. However, the committee failed to input early controls and checks on builders, and this early period marked an explosion of shoddy construction and poor neighborhood planning.

¹⁴ Kenneth A. Shepsle, "Representation and Governance: The Great Legislative Trade-off," *Political Science Quarterly* 103, no. 3 (1988): 461-84.

¹⁵U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Banking and Currency, Subcommittee on Housing. *Hearings, 88th Congress, First Session*, 1963.

¹⁶ George S. Goodwin, "Subcommittees: The Miniature Legislatures of Congress," *American Political Science Review* 56, no. 3 (1962): 596-604.

By 1952, the problem had gotten so out of hand that Rains called for hearings and investigations into the matter. These investigations eventually proved what Astrid Monson, in “Slums, Semi-Slums, and Super-Slums,” described as “the bad planning, skimmed construction, and negligent inspection which permitted us to be saddled with these slums of the future.”¹⁷ These efforts were particularly apparent in those urban areas chosen for rehabilitation and increased development. The committee wielded the power to evict tenants, raise rents, and allow for the demolishing of other buildings deemed dilapidated or a detriment to increased renewal efforts. These destroyed buildings often included tenements for the poor, cheap rent apartment buildings, and other such residences. It was not uncommon for these buildings to have a black majority among residents. After destruction of homes or eviction, black residents were often forced or coerced into living in comparably cheap slums or ghettos that were further isolated from local white communities, and traditionally black communities and neighborhoods became “totally displaced.”¹⁸

All-black neighborhoods were a common occurrence throughout the country, but especially in the South, during Rains’s tenure as the chairman of the Special Housing Subcommittee. Many southern white leaders in this period maintained that southern blacks did not desire integration, even when faced with overwhelming evidence that proved the contrary.¹⁹ Nevertheless, some southern blacks did fear the potential effects of integration. Some black

¹⁷ Astrid Monson, “Slums, Semi-Slums, and Super-Slums,” *Marriage and Family Living* 17, no. 2 (1955): 118-22.

¹⁸ Paul R. Monson, “Racializing the Commonplace Landscape: An Archaeology of Urban Renewal along the Color Line,” *World Archaeology* 38, no. 1 (2006): 60-71.

¹⁹ Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 204-206.

leaders felt that integration would lead to white leaders abandoning public schools and public services, fears that would partly come true.

The federal agencies responsible for enforcing urban renewal programs and shaping policy were the federal housing administration (FHA) and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), following the passage of the Department of Housing and Urban Development Act in 1965.²⁰ There was explosion of interest and funding for urban renewal in this period. Senator Sparkman described the legislation as being “on a scale far exceeding anything ever attempted by our government.”²¹ Slum clearance became an accepted solution to revitalizing urban areas in this period. It was thought that slums (or ghettos, as they were often known) were an economic drain on American cities. They were also considered to be hotbeds of crime. By clearing these slums of residents, demolishing them, then allowing for the construction of new sites on the land, this would provide a noticeable benefit to cities and their residents alike. Slums were almost characterized as living creatures, draining a city’s resources and trapping residents in a cycle of perpetual poverty. The biggest issues surrounding slum clearance became the sites chosen for clearance, and where residents would be placed after the destruction of their homes.

Almost immediately, these issues took on a racial aspect. American slums became primarily associated with African Americans, and the removal of such became a rallying point for segregationists, particularly in the southern United States. Slum clearing and urban renewal

²⁰ Chester Hartman, Jon Pynoos, and Robert Schafer, ed., *Housing Urban America* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2013), 497. For more information on the history of the Housing and Urban Development Act of 1965, see: Richard Lawrence Guido, *The Creation of the Department of Housing and Urban Development* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1967).

²¹ U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Banking and Currency, Subcommittee on Housing, *Housing Legislation of 1966*, 89th Cong., 1st sess., 1966.

projects were often a thinly veiled attempt to further enforce the dictates of segregation, and slum clearance was described more accurately by African Americans as “Negro clearance.”²² After the tenants of a slum were evicted, they were often relocated to areas even further away from predominantly white neighborhoods and areas.²³ Besides this, multiple slums could be cleared out, with the residents of each all being made to move to one centralized, massive public housing project. Segregationists that supported these tactics were motivated by a simple geographic separation, but especially by the impact of that distance on zoning for schools.

This was merely one of a number of tactics used by segregationists following the *Brown v. Board* decision in 1954, which stipulated that racially separated schools were unequal and unconstitutional. Redistricting and slum clearance were perhaps the most effective tools wielded by segregationists in this period to further their cause. Clarence Mitchell, director of the Washington D.C. chapter of the NAACP during the 1950s and 1960s, was one of the more outspoken critics of these tactics, which he in no uncertain terms regarded as tools meant to target African American residents and force them from desirable areas. Mitchell felt that even mortgage and insurance disbursement was racially motivated, and described the process in this way:

Middle- and upper-income whites are moving into the suburbs. Negroes of all income levels are, in turn, moving into a limited amount of housing the whites leave behind. But because FHA-insured housing has a single, low-interest mortgage, the white home purchaser enjoys a low rate of interest. In contrast to him, the Negro homeowner usually falls heir to property on which a 50- to 60- percent mortgage (as contrasted to 80 percent FHA insurance mortgage) is the maximum. Since the Negro homeowner’s mortgage is not insured, the interest rate is universally higher than that on an FHA-insured dwelling.

²² Denton L. Watson, *Lion in the Lobby: Clarence Mitchell, Jr.’s Struggle for the Passage of Civil Rights Laws* (Lanham: University Press of America, Inc., 2002), 250-252.

²³ Robert C. Weaver, *The Negro Ghetto* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1967), 73-75.

And the Negro has to take junior mortgages, with their frequently high discounts and usually high interest rates.²⁴

Mitchell recognized that FHA practices were being used as a viable workaround to maintain segregationist practices in housing. In particular, he viewed the practice of slum clearance as the most destructive to African American communities. Slum clearance was seen as one of the more critical functions of the FHA as outlined by various housing acts from the 1950s onwards. Under federally mandated slum clearance programs, if an area was viewed as desirable for new construction, but already had tenants present in a building or neighborhood, those residents could be legally forced out. A stipulation for this removal was that the residents be provided with adequate public housing to replace the places they had been forced from. Additionally, displaced residents were eligible to qualify for loans or payment disbursements if it was felt they had not been fully compensated for the loss of their property.

Instead of providing adequate temporary housing and full compensation, displaced African Americans often got trapped in a system of overly high rents while simultaneously being blocked from access to affordable mortgage or insurance rates. Indeed, rent for African Americans was typically higher across the board for comparable properties than for white residents. Many banking institutions, privately and those intended to be sponsored by the FHA, were reluctant to grant mortgages to African Americans, and viewed the prospect as much more of a risk, even in the face of mounting evidence that African Americans were no more of a financial risk than whites.²⁵ Evidence for this fact is further expounded in other congressional

²⁴ U.S. Congress, Senate, *Statement by Clarence Mitchell, Director of the Washington Bureau of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People*, 84th Cong., 1st sess., 1956.

²⁵ U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Banking and Currency, Subcommittee on Housing, *Statement by Clarence Mitchell, Housing Amendments of 1953*, 83rd Cong., 1st sess., 1953.

hearings. It seems that the preponderance of evidence suggests that the supposed riskiness of granting loans and mortgages to African Americans was a myth:

The FHA annually makes a survey of all the large scale rental housing projects financed with FHA mortgages which reveals the vacancies, rent levels, turnover, etc., in each of these rental properties. The reports from the Negro projects in the Los Angeles area disclosed that there were fewer vacancies, higher rents and smaller turnover in those units than in comparable units in white neighborhoods. A typical remark by the owner of a 12-unit apartment in a neighborhood on the southwest side of Los Angeles which is in transition from white to nonwhite was, 'Our building has 100 percent Negro occupancy. Rent payments are prompt and we have a waiting list of prospective tenants.' A look at the rents makes this statement even more startling. The 1-bedroom units were rented at \$85 and the 2-bedroom apartments at \$110 per month, which was considerably higher than the rents for comparable units in white neighborhoods.²⁶

While FHA-subscribed segregation was incredibly detrimental, the most damaging by far was the practice of tenant relocation, in which residents could be forcefully removed if their house or apartment resided on land that had been designated for construction under the FHA loan system. Relocation effected African Americans at a far greater rate than white residents, and traditionally African American areas were often targeted for resident removal and "rehabilitation," which acted to essentially change the demographic of a site from primarily African American to exclusively white.²⁷

As a result of these practices and many more, the FHA was largely a negative force in the lives of African Americans during the 1950s-1960s. The biggest problem for African Americans, public housing, was a result of FHA's program of urban renewal. The process was often called "Negro removal," and low-income housing occupied by African Americans that was razed as a

²⁶ U.S. Congress, House, *Congressional Minutes from Housing Amendments, Projects Filled*, 83rd Cong., 1st sess., 1953.

²⁷ Arnold R. Hirsch, "Choosing Segregation. Federal Housing Policy Between Shelley and Brown," in *From Tenements to the Taylor Homes: In Search of an Urban Housing Policy in Twentieth Century America*, ed. John F. Bauman, Roger Biles, and Kristin M. Szylvian (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000): 206-225.

result of urban renewal was very rarely replaced completely. In Gwendolyn Wright's *Building the Dream*, she notes that "between 1949 and 1968, 425,000 units of low-income housing" was destroyed for redevelopment, and "only 125,000 new units had been constructed, over half of which were luxury apartments."²⁸ However, amidst this, the FHA did achieve some positive results, particularly in the expansion of affordable housing for the elderly and mortgage reductions for military veterans. The FHA has a complex history, and legislation often passed that went against federally funded studies designed to measure the effects of varying loan rates and housing construction. One example of such is the investor study on the benefits of housing integration, which found that housing integration was a measurable economic benefit to an area:

It usually will be found that sales activity is greater in racially mixed areas, especially in the low and moderate price ranges, and that the high effective demand among Negro buyers not only sustains price levels but often increases them.

Actually whether prices rise or fall depends upon the extent of the demand and the ability of the market to bid up prices, and has nothing to do whatsoever with racial characteristics. Generally speaking the Negro homeowner pays higher prices than his white prototype because his color restricts his field of operations.²⁹

The notable success of African American investors and integrated areas in general encouraged a rethinking in appraisal methods as well. New studies in the 1950s and 1960s found that integrated neighborhoods were in fact an economic boon to residents, and that it more often increased property values:

Right now a change is taking place in appraisal thought with respect to the opinion held on the effect of the infiltration or invasion of minority groups on white neighborhoods. Most appraisal texts treat the problem from the viewpoint of 20 years ago when it was commonly believed by nearly all that the presence of Negroes or other minorities in a neighborhood was a serious value-destroying influence. Appraisers were considered remiss in their duty if they failed to discover and report the presence of any minority member anywhere in the neighborhood of the subject property. Some appraisers kept

²⁸ Gwendolyn Wright, *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), chapter 12.

²⁹ U.S. Congress, House, *Congressional Minutes from Housing Amendments, Projects Filled*, 83rd Cong., 2nd sess., 1953.

maps outlining all the neighborhoods occupied by minorities for ready reference. This type of thinking is undergoing a change. There are many locations where such generalizations are no longer true.³⁰

In light of this evidence and more, common justifications by southern leaders such as Rains about the causes of disparity in the granting of mortgages and loans to African Americans proves incorrect. Rains, like other southern leaders, held on to older notions about the deleterious nature of integrated neighborhoods and legislated civil rights in general. During a 1963 hearing before Congress, Rains expressed his opposition to H.R. 7152, the Civil Rights Act, “in its entirety.” Rains described the legislation as “absurd,” the South as the country’s “traditional whipping boy,” Civil Rights demonstrators as being paid for “rolling in the street,” and that it was an attack on white voters and a victory for mob rule.³¹ It is no surprise then that housing legislation had mixed results for African Americans.

The results of these programs can be seen clearly in Rains’s own Gadsden, Alabama. Because of its unique history and the impact of Rains, the city is an excellent case study for these deleterious effects. During Rains’s tenure in Congress, Gadsden became an early supporter of FHA programs. Gadsden’s mayor during this period, J. H. Meighan, was fully on board with the implementation of housing programs in Gadsden. In a hearing before the Joint Committee on Housing in 1947, Meighan tells the committee, including Rains, that Gadsden was a unique case in regards to housing because of its “tremendous growth” during the 1930s and 1940s. In fact, between 1930 and 1940, Gadsden grew at a faster rate than any other city in the country, leaving

³⁰ U.S. Congress, House, *Congressional Minutes from Housing Amendments, Projects Filled*, 83rd Cong., 2nd sess., 1953.

³¹ U.S. Congress, House, Committee on the Judiciary, *Miscellaneous Proposals Regarding the Civil Rights of Persons Within the Jurisdiction of the United States, Part 3*, 88th Cong., 1st sess., 1963.

available housing “wholly inadequate.”³² Slums were cleared, large-scale renewal programs began, and public housing construction increased. Gadsden underwent a vast plan designed to modernize the city.³³ However, Gadsden remained deeply segregated, and likely became even more divided after these programs were initiated. So poor were conditions for African Americans in Gadsden that it became a hotbed for civil rights demonstrations and activity.³⁴

Gadsden remained one of the poorest cities in the region and was by some measures one of the poorest in the country in the latter twentieth century. FHA imposed segregation and restrictions proved to be an economic detriment, as resale value in integrated areas was higher, and markets generally more robust in neighborhoods that were both integrated and that were in areas that provided competitive loans to African American residents. This contrast is striking, but not necessarily surprising, and is perhaps the best evidence that the FHA was used by southern segregationists for this purpose; otherwise, natural market forces would have taken over and neighborhoods would have become more integrated (and thus financially healthy and economically desirable). This continued practice of refusing to grant loans and mortgages to African Americans (or residents in largely minority-owned areas) was known as redlining, and persisted for a number of years after these findings.³⁵

Thus, there is increasingly clear evidence that FHA programs were often used as a way to curtail the movement of African Americans into white neighborhoods, or even restricting their

³² U.S. Congress, House, Joint Committee on Housing, 80th Cong., 1st sess., 1947.

³³ Al Fox, “\$3 Million Urban Renewal Projects for City OK’d,” *Gadsden Times*, March 10, 1957.

³⁴ Frye Gaillard, *Cradle of Freedom: Alabama and the Movement that Changed America* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004), 157-162.

³⁵ Annelise Orleck, *Storming Caesar’s Palace, How Black Mothers Fought Their Own War on Poverty* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005), 210.

access to housing to such a degree that they were all but confined to one or two particular neighborhoods or communities. The fact that Alabama and Georgia both applied for more FHA housing programs, and sought more permissions for relocations, suggests that these FHA regulations were used as an expedient political workaround to integration legislation. Because of the leadership in housing of Albert Rains and John Sparkman, by 1957 Alabama had the second largest amount of FHA construction projects in the nation, lagging behind only Georgia, though Alabama was “ahead as far as actual progress” in planning.³⁶ Georgia had not yet qualified for federal funds to the same extent as Alabama.. By 1957, 17 cities in Alabama were participating in urban renewal, slum clearance, and public housing projects, more than any other states besides New York, Pennsylvania, and Tennessee.³⁷ The Southeastern United States, as a whole, had more planned and in process public housing projects than any other region of the country. As previously noted, African Americans were unequally targeted for being forcibly moved to these public housing units. In every instance noted in the records of congressional hearings and minutes, more African Americans were removed from a building or neighborhood than whites, most commonly at a rate of approximately 8-2.³⁸

These slum clearance projects had tangible results on African Americans and on continued segregation. Many African Americans were forced out of areas that had previously been either close to white areas or were partially integrated. African Americans from multiple different neighborhoods were then forced out into newly constructed public housing projects

³⁶ U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Banking and Currency, Subcommittee on Housing, *First Session on Urban Renewal and Other Housing*, 85th Cong., 1st sess., 1957.

³⁷ U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Banking and Currency, Subcommittee on Housing, *Statement of Nathan F. S. Porter, Executive Director, Huntsville Housing Authority – Urban Renewal in Selected Cities*, 85th Cong., 1st sess., 1957.

³⁸ These statistics are found throughout the Congressional Hearings on Housing from 1951-1964.

well outside of white areas.³⁹ The effects of this were initially twofold. This established clear boundaries between what were seen as white areas, and what were seen as African American areas. This further cemented housing segregation, to a more extreme degree than had been seen before the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. By forcing African Americans away from white areas, schools could legally remain segregated, as zoning laws came into effect.

One of the more common subjects in letters from constituents to Rains was disagreement over school integration, such as this example from 1964:

We at Pleasant Com (sic) would like to ask you if we might get new laws to help the school situation this law that allows the colored folks to go to the school of his choice also allows the small children of the grade school to pass up the smaller school and go on to the D.A.R. school the bus overcrowded with about 130 pupils on it while our small school don't have enough to operate our lunchroom.

(unreadable) not enough for two teachers when we should have 3, at the D.A.R. they didn't have room for them and had to set them up in the auditorium. This school is not the only one there are several more in this county in the same fit.⁴⁰

During this period President Lyndon B. Johnson recognized that there were continued issues in federal housing mandates. Johnson sought to partially alleviate the problem, and many others effecting poor Americans, through the passing of the Economic Opportunity Act in 1964. This act, part of the larger War on Poverty, was designed to provide jobs, increase access to affordable mortgages and loans, and create more affordable housing. Many in the Southeastern United States opposed the act, arguing that it was simply another form of federal tyranny and over involvement in state government. Others, in fact, viewed it as communistic and a threat to

³⁹ Alan Rabinowitz, *Urban Economics and Land Use in America: The Transformation of Cities in the Twentieth Century* (London, England: M.E. Sharpe, 2004), 141.

⁴⁰ Mrs. J. L. Brewer, letter to Albert Rains, February 14, 1964.

the American way of life. Perhaps the most common criticism in the South was that the Economic Opportunity Act was simply a vehicle for further implementing President Johnson's ambitious agenda regarding civil rights.

A letter from the Alabama State Chamber of Commerce to Albert Rains, July 21, 1964, encapsulates this argument:

The glaring fact that stands out above all others, however, is that the bill is nothing more than a method of implementing the Civil Rights Law... The 'Poverty Czar' in charge would have practically unlimited control of these funds. If a state didn't want any of this aid, the 'Poverty czar' could by-pass the governor, the state legislature, all local officials, and turn over the administration of these funds in that particular state to any group he might designate, such as NCC, CORE, NAACP, etc.

This combination of a Civil Rights monstrosity and election-year vote-buying gimmick must not be allowed to become law. We therefore urgently request that you write your representative asking him to vote against it. No amount of amending can make it acceptable – it must be completely defeated.⁴¹

These attitudes were not uncommon. One frequent criticism by residents who wrote to him was the apparent redundancy of some of the proposed programs, and how many of the services were supposedly already being offered to poor citizens. Many, especially in the South, thought that Johnson's War on Poverty was little more than a desperate gambit to garner more votes before another election cycle. Additionally, there was increasing fear that these War on Poverty would not just encourage communism and socialism in America, but that this was indeed a war to win Civil Rights. There was real fear throughout the South that if the War on Poverty was successful, white southerners would be strong-armed and forced to accept Civil

⁴¹ Alabama State Chamber of Commerce, letter to Albert Rains, July 21, 1964.

Rights legislation as well. Many of the programs intended to benefit Alabama had either been previously proposed or had already been implemented in some form or fashion. Labor still enjoyed a number of strongholds throughout the state. Increasingly, white voters in Alabama saw the specter of Civil Rights in any progressive legislation, and progressive representatives like Albert Rains had to acknowledge this specter any time it surfaced. A number of leading businessman and investors in the South (and Alabama in particular) saw the programs as entirely unnecessary, and fought against them strongly. One businessman who did this was Winton M. Blount, who expressed his opposition to the program thusly:

We would like to register our protest against this measure which is being ballyhooed as a major new effort to stamp out poverty.

This is hardly a package of new legislative ideas. Most of the specific programs authorized by the bill have been proposed before in individual bills. There are 12 distinct programs authorized in the bill – only 4 are entirely new and 3 of these are minor programs. The remaining 8 include 6 which were before Congress last year in separate bills and which represent liberalizing and expanding of existing programs. It is our sincere belief that this measure is more political than it is economic and that the war on poverty would be advanced much further by sound fiscal measures than by the puny attack the administration is advocating in this “Poverty Program”... We hope you will see this proposed measure for what it really is – political rather than economic – and can oppose its passage when it comes to a vote in the House.⁴²

Certainly, some recognized the Economic Opportunity act as another way to protect Civil Rights legislation, or at least as another vehicle for Civil rights law. Considering the amount of correspondence he received on the subject, it is without doubt that Rains was aware of the prevalence of this opinion in Alabama.⁴³

⁴² Winton M. Blount, letter to Albert Rains, 1964.

⁴³ Winton M. Blount in this period was a real estate and construction mogul based largely in Montgomery, Alabama. There, he and his family have built a number of parks. The most impressive of all is the Shakespeare festival, or Winton Blount Cultural Center for the arts. Rains’s lack of support for the Economic Opportunity Act and the War on Poverty in general is striking when considering his deep involvement with housing.

Another frequent criticism of the Economic Opportunity Act was the perception that it would provide “hand-outs” or “economic give-aways” that would harm American capitalism. Accusations of socialism and communism were common, and these were often associated with the Civil Rights Act as well. Perhaps ironically, many poor white southerners were some of the staunchest opponents of the Economic Opportunity Act, and certainly some of the most vocal. This is partly due to pre-existing, deep-rooted mistrust of government that was widespread among poor white Alabamians, a legacy of prior red-baiting, abuse of labor groups, betrayal by politicians, and poor whites that “became too consumed with race.”⁴⁴ Though the Economic Opportunity Act likely would have greatly benefited Alabama’s poor whites, it became inextricably to race and communism among that particular voting bloc, even in the more liberal areas of north Alabama.

Rains in this period received a tremendous amount of personal correspondence from white southerners in which they expressed their opposition on these grounds. Following is a fairly typical example:

Dear Congressman: I wish to voice opposition to the President’s Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 known as the Administration’s Poverty Program H.R. 11377.

A study of this bill shows that in practically every instance it is a duplication of existing programs that are being carried out at the present time. It is very vague and indefinite as to what its scope will be besides placing power to untold millions of dollars in the hands of individuals with no check or curtailment of authority by anyone.

Apparently this bill is a jumped up effort simply to make a large vote getting appeal to certain public elements.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Robert J. Norrell, “Labor at the Ballot Box: Alabama Politics from the New Deal to the Dixiecrat Movement,” *Journal of Southern History* 57, no. 2 (1991): 201-34.

⁴⁵ J.E. Boatwright, letter to Albert Rains, July 20, 1964.

Inundated with such letters, Rains nevertheless kept his opinions on the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 closely guarded. Opposition arguments typically centered on interpretations of the Economic Opportunity Act as thinly disguised communistic legislation, and thus a boon to organizations such as the NAACP. When the author of the above letter notes “certain public elements,” he is largely referring to the NAACP, SNCC, and other groups seeking social and economic change in Alabama.⁴⁶ Many in Alabama decried that funds from the Economic Opportunity Act were going to socialistic, civil rights organizations that did not represent the best interests of the state or its people. Even national and state representatives echoed these points. Alabama congressman John H. Buchanan made mention of “mounting evidence of involvement of subversive elements and of left-wing extremists in the antipoverty program.”⁴⁷

Despite extensive opposition, Albert Rains was one of only three Alabama congressmen to vote for the passage of the Economic Opportunity Act.⁴⁸ Though in correspondence he expressed misgivings about the involvement of Civil Rights groups in the legislation, Rains was ultimately a proponent of government spending, intervention, and large funding bills. Excluding the issue of Civil Rights, the progressive nature of the Economic Opportunity Act aligns with Rains’s housing legislation and prior voting record almost seamlessly. Thus, the Economic Opportunity Act and larger War on Poverty act as an excellent encapsulation of the difficult route laid out for southern liberals during this time, as seemingly straightforward progressive

⁴⁶ Susan Youngblood Ashmore, *Carry it on: The War on Poverty and the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama, 1964-1972* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 185-90.

⁴⁷ David Zarefsky, *President Johnson’s War on Poverty: Rhetoric and History* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1986), 144-148.

⁴⁸ “Vote Record for the Economic Opportunity Act,” accessed May 7, 2018, www.govtrack.us/congress/votes/88-1964/h201; Accessed: 8/28/18.

economic reforms were often superseded by the need to pay homage to prevailing anti-civil rights rhetoric back home. Many of Alabama's "liberal politicians" failed to navigate this treacherous course, and "fell casualty to racial politics."⁴⁹

Serving successfully for twenty years in Congress, Albert Rains successfully balanced his personal motivations and progressive ideology against a constituency that became increasingly suspicious of government intervention or aid. Rains supported segregation, slum clearance, urban removal, and historic preservation, and in ways viewed the three as inextricably linked. As chairman of the housing subcommittee, Rains was intensely interested in slum clearing projects in the northern United States, and openly wondered if such programs could be made to work in the south as effectively.⁵⁰ Additionally, his efforts to encourage urban renewal were in part what motivated his support of slum clearance policies. Many of these urban spaces primarily occupied by African American residents were seen as at risk, and thus had to be saved by federal government initiatives. Essentially, these spaces were seen by segregationist leaders as needing to be saved from African American residents, not saved for the benefit of all. Proclamations on the desperate need of urban renewal were merely justification for pushing out residents.

Albert Rains recognized at least some of the harm done by slum clearance and urban renewal programs, though his sympathy was not directed at those African Americans forced to move from their family homes or areas, but instead to what he viewed as a nationwide crisis of cultural heritage loss. Rains's later involvement with the committee on historic preservation, and his role in creating *With Heritage So Rich*, are a result of these views. He lamented the loss of hundreds of historical structures to the bulldozers spreading the wave of urban renewal across the

⁴⁹ Wayne Flynt, *Poor but Proud*, 354.

⁵⁰ U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Banking and Currency, Subcommittee on Housing, *Hearings*, 84th Cong., 1st sess., 1955.

country, but did not openly acknowledge his own role in making urban renewal possible. Thus, Rains played a central role in both making it possible for so many historic sites to be demolished, and then later making it possible to save and record the sites still standing.

Rains also served as a member of the House Committee on Banking and Currency, as well as the Joint Committee on Defense Production. As a member of both committees, in addition to his involvement with housing, Rains wielded an exceptional amount of influence. While Rains was a member of the Joint Committee on Defense Production, the percentage of the GDP devoted to defense spending fell sharply. While much of this decrease is because of military retraction following World War II, Rains did not strongly support increased military expenditures. However, Rains did support veterans, and worked tirelessly throughout his career to increase benefits, and provide low rent housing specifically for military veterans, though African American veterans still faced challenges.⁵¹ Another critical committee in which Rains wielded influence, the House Committee on Banking and Currency, was responsible in this period for all financial services, including banking, insurance, the issuance of loans, and securities. This committee was also deeply involved in the housing industry, and Rains used this connection with a deft hand to clear the way for his colossal housing bills by effectively aiding in the creation of investor-friendly loans, cheaper loans for home buyers, lower, subsidized rents, and banking regulation.⁵² Interestingly, immediately after Rains's tenure in Congress, the mirror committee in the Senate became known as the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs, making clear the connection between financial services and housing. Alabama senator John Sparkman was committee chair from 1966, the year after Rains's retirement from Congress,

⁵¹ Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company, 2017), chapter 3.

⁵² Jo Cox, "Rains Inducted into Hall of Fame," *The Etowah News Journal*, June 12, 1980.

to 1970. By the time of his retirement, Rains had “been the author of almost every Democratic housing bill for the last decade.”⁵³

⁵³ Bill Tarvin, “Legislative Accomplishments and Career of Rains Traced,” *Gadsden Times*, December 6, 1964.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the political career of Albert Rains provides a fascinating snapshot of larger southern attitudes during the period of 1945-1965. Rains was a central figure in the history of American housing and historic preservation, and these programs were effected by his southern influences. This twenty-year span saw a significant amount of change across the nation, but particularly in the South. Segregation in education was ruled illegal, and resistance towards Jim Crow policies in the South increased exponentially. The attitudes of many southern whites in this period were shaped by fears of uncontrollable change, and what they viewed as fundamental threats to their traditional ways of life. Thus, to combat increased efforts at integration, southern politicians sought alternative ways to further propagate segregation, particularly in the South. Rains moved in lockstep with his fellow Alabama politicians in voting against Civil Rights bills, and voted against all major Civil Rights legislation, including the Civil Rights Act of 1957, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Voting Rights Act. Rains made his opposition to Civil Rights legislation known in no uncertain terms. In a speech on the House floor, Rains “turned toward the members of the Northern bipartisan coalition” and “in a thinly veiled warning” asked them “do you know who sits on Appropriations Committees, who are chairmen of Appropriations subcommittees? They are not going to grant money for programs that are not for everybody,” saying that this would be done “in the name of instant brotherhood.”¹ During a 1957 hearing on proposed Civil Rights legislation, Rains described proposals for the establishment of an

¹ “House Approves Federal Aid Curb in Rights Bill: Rejects Attack on Plan to Cut Off Funds for Areas That Discriminate,” *New York Times*, February 8, 1964.

Executive Commission on Civil Rights as “anti-American,” and further went on to oppose the establishment of a Joint Congressional Committee on Civil Rights, longing to “see the day when this political football is kicked out of Congress for good.” He then categorized recommended Federal protection against lynching as “ridiculous,” stating “there is no need and no justification for antilynching legislation. This type of legislation is political demagoguery at its height.”² In a hearing before Congress about Civil Rights legislation and the desegregation of schools in 1959, Rains struck a similar chord. He said of a proposed increase of federal intervention in school desegregation, “we are told that if we integrate our schools by abandoning long established tradition and practice as well as hundreds of modern Negro schools built by white taxpayers, if we bring about chaos in thousands of communities and wreck our school systems for generations to come, if we do all of this we may obtain a little ‘technical aid,’ ...I call it unjust and unconstitutional and the citizens of Alabama who have for years now sacrificed white school buildings in order to maintain equal facilities and equal teacher pay for colored schools are not, I am confident, interested in this kind of ‘technical aid.’”³

The Appropriations Committees and subcommittees, occupied by many southerners, would not support programs that involved African Americans. Rains feared that his housing legislation would suffer as a result as well. Since segregation in education was illegal, though it would not be until the early 1970s when integration in education was widespread, FHA mandated housing relocation efforts provided new ways to ensure that African Americans did not gain access to white schools. Indeed, segregation in housing and the proximity of living

²U.S. Congress, House, Committee on the Judiciary, *Civil Rights Hearings Before Subcommittee No. 5*, 85th Cong., 1st sess., 1957.

³ U.S. Congress, Senate, Subcommittee on Constitutional Rights of the Committee on the Judiciary, *Civil Rights, Hearings Before the United States Senate, Part 2*, 86th Cong., 1st sess., 1959.

spaces actually worsened after the *Brown* decision in many areas in the South. A side result of relocation and the construction of public housing was the creation of areas that were almost totally comprised of African American residents. This relative isolation in turn made economic success more difficult as it made it much easier for banks to practice redlining, and many of these areas were seen as undesirable. It is important to remember that these areas were most often the areas that were unwanted by whites.

Amidst these feelings of being under threat, Horseshoe Bend National Military Park, like many other monuments of the period, became a poignant example of increased efforts to commemorate and memorialize white history. Though there is significant variation among these monuments, Horseshoe Bend was similarly a promotion of white southern history, and specifically a promotion of a white victory over a minority group (Native Americans). These connections were clear even in the original planning stages, and those involved were typically unabashed by the connotations. Thus, this period, and much of Albert Rains's political career, can be defined as largely reactionary to forces of social change that white southerners often felt helpless to stop. Housing, commemoration, and slum clearance were simply tools to preserve a way of life that had already been irrevocably changed.

Albert Rains serves as a touchstone for the effects of accumulated southern history and traditions on white southerners during the twentieth century. Rains embodied and manipulated the fears of the common white Alabama citizen of this period and reflected their fears and insecurities. Though he was particularly shaped by liberal ideals and progressivism that characterized Alabama's politicians during the first half of the twentieth century, Rains was fundamentally shaped by virulent segregationist traditions as well. In the same statement during a congressional hearing on housing that Rains identified himself as a "States rights Democrat,"

he also lambasted those who argued for less federal government spending, arguing that it was “the duty of every citizen in the United States” to “pay the national bill” for the collective good, and that states “won’t assume the responsibilities at the State level they should.”⁴ Indeed, if not for his opposition to civil rights and his support of segregation, Rains could have wielded even greater influence.

After the announcement of his death in 1991, the *Washington Post* wrote on Rains that “He was mentioned at different times as a possible candidate for Speaker of the House and governor of Alabama.”⁵ However, his support of segregation hindered his chances irreparably for Speaker, and George Wallace put an end to any chance he may have had at the gubernatorial office. The *Congressional Record* even states that at this time, “it would have been impossible for a Southerner to be elected to such a position.”⁶ By 1961, Rains was described as having “probably the most liberal voting record of any Southerner,” but many southerners considered him “too liberal.”⁷ Following the transformation of the Republican Party and widespread redistricting in Alabama, Rains felt his chances at re-election were remote, and he chose not to run again. Albert Rains never ran for any public office again, spending his retirement among his family, though he was still consulted by active politicians. He spent the remainder of his life as a staunch opponent to George Wallace, and what he saw as rampant political disruption, egotism, and division in Alabama politics. Rains, along with fellow liberal Alabama politicians Graves, Hill, Sparkman, Elliott, Folsom, and Hugo Black, “made Alabama one of the most liberal states

⁴ U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Banking and Currency, Subcommittee on Housing. *Housing Act of 1958*, July 7, 1958.

⁵ Richard Pearson, “Albert M. Rains Dies at 89; Was Alabama Congressman,” *Washington Post*, March 24, 1991.

⁶ *Proceedings and Debates of the 102nd Congress*, 102nd Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record* (1991).

⁷ “Speakership Controversy May Take Religious Turn,” *The Salisbury Times*, November 21, 1961.

in the union except on the issue of race.” An excellent example of this comes from the *New York Times* from 1964. Upon the announcement of his retirement from Congress, the *New York Times* described him as having “a mind that combines political and economic liberalism with keen practicality.” This is an apt description, though it belies the true complexity of Albert Rains; a man who embodied southern progressivism, economic liberalism, and segregationist policies for twenty years within the halls of Congress, during one of the most tumultuous times in national and Alabama politics.

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