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The proliferation of football players-turned-physicians in Alabama suggests a correlation between the discipline, time management skills, and work ethic required from the sport and the profession.
The archives at Alabama State University (ASU) emphasize African American history and culture, with a focus related to the modern civil rights movement in Alabama. The ASU Boone Collection, an archive of items relating to Rev. Richard Charles Boone, sheds an important light on how a field director in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), the civil rights organization established by Martin Luther King Jr. and other activist ministers in 1957, worked to challenge racial discrimination in mid-twentieth-century America. SCLC field directors worked to implement SCLC programs in targeted communities identified by the organization’s leadership. The bulk of the collection is made up of materials related to Boone’s civil rights work with the SCLC throughout the South and with various civil rights initiatives in Montgomery. The collection consists of a large format photo album, several recordings and transcripts, and two cubic feet of papers. Boone, who was part of a cadre of freedom fighters introduced to activism while a student at Alabama State College (now ASU), worked on civil rights campaigns in various places throughout the United States and Alabama, including in New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Selma, Montgomery, Tuscaloosa, and Birmingham.

Correspondence included in the collection between Boone and the SCLC leadership illustrates how this student activist moved through the ranks in the direct-action wing of the movement. Teresa Baxley, in her 2009 ASU master’s thesis, *Richard Charles Boone: Montgomery Civil Rights Activist and Proponent of Nonviolence, 1960–1973*, describes how Boone worked for civil rights attorney Charles Conley as a student. It was through attorney Conley that Boone became familiar with the SCLC. In 1960 Boone joined the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), but like many college students introduced to the movement, he eventually migrated into Martin Luther King Jr.’s SCLC. In the SCLC, Boone worked as a field secretary on campaigns in Tuscaloosa and Birmingham. He eventually headed up his own campaigns as a field director in Selma and Etowah County. The Boone Collection also highlights the SCLC campaigns in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Chicago, Illinois; and Rochester, New York.

Early in the modern civil rights movement, activists began to organize around participatory democracy and sought ways that black people could realize an equitable voice in the political life of their communities. In March 1963 Boone began working in Selma for the SCLC to overcome obstacles to black voting rights. In the much-celebrated Selma to Montgomery march, Boone also spoke at churches and other...
venues to generate support for the marchers as they neared the capital city. At ASU he organized over one thousand students who agreed to leave campus en masse and join the marchers entering town from Selma.

After the passage of the Voting Rights Act, Boone was among a group of African Americans in Alabama who worked to pursue political influence outside the Democratic Party, the party of George Wallace and Eugene “Bull” Connor. For most of the twentieth century, the Democratic Party of Alabama operated under the symbol of a rooster and used the motto “White Supremacy for Right.” In 1968 Huntsville dentist John Cashion founded the National Democratic Party of Alabama (NDPA) as a wing of the Democratic Party. The political organization was created to offer minorities an opportunity to hold office and fully participate in the political process. The collection at ASU also features materials from Boone’s 1968 failed run for Congress, when he ran on the NDPA ticket in Alabama.

Additionally, the Boone Collection details developments in the late 1960s, during the waning days of the modern civil rights movement. In 1965 Boone objected to being reassigned to Chicago by the SCLC. He opted to stay in Montgomery and attack vestiges of racial discrimination in the capital city. He also worked through the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) on a number of projects. The collection reflects the MIA involvement in desegregating schools, the public library, and public parks. In keeping with the tradition of SCLC activists, Boone became an ordained Baptist preacher in 1967, and he was re-affirmed in the early 1970s by the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church. Boone’s civil rights work continued aside from the SCLC in the late 1960s.

Many in the MIA did not believe in street demonstrations and discouraged Boone’s brand of protest. He reacted by establishing the Alabama Action Committee (AAC) in 1967. Letters, newspaper articles, and flyers in the Boone Collection illuminate the interworking of the AAC. The collection also reveals the AAC’s attempts to compel stores on Dexter Avenue to hire blacks, allow black employees to handle money and manage white employees, and to treat their black customers courteously. The papers in the Boone Collection relating to the AAC chronicle the 1969 “Blackout,” a boycott of downtown Montgomery stores. The AAC’s publication, Voice of Action, shows how the AAC targeted police brutality, particularly in the 1969 police arrest and beating of Liege Richardson, a black disc jockey at WPAX radio.
For the entire decade of the 1960s, ASU students or former students were involved in civil rights demonstrations. The decade ended with Boone at the center of a demonstration on the ASU campus. This episode involved the firing of Alvin Homes, an instructor and records and registration employee. Boone, who was in and out of school during the entire decade, led a student demonstration and a weeklong takeover of the student union. In the aftermath, school president Levi Watkins closed the college and dismissed seven students, including Boone.

In 1970 Boone was arrested and convicted of conspiracy to commit arson. This episode began with him arranging for several young men from New York City to picket the WRMA radio station. Montgomery police accused the young people of attempting to set the Dexter Avenue station on fire. As they were approached, the men fled and refused to stop when ordered to do so. After giving chase, the officers fired and killed two of the picketers. The Boone Collection provides documentation of this episode, Boone’s subsequent arrest, and his seven-year sentence. During a year in solitary confinement, Boone penned his “toilet paper manifesto.” He served two years of his sentence before the case against him was dropped for insufficient evidence. After his release, Boone asked to be reinstated as an ASU student, and he received his degree in political science on June 4, 1972.

While the modern civil rights movement defined Rev. Boone’s life, the end of the 1960s did not bring an end to Boone’s engagement. Some civil rights activists adopted nonviolence as a practical strategy to address racial discrimination during the modern civil rights movement. Rev. Boone embraced nonviolence and social justice as his life’s mission. He continued his crusade for justice, picketing Morris Dees and the Montgomery based Southern Poverty Law Center in 1992, after Dees supported death penalty proponent Edward E. Carnes for Federal appeals court judge. Boone protested at Montgomery City Hall during a 2000 police brutality case, and he protested in opposition to the United States’s decision to go to war in Iraq. Rev. Boone embodied the principals of fairness, universal love, and justice, speaking out against the mass-incarceration of black men and the persistent poverty that stifles so many lives. The movement gave his existence meaning and his contributions, as chronicled in his collection, gave the city of Montgomery, the state of Alabama, and the United States itself an opportunity to embrace claims of justice, liberty, and equality more fully, as articulated in the nation’s founding documents.

During the last decade of his life, Boone worked closely with the National Center for the Study of Civil Rights and African American Culture, located at his alma mater. Through the center, Boone shared movement stories with local groups and with visitors from all over the world. The ASU archives maintains a videotaped oral history of Reverend Boone, and holds several recordings of his presentations, allowing people to listen in as Boone talked to college students and church groups, as he sang movement songs, and as he recounted the heroics of those little-mentioned personalities he encountered in the movement. Before the seventy-six-year-old Boone passed away in 2013, he played a key role in the National Park Service decision to locate the Selma to Montgomery March Interpretive Center on the campus of ASU. The center is slated to break ground on March 7, 2015.

Howard Robinson teaches American history at Alabama State University (ASU) and has served as the university archivist for ten years. He is a native of New York City, a graduate of ASU, and received his PhD in American history from the University of Akron. Louis A. Pitschmann, standing editor of the “Revealing Hidden Collections” department of Alabama Heritage, is Dean of the University Libraries at the University of Alabama and director of the Alabama Center for the Book, which co-sponsor this department.
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