
ALBERT GORE, SR., AND HIS PAPERS: THE SENATE COLLECTION

Tara Michele Mitchell
Middle Tennessee State University

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Gore served during several particularly trying periods in American history. He was the first Congressman to have a weekly radio program, broadcast locally on WSM radio. His was quite possibly the first official voice Tennesseeans heard after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. He enlisted shortly after war began, but President Roosevelt kept him in Washington, and in Congress. Later, as a Senator, Gore was one of the few southern moderates throughout the period known as the "Second Reconstruction," a difficult position to take in an increasingly volatile South. Gore was also one of the leading "doves" during the Vietnam War. He opposed American involvement in the war, but at the same time strongly supported American troops, including his own son, who fought in that war in which he did not believe.

The contributions Albert Gore made to Tennessee and the United States are numerous. A great supporter of the Tennessee Valley Authority, Gore was one of the Senators responsible for exposing the Dixon-Yates controversy, thus preventing the sale of TVA to private investors. Albert Gore authored the first Medicare bill, and led in the passage of progressive tax reforms, undone as he says, by President Reagan. Gore was the father of the Interstate Highway System, authoring the bill, overseeing its passage, and keeping a close watch on its implementation.

A highly successful Senator, Albert Gore would be the first to admit that he had hoped to be nominated for vice-president in 1956, and had presidential aspirations for the 1960 election. It is certain that the Senator took great pride in campaigning for his son Al in the 1988 and 1992 elections, and is delighted in watching him fulfill his duties as vice-president.

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invitation to extremism, which made moderation a hazardous political course."¹ While Gore voted against the Civil Rights Act of 1964, he supported every other piece of Civil Rights legislation from 1953 to 1970. His "no" vote came only after his amendment opposing cut-off of federal funds to schools and hospitals failed. As a former teacher and school superintendent, Gore felt he could not support legislation that would penalize children and the sick for bureaucratic failure to comply.

Because of his very vocal opposition to the administration's policies in Vietnam, Albert Gore became the primary target in the Nixon-Agnew "Southern Strategy." Using Gore's stand on Vietnam, Civil Rights, and Senator Dirksen's amendment on prayer in public schools, Republican Bill Brock and a well-financed campaign against Gore succeeded in unseating the incumbent Senator. As Gore remembers, he was "promoted to private life by a marginal error on the part of the people of Tennessee."² Senator Gore went on to become Chairman of the Board of Occidental Petroleum, although he has since retired from that post as well.

Upon leaving the Senate, Senator Gore sent his papers, official correspondence, and other memorabilia from his Washington career to his good friend, Norman Parks, then professor of political science at Middle Tennessee State University, Gore's alma mater. The papers began arriving in 1971. Unfortunately, for lack of facilities, the Gore Papers sat in filing cabinets, boxes, and mailbags in a room in Todd Library, inaccessible except to the bravest of researchers.

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In 1986, Professor James Neal in the History Department at MTSU, along with a graduate student, began the arduous task of putting some order to the jumble of papers. Luckily, the papers and correspondence were in their original folders, and Senator Gore and his staff had neatly labeled almost every folder. Once the information on the labels was put into the computer, a filing system emerged, giving some order to the papers, and some idea to the historical value they held. For the past two years, Neal, and his graduate assistants, and volunteers have been working to make the papers physically conform to the computer-generated list, to produce a finding aid to the various collections, and to make the collections more accessible to the general researcher.

Twenty-four series make up the Albert Gore Senate Collection. There are over fifteen thousand folders in the Senate collection alone, to say nothing of the papers from the Tennessee Commissioner of Labor and later U.S. Congressmen. More people have been shown these papers in the past year (1993-94) than in their first twenty at MTSU. They have been used by many professionals, by biographers of Lyndon Johnson and Armand Hammer, by authors of books and articles on everything from reciprocal trade to juke-box legislation, and by graduate students and professors from Tennessee and Kentucky to Colorado and England. Gore Research Center staff is particularly proud that over six hundred MTSU undergraduates have been exposed to the Gore papers.

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students are given packets containing constituent correspondence concerning an aspect of recent American history (usually Civil Rights or Vietnam), and asked to write a short essay on the issue involved, and discuss the arguments on both sides of the issue, ascertain Senator Gore's position on the issue, and give a brief personal opinion on both the issue and the assignment. Other professors have required their classes to attend an orientation session in the Gore Research Center where the students view various types of materials before researching topics for new term papers. The response from students and professors alike has been overwhelmingly favorable.

While some of the students are history majors who will go on to work in other archives and manuscript repositories, the vast majority are students taking American history because it is required. For the majority of these students it is their first and last trip of this nature, although there have been some repeat visitors. For instance, last fall a student in American history wrote his term paper on nuclear testing in the 1950s and 1960s in his home town of Oak Ridge. His findings were rather surprising, and have paralleled many items in the news as of late. He returned this semester, although he has already received his grade, to talk about his paper and the chance to do further research now that many more things concerning Oak Ridge have been revealed.

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