

## Using Primary Sources in the Classroom: The Alabama Constitution of 1901 Unit

This lesson was created by educators working with the Alabama Department of Archives as part of the “[Using Primary Sources in the Classroom](#)” project in 1996.

### Lesson 1: A Map Can Tell a Story

#### Background information for teachers:

Both the vote to hold a convention and the vote to ratify the resulting constitution in 1901 were hotly contested, revealing sectional cleavages familiar in Alabama's history. The need for a new constitution to replace the 1875 "Redeemer Constitution" was sought by Alabamians with a variety of reform agendas, but the major issue came down to denying the vote to blacks in an effort to promote "honest elections."

In the vote to assemble a convention, the proponents drew their strength from the plantation Black Belt counties, garnering 61 percent of the statewide vote. Opposition was centered in the north Alabama hill country and the southeastern Wiregrass region where white small farmers feared losing their right to vote in the proposed "reform" constitution. Once the new constitution was promulgated and put to a vote, the opposition increased so that the [1901 Constitution](#) garnered only 57 percent of the statewide vote.

Again, the Black Belt counties -- home to most black Alabamians -- provided the margin of victory since a majority of votes in the rest of the state disapproved the new constitution. In ten of these Black Belt counties, more votes were cast in favor of ratification than there were registered voters -- reprising the accusations of vote fraud that had led to the demand for a new constitution in the first place.

#### Content Standards:

Alabama Course of Study: Social Studies (2010)

- 4<sup>th</sup> Grade
  - 1. Compare historical and current economic, political, and geographic information about Alabama on thematic maps, including weather and climate, physical-relief, waterway, transportation, political, economic development, land-use, and population maps.
  - 10. Analyze social and educational changes during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries for their impact on Alabama.
    - Examples: social—implementation of the *Plessey versus Ferguson* “separate but not equal” court decision, birth of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) educational—establishment of normal schools and land- grant colleges such as Huntsville Normal School (Alabama Agricultural and Mechanical [A&M] University), Agricultural and Mechanical College of Alabama (Auburn University), Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute (Tuskegee University), Lincoln Normal School (Alabama

State University)

- Explaining the development and changing role of industry, trade, and agriculture in Alabama during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including the rise of Populism
- Explaining the Jim Crow laws
- Identifying Alabamians who made contributions in the fields of science, education, the arts, politics, and business during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries
- 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Civics:
  - 5. Compare duties and functions of members of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of Alabama's local and state governments and of the national government.
    - Locating political and geographic districts of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of Alabama's local and state governments and of the national government
    - Describing the organization and jurisdiction of courts at the local, state, and national levels within the judicial system of the United States
    - Explaining concepts of separation of powers and checks and balances among the three branches of state and national governments
- 10<sup>th</sup> Grade:
  - 15. Compare congressional and presidential reconstruction plans, including African-American political participation.
    - Tracing economic changes in the post-Civil War period for whites and African Americans in the North and South, including the effectiveness of the Freedmen's Bureau
    - Describing social restructuring of the South, including Southern military districts, the role of carpetbaggers and scalawags, the creation of the black codes, and the Ku Klux Klan
    - Describing the Compromise of 1877
    - Summarizing post-Civil War constitutional amendments, including the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments
    - Explaining causes for the impeachment of President Andrew Johnson
    - Explaining the impact of the Jim Crow laws and Plessey versus Ferguson on the social and political structure of the New South after Reconstruction
    - Analyzing political and social motives that shaped the Constitution of Alabama of 1901 to determine their long-term effect on politics and economics in Alabama
- 12<sup>th</sup> Grade Government
  - 5. Compare specific functions, organizations, and purposes of local and state governments, including implementing fiscal and monetary policies, ensuring personal security, and regulating transportation.
    - Analyzing the Constitution of Alabama of 1901 to determine its impact on local funding and campaign funding
    - Describing the influence of special interest groups on

state government

### National Standards for History

- Era 5 Civil War and Reconstruction (1850-1877)
  - Standard 3: How various reconstruction plans succeeded or failed
- Era 7 The Emergence of Modern America (1890-1930)
  - Standard 1: How Progressives and others addressed problems of industrial capitalism, urbanization, and political corruption

### National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies

- Standard 2 – Time, Continuity, and Change
  - Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the past and its legacy
- Standard 3 – People, Places, and Environments
  - Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of people, places, and environments
- Standard 5 – Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
  - Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of interactions among individuals, groups, and institutions
- Standard 6 – Power, Authority, and Governance
  - Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of how people create, interact with, and change structures of power, authority, and governance.
- Standard 10 – Civic Ideals and Practices
  - Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the ideals, principles, and practices of citizenship in a democratic republic.

### Learning Objectives:

Upon completion of this lesson, students should be able to:

1. Identify various counties in Alabama.
2. Recognize voting patterns.
3. Discuss a possible link between the geographic areas of Alabama and political opinion.

### Suggested Activities:

1. Provide students with two [blank maps of Alabama](#) and two different colors of crayons or colored pencils and a copy of Document 1.
2. Ask the students to label each map as follows: Map A. Should a Constitutional Convention be Held? (April 23, 1901) Map B. Ratification of the Constitution (November 11, 1901)

3. Using one color ask the students to shade in the counties that supported the convention on map A.
4. Using the same color, ask the students to shade in the counties that supported the constitution on map B.
5. Using the second color, ask the students to shade in the counties that were against the convention on map A.
6. Using the second color, again, ask the students to shade in the counties that did not support the constitution on map B.
7. Allow students to point out the similarities and differences in the maps.
8. Use a map of the geographic divisions of the state. Are there patterns that can be noticed? How did the Black Belt vote? How did the northern portions of Alabama vote?
9. What conclusions or ideas can be drawn about the population of Alabama and the support of the constitution?
10. Allow the students to locate their county and discuss the opinions of their home areas.

**Primary Sources:**

[Document 1](#): "Votes by Counties on the Question of Holding a Constitutional Convention and the Ratification of the Constitution," Alabama Department of Archives and History, Official and Statistical Register 1903 (Montgomery: Brown Printing Co., 1903).

[Full Document](#): Primary Source located on page 141 of the original.