

***National Liberal,
Hometown Radical,
and
New
Populist
Politician***



The Life of Fred Harris

*By Amy L. Scott**

The Oklahoma sun scorched twelve-year-old Fred Harris's dirt-caked neck. He rolled up his sleeves, tossed a worn bag over his shoulder, and gingerly grasped another cotton boll. By 1942 Fred had worked the southern Oklahoma cotton fields for eight sultry summers, and he knew how to maneuver his fingers to avoid the stickers of the protective boll and separate the cotton. Whether hay-ing, milking cows, picking cotton, or following the wheat harvest from southern Oklahoma to South Dakota, young Fred had learned

to work hard. But Fred recognized that economic uncertainty—high risks and meager profits—constituted the only compensation of many hard-working Southern Plains farmers, and he dreamed of a different life. Fred had witnessed his father's struggle to eke out a living as a dry-land farmer on the edge of the Oklahoma Dust Bowl. He had managed to provide for his family, but just barely. Surely, young Fred thought, life promised more than simply surviving drought, dust, and crop failure in Walters, Oklahoma. He rubbed the sweat from his eyes, looked up to the sky, and prayed. "Lord, get me out of here."¹

Harris's life epitomizes the familiar Horatio Alger story of "the local boy makes good." Through three successive careers as a lawyer, politician, and university professor, Harris escaped the rural poverty and agricultural world of his boyhood. He has walked the halls of America's most prestigious institutions of government and education. He served in the Oklahoma State Senate, the United States Senate, chaired the Democratic National Committee, and twice—in 1972 and 1976—campaigning for the presidency. Upon leaving public office in 1973, Harris channeled his inexhaustible energy into a new career as a professor of political science at the University of New Mexico, producing eight scholarly books, editing eight others, and penning his first murder mystery, *Coyote Revenge*, in 2000.² The most compelling parts of Harris's story include his political transformation and personal growth during his eight years as senator, his battle to define debate on controversial national issues, and his tireless effort to extend political and economic equality to America's poor and minorities during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Except for passing mention in political monographs, most historians have ignored Fred Harris and his crusade for social justice. However, his personal and political transformation, from a liberal establishment senator who towed the party line to a progressive "New Populist" who voiced and voted his convictions, represents an astounding effort by a national leader to find inclusive methods for distributing political and economic power. Throughout his years of public service, Harris worked tirelessly to extend America's democratic dream to the poor, the working class, and ethnic minorities. Political pundits often referred to Harris's dream of uniting the working class across racial lines to oppose powerful corporate and governmental institutions as the wildest sort of political fantasizing.³ Harris believed strongly that if he raised the issues, average Americans, whom he believed capable of governing themselves,

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would catch his contagious dream for participatory democracy and forge a politics that promised political and economic equality to all.

As a young senator, Harris struggled to balance his ambition for high political office with his convictions that the federal government existed in part to help the poor. He also lived in a world of political pragmatism, where getting reelected directed the actions of many of his colleagues. In addition, he represented a state whose conservative constituency might have returned him to Washington indefinitely had he simply paid lip service to their social agenda and economic interests, but Harris stood his ground. He acted on his principles, claiming time and again in his folksy southern drawl, "Some things are just too basic to compromise on."⁴ Although his political and economic progressivism cost him dearly in his home state, where an indigenous brand of fundamentalist conservatism had ripened by 1972, Harris refused to waver from his liberal convictions.

Harris entered the senate as an establishment liberal with the attitude that "the best way to get along is to go along." Over the years, Harris matured into a fiery national leader who stimulated debate, pushed for progressive reforms, questioned establishment policies such as America's involvement in Vietnam, and suggested practical federal solutions to the problems of poverty, racism, and urban unrest.⁵ Over the course of his senatorial career, he molded his political and moral beliefs into a political platform he termed the "New Populism," and he zealously delivered that message to the nation during his 1972 and 1976 presidential campaigns.

Roots of a New Populist

Fred Harris was born November 13, 1930, in a run-down, two-room farm house near Walters, Oklahoma, a small farming community in southeastern Oklahoma located fifteen miles north of the Red River.⁶ His grandfather, a second-generation Mississippi sharecropper, had moved to Oklahoma Territory in 1908 in search of cheap land and economic independence. Harris's father, "along with the mortgage company," owned a small farm, but he barely survived the debt and crop failures that saddled most dirt farmers in 1930s depression Oklahoma. As a boy, Fred witnessed the fatalistic outlook of many Oklahoma farmers, the belief that their fate, influenced by both weather and farm prices, was beyond their control. However, Fred's father told a different story. In the tradition of the old-time Oklahoma populists and socialists, Fred B. Harris blamed his troubles on Republican bankers, powerful corporate interests,

and a federal government that tilted the scales in favor of the wealthy. Young Fred remembered his father standing on the sidewalk in front of the drugstore, Stetson hat pulled down to his eyebrows and hands shoved into the pockets of his faded jeans, preaching to fellow farmers about “the interests” and “the malefactors of wealth.” “Those damn Republican bankers are making more off your crops than you are,” he would rail. Within that power structure, Fred’s father claimed, a working man would never be able to get ahead.⁷

From the time that he was four years old, hard work proved a constant in Fred’s life. He worked his first paid job at the age of five, earning ten cents an hour to drive a horse in a circle to provide power for a hay bailer.⁸ Every summer for nine years, he trailed the wheat harvest from southern Oklahoma to South Dakota, and he also followed the cotton harvest onto the high plains of west Texas.⁹ Although he had time for few high school activities, Fred joined the high school debate team his senior year. There he displayed what would later become one of his strongest skills by winning the Future Farmers of America state championship for public speaking.¹⁰

Harris graduated from Walters High School in 1948 and entered the University of Oklahoma in Norman that fall. In the spring of his freshmen year, he married his high school sweetheart, LaDonna Crawford, a Comanche. Their jobs at the university—Fred worked in a printing shop and LaDonna as a library assistant—barely covered their tuition and living expenses. Despite working and attending school full time, they both joined student organizations that reflected their growing political activism. Fred ran successfully for office in student government, and LaDonna joined the university’s Native American organization.

Gifted with a fine mind, Harris breezed through undergraduate school, won admission to Phi Beta Kappa, and obtained his degree in political science and history in 1952. He entered the University of Oklahoma College of Law the next fall. LaDonna supported the couple while Fred concentrated on law school. In addition to earning the highest grade point average in the history of the College of Law, Harris won the coveted position of managing editor of the *Oklahoma Bar Review*. He also served as president of the Student Bar Association and worked as a research assistant for the dean of the College of Law.¹¹

During his first year of law school, Harris’s interest in government enticed him to take a friend to the balcony of the state legislature. He later recalled. “Well, we were both just fascinated by it. You

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know, it was just like watching a bunch of damned maggots working kind of a morbid fascination you know, watching the thing, and so on the way home I said, 'Goddamnit Charlie, there ought to be some way we can figure out how to stay around this place.'"12 Smitten with the political bug, Harris decided to act on his idea, he ran for a seat in the Oklahoma House of Representatives in 1954, the same year he graduated from law school and passed the bar examination. Although he lost the race, he made crucial connections with Oklahoma politicians and began to build a steady network of supporters.13

After law school, the Harrises moved to Lawton, Oklahoma, where he founded the law firm of Harris, Newcombe, Redman, and Doolin.14 He remained with the firm for eight years, but his real interest lay in attaining public office and pushing for progressive reforms. Harris's first chance for social activism occurred when Lawton's African-American population decided to integrate the town's public facilities. Racial segregation had defined a way of life in southern Oklahoma. In fact, blacks had not been allowed to live in Harris's hometown. However, the Lawton civil rights movement personalized the ugliness of contemporary racial policies and awakened in him a desire to fight social injustice. He and LaDonna marched in the protests and participated in the sit-ins that eventually helped to desegregate Lawton.

In 1956 Harris won a seat in the Oklahoma State Senate; at twenty-five, he was the youngest member of the Oklahoma legislature. Bill Sexton, a lawyer from Lawton and a friend of Harris's, recalled that political observers believed Harris planned to put in his time, build name recognition, and then run for national office. That may have been true. While driving to a celebration party in Norman after winning the Democratic primary in the 1956 state senate race, Harris told Sexton. "Well all of these congratulations are okay, but what I really want to be is a United States Senator."15

Nevertheless, Harris did more than bide his time in the Oklahoma Senate. From 1956 to 1964 he acquired a reputation as the "busiest and hardest working member of the legislature."16 As a member of the Oklahoma Senate, he built a positive record on civil rights by drafting and pushing through legislation that established the Oklahoma Human Rights Commission, whose goal was to investigate racial discrimination in state employment.17 He aided local farmers by co-authoring legislation that established the Oklahoma Wheat Commission and provided state tax exemptions for farmers. Harris had a progressive vision for Oklahoma's future, yet

he walked a political tightrope in the state legislature, sometimes supporting laws that favored big business and industry and at other times advocating progressive reforms that primarily helped working people. For instance, he favored lowering taxes for the state's oil production companies, but he also demonstrated his willingness to fight powerfully entrenched interests, regardless of the political risks.¹⁸ Harris cosponsored a bill designed to remove the responsibility for road maintenance from the often-corrupt county commissioners and place it under the jurisdiction of the Oklahoma State Highway Department. The controversial bill failed, and of its four cosponsors only Harris won reelection.¹⁹

On January 1, 1963, Robert S. Kerr, Oklahoma's senior senator in Washington, passed away, leaving his senate seat vacant.²⁰ Backed by the wealthy and influential Kerr family, Harris entered the race. In a primary run-off, he defeated the favored J. Howard Edmondson, Oklahoma's former governor, by 100,000 votes.²¹ Since the New



During Fred Harris's 1964 United States Senate campaign, LaDonna Harris rode in a float that listed her husband's qualifications for the seat (All photographs courtesy Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma).

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Deal, Oklahoma elections had usually been decided in the primaries of a largely Democratic state; in fact, the general election was often a cakewalk for whoever won the Democratic primary. However, after 1960 expanding industry and the volatile issue of civil rights fostered a growing conservatism in traditionally Democratic Oklahoma politics. In addition, in 1964 Harris faced a formidable opponent in Republican Bud Wilkinson, a University of Oklahoma football legend who had coached the Sooners to three national championships, a thirty-three game winning streak, and a forty-seven game winning streak. Wilkinson's name recognition hovered around 100 percent in Oklahoma. After a decade of dust, drought, and dependence on government subsidies, many Oklahomans believed they had little to be proud of, save their nationally dominant Sooner football squad.²²

Despite Wilkinson's name recognition, Harris gained the edge through his hard-driving, meet-and-greet campaign strategy. He crisscrossed the state, drove 30,000 miles, visited 858 Oklahoma towns, and shook hands with 150,000 people. Dressed in his dark blue, pin-striped suit, his black hair slicked back and parted straight down the middle, Harris walked the streets of each town he visited with a yellow legal pad in hand. He scrawled down the name of every person he met and placed a "yes" or "no" by their name. Afterward, he mailed the "yes people" fliers asking for their vote on election day.²³

In 1964 Harris had another advantage in that Republican Bud Wilkinson ran on the Barry Goldwater presidential ticket. Goldwater's hard-line stance on nuclear warfare and his vigorous attacks on social security payments alarmed many Oklahomans, costing Wilkinson crucial votes.²⁴ At that time Oklahomans had not yet been alienated from the Democratic Party by the divisive social issues of 1960s Great Society liberalism. Most remained New Deal Democrats. As a result, the folksy Texas manner of the Democratic presidential candidate, Lyndon B. Johnson, appealed to many Oklahomans. President Johnson's campaign trail passed through Oklahoma, and Fred Harris, who needed all the help he could get to defeat Wilkinson, stuck closely to the president's side. In an earlier meeting with Harris, Johnson had promised to assist the young candidate in the election, joking that "Old Bob Kerr would never forgive us if we let a Republican take his seat," but when Johnson arrived in Oklahoma he warned reporters that he would not take pictures with Democratic candidates or comment on the congressional races.²⁵ However, an anxious reporter pressed Johnson into dis-

cussing the senate race, and fortunately, Fred Harris, standing next to the towering Texan, was in the right place at the right time. Initially put off by the reporter's persistence, Johnson threw his arm around Harris, pulled him close, and performed for the camera. "I need Fred Harris in Washington. Send me Fred Harris, and together we'll charge hell with a bucket of water. We'll tack the coon skin on the barn door, and old Fred'll bring home the bacon." Harris later recalled that local television networks played Johnson's speech so frequently that "it became as familiar to Oklahoma viewers as *Gunsmoke*."²⁶ Oklahomans well understood Johnson's "down-home" promise of local pork-barrel politics. By a slim margin of 21,390 votes, they sent Fred Harris to the United States Senate in 1964.²⁷

"An Independent Democrat" Joins the Liberal Establishment

Fred Harris later joked that "Wilkinson was no hill for a climber." However, political analysts argued that he had slipped into the senate on the coattails of "Landslide Johnson," who defeated Goldwater by an overwhelming majority with 61 percent of the popular vote.²⁸ Harris adamantly disputed the charge that he was a "Johnson man." On his "Thank You Tour" of all seventy-seven Oklahoma counties, he assured his constituents that he would execute his office with sound judgment and independence. "I am an independent Democrat," he said. "I want to help the President where I can. Where I can't, I will just as vigorously disagree. I will be guided by my own conscience, and the views of our people at home. We are going up there and commence to build!"²⁹ Harris's words contained a certain irony for, as he matured politically and stepped into the spotlight of national politics, his conscience increasingly diverged from the conservative views of his Oklahoma constituents.

Harris fully intended to maintain his independence as a United States senator, but he quickly discovered that attaining seats on important committees meant cultivating relationships with powerful Democratic senate insiders, such as Richard Russell (Georgia), Russell Long (Louisiana), Hubert Humphrey (Minnesota), and Mike Mansfield (Montana). Harris realized that he faced reelection in Oklahoma in less than two years. Working within the senate's inflexible seniority system and towing the party line on major legislation, he finished out Kerr's unexpired term. Harris explained his first two years in the senate by recounting that Senator Russell once told him one could estimate the number of years left in a sena-

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tor's term by observing his posture: "If he's got six years to go, he's looking up, his thoughts away off somewhere. If it's about four years until he has to run again, he's looking straight ahead, and if he's in the last two years of his term, he's looking down, watching where he steps." Harris recalled that he arrived in the senate "looking down, and watching where I stepped." Given the proximity to election time, he was hesitant to speak out on controversial issues.³⁰

At the same time that he forged political ties with establishment senators and President Johnson—the Harrises frequently dined with President and Mrs. Johnson and watched movies with them at the White House—Harris also built close, personal friendships with his seatmates. He grew especially close to liberal senators Robert Kennedy (New York) and Walter Mondale (Minnesota). Harris and Kennedy both moved into the same McLean, Virginia, suburb, and their families often spent weekends sailing, swimming, and relaxing together at the Kennedy compound in Hyannisport, Massachusetts. Because he maintained friendships with Lyndon Johnson and Robert Kennedy, political pundits from the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* described Harris as an ambitious political tight-rope walker. To some extent, that was true. During his first term, he



President Lyndon Johnson met with members of the Kerner Commission, including Fred Harris (standing, fourth from left), in 1967. Committee chairman Otto Kerner sits on Johnson's right.

rarely spoke out on controversial issues. Instead, he learned the rules of the senate, read voraciously, and educated himself on economics, education, race relations, and poverty in America. By 1967 Harris's colleagues had nicknamed him "Mr. Science," and he won their respect through his tireless work on the Government Operations Committee and the Government Research Subcommittee.³¹

Leaning to the Left

Harris's hard work, his moderate stances on the issues, and his extensive grass roots campaign network in Oklahoma won him reelection in 1966 by a wide margin. As national issues began to heat up, and with six more years guaranteed in the senate, he jumped into the political fire. Harris had entered the United States Senate as a young, establishment liberal. As a "Johnson Man," he supported the president's Great Society and War on Poverty programs. However, Harris's second term from 1966 to 1972 spanned the chaotic fall of the postwar Democratic liberal consensus. It also witnessed the fragmentation of American society around the issues of race and ethnicity, poverty, urban unrest, and the Vietnam War. In addition, Harris's second senate term coincided with a critical transition in American politics. A majority of American voters rejected the proliferation of federal programs designed to achieve the liberal goals of racial and economic justice. They turned their backs on increased civil rights legislation, the Great Society, and the War on Poverty, demanding instead community control of social and economic issues based on the premise that local standards, not the federal government, should dictate public policy.³²

The polarization of the nation along lines of race and class, inner-city poverty, violent urban disorders, the Vietnam War, and voter rejection of federally sponsored social programs dominated national politics from 1966 to 1972. During his second term in Washington, Harris's political ideas evolved from his personal confrontation with those divisive issues. His work on the National Advisory Commission for Civil Disorders (Kerner Commission) especially influenced his move to the left and fueled his desire to initiate political debate on both racial policy and economic issues outside of the senate establishment. Harris later referred to his experience on the Kerner Commission as his "political watershed." At that point, like other young senators including Robert Kennedy, Harris began to doubt that the conventional liberal social programs instituted during the Kennedy-Johnson years, all programs he had supported, could ever erase the nation's existing social inequities.³³

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Appointed to the Kerner Commission in March, 1967, by President Johnson in the wake of four summers of destructive urban rioting, Harris closely studied the plight of America's increasingly rebellious urban poor. He concluded that a volatile mix of socioeconomic conditions had been brewing in inner cities since the early 1950s. Black migration to central cities and the preference of the white middle class for suburban living had created an urban geography of socioeconomic and racial segregation, homogenous, white, middle-class suburbs ringed decaying central cities peopled by minorities and characterized by poverty, crime, and unemployment. A wall of exclusivity surrounded suburbia, fortified by racially based restrictive covenants, discriminatory lending practices, and unspoken agreements between developers and homeowners that barred blacks from the suburbs.³⁴ Most low-income urbanites were confined to crime-infested slums with few public services, no jobs, and substandard schools. Meanwhile, upper- and middle-class suburbanites remained comfortably insulated on the suburban fringe, with access to trendy shopping malls, quality schools, and a booming job market.³⁵

Between 1964 and 1968, a succession of Great Society programs masterminded by the Johnson administration, and adamantly supported by most Democratic senators including Fred Harris, redefined the federal government's relationship to cities and the urban poor.³⁶ The most significant Great Society urban programs, Community Action and Model Cities, originated from the national liberals' belief that isolated pockets of poverty in inner cities resulted from political paralysis. Under the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, the Eighty-ninth Congress created the Community Action Program to force open local political structures and "empower the urban poor." By awarding grants to agencies independent of city governments and requiring "maximum feasible participation" of the poor in Community Action Programs, the Johnson administration tried to ensure representation of the poor in local affairs.³⁷

In most cities, the Community Action Program fell short of liberal planners' visions of participatory democracy. The program spanned the time period during which many African Americans, frustrated by the inability of liberal legislation to ameliorate joblessness, inadequate health care, and substandard ghettos, rejected the nonviolent, integrationist approach of the Civil Rights Movement. Many adopted a Black Power rhetoric and an ideology of separatism to achieve their hoped-for political and economic power.³⁸ As Harris learned during his research for the Kerner Commission,

black urban America, replete with racial segregation, police harassment, inadequate housing, and high unemployment, provided a volatile mix for an incendiary brand of black nationalism.

Conflict exploded in several cities when the poor and minorities challenged officials for control of Community Action boards. Some programs became forums for bashing local government and a base for radical opposition to local political leadership.³⁹ In response, mayors lambasted Community Action as “federally sponsored radicalism” deliberately designed to spark “class warfare.”⁴⁰ In the face of opposition from Democratic mayors and fearing a continuance of violent uprisings in black ghettos, President Johnson appointed a task force to devise a solution to the escalating urban problems of poverty and rebellion.⁴¹ Their answer emerged as the Model Cities Program. This innovative program, administered by city governments, combined physical rehabilitation and social programs to rebuild economies, transportation and healthcare systems, schools, housing, and recreational facilities in depressed “target areas.”⁴² The ambitious goals of Model Cities—to eradicate poverty and revitalize the slums of sixty-six cities—were not matched by an ambitious appropriation from Congress. The scheme drew only \$12 million for first-year planning and \$575 million to implement plans over a five-year period.⁴³ Under Fred Harris’s influence, Oklahoma received funding for two Model Cities programs, Lawton and Tulsa.

However, Model Cities was too little and too late to stop urban unrest and halt the demands for community control from inner city poor and minorities. The image of the city as a place of confrontation, violence, and lawlessness took on greater significance during the summer of 1967. From January to September, 164 civil disturbances and eight major riots occurred.⁴⁴ Black Power leader H. “Rap” Brown’s fiery rhetoric ominously predicted the mass destruction that swept Detroit in 1967 in the worst rioting in American history: “Black folks built America, and if America don’t come around, we’re going to burn America down.”⁴⁵ In July, 1967, nine days of rioting in Detroit resulted in forty-three deaths, 7,200 arrests, 683 buildings destroyed, and \$50 million of property damage.⁴⁶

The smoke still lingered over Detroit’s “Charcoal Alleys” when Fred Harris rose in the senate and requested that President Johnson nominate a “Blue Ribbon Committee” to study the causes of urban rioting. Just two days later, on July 29, 1967, Johnson responded by appointing the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders to investigate urban rioting and recommend a new direc-

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tion for federal policy. That evening Johnson named Fred Harris to the commission.⁴⁷

Throughout the commission's study, Harris walked the streets of burned-out ghettos in Detroit, Newark, Cincinnati, Chicago, Harlem, and Watts. He confronted the anger of young black men who refused to speak to him or shake his hand, and he struggled to comprehend the causes of the violence and disorder that had afflicted America's inner cities. Compelled to share the painful truth about the state of the nation's inner cities, Harris emerged as a powerful and persuasive voice on the commission, doggedly urging members to the unanimous conclusion that racism, powerlessness, and poverty had ultimately sparked the riots. The controversial March, 1968, *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, warned that without intensive federal government programs to eliminate discrimination, segregation, and economic inequality the rebellion of the inner-city poor would escalate. "Our nation is moving toward two societies," the commission concluded, "one black, one white—separate and unequal."⁴⁸

Harris's work on the Kerner Commission represented a turning point in his political career, his approach to social problems, and his style of leadership. Harris later likened his work on the commission to St. Paul's conversion experience on the road to Damascus. He observed, "I've got religion and I intend to spread it, because there are some things you just have to do."⁴⁹ Whereas before his work on the commission he had remained rather quiet on issues of race, economics, poverty, and the Vietnam War, afterward he dropped all pretexts of being a conservative or middle-of-the-road politician and confidently voiced his opinion on the controversial political issues of the day.⁵⁰

National Liberal or Hometown Radical?

After the Kerner Commission issued its widely publicized report, Oklahoma newspapers soon began to debate Harris's chances for reelection in 1972. Critical mail poured into his Washington office. Three Oklahoma City high school teachers blasted Harris's views on race. Their letter, which hinted at entrenched, racial attitudes and foreshadowed Harris's fight for reelection in Oklahoma, deserves to be quoted at length.

Our neighborhood WAS a Fred Harris neighborhood. We were for you, but that has changed. Our disillusionment began when you added your weight to the idea that we, as white racists, were to blame for the racial troubles that beset our nation. Have you ever heard white



As Hubert Humphrey (not pictured) gave his acceptance speech at the 1968 Democratic National Convention, Fred Harris, Lawrence O'Brien, and Walter Mondale listened intently as LaDonna Harris (facing camera) applauded a point.

groups shouting, "White is beautiful" or "White power"? I believe a person would have to be very dense not to see how practically all blacks condone the terrorist acts and violence committed by blacks. On the other hand, almost all white people severely condemn such acts committed by white people. No, Mr. Harris, we feel that you are most prejudiced and racist for blaming the white people in Oklahoma for Oklahoma's racial problems.⁵¹

Despite such sentiments from his conservative constituents, Harris adamantly defended his stance on race and the inner-city poor. "You cannot turn your back on the black people or the problem of the central cities," he told the *Oklahoma Journal*. "You cannot refuse to stand up for the poor or hungry without calling into question your reason for existing as a political party. If I can come to see these things, anyone can."⁵² The criticism Harris received from Oklahomans concerning his stance on race and federal aid to cities paled in comparison with the scathing attacks that followed his break with President Johnson's Vietnam policy in August, 1968. Before 1968 Harris had publicly supported Johnson's position, hawkishly declaring on the senate floor, "America shouldn't abandon its carefully chosen course in Vietnam and choose the dishonor and possible disaster of a surrender. All Americans know, deep down in-

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side themselves, that defending the course of freedom under adverse conditions is part of America's burden in leading the free world."⁵³

Harris has traced his leftward shift on the war issue to a March, 1968, meeting with Roger Hilsman, a presidential advisor who had traveled to South Vietnam and planned to suggest that Johnson de-escalate the war. After Johnson announced that he would not run for reelection, Vice President Hubert Humphrey asked Senators Harris and Mondale to co-chair his presidential campaign. Harris recognized that the antiwar movement had driven Johnson from office, and he pushed Humphrey to distance himself from President Johnson by calling for a bombing halt and a reduction of troops in Vietnam. Simultaneously, Harris networked with influential Democrats, pressing them to place a peace plank in the party platform before the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago.

Amidst disagreement over the war inside the convention hall and street heat from 10,000 antiwar protesters in Chicago's streets, the 1968 Democratic convention sounded the death knell of consensus liberalism. While antiwar protesters battled Mayor Richard Daley's police in the streets outside the convention hall, Democrats attempted to bridge the chasm between Eugene McCarthy's call for total withdrawal of American forces and the Johnson camp's insistence on continuing the bombing in order to protect American ground troops. The party compromised, declaring that the bombing should be halted under the condition that American ground forces would not be endangered.⁵⁴

Harris's hard work for Humphrey's campaign won him the chairmanship of the Democratic National Committee. When he assumed office in 1968, he inherited a party splintered by Vietnam and racial, ethnic, and generational divisions. One reporter called Harris a "daredevil," likening his bid for party leadership to a crash landing on the *Titanic*. Harris appreciated a challenge. He needed a forum outside the senate through which he could develop and articulate his new political strategy. As Democratic Party leader from 1968 to 1969, Harris concluded that forging inclusive socioeconomic policies provided the only means for overcoming social divisions.⁵⁵

Before the country could be united across racial and class lines, Harris believed, Americans had to deal with the most divisive issue of all, the Vietnam War. In the wake of multiple disasters for the Democratic Party in 1968 including the assassination of Robert Kennedy, Johnson's decision not to seek reelection, and the violence

at the Chicago convention, Harris publicly called for a de-escalation of the war, claiming: "We haven't got the men or resources to solve the mess in Indo-China."⁵⁶ He joined the October 15, 1969, moratorium—a nationwide antiwar protest in which more than 2 million Americans participated—by speaking at the University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma State University. He encouraged Oklahoma churches and synagogues to open their doors so that people might spend some "quiet moments of reflection and pray for peace."⁵⁷

Harris's outspokenness on Vietnam won him accolades from national political savants, who lauded his "folksy, down-home style," exuberance, and intellect, but it won him little praise in his home state. After Harris's moratorium speeches, he received a barrage of mail from frustrated Oklahomans who viewed his antiwar position as radical, cowardly, and unpatriotic. One man wrote, "I am 66 years of age and never in my life have I ever voted for a Republican. When you threw in with the hippies and yippies and that revolutionary gang that openly carry the flags of the leaders of communism and show their preference for our avowed enemies you absolutely lost me."⁵⁸ Another challenged, "Is it possible that you are going to join that awful group—Kennedy, McGovern, Fulbright, et al, who want the USA to be the first Free nation to surrender to a small uncivilized communist nation? Be a man, Senator—stand up for anticommunism."⁵⁹ Two constituents, who had voted the straight Democratic ticket for twenty-five years, mailed Harris a critical letter to which they had stapled their voter identification cards.⁶⁰ In addition, Oklahoma newspaper editors denounced Harris's stance on the war. Bill Wright of the *Skiatook News* wrote, "It seems strange that Senator Harris's wife works so hard trying to preserve our 'American Heritage' in her work for the Indians, when at the same time the Senator is apparently willing to give it away to the Commies."⁶¹

Harris bravely answered charges that he had misrepresented Oklahomans. He tried to counter speculation of his certain demise in the 1972 election by earnestly asserting that he had only followed his conscience. "Issues like these are way too basic to compromise," he stated. "If I didn't want to deal with them, I wouldn't have come to the Senate. But, you know, if you ever get away from what you think is right, you are in terrible trouble. You won't know what you stand for, and you won't be able to defend yourself."⁶²

In addition, Harris focused optimistically on the supportive mail he received, mostly from university students and constituents whose sons were fighting in Vietnam. He also clipped the positive

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editorials that frequently appeared in Oklahoma's African-American newspapers. A reporter for the Oklahoma City-based *Black Dispatch* wrote: "Almost daily we read in local newspapers 'he is not responsible to Oklahoma people' or 'he is okay on the national level but not for us.' Our senior senator by his record and any national poll is head and shoulders over anyone in the political arena from Oklahoma, yet we don't dig his jive. Tis said, 'A prophet is least recognized in his own home.'"⁶³ Ignoring banners that spelled out in bold red letters "Fred is Red" and "Shed Fred," Harris also took heart in the large crowds that attended his bimonthly speeches in various Oklahoma towns. He wrote in 1970 to economist John Kenneth Galbraith, "I had the largest crowds and the most enthusiastic reception I have had since I have been in the Senate, and I found a mounting impatience with the war and increasing sentiment in favor of our rapid disengagement from it."⁶⁴

Forging a New Populist Platform

Following 1970 Harris increasingly assumed a national profile. In a March, 1970, memorandum, he directed his staff to inform him of every opportunity "to appear personally before a Senate committee on all important matters or legislation which is of interest nationally." He also asked staff members for suggestions for major speeches on national topics, stating: "I should make at least one a month on an important national topic. Let's write the speeches first, and then I can find the forum, even if it's just on the Senate floor."⁶⁵

After 1970 Harris became much more active on the senate floor. He cosponsored progressive legislation such as the Ocean Mammal Protection Act of 1971 and the Federal Drug Abuse and Drug Dependence, Prevention, Treatment, and Rehabilitation Act of 1971.⁶⁶ In addition, when several elders and the cacique of Taos Pueblo in New Mexico visited him to explain their frustrating battle to regain 48,000 acres of tribal lands held by the National Forest Service, he promised them that he would "blast that bill out of committee and get it passed."⁶⁷ In fact, Harris led the effort to return Blue Lake to the Taos tribe. In a decisive senate floor fight with Senator Clinton P Anderson of New Mexico, who believed that returning Blue Lake would serve as a dangerous precedent, Harris convinced the senate of the spiritual significance of Blue Lake to Taos Pueblo.⁶⁸

An atmosphere of increasing hostility toward a burgeoning federal government bureaucracy, concern for a tighter economy and corporate restructuring, and the rise of widespread grass roots organizing for community control of political power and resources

characterized the political atmosphere of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Politicians seeking to capitalize on Americans' growing frustrations searched for a style of politics that would attract the wandering constituency of the New Deal Democratic coalition. In 1968 Richard Nixon had cashed in with his "Southern Strategy," by forming a tenuous coalition based on southern Democrats, working-class white ethnics, and conservative suburbanites. Simultaneously, Alabama governor and presidential candidate George Wallace had attracted voters with his old-style racist populism that derided "pointy-headed" intellectuals, unpatriotic student protesters, federal government bureaucracy, and establishment liberals; Wallace promised to return the power to govern to the white working man.⁶⁹

After the 1968 election, politicians on the left also saw promise in the radical political tradition of populism. Nixon's and Wallace's brand of populism proved conservative and exclusionary; left-leaning politicians sought a method for uniting the traditional Democratic constituency around a platform of progressive social reform. Many liberal-left thinkers viewed populism as the only way to overcome racial divisions and forge an inclusive participatory democracy that would unite the working class across racial lines in a mass movement to redistribute wealth and income.

In a July, 1971, *New York Magazine* article, "New Populist Manifesto," Jack Newfield, a political analyst and former speech writer in the Kennedy administration, eloquently laid out the ideals of "New Populism." As Newfield wrote, "Of all the political traditions of redemption available to us, Populism seems the best to synthesize the root need to redistribute wealth and the commitment to broaden democratic participation, a synthesis that could tie the poor and almost poor with the young into a new majority for justice."⁷⁰

Nineteenth-century populism, sustained by several decades of agrarian discontent, had called for a graduated income tax and government ownership of transportation and communications systems—railroads, telegraph, and telephone—in order to enhance the competitive position of the farmer in the marketplace.⁷¹ In that tradition, "New Populism" emphasized the obligation of government to intervene in the market to redistribute wealth. In addition, Newfield stressed that the New Populists had to move away from policies that favored African Americans over working class or poor whites. Such "color-coded" policies, liberal-left politicians concluded, emphasized divisive emotional issues instead of economic issues that concerned all working people.⁷² Instead of forced busing



Harris greeted several young supporters during his 1972 presidential campaign.

or policies such as Model Cities that benefitted a few inner-city neighborhoods, Newfield claimed that the New Populists had to fashion agencies and programs that “helped everyone, black and white, programs like national health insurance, a minimum wage law, income guarantees, and tax reforms that benefit blue-collar families.”⁷³ Newfield’s article outlined “six critical domestic problems” that might define the 1972 presidential election, in fact, the article resembled a presidential campaign strategy. Harris studied the article carefully and adopted several of Newfield’s tenets into his own “New Populist” platform.

After 1970 Harris became totally committed to finding economically sound solutions to help erase inequality in America. In fact, friends observed that instead of socializing at Washington parties, Harris often read economics books. As evidenced by a September, 1971, letter to constituents, he believed that traditional liberal socioeconomic policies were counterproductive. “Programs from

Model Cities to Community Action,” Harris wrote, “were based on the premise that the poor needed social services and guidance, rather than income and jobs. There is little evidence that the poverty programs had much impact on poverty. I don’t think we can wait to redistribute income.”⁷⁴

In late 1971 Harris articulated the foundation of his “New Populism,” explaining on the senate floor, “The old remedies to control inflation don’t work anymore. And they won’t work until we cut down the power of the big corporations to raise prices without regard to market pressures.” He introduced the Industrial Reorganization Act (1971), which proposed breaking up “shared monopolies,” defined by Harris as any industry in which four or fewer corporations controlled 70 percent of sales.⁷⁵ Harris also backed the National Welfare Rights Organization’s (NWRO) successful effort to kill President Nixon’s welfare-reform package. Had the package passed, Family Assistance Planning would have ended New Deal and Great Society public assistance by replacing Aid to Families with Dependent Children with a guaranteed income for the working class. Harris, who believed the subsidy amounts recommended by the Nixon administration punished single welfare mothers, held hearings in the senate during which members of the NWRO protested Nixon’s plan.⁷⁶ Harris saw Nixon’s plan as pie-in-the-sky political maneuvering that hurt the poor. He recalled a heated conversation with a senator who supported the plan.

I said, this may be intellectually stimulating for people like me and you, but by God you go into three welfare homes and see how they love it. Tell them that in order to get this wonderful intellectual principle through, they had to take a cut in welfare payments. Yeah, it’s a great start toward a wonderful system. Unfortunately, you all have to kind of take a sacrifice. Bullshit!⁷⁷

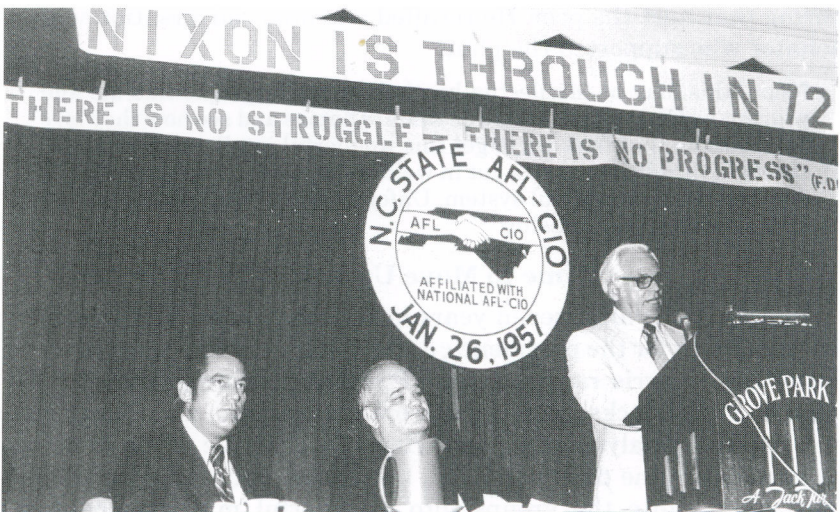
“Time to Move Up or Out”

In July, 1971, after seven years in the senate, Harris announced his candidacy for the presidency, declaring that it was “time to move up or out.” Harris ran on a New Populist platform, declaring his plan to unite blacks, blue-collar workers, farmers, and young people. Election analysts dismissed Harris’s idealistic plans to politically mobilize the disadvantaged, but Harris believed good leadership could unite the groups into a powerful majority coalition. “They don’t have to love each other,” he joked. “I wish they would. But it’s enough if they can just understand they have the same problems.”⁷⁸

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From the beginning, Harris stood little chance of winning. He entered the race late, with little name recognition, meager financial support, and no definitive campaign plan or style. In fact, Harris's style clashed with his New Populist platform. He chanted "No More Bullshit" at rallies and promised to "take the rich off welfare," but in order to impress the media, he chartered jets, threw expensive campaign parties, and rode to events in limousines.⁷⁹ Although political reporters credited Harris with raising the issues, most believed his style and image alone would keep him out of the White House. "Harris even looks like the heir of the Populists," wrote reporter Milton Viorst. "He parts his hair in the middle and slicks it down toward his ears. His inexpensive suits crumple easily. His fingernails still seem, metaphorically, to carry the dirt from his boyhood on a poor Oklahoma farm."⁸⁰ In addition, Harris's promises to raise taxes for the rich and break up monopolies alienated his financial backers, including a Wall Street investment banker who had promised to bankroll the early stages of his campaign.⁸¹

After accumulating \$40,000 in debt, Harris dropped out of the 1972 presidential campaign after only six weeks. He accepted a position at an international law firm in Washington D.C., and taught



During his 1972 presidential campaign swing through the eastern United States, Harris attended a meeting of the North Carolina chapter of the American Federation of Labor.



Harris greets an unidentified supporter during a 1972 campaign appearance.

a “New Populist Studies” course at American University. In 1972 he founded the “New Populist Coalition” to push for tax reform and end loopholes that fostered “capitalism for the poor and welfare for the rich.” Legal work, teaching, and public advocacy kept Harris busy, but he had not shed his political bug, and after a short time out of office he grew restless.

In June, 1974, upon hearing that Walter Mondale planned to run for president, Harris penned a letter to his old seatmate, offering campaign suggestions that emphasized the New Populist economic principles of tax reform, income redistribution, antitrust enforcement, and the dangers of government power. Realizing that he had developed both a powerful platform and a pragmatic campaign strategy, Harris never mailed the letter. Instead, he reworked it into a blueprint for his own presidential campaign.⁸² Harris had learned from his failed attempt at the presidency in 1972 that he needed a simple, yet definitive campaign style to match his hard-hitting New Populist platform. In “A Model 1976 Campaign,” originally the letter to Mondale, Harris outlined his plan for “a people’s campaign”:

The candidate must articulate in blunt language the real frustration that people rightly feel because of elitism, privilege, bigness, and concentrated power. No twelve point programs and new bureaucracies,

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A proud and beaming Fred and LaDonna Harris prepared to take their recreational vehicle "On the Road to the White House" in 1974.

but common sense steps to diffuse economic and political power more widely. No limousines and drivers for the candidate. He must campaign like other persons live. Buses, public transportation, coffees in homes, personal contact, staying in people's homes, no campaign jets and big staffs. A people's campaign will generate its own money.⁸³

Harris based his campaign on grass roots support. To raise money, he collected donations at rallies, encouraged supporters to hold garage sales, bake sales, and "Neighbors Night Coffees" across America.⁸⁴ Instead of renting headquarters in Washington, D.C., Harris moved two trailers into his backyard and ran the campaign from his home in McLean, Virginia.⁸⁵ To gain publicity, Harris drove a camper from Washington, D.C., to San Francisco during the summer of 1974 as part of his "On the Road to the White House" tour. During the tour Harris appeared at fifty-five picnics, rallies, and coffees. He even crashed a parade in a small Nebraska town, pulling his camper in directly behind the district's Republican representative to Congress.⁸⁶

Harris barnstormed the nation decrying the concentration of power in American government and business and advocating an "economic democracy." "A fair distribution of wealth and income and

power,” Harris proclaimed, “ought to be an explicit goal of government.”⁸⁷ He openly called for economic restructuring and distanced himself from Great Society liberalism.

The traditional liberal approach is to look at people who have nutritional problems and offer food stamps. What people lack is money—money which would allow them to solve most of their problems themselves. We are hampered by the “Scrooge Syndrome,” which still characterizes too much of traditional liberalism. every now and then we are shocked into taking a turkey to the Cratchits at Christmas, when decent wages all year long would have worked better.⁸⁸

Harris tempered his straightforward message, described by journalist Jules Witcover as “an unmitigated war on the individual and corporate rich and the special government privilege they enjoy,” with a down-home sense of humor. He entertained listeners while driving home his thoughtful critique about power and wealth in America. “President Ford even has a joke-writer on his payroll who makes almost as much as his chief economic advisor,” Harris would quip. “That may explain why when Ford makes a joke, it’s economic policy. And when he makes economic policy, it’s a joke.”⁸⁹

By December, 1975, *Washington Post* columnist David Broder reported that candidates Fred Harris and Jimmy Carter had assembled “the most envied personal organizations in the early primary and caucus states, and it appeared that Harris’s grass roots campaign might pay off.”⁹⁰ Harris delivered his message with emotion, and his focused stance on the issues attracted many supporters. But his grass roots campaign failed to establish the financial backing to sustain the effort; in the end, Harris was outspent. The New Hampshire primary, in which Harris captured only 11 percent of the vote, signaled that his 1976 presidential campaign and his national political career were drawing to a close.

After his second presidential campaign, Harris embarked on another career as a professor of political science at the University of New Mexico. Harris took a lengthy hiatus from public service, but occasionally served on a New Mexico state government committee. However, he devoted the majority of his time to teaching political science and government, traveling internationally, and producing scholarship on Congress, government, and international relations between the United States and Mexico. Harris eventually reentered state politics in New Mexico, recently serving as the state chair for the Democratic Party of New Mexico.

At the age of sixty-nine, Harris claims to prefer his peaceful Corrales home alongside the Rio Grande to the cacophonies of the

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political rat race. Instead of advocating New Populist reforms to redistribute wealth and power in America, he now writes murder mysteries set in 1930s Oklahoma. At a book signing for *Coyote Revenge*, his quick, gray eyes and loud infectious laugh reveal the energy, wit, and confidence reminiscent of a younger Fred Harris. His political fervor has cooled a bit, but as he recounts a conversation about his book, one does not have to look hard to see that Fred Harris will never bury his political bug or his populist Oklahoma roots. "There is one Republican in it," his friend said of the book. "Yeah, that's right—the banker," Harris replied, "but I killed him off on page one and set him on fire on page two."

ENDNOTES

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¹ Charles Mangel, "The Remarkable Mr. Harris," *Look Magazine*, March 18, 1969, 77

² Harris's nonfiction publications include *Locked in the Poorhouse: Cities, Race, and Poverty in the United States*, co-ed. Lynn A. Curtis (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999); *In Defense of Congress* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995); *Deadlock or Decision. The U. S. Senate and the Rise of National Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); ed., *Los Obstaculos para el Desarrollo* (Albuquerque: Office of International Technical Cooperation, University of New Mexico, 1991); *America's Government*, with Gary Wasserman (Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman/Little, Brown, 1990); *Quiet Riots: Race and Poverty in the United States*, co-ed. Roger W. Wilkins (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988); *Understanding American Government*, with Randy Roberts and Margaret S. Elliston (Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman, 1988); ed., *Readings on the Body Politic* (Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman, 1987); *Estudios sobre los Estados Unidos y su Relacion Bilateral con Mexico*, with David Cooper (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico, 1986); *America's Democracy: The Ideal and the Reality* (Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman, 1980); *America's Legislative Processes: Congress and the States*, with Paul L. Rain (Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman, 1983); *Potomac Fever* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977); ed., *Social Science and National Policy* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1970); *The New Populism* (New York: Saturday Review Press, 1973); *Now is the Time: A New Populist Call to Action* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971); and *Alarms and Hopes: A Personal Journey, A Personal View* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968). His books of fiction are *Coyote Revenge* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999), *Easy Pickin's* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), and *Following the Harvest* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004).

³ Tom Dearmore, "A Shout to the Vested Interests," *The Evening Star*, September 17 1971, Carl Albert Center, University of Oklahoma, Norman (hereafter cited as CAC).

⁴ Mangel, "The Remarkable Mr. Harris," *Look Magazine*, March 18, 1969, 79.

⁵ Quote from Fred R. Harris, *Potomac Fever* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), 77

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- ⁶ “Fred R. Harris: Biographical Information,” Box 287 Folder 6, CAC.
- ⁷ Fred R. Harris, *The New Populism* (Berkeley, California: Thorp Springs Press, 1973), 1, 143–146.
- ⁸ “Interview with Fred Harris: Run, Fred, Run!” *Oklahoma Monthly*, 1972, 63, Box 287 Folder 11, CAC.
- ⁹ Harris, *The New Populism*, 15.
- ¹⁰ Untitled document containing biographical information, Box 289, Folder 14, CAC.
- ¹¹ Resume of Fred R. Harris, March 21, 2000, in author’s possession.
- ¹² William Chapman, “Harris Calls 1960s Riots His Political Watershed,” *Washington Post*, December 26, 1975. A1.
- ¹³ “Interview with Fred Harris,” 64, Box 287 Folder 11, CAC.
- ¹⁴ Untitled document containing biographical information, Box 289, Folder 14, CAC.
- ¹⁵ Chapman, “Harris Calls Riots His Political Watershed,” *Washington Post*, December 26, 1975, A1.
- ¹⁶ *Oklahoma Journal*, October 27 1964, Vertical Files, Oklahoma Biography, Fred R. Harris, Tulsa City-County Library, Tulsa (hereafter cited as TCCL).
- ¹⁷ “Interview with Fred Harris,” 64, Box 287 Folder 11, CAC.
- ¹⁸ *Oklahoma Journal*, October 27 1964, Vertical Files, Oklahoma Biography, Fred R. Harris, TCCL.
- ¹⁹ Mangel, “The Remarkable Mr. Harris,” *Look Magazine*, March 18, 1969, 77–80.
- ²⁰ Library of Congress Congressional Research Service, memorandum, Box 287 Folder 6, CAC.
- ²¹ So confident was Edmondson that he would win the senate election that he stepped down as governor to enter the race.
- ²² Berry Wayne Tramel, “The Significance of Sports in Oklahoma,” in *The Culture of Oklahoma*, ed. Howard F. Stein and Robert F. Hill (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993).
- ²³ “Harris Does Things Young,” *Oklahoma Journal*, August 25, 1968, D1.
- ²⁴ William Chafe, *The Unfinished Journey: America Since World War II*, 3d ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 234.
- ²⁵ Harris, *Potomac Fever* 90.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 99.
- ²⁷ “Interview with Fred Harris,” 64, Box 287 Folder 11, CAC.
- ²⁸ Chafe, *Unfinished Journey*, 234.
- ²⁹ Bill Duncan, “Walters Boy Makes Good: ‘Freddie’ Returns Home,” *Oklahoma Journal*, November 24, 1964, Vertical Files, Oklahoma Biography, Fred R. Harris, TCCL; “Harris Hastily Establishes Operations on Capitol Hill,” *Tulsa (Oklahoma) World*, November 5, 1964, A18.
- ³⁰ Harris, *Potomac Fever*, 49, 72.
- ³¹ Ned Curran, “Harris Gathers Egghead Staff,” *Tulsa World*, August 14, 1966); “Harris, Fred R.,” *Who’s Who in American Politics, 1999–2000*, 17th ed. (New York: Marquis Who’s Who, 2000).
- ³² David Farber, “Democratic Subjects in the American Sixties: National Politics, Cultural Authenticity, and Community Interests,” in *The Conservative Sixties*, ed. David Farber and Jeff Roche (New York: Peter Lang, 2003).
- ³³ Chapman, “Harris Calls 1960s Riots His Political Watershed,” *Washington Post*, December 26, 1975, A6.

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³⁴ Between 1946 and 1959, black homeowners accounted for less than 2 percent of those financed through federal mortgage insurance. Jill Quadagno, *The Color of Welfare: How Racism Undermined the War on Poverty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 91.

³⁵ In August, 1965, rioting erupted in Watts, a south-central Los Angeles neighborhood with 30 percent unemployment and 60 percent of its residents on welfare, after police arrested a black man for driving while intoxicated. Six days of burning and looting ended with thirty-four dead, 1,032 injured, and \$40 million of property damage. The Watts riot drove home the bitter reality of social, racial, and economic polarization in 1960s urban America. Edward W. Soja, "Los Angeles, 1965-1992: From Crisis-Generated Restructuring to Restructuring Generated Crises," in *The City: Los Angeles and Urban Theory at the End of the Twentieth Century*, ed. Allen J. Scott and Edward W. Soja (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 430.

³⁶ For a discussion of federal urban policies see John H. Mollenkopf, *The Contested City* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), and Allen J. Matusow, *The Unraveling of America. A History of American Liberalism in the 1960s* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984). In 1960, forty-four federal programs for cities totaled \$3.9 billion; by 1969, 500 programs existed and annual appropriations ballooned to \$14 billion. Howard P. Chudacoff and Judith E. Smith, *The Evolution of American Urban Society*, 3d ed. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1988), 264.

³⁷ For a discussion of place-based urban policy see Dennis E. Gale, *Understanding Urban Unrest: From Reverend King to Rodney King* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1996).

³⁸ For discussion of the Black Power Movement see William L. Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon. The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-1975* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

³⁹ Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Maximum Feasible Participation* (New York: Free Press, 1969), 87

⁴⁰ Peter Marris and Martin Rein, *Dilemmas of Social Reform. Poverty and Community Action in the United States*, 2d ed. (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1973), 251.

⁴¹ Charles M. Haar, *Between the Idea and the Reality: A Study in the Origins, Fate, and Legacy of the Model Cities Program* (Toronto: Little, Brown, and Company, 1975), 45.

⁴² To avoid the controversies of Community Action, the program maintained a strong element of citizen participation in planning and implementation, but primary responsibility for implementing the program rested with mayors. By channeling funds through the mayor's office, the federal government avoided the appearance of national dictation of local policy, but in truth more than forty pages of federal guidelines structured the program. Robert A. Aleshire, "Power to the People: An Assessment of the Community Action and Model Cities Experience," in *Political Power and the Urban Crisis*, ed. Alan Shank, 3d ed. (Boston: Holbrook Press, 1976), 290.

⁴³ Marris and Rein, *Dilemmas of Social Reform*, 265.

⁴⁴ James Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 663.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 662.

⁴⁶ Kenneth Fox, *Metropolitan America. Urban Life and Urban Policy in the United States, 1940-1980* (New York: MacMillan, 1985), 152.

⁴⁷ The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders was called the Kerner Commission after its chairman, Illinois Governor Otto Kerner. Harris, *Potomac Fever*, 106.

⁴⁸ Fox, *Metropolitan America*, 152.

⁴⁹ Allan Cromley, "What Isn't Fred Up To?" (Oklahoma City) *Daily Oklahoman*, undated clipping, Box 177 Folder 40, CAC.

⁵⁰ Frosty Troy, "Maverick Harris Still Bucking the Tide: Has Found Personal Political Niche in Liberalism," *Tulsa (Oklahoma) Tribune*, October 18, 1969, A1.

⁵¹ Opal Ridenour, Nell Farrow, and Ruth Steele to Fred Harris, n.d., Box 210, Folder 13, CAC.

⁵² Harry Culver, "Harris Keeping His Presidential Options Open," *Oklahoma Journal*, May 17 1970, 17

⁵³ J. Bob Lucas, "Everyone Changes His Mind," *Tulsa Tribune*, October 24, 1970, A1.

⁵⁴ Allan Cromley, "Harris's Shift to Dovishness Began in 1968," (Oklahoma City) *Sunday Oklahoman*, October 19, 1969, A24.

⁵⁵ Mary Goddard, "He'll Pull the Double Load: Senator Harris a Political Workhorse," *Daily Oklahoman*, January 5, 1969; Harry Kelly, "Senator Harris 'Walks at a Run' To 'Rescue' Democratic Party," *Tulsa Tribune*, May 21, 1969.

⁵⁶ Chuck Ervin, "Harris Sees Tough Election in 1972," *Tulsa World*, December 12, 1970, B1.

⁵⁷ Alex Adwan, "Harris Holds to Viet Withdrawal View," *Tulsa World*, October 4, 1969, A1.

⁵⁸ Carl Raney to Fred Harris, February 23, 1970, Box 210, Folder 13, CAC. Harris sympathized with student protesters. Believing that change occurred more effectively within the governmental system, he tried to create a place for America's youth within the establishment through his Youth Participation Act (1968). Had it passed, Harris's legislation would have established the Office of Youth Participation within the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. The bill required that 50 percent of the staff be sixteen to twenty-four years old. Harris recalled that his daughter and her friends assisted him in authoring the bill. Noel Grove, "Harris Bill Urges Policy Voice for Youth," *Tulsa Tribune*, August 2, 1968.

⁵⁹ Lee Van Derlinder to Fred Harris, February 7 1970, Box 204, Folder 11, CAC.

⁶⁰ Bill and Joanne Smith to Fred Harris, May 14, 1970, Box 210, Folder 13, CAC.

⁶¹ Bill Wright, "Page Two Editorial," *Skiatook (Oklahoma) News*, May 21, 1970, 2.

⁶² Mangel, "The Remarkable Mr. Harris," *Look Magazine*, March 18, 1969, 75. Harris also stated: "Some people say I hurt myself politically on Vietnam. If that's so, don't think I did it because I'm dumb, because I'm ignorant. I want you to understand that I did it on purpose. When a man's conscience tells him what to do in matters like these, in issues of life and death, of war and peace, if he doesn't speak out for what he believes, he oughtn't hold public office." Lee Slater, "Is Harris in Trouble?" *Tulsa World*, January 11, 1970, A1.

⁶³ Jimmy Stewart, "Jimmy Says," (Oklahoma City) *Black Dispatch*, May 14, 1971, A13. Representative Ben H. Hill of Tulsa later said of Harris, "We Blacks thank God for him. He has stood for the things which would preserve us." "Tulsa Visitor Harris Speaks Out for Populist Government," *Tulsa World*, March 5, 1971.

⁶⁴ Fred Harris to Professor John Kenneth Galbraith, Professor of Economics at Harvard University, January 21, 1970, Box 190, Folder G, CAC.

⁶⁵ Fred R. Harris to Jim Monroe, March 4, 1970, Box 246, Folder 13, CAC. In the same memorandum, Harris coached his staff on speech writing: "I believe that the literary quality of our written efforts can be improved. Even a page and a half statement for the Senate floor should be carefully drawn because the record of it will stay forever. Apt quotations dress up statements a great deal, take it out of the ordinary and give it a literary flavor it otherwise would be missing. Look at the speeches of JFK and

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RFK on how to draft these statements and look at statements of LBJ, particularly his messages to Congress on how short declarative sentences can make the speech easy to understand and easier quoted.”

⁶⁶ Untitled document describing Harris’s stance on several issues, Box 289, Folder 14, CAC.

⁶⁷ Alex Adwan, “What’s Senator Harris Planning?” *Tulsa World*, December 6, 1970.

⁶⁸ Donald Parman, *Indians and the American West in the Twentieth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 153. Harris’s role in the return of Blue Lake has been ignored by historians who usually credit the Nixon administration.

⁶⁹ Simon Lazarus, *The Genteel Populists* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1974), 11.

⁷⁰ Jack Newfield, “A Populist Manifesto: The Making of a New Majority,” *New York Magazine*, July 19, 1971, 40.

⁷¹ “Populism,” in Howard Lamar, ed., *The New Encyclopedia of the American West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 899–901.

⁷² New Populist thinking on race and class drew on the ideology of nineteenth-century populists such as Tom Watson: “Now the People’s Party [the Populists] says to these two men [black and white], you are kept apart that you may be separately fleeced of your earnings. You are made to hate each other because upon that hatred is rested the keystone of the arch of financial despotism which enslaves you both. You are deceived and blinded that you may not see how this race antagonism perpetuates a monetary system which beggars both.” Ferenc Szasz, “United States Populism,” in *Latin American Populism in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Michael L. Connell (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982), 202.

⁷³ Newfield, “A Populist Manifesto,” 41.

⁷⁴ Press Release, September 2, 1971, Box 289, Folder 12, CAC.

⁷⁵ “FRH Introduces Anti-Trust Bill,” Box 289, Folder 14, CAC.

⁷⁶ Oklahoma newspapers reported that Harris was “playing pure politics” by opposing Nixon’s Family Assistance Plan. They claimed that he voted against it because he “just couldn’t stand the idea of Richard Nixon getting credit for this bill.” Mike Flanagan, “Harris’s War, Poor Stands Draw Fire,” *Tulsa World*, November 26, 1970, A1.

⁷⁷ Chapman, “Harris Calls 1960s Riots His Political Watershed,” *Washington Post*, December 26, 1975, A7

⁷⁸ David Craighead, “Program Airs Harris Views,” *Tulsa World*, July 28, 1971, A7

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Viorst also called attention to Harris’s southern Oklahoma drawl: “He puts the accent at the start of words like “insurance” and “United States.” He slurs the succession of syllables in “particularly” and “pollution.” Milton Viorst, “The Populist Campaign is Exciting,” untitled, undated clipping, Box 289, Folder 18, CAC.

⁸¹ Burl Hays, Harris’s executive assistant, told an *Oklahoma Journal* reporter “He had gotten the backing of a bunch of Eastern liberal fatcats. Then he came up with this plan for redistributing income and they backed out.” Enoch Needham, “Turbulent Years Coming to End for Harris’ Staff,” *Oklahoma Journal*, February 27 1972.

⁸² Harris, *Potomac Fever* 182.

⁸³ Fred Harris to Friends, “A Model 1976 Campaign,” June, 1974, Box 287 Folder 11, CAC.

⁸⁴ Harris, *Potomac Fever*, 194.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 198.

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⁸⁶ Ibid., 190.

⁸⁷ Untitled document that outlines Harris's 1976 Presidential Campaign Platform, Box 300, Folder 4, CAC.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Jules Witcover, "Fred Harris: Wooing the Left," *The Progressive*, January, 1976, 35-37

⁹⁰ David S. Broder, "Fulltime Candidates," *Washington Post*, December 14, 1975, F7