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“HER HERITAGE IS HELPFUL” RACE, ETHNICITY, AND GENDER IN THE POLITICIZATION OF LADONNA HARRIS

SARAH EPPLER JANDA

“What is it like to live in a tent?” asked Robert Kennedy’s five-year-old daughter, Kerry, when she met LaDonna Harris for the first time in 1965. LaDonna assured her that Indians no longer lived in “tents” and Kerry’s mother, Ethel, jokingly told LaDonna not to disillusion the child. LaDonna insisted that she wanted Kerry to have an accurate understanding of what Indians were like, to which Kerry responded by asking if she shot a bow and arrow.¹ The exchange speaks volumes about

the ignorance through which mainstream society viewed Native Americans, and mirrored many of Harris’s other experiences with the media, the public, and government leaders as she rose from humble origins in the Great Plains to national prominence as a leading advocate of Native American rights in the latter half of the twentieth century.

Harris helped to integrate Lawton, Oklahoma, in the early 1960s, founded Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity (OIO) in 1965, and established Americans for Indian Opportunity (AIO) in 1970. She also became the first congressional wife to testify before Congress as an expert on Native Americans, served on a litany of state and national committees focusing on everything from mental health and education to women and African Americans, and is the recipient of numerous awards for her humanitarian efforts. Her most significant work, however, remains in the area of Native American advocacy, and when LaDonna stepped down as executive director of AIO in 2002 it marked the thirty-second anniversary of the founding of the organization and a milestone in her lifetime of service.²

LaDonna was born in rural southwestern Oklahoma in 1931, and met with presidents

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ranging from Lyndon B. Johnson to Bill Clinton because of her expertise on Indian affairs. Her experiences as an "Okie," an Indian, and a woman in the Great Plains in the mid-twentieth century laid the foundation for her political identity and reveal a great deal about race relations and the gender constructs that she ultimately came to challenge.

BEING COMANCHE

From her earliest memories, elements of both Comanche tradition and mainstream white culture infused LaDonna's life. She learned to speak the Comanche language and became acquainted with Comanche traditions and culture while growing up in the care of her maternal grandparents, John and Wick-ie Tabbytite. Her grandparents had a farm on the land that they selected in the late nineteenth century as a part of the 1887 Dawes Severalty Act.³ While the Tabbytite family lived nearly thirty miles from the Comanche Nation headquarters in Lawton, Oklahoma, their farm was still considered a part of "Comanche Country." In fact, a sizable portion of what became southwestern Oklahoma had comprised the Kiowa, Comanche, and Apache Reservation until the U.S. government opened the land to white homesteaders in 1901, just six years prior to Oklahoma statehood.⁴ While the combined population of Kiowa, Comanche, and Apache Indians living in southwest Oklahoma in 1931 totaled only 5,500, the Native American population in the area managed to sustain a strong sense of community even in the face of such obstacles as allotment, continued dispossession of their land, and the Great Depression, which lasted from 1929 until American entry into World War II.⁵

For LaDonna and other Comanches who grew up in the Great Plains, the sense of belonging to a community underpinned what it meant to be Comanche.⁶ According to Morris W. Foster, "What is most conspicuous about the enduring enterprise of 'being Comanche' is the ability of a people to continue to associate with one another, not the preservation of a specific

territory, language, or social structure through which to do so," and LaDonna's recollections of her childhood bear out the significance of social interaction and extended kinship families to Comanche culture.⁷ Summertime for LaDonna meant an inundation of extended family in the home of her grandparents, and at Christmas her great-grandmother's house swelled with activity. LaDonna says this interaction made her close to all of her great-aunts, great-uncles, and cousins, who "were like brothers and sisters" to her.⁸ These connections were vital to the Comanche, among whom ethnohistorian Thomas W. Kavanagh found that the "nuclear family was usually not an independent entity but cooperated with others to form a bilaterally extended household."⁹ Both the interdependence of the group and the prevalence of extended kinship ties in Comanche culture can be seen in LaDonna's perception of her relationship to the world around her. For example, LaDonna credits her Comanche heritage with teaching her the importance of being a strong individual, not for its own sake, but for the good of the group. She also learned to value all life as sacred and intertwined.¹⁰

Despite LaDonna's sense of being connected to a larger community that consisted of extended family, fictive kin (those not actually related by blood but who were considered family), and the Comanche tribe, she still lived within the parameters of a poor, rural, predominantly white community. Negative stereotypes of Native Americans persisted among many whites living in southwest Oklahoma during this period. Foster argues that Comanches were viewed as inferior, lazy, and financially irresponsible.¹¹ As such, "they were essentially locked out of the Anglo economy" and "found themselves marked as a separate category of people in their interactions" with the white community.¹² Racism toward Native Americans left its imprint on LaDonna as well. She recalled one instance when a classmate called her and her cousin "gut-eaters," for which her female cousin promptly "whipped up" on the boy who made LaDonna cry.¹³ She had no idea that not everyone ate intestines, a traditional Comanche food,

and for the first time she found herself painfully confronted with what it meant to be different. That evening, when LaDonna tearfully told her grandmother about the incident, her grandmother cheered her up by telling her that white people ate mussels and crawdads.¹⁴ This of course shocked LaDonna. She learned to channel her hurt feelings and cope with anger, but she never forgot her early encounters with the prejudice she experienced growing up in the Great Plains. They stayed with her and later fed her determination to fight against discrimination. Early on, LaDonna drew on the lessons taught by her Comanche grandparents to make sense out of the world. In the critical process of identity formation, LaDonna encountered two important factors: first, being Comanche made her different; second, being Comanche provided a lens through which to view and give meaning to the larger world outside her tribe and beyond the Great Plains.

A PARTNERSHIP IS BORN

LaDonna met her future husband, Fred Harris, while attending high school in the small town of Walters, Oklahoma. While LaDonna “wasn’t very impressed with his physical appearance” at first, she eventually responded to his persistent overtures.¹⁵ He offered to run her campaign for turkey queen of Cotton County, and although she did not win, this local beauty contest marked the beginning of a partnership that lasted for over thirty years. After Fred Harris graduated from high school in the spring of 1948, he attended the University of Oklahoma in Norman. Ignoring the objections of their families, Fred and LaDonna married the following year, just before she received her high school diploma. The fact that LaDonna was half Comanche and Fred was white did not appear to be an issue with the young couple. Historically, many Indian women in the Great Plains had married white men, including LaDonna’s own mother, which speaks to the diverse and multicultural nature of the American West.¹⁶ In the broader context of this sort of regional identification,

LaDonna described herself as a “stoic Indian girl” and Fred as “poor white trash.”¹⁷ Shortly after their marriage, in the summer of 1949, they moved to Norman, and LaDonna became pregnant with their first child, Kathryn. In 1952 Fred graduated with his bachelor’s degree in history and political science, and remained at the university to study law for the next three years.

The partnership that began with LaDonna’s bid for turkey queen deepened considerably during Fred’s college and law school days. Early on, Fred developed the habit of sharing with LaDonna what he learned in his classes. It not only brought the two of them closer, it became a key study habit for Fred as he prepared for exams. This tendency to discuss his ideas and newly acquired knowledge with LaDonna established a trend that defined their relationship when Fred later became involved in politics. Their time in Norman also coincided with the emergence of the civil rights movement nationally and within Oklahoma, and awakened them to the extent of the profound prejudice against African Americans.¹⁸

PROMOTING CIVIL RIGHTS

That awakening arrived for Norman and for the Harrises during volatile challenges to segregation during the late 1940s and early 1950s.¹⁹ Norman was a notorious “sundown town,” where African Americans had not dared to stay after sunset for most of the town’s short history. However, in the mid-1940s a handful of African American students, with the help of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), began challenging Oklahoma segregation laws. The 1896 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which laid the legal foundation for segregation by allowing that separate but equal facilities could be provided for blacks and whites, came under increasing fire both in the nation at large and in Oklahoma in particular. According to Oklahoma law, anyone of African descent was recognized as “negro” or “colored” in the state constitution. All other

people fell into the category of "white."²⁰ This language not only set up significant prejudice against African Americans, it underscored the ambiguous status of Native Americans in the state.

As a result of lengthy court battles fought by the NAACP, George W. McLaurin became the first African American admitted to the University of Oklahoma Graduate College in 1948.²¹ In the summer of 1949, just a few months after Fred and LaDonna Harris were married, Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher became the first African American admitted to the University of Oklahoma School of Law.²² When Fred and LaDonna made their first home together in Norman that same summer, racism still infested the town on the heels of forced integration of the graduate college. Living in Norman in the early 1950s, LaDonna became aware of racism in a way she had not fully appreciated before, through the daughter of the principal of the black school in Norman, who babysat for her daughter Kathryn. One afternoon, LaDonna saw her babysitter standing outside a movie theater protesting racial discrimination. She then realized that people she knew were participating in the battle against segregation, that it was more than a distant phenomenon or a headline in a newspaper.²³

Around the Great Plains and across the nation, there was nothing subtle about racism toward African Americans. In a 1941 attempt to head off desegregation, the Oklahoma state legislature made it a misdemeanor for blacks and whites to attend schools together.²⁴ The implication this law had for Native Americans proved less clear. Oklahoma had, after all, been the site of many Indian reservations prior to statehood in 1907 and boasted a significant population of Native Americans from many tribes. Like people from other parts of the Great Plains, many native Oklahomans who identified themselves as "white" had retained quaint stories of Indian ancestry. And yet, while the discrimination against Native Americans did not follow the same conspicuous pattern as that against African Americans, it still served the same function. When

LaDonna watched African Americans challenging racism in Norman she began to relate it to her own experiences. She remembered an occasion as a young girl in Walters when the Native American children were separated from the white children for purposes of immunization. Recalling that incident, she now had a larger framework of racial discrimination within which to place both her experiences and those of African Americans, and the blatant manifestations of racism against African Americans soon fostered within her a deeper understanding of prejudice.²⁵

Yet Harris's recognition of the similarities in racism toward blacks and Indians were not always shared by others. In fact, one problem with the emerging dialogue on racism in the mid-twentieth century was the tendency to view racism strictly in terms of black and white. More often than not the quest for civil rights signified an effort to end discrimination only against African Americans rather than against all ethnic and racial groups suffering from oppression. Connections between the struggle for equality by various groups did increase in the 1960s and 1970s, but there remained a powerful tendency among whites and many African Americans to view racism through a lens that omitted other people of color. That tendency grew out of a historic tendency in the United States to view whiteness and blackness as opposites, which in turn made the status of Native Americans unclear. Blacks were perceived as a threat and therefore the source of white loathing during much of American history (and particularly in the mid-twentieth century), while Indians grew ever more invisible until becoming almost mythical tokens of old Wild West imagery.²⁶

Fred and LaDonna took an important step toward challenging those stereotypes when Fred graduated first in his class from law school in 1954 and he and LaDonna moved to Lawton, where he began practicing law. Although they left Norman behind, their introduction to racial tension and the struggle for civil rights had prepared them for the social challenges they chose to confront in southwest Oklahoma.

Some of those challenges were highlighted in the same year that Fred graduated, when U.S. Supreme Court Justice Earl Warren handed down the unanimous decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* deeming the doctrine of separate but equal “inherently unequal” and calling for the desegregation of public schools.²⁷ Yet integration came slowly and not without considerable effort by grassroots activists.²⁸ Although Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher and other African Americans had gained entrance to the graduate college at the University of Oklahoma, the undergraduate school was not integrated until 1955, not long after the ruling in the *Brown* case.

Indeed, cities all across the United States struggled with the tumultuous process of securing basic rights for African Americans. In 1956, over ninety southern congressmen signed the Southern Manifesto, which condemned the *Brown* decision and pledged to fight desegregation. The following year, President Dwight D. Eisenhower sent soldiers from the 101st Airborne Division to Central High in Little Rock, Arkansas, in order to protect nine African American students who attempted to enroll in the previously all-white school. Racial tensions teetered on the brink as federal troops were sent into the South to enforce federal law for the first time since Reconstruction. Fortunately, the Little Rock situation did not escalate into a second civil war, but much of the country held its breath in the face of such dramatic racial turmoil. The civil rights movement swept the nation and polarized its citizens over the issue of equality.

INTEGRATING LAWTON

Influenced by that movement and by demonstrations they witnessed in Norman, Fred and LaDonna Harris brought a sense of purpose with them to Lawton and eventually worked with others in their new community to fight racism and integrate the city. In September of 1963, a small group of about thirteen people composed of African Americans, whites, and Native Americans in Lawton began meeting to discuss

strategies for integrating the city.²⁹ According to local civil rights activist Maggie Gover, “the idea of a meeting came from a group of women who had been getting together for lunch to mull over what was happening and what might be done about it.”³⁰ These meetings generally took place on Wednesday nights at the home of one of the members. LaDonna Harris was one of the founding members of what came to be called simply “the Group.” She recalled how their meetings “grew like magic,” and said that “we would have a covered-dish supper and then talk about the issues and integrating Lawton, particularly restaurants.”³¹ In a 1965 brief history of the Group, members described it as a “dis-organized organization” with no constitution, by-laws, charter, membership roster, or anything else that signified an official organization.³² Intent on maintaining the informal structure of their organization, the members took turns leading the meetings. Dubbed the “Honcho,” or “Head Honcho,” the leader of the meetings changed from one week to the next. LaDonna Harris explained, “Everybody had to chair it [the meetings] so there wouldn’t be any fighting for leadership.”³³

According to the Group’s own history, the purpose of the organization was to “make Lawton a truly integrated community.”³⁴ Their first meeting established that African Americans “felt alone in their efforts to secure equal opportunities” and that they had no “desire to demonstrate or engage in violent actions.”³⁵ The significance of that first meeting can be seen through an examination of how the Group proceeded from that point forward. Significantly, the organization brought together people from a variety of ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, which allowed its members to share their experiences and learn from one another. The Group described its membership as including “business men, civic leaders, NAACP officials, educators, clergymen, labor officials, military men, civil service personnel, and just plain folk.”³⁶ Equally important to the diversity of the Group was their desire to find a peaceful solution to the problem of discrimination and segregation.

The Group began compiling a list of all of the segregated restaurants and other establishments in Lawton, and then "black and white members would visit a segregated facility together."³⁷ In fact, this list "actually determined the Group's method of operation" because if a given establishment "was determined to be segregated" then "one of the persons in The Group who knew the owner or proprietor would try to convince him that he should integrate."³⁸ While the Group found this approach to be "successful in most cases," LaDonna Harris recounted an all too common response from proprietors of businesses who seemed not to grasp the inherent inequality of segregation.³⁹ One woman who owned a diner not far from Fort Sill said, "'Well, if we don't want to eat with Negroes, why do they want to eat with us?'"⁴⁰ Nevertheless, the Group made a number of important advances toward securing greater civil rights.

Grassroots activism in Lawton, as in thousands of communities across the United States, did something legislation alone could not accomplish: it quite literally set out to change one mind at a time through dialogue and interpersonal relationships. Less than three years after the formation of the Group, Lawton's only black doctor, E. A. Owens, who served as the president of the Lawton NAACP chapter in addition to being a member of the Group, asserted that "by personal contact about 95% of the public accommodations were opened to all."⁴¹

Ultimately, the struggle to achieve an integrated Lawton spanned many years and encompassed the efforts of numerous individuals, of which Fred and LaDonna Harris were only two. By the time the city confronted its "most dramatic episode" in the integration effort, involving Lawton's only amusement park and swimming pool—the aptly named Doe Doe Park—Fred and LaDonna Harris had already entered into a much wider social and political arena in the nation's capital.⁴² The role played by LaDonna Harris in the integration of Lawton and the way African Americans viewed her, however, foreshadowed LaDonna's later humanitarian efforts to protect the civil rights of people nationally as well as internationally.

THE AMBIGUITY OF ETHNICITY

The commitment of Fred and LaDonna Harris to civil rights is obvious. Far more ambiguous, however, is the perception of both Fred and LaDonna's ethnicity, which reveals the fluidity of contradictory notions of ethnicity in the Great Plains.⁴³ Some people thought Fred Harris was Native American because of his dark complexion and his affinity for Comanche culture. At times LaDonna Harris was clearly identified as "Comanche" or "half Comanche." Yet, in the context of African American struggles to gain equal access to public facilities in Lawton, LaDonna's ethnicity seems conspicuously invisible at times. For instance, "a black businessman in Lawton" said Fred and LaDonna "were among the first white people to join" African Americans in the effort to integrate Lawton. The man added that "LaDonna picketed with us. We trust these two."⁴⁴ While these comments were intended to be complimentary, they clearly designated Fred and LaDonna as outsiders, albeit trustworthy outsiders. Similarly, Betty Owens, another African American who was at the center of Lawton integration efforts, also remembered Fred and LaDonna as "among the first white persons involved" with the Group.⁴⁵ The implication is not that these two African Americans were unaware of LaDonna's Comanche heritage, but rather, that juxtaposed against their own racial identity amid the volatile civil rights movement, LaDonna seemed white. Their own sense of "blackness" and "otherness" clearly differentiated them from LaDonna.

To further complicate the issue, by the early 1960s LaDonna belonged to a white upper-middle-class "ethnicity" of sorts. As Fred's political career grew by leaps and bounds (he served for eight years in the Oklahoma Senate and was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1964), both Fred and LaDonna increasingly became a part of the "whiteness" that so many African Americans found themselves defined against. At a time and place in which the very words "civil rights" and "equality" primarily signified the fight to end the oppression of black America, the light-skinned

beauty from Comanche Country who grew up to marry a senator, live in the suburbs, and have three children, was indeed caught between ethnicities. One of the most powerful contributions of the later American Indian Movement came in the form of reinventing, redefining, and reasserting Indianness.⁴⁶ Because this had yet to happen and because civil rights connoted a black struggle, the token status of Native Americans persisted. That Fred and LaDonna Harris were nicknamed “Freddie and the Indian” by one of Fred’s colleagues in the state legislature underscores the tokenism so indelicately apparent in the status of American Indians in the mid-twentieth century.⁴⁷ Had Fred Harris been married to an African American woman instead of a Comanche woman, there can be little doubt that “Freddie and the Negro” or “Freddie and the Colored Woman” would have been viewed as neither quaint, charming, nor unthreatening.

“FREDDIE AND THE INDIAN”

The public relationship of Fred and LaDonna Harris became one of the defining characteristics of Fred’s political persona because of the centrality of LaDonna in her husband’s career. Fred’s involvement in politics began as a college student when he joined the Young Democrats chapter at the University of Oklahoma. He even ran for the Oklahoma state legislature while still in law school. He lost in that first attempt but won the 1956 election and became an Oklahoma state senator. Fred remained in the Oklahoma state senate until 1964 when he left to fill a U.S. Senate seat after the death of Robert S. Kerr.⁴⁸ Fred always included LaDonna in his political career and she became a crucial asset. This young pair from rural Oklahoma ultimately became one of the most prominent political couples of the period. Just as Fred had discussed his coursework with LaDonna while studying at OU, he also shared his work in the state legislature with her. Both described their marriage as one in which they shared everything with each other and were each other’s best friend. While making LaDonna an integral



FIG. 1. LaDonna Harris on the phone during Fred Harris’s bid for the U.S. Senate in 1964. Courtesy of LaDonna Harris, President of Americans for Indian Opportunity.

part of his political career seemed natural to the two of them, it raised more than a few eyebrows and did not come without criticism from friends and colleagues alike.⁴⁹ Kathryn Harris remembers a Lawton neighbor being “very critical” of LaDonna for being so involved in Fred’s career and for not being home more often.⁵⁰

After Fred’s election to the Oklahoma state senate, LaDonna frequently joined Fred on the senate floor, sitting by his desk. Both were in their mid-twenties when Fred took office, making them considerably younger than the politicians with whom they interacted, and LaDonna felt that her assistance made Fred appear more mature.⁵¹ However, as the only senate wife present, it took people time to adjust to her unusual presence. LaDonna explained that she would watch people to determine what role she could play and how best to act, and in the state senate she solved this problem by serving as a hostess until eventually people grew accustomed to seeing her there. She poured drinks, emptied ashtrays, and ironically

acquiesced to conventional assumptions about women's roles while simultaneously challenging them.⁵² Her very presence on the floor of the state senate stood in stark contrast to perceptions of the proper role for women in general and political wives in particular. Yet by acting as a hostess she played a traditional female role in a nontraditional setting. She offered a further challenge to gender assumptions when photographed on the senate floor while very noticeably pregnant with her second child, Bryon. When the picture appeared in the most widely circulated newspaper in the state, the *Daily Oklahoman*, Fred Harris remembered it causing considerable grumbling about the inappropriateness of her being in the senate offices in such a delicate condition.⁵³ Perhaps equally troubling to Fred's colleagues was the fact that LaDonna sometimes joined them for after-hours socializing. LaDonna related an incident in which she accompanied Fred to a restaurant to meet several of his colleagues. The other men brought their mistresses, rather than their wives, making LaDonna's presence particularly disconcerting.⁵⁴

LaDonna did, however, do more than simply spend time on the senate floor and play hostess to her husband's colleagues. She actively campaigned for her husband in both the 1956 election and in his successful bid for reelection in 1960. In 1962, when Fred unsuccessfully ran for governor of Oklahoma, LaDonna figured prominently in his campaign literature. Her visibility seems noteworthy because of the particular aspects of LaDonna's life that were emphasized.⁵⁵ Here was a woman who fulfilled both traditional female roles as a "devoted mother and housewife," but who also involved herself in supporting programs for "Indian progress" and provided "the woman's view" on a host of issues to her senator husband.⁵⁶ The gendered imagery used to project both the public and private attributes of LaDonna Harris seems significant given that the campaign literature emphasized precisely those things that were intended to give Fred and LaDonna the greatest appeal.

While it was not that unusual to see the wives of politicians campaigning for their husbands

and acting as unofficial staff, LaDonna surpassed this sort of "helpmate" status relatively quickly. In fact, by the end of the decade Fred had become her helpmate in many respects. She utilized his staff, and on several occasions he responded to correspondence for her. The senator made good use of his wife's talents as well. He received numerous invitations to serve on state committees and organizations and could not possibly accept them all. On occasion, Fred sent LaDonna in his place, and this arrangement opened the door for LaDonna to develop her own political identity. When the Southwest Center for Human Relations at the University of Oklahoma invited Fred to participate in a weeklong seminar on civil rights, he could not get away and asked LaDonna to attend instead. Fred told the sponsors of the seminar that he would support whatever LaDonna said and that they would basically be getting two for one by having LaDonna in attendance.⁵⁷

AN ACTIVIST IN HER OWN RIGHT

While attending the civil rights seminar, LaDonna grew disturbed by the exclusive focus on discrimination against African Americans.⁵⁸ Not once did she hear anything about Native Americans. LaDonna tried to raise this issue but could not find the words to express how she felt. She finally burst into tears of frustration after someone told her that there were no Indian problems in Oklahoma because the Bureau of Indian Affairs took care of them.⁵⁹ She and Fred had always worked so closely that they spoke as one; unfortunately for LaDonna, it was with Fred's voice. In his absence, LaDonna realized that if she wanted to make people understand Indian problems she would have to find a way to articulate her concerns. She still saw herself as a stoic Indian girl and had grown comfortable with Fred acting as their voice and she as their intuition.⁶⁰ Over time and with a lot of practice, she became more comfortable speaking to groups of people and her frustration became an asset once she learned to channel her strong feelings into action.



FIG. 2. *The Harris family in 1967. Left to right, Laura Harris, Fred Harris, LaDonna Harris, Kathryn Harris (Tijerina), and Byron Harris. Courtesy of LaDonna Harris, President of Americans for Indian Opportunity.*

The visibility of LaDonna in Fred's work, such as her attendance at the civil rights seminar, her presence on the senate floor, and her campaigning, continued to draw attention from supporters as well as critics. However, the criticism regarding her visibility in his career at the state level paled in comparison to what they faced in his bid for the U.S. Senate. Some of the old guard from the Robert S. Kerr camp told Fred there was "too much LaDonna" in his campaign.⁶¹ When Fred gave speeches he typically said, "LaDonna and I did such and such" or "LaDonna and I think this or that." For he and LaDonna this seemed a logical outgrowth of their close relationship; they shared so much that it became second nature for Fred to include her in his speeches.⁶² And, despite the

objection by some that LaDonna played too big a role in Fred's political career, others praised their teamwork.⁶³ One newspaper commented, "Even in a town where husband and wife teams are no novelty, the young Fred Harris (both only 34) stand out as one of the smoothest working combinations to come along."⁶⁴

On the surface LaDonna appeared in many ways to be a traditional wife. Shortly after Fred became a U.S. senator, LaDonna criticized congressional wives who were absent from campaign functions: "If she's campaigning with him, if she's standing right back of him, if she's sharing with him, then she's being a real wife. That's what I am and am going to continue to be."⁶⁵ Her daughters, Kathryn and Laura, were flabbergasted years later when they came across an old

interview in which their mother said she did not help her husband make any decisions and that she just supported him. Laughing, LaDonna explained, "I was smart enough to know what the general public expected of me at that time."⁶⁶ LaDonna Harris was not exactly the "typical" stay-at-home wife and mother. Early on she developed a keen interest in politics and a desire to work on behalf of oppressed people. Some of her Lawton peers even wondered how the Harris children would turn out given their mother's flurry of political activity.⁶⁷ As Laura Harris explained, her mother was not a "milk and cookies" kind of mom.⁶⁸ Instead, both Fred and LaDonna Harris and those who knew them best in this critical period have described their marriage as a full partnership in every sense of the word.⁶⁹ LaDonna became crucial to Fred's career, as he would to hers.

IN THE NATION'S CAPITAL

When Fred and LaDonna moved from Lawton to Virginia to be near the nation's capital in the mid-1960s, they were catapulted into a very different world than the one they left behind in Oklahoma. Suddenly they found themselves socializing with President Lyndon B. Johnson and his wife, Lady Bird Johnson. They became good friends with their neighbors, Sen. Robert Kennedy and his wife, Ethel, after LaDonna met Ethel at a Senate Ladies Club function. Fred and LaDonna also made friends with Vice President Hubert Humphrey and his wife, Muriel, as well as Sen. Walter Mondale from Minnesota and his wife, Joan. Fred and LaDonna soon were socializing with a veritable "who's who" of Washington politicians. One journalist described Fred Harris as "the only person in Washington who could have breakfast with Lyndon Johnson, lunch with Hubert Humphrey, and dinner with Robert Kennedy."⁷⁰

Socializing aside, Fred faced many demands as he settled into his new job, and LaDonna confronted a new set of expectations as the wife of a junior senator. She had three children to raise and at times felt unprepared for the

social expectations placed on congressional wives. She had no desire to become "a painted backdrop" as she described some of the Senate wives.⁷¹ By this point in her life, LaDonna wanted to work on behalf of Native American rights, not attend social functions with other congressional wives.⁷² She still struggled to verbalize her passionate feelings about helping Native Americans as she and Fred adapted to their life in Washington.

LaDonna wanted Native Americans to maintain cultural autonomy and to have greater access to mainstream economic and social opportunities. The tension between the preservation of heritage and opportunities in a dominant society later manifested itself in the founding of Oklahomans for Indian Opportunity (OIO).⁷³ The issue of Indian identity, embodied in the tension between participation in mainstream society and cultural autonomy, permeated both government discourse on Indian assistance and the manifestation and articulation of "Indianness" in society at large. The seeming contradiction between maintaining Native American traditions while functioning in dominant society posed a considerable challenge to Indian rights advocates. LaDonna Harris dismissed the idea that a contradiction existed or that Native Americans could not do both. Instead, she involved herself in mainstream politics and community issues while identifying herself as a "wild Comanche" and working for Indian causes.⁷⁴ Despite her own conviction that one could exist in both worlds, it indeed posed a tremendous challenge for her to help others do the same. "I was lucky," Harris recalled. "Somehow, I learned to make it in both worlds—the white and the Indian."⁷⁵

ROMANTICIZED INDIANNESS IN GREAT PLAINS MYTHOLOGY

Stereotypes of Native Americans further aggravated the struggle to reconcile participation in dominant society with the preservation of cultural identity. At the same time as the founder of OIO embraced her heritage and promoted the entrance of Indians into the

mainstream, she also confronted the simultaneous ignorance and fascination that characterized much of America's perceptions of Native Americans. After all, Fred and LaDonna's relationship could have been the basis for any number of Western films set in the Great Plains in which a white cowboy and beautiful Indian fall in love. As a child, Fred and LaDonna's son, Byron, often told people that his dad was a cowboy and his mother was an Indian, capturing the quintessential mythology that wed Indian and white cultures in the Great Plains.⁷⁶ Aside from this sort of Hollywood Western imagery that captured people's imaginations, the lack of understanding regarding the legal status of Native Americans proved an even greater challenge for LaDonna. For example, a representative from one of the most well-respected museums in the United States, the Smithsonian Institution, met with LaDonna to discuss sponsoring a Native American heritage project and, in the course of the conversation, asked if Indians could vote.⁷⁷

Ignorance about the status and culture of Native Americans posed a significant obstacle in the struggle to improve opportunities for Indians. In fact, Fred Harris often told people that when LaDonna first voiced her desire to interest people in Indian problems, even he responded, "What Indian problems? I've lived all my life among Indians and the only Indian problem I know of is the one I married."⁷⁸ In fact, he made these comments in a speech to his fellow U.S. senators in 1966. Explaining the context of such remarks, the former senator said that this parodied a common response to his and LaDonna's raising the issue of problems facing Native Americans. For instance, a friend of Fred Harris from Oklahoma once told Fred he had gone to school with lots of Indians and they did not seem to him to have any problems. When Fred asked his friend what had happened to those Indian classmates, his friend responded that he was not sure but that he did not think any of them had graduated from high school.⁷⁹ Drawing on conversations such as this one, Fred utilized humor as a way to identify with people and put them at ease before turning to the sober facts surrounding the conditions of Native

Americans. Moreover, Fred's characterization of LaDonna as "his Indian problem" mocked the very derogatory way in which many referred to "the Indian problem."⁸⁰ While today such comments would likely be construed as racist and sexist, in the mid-1960s it allowed Senator Harris to identify with both his peers and his constituents by first relating to their ignorance before educating them on Indian issues. Still, the fact that employing stereotypes of Native Americans seemed a useful tool in educating Congress and the American public speaks volumes.

This use of humor to combat ignorance helps explain why many of his peers in Congress considered Fred Harris to be an expert on Indian issues, and why Harris characterized himself as a "self-admitted expert on Comanche Indian history and culture" while joking with the media about his wife's background.⁸¹ He commented at times that LaDonna was "fierce and warlike, but I domesticated her."⁸² Fred also told one reporter, "When a pretty Indian girl with brains leaves the reservation, watch out!" because "anything can happen."⁸³ The fact that LaDonna never lived on a reservation did not prevent Fred from utilizing stereotypes of Native Americans as a public relations tool. He did, however, see such anecdotes as a way of poking fun at the general lack of knowledge about Native Americans rather than with the intention of simply perpetuating stereotypes and ignorance.

While this sort of lighthearted commentary may have inspired a few laughs, the ramifications were quite significant. These remarks evoked a vivid image in an era of social and political upheaval. The message seemed clear: Indians were not a threat. Moreover, they could be reformed and remade in the image of the white man. So long as assimilation, or more appropriately integration, of Native Americans into the mainstream remained the ultimate goal, the advocacy of Indian rights did not pose a danger. On the surface, Fred and LaDonna's relationship provided the ultimate metaphor for assimilation. She had married a white man, and as the wife of a U.S. senator represented the epitome of the American dream, right

down to their three children and suburban Virginia home located just a few doors down from Robert and Ethel Kennedy's house. Yet LaDonna Harris strongly rejected the notion of assimilation, maintaining that her Comanche values defined both her and her life's work.⁸⁴

THE RACISM OF ASSIMILATION

Regardless of LaDonna Harris's own feelings about assimilation in the United States, American society in the 1960s did not readily accept or even understand such sentiments. The media interest in LaDonna Harris, the comments about her high cheekbones, the headlines that drew on stereotypes of Native Americans, and even to some extent the jokes made by Fred Harris all revealed that underneath the spirit of reform lay an uneasiness about race relations. In the 1960s, reform generated conflict, and while the government paid lip service to improving the condition of Native Americans, the assumption that improvement and assimilation were one and the same left little consideration for an alternative view of Native Americans. The "good" Indian or the "progressive" Indian was the one who entered into the mainstream, shedding his or her cultural baggage along the way. Moreover, as a politician from conservative Oklahoma, Fred's use of humor about LaDonna's heritage may have reassured the "good ole boys" network that neither he nor his wife were a threat to the existing power structure. Ultimately, both Fred and LaDonna Harris proved too liberal and indeed too radical for their constituents in the Plains. Still, the success of Fred and LaDonna at the national level hinged, at least in part, on their insistence that Indians be encouraged to participate in the mainstream society and economy.

As a prominent interracial couple, the image put forth by Fred and LaDonna had significant implications for how society perceived them. Few Indians enjoyed both the high profile and unthreatening role that LaDonna Harris held at the national level during the 1960s, and it is unlikely she would have reached the audi-

ence she did and met with such an enthusiastic response by government officials had her rhetoric not been in keeping with the ultimate goal of the federal government to integrate Indians. As the epitome of the "good citizen Indian," LaDonna represented a number of positive attributes to the nation. First, she symbolized the beneficial aspects of assimilation as a Native American who had successfully become a part of mainstream society. Second, Harris acted as an advocate for Indians without appearing radical, especially in comparison to the young activists in the American Indian Movement. The pictures of LaDonna that appeared in newspapers and magazines during this period very clearly identified her as belonging to the mainstream. Finally, in addition to being a "model" Indian, she also fulfilled the expectations of a congressional wife in a way that facilitated a positive image of both her and Fred.

THE UNIQUE SENATORIAL ASSET

To be sure, their public relationship had important ramifications both for their careers and the Indian advocacy they supported. One newspaper described LaDonna as a "unique Senatorial asset" and claimed that "her heritage is helpful."⁸⁵ She frequently drew praise for helping Fred with his career, enabling her to move forward with her own activism without appearing to threaten her husband.⁸⁶ She represented both the ideal wife and a positive image of the assimilated Indian. As one reporter indicated, "Washington must be changing its mind about the Comanche Indian."⁸⁷ Here again, while the message in the article paid a compliment to LaDonna on the surface, the premise from which it originated smacked of racially distorted stereotypes of Native Americans. Despite having to contend with such stereotypes, LaDonna managed to use socially constructed notions of both Indianness and femininity to her advantage. The image of LaDonna Harris as a doting and supportive wife afforded a certain legitimacy to her own entrance into the political world in the unofficial, but ultimately highly effective, role of congressional wife. Furthermore, her public

relationship with Fred and the way in which his prominence and her “Indianness” served to reinforce the status and effectiveness of each other facilitated their success in advocating for Native American rights. She helped legitimize his role as an expert on the problems of Native Americans, but he provided “the muscle behind her convictions.”⁸⁸ In a period when race relations teetered precariously and radicalism permeated the mainstream, the rise of LaDonna Harris to national prominence illustrates the centrality of the image she projected to the success of her advocacy. She used her position to gain attention and support for her own work to better the conditions and opportunities of Indians.

Though not an elected official, LaDonna Harris occupied a unique role in Washington. Because her advocacy was tied so intimately with that of her husband’s, they reinforced each other’s work. People considered Fred an expert on Indian issues in part because of his marriage to an Indian. In an address to Congress on Indian policy, Representative Alan Simpson from Wyoming complimented Fred on his marriage to LaDonna: “Although I cannot command a lovely Comanche wife, I can say that my Uncle Dick married a Shoshone Indian. So I can at least I can say that I have an Indian relative.”⁸⁹

The language employed by members of Congress and society at large reflected a growing preoccupation with identity politics. Referring to LaDonna Harris and other Indians as “being on the warpath,” “putting on their warpaint,” and “holding powwows” (instead of meetings) capitalized on stereotypes of Native Americans. Certainly racist by today’s standards, it is important to point out that much of this vernacular signified an earnest effort by non-Indians to relate to Native Americans. Just as Fred Harris used humor to educate the public and his congressional peers about problems facing Native Americans, many newspapers nurtured a serious desire to educate as well. For instance, the article about LaDonna Harris entitled “Warpaint for the Senator’s Wife” articulated a litany of

problems confronting Native Americans and praised LaDonna’s efforts on their behalf.⁹⁰ On the one hand, the language used smacks of racism and distorted views of Indians. On the other, the purpose does not seem to have been merely to mock Indians. Beneath headlines such as “Senator’s Wife on Warpath” were stories that promoted Indian issues, rather than simply denigrating and dismissing them. In short, embedded in the use of racist stereotypes also lies the effort to identify with Native Americans. That said, the racist imagery of such headlines cannot be ignored. The fact remains that the permissibility of depicting this image of Native Americans hinged on a comfortably ignorant fascination with the quaintness of Indians.

That Native Americans were viewed as relics of the past rather than as a group in need of serious consideration explains some of the popular depictions of LaDonna and other Indians. Certainly it would have been unacceptable to see a comparable newspaper headline about African Americans, regardless of how supportive the story underneath might have been. Yet because of the historically ambiguous status of Native Americans, a different standard existed for them. Both literally and figuratively, Native Americans held a mascotlike status in the United States. As Mary Ann Weston found in her study of media coverage of Native Americans, journalism has gone beyond simply reflecting “images and stereotypes prevalent in popular culture.”⁹¹ Stereotyping, argues Weston, “does not depend only on the use of crude language or factual inaccuracies” but also “comes from the choice of stories to report, the ways the stories are organized and written, [and] the phrases used in headlines.”⁹² Ironically, many journalists no doubt viewed their depictions of the wife of a prominent senator as “going on the warpath” as merely a cute play on words.

THE THIRD U.S. SENATOR

Despite having to contend with the continued stereotyping of Indians, in just a few years

LaDonna became a nationally known and respected authority on Native Americans. One magazine article described LaDonna Harris as "tough, smart, angry" and went on to say, "From that anger may grow a national realization that Indians should no longer be considered wards of the nation, but, instead, human beings with very human, basic problems."⁹³ Articles in national magazines such as this one further propelled LaDonna Harris into the national spotlight and brought the condition of Native Americans to the attention of those in power and the general public.

In many ways LaDonna ultimately surpassed Fred in both prominence and effectiveness in advocating for reform of Indian rights and government legislation. While Fred remained supportive of LaDonna's work, it rankled him when people began referring to her as a senator. He told Myra McPherson that he could take everything "until they started calling LaDonna 'Senator.'" That, added Fred, was "where the liberation stuff just stops."⁹⁴ Sure enough, as LaDonna rose in national stature, she at times seemed the biggest competition Fred faced. No doubt Fred's pride in his wife's work did not stem a sense of irritation when, in 1967, Ernest Woods, area coordinator of the Oklahoma Community Action Program, wrote to him saying: "Oklahoma is indeed fortunate to have Mrs. Harris, as a virtual *third United States Senator*."⁹⁵ Robert Kennedy also recognized LaDonna's contributions and characterized her as "one of the most ardent champions of justice for the American Indian."⁹⁶

In a relatively short time LaDonna Harris went from being a small-town girl from the Great Plains to testifying before Congress as an expert on Native American problems in Oklahoma. This marked only the beginning, however, of the work that continued to define her life. While friends from Lawton never saw LaDonna as a traditional homemaker, and Washington newspapers realized she was no "tea party congressional wife," she did in fact utilize assumptions about traditional female roles to effect change for Native Americans, women, and African Americans.⁹⁷ When she

and Fred first arrived in the capital in the mid-1960s, LaDonna thought she would go crazy folding bandages for the Red Cross along with other congressional wives. Despite the emergence of the modern women's movement, this was the type of civic service expected and encouraged from political wives.⁹⁸ Within just a few short years no one would expect to see LaDonna Harris folding bandages or organizing tea parties. She had become a respected leader in her own right. She accomplished this by expanding assumptions about the traditional role of women rather than directly challenging them, for the word "feminism" had not yet crept into LaDonna's vocabulary. That would come later.

NOTES

1. Malvina Stephenson, "LaDonna Harris May Be Answer to TV Myth," *Tulsa Daily World*, May 18, 1965, 10.

2. While LaDonna Harris stepped down as the executive director of AIO in the fall of 2002, she remains president of the organization, and her daughter Laura Harris, who has since served as AIO's executive director, says her mother has not slowed down at all. Laura Harris, in a telephone interview with author, July 24, 2003.

3. LaDonna Harris, *LaDonna Harris: A Comanche Life*, ed. H. Henrietta Stockel (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 2. The Dawes Severalty Act was an effort to end the collective ownership of land by Native Americans by essentially turning them into farmers and forcing them to assimilate into white society. As a result of this policy, American Indians lost over 60 percent of their land between 1887 and 1934. See Frederick Hoxie, *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1800-1920* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984); Janet A. McDonnell, *Dispossession of the Indian Estate, 1887-1934* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

4. Morris W. Foster, *Being Comanche: A Social History of an American Indian Community* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1991), 103.

5. *Ibid.*, 102.

6. For a discussion of Plains Indians, see Peter Iverson, ed., *The Plains Indians of the Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985); John Canfield Ewers, *Plains Indian History and Culture: Essays on Continuity and Change* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997); Paul Howard Carlson, *The Plains Indians* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1998).

7. Foster, *Being Comanche*, 20.
8. LaDonna Harris, 3.
9. Thomas W. Kavanagh, *Comanche Political History: An Ethnohistorical Perspective, 1706-1875* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 41.
10. LaDonna Harris, in a telephone interview with author, November 20, 2000, Bernalillo, NM.
11. Foster, *Being Comanche*, 106.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., 2.
14. LaDonna Harris, draft of biographical profile, p. 2, Series 1, Box 4, LaDonna Harris Collection, Native American Educational Studies College (hereafter LHC, NEAS), Chicago.
15. Ibid.
16. For a discussion of the experience of women in the American West, see Elizabeth Jameson and Susan Armitage, eds., *The Women's West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987); Glenda Riley, *The Female Frontier: A Comparative View of Women on Prairie and the Plains* (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 1988); Linda Williams Reese, *Women of Oklahoma, 1890-1920* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997); Elizabeth Jameson and Susan Armitage, eds., *Writing the Range: Race, Class, and Culture in the Women's West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997).
17. LaDonna Harris, in a telephone interview with author, September 25, 2001.
18. See Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Neil Wynn, *The Afro-American and the Second World War* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1976); August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, *CORE: A Study in Civil Rights, 1942-1968* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).
19. For a discussion of racism and violence in the Great Plains, see Clare V. McKanna Jr., "Black Enclaves of Violence: Race and Homicide in Great Plains Cities, 1890-1920," *Great Plains Quarterly* 23 (Summer 2003): 147-60.
20. George Lynn Cross, *Blacks in White Colleges: Oklahoma's Landmark Cases* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1975), 29.
21. Ibid.
22. Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher and Danney Gobel, *A Matter of Black and White: The Autobiography of Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996); Cross, *Blacks in White Colleges*.
23. LaDonna Harris, in a telephone interview with author, March 11, 2002.
24. Cross, *Blacks in White Colleges*, 32.
25. LaDonna Harris, draft of biographical profile, p. 1, LHC, NAES College.
26. For a discussion of the significance of Indianness in defining American culture (and the tendency of whites to mimic Indian rituals and culture), see Phillip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).
27. See Jean Van Delinder, "Early Civil Rights Activism in Topeka, Kansas, Prior to the 1954 Brown Case," *Great Plains Quarterly* 21 (Winter 2001): 45-61.
28. For a discussion of grassroots activism in the civil rights movement, see John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Champaign, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
29. "A History of 'the Group,'" June 7, 1965, p. 1, Folder 1, Sarah "Betty" Owens Collection (hereafter Owens Collection), Museum of the Great Plains (hereafter MGP), Lawton, OK.
30. Ibid., 6.
31. LaDonna Harris, 54.
32. "History of 'the Group,'" p. 1, Owens Collection, MGP.
33. LaDonna Harris, 55.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid., 2.
37. "A Struggle for Equality—A Community View," booklet published by the Museum of the Great Plains to accompany an exhibit on the integration of Lawton, 2003, p. 21.
38. "History of 'the Group,'" pp. 1-2, Folder 1, Owens Collection, MGP.
39. Ibid., 2.
40. LaDonna Harris, 55.
41. Open letter from E. A. Owens, president of the Lawton chapter of the NAACP, July 6, 1966, p. 2, Folder 1, Owens Collection, MGP.
42. "A Struggle for Equality—A Community View," p. 22.
43. See Frederick C. Luebke, ed., *Ethnicity on the Great Plains* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press and Center for Great Plains Studies, 1980).
44. Charles Mangel, "The Remarkable Fred Harris," *Look Magazine*, March 18, 1969, 76.
45. Maggie Gover, "We Called Ourselves THE GROUP: The Story of a Small GROUP of People Who Changed a City and Each Other" (unpublished manuscript), 7.
46. See Sheryl L. Lindsley, Charles A. Braithwaite, and Kristin L. Ahlberg, "Mending the Sacred Hoop: Identity Enactment and the Occupation of Wounded Knee," *Great Plains Quarterly* 22 (Spring 2002): 115-26.
47. LaDonna Harris, 54.
48. For a thorough biography of Fred Harris that charts the course of his political career, see Richard Lowitt, *Fred Harris: His Journey from Liberalism to Populism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002).
49. LaDonna Harris, interview, November 20, 2000; Fred Harris, in a telephone interview with author, October 2, 2001.

50. Kathryn Harris Tijerina, in a telephone interview with author, 28 July 2003.

51. LaDonna Harris, interview, November 20, 2000.

52. Ibid.

53. Fred Harris, interview, October 2, 2001.

54. LaDonna Harris, interview, September 25, 2001.

55. "Onward!" Fred Harris, campaign literature, Oklahoma gubernatorial race, 1962, Folder 5, Box 50, Fred Harris Collection (hereafter FHC), MGP, Lawton, OK.

56. Ibid.

57. LaDonna Harris, interview, September 25, 2001.

58. LaDonna Harris, interview, November 20, 2000.

59. Ibid., 9.

60. LaDonna Harris, interview, September 25, 2001.

61. LaDonna Harris, interview, November 20, 2000.

62. Ibid.

63. The teamwork of Fred and LaDonna Harris brought them to the attention of journalist Myra MacPherson, who included them in her book on political couples. She notes the close relationship of the Harrises as well as their political partnership. See Myra McPherson, *The Power Lovers: An Intimate Look at Politicians and Their Marriages* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1975), especially 417-24.

64. "Sooner Wife Wows Them," *Wichita Eagle*, March 20, 1965, 6B.

65. Wauhillau La Hay, "Wife Shares Political Triumph," *New York World Telegram and Sun*, January 8, 1965.

66. LaDonna Harris, interview, November 20, 2000.

67. Aulena Gibson, interview with author, October 2, 2001, Lawton, OK.

68. Laura Harris, interview, July 24, 2003.

69. LaDonna Harris, interview, September 25, 2001; Fred Harris, interview, October 2, 2001; Beverly Saffa Stapleton, interview with author, September 23, 2001, Lawton, OK.

70. Fred R. Harris, *Potomac Fever* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1977), p. 104.

71. MacPherson, *Power Lovers*, 422.

72. LaDonna Harris, interview, September 25, 2001.

73. LaDonna Harris helped found OIO in 1965. This organizations sought to find ways to improve economic and educational opportunities for Native Americans while also preserving native cultures. Harris served as president of OIO until 1968 when she stepped down to chair President Lyndon B. Johnson's

Women's Advisory Council on the War on Poverty. For a discussion of OIO, see Daniel M. Cobb, "'Us Indians Understand the Basics': Oklahoma Indians and the Politics of Community Action, 1964-1970," *Western Historical Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (2002): 41-66.

74. Malvina Stephenson, "They Communicate in Comanche," *Sunday Star*, November 15, 1964.

75. LaDonna Harris, draft of biographical profile, p. 2, LHC, NAES College.

76. LaDonna Harris, interview, September 25, 2001.

77. Ibid.

78. Fred Harris, "American Indians—New Destiny," 89th Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record—Senate* 112, pt. 7 (April 21, 1966): 8311.

79. Fred Harris, interview, October 2, 2001.

80. LaDonna Harris, in a telephone interview with author, October 15, 2003. LaDonna Harris is quick to point out that she and Fred were co-opting derogatory language as a way to marginalize the racist overtones. This is quite similar to the way in which Hispanic Americans reclaimed the word "Chicano" as their own to erase the negative implications once carried in the usage of the word.

81. Fred Harris, "American Indians—New Destiny," 8311.

82. Tom Malone, "Wife Helps Harris on the Warpath," unidentified newspaper, Folder 9, Box 286, Fred Harris Collection (hereafter FHC), Carl Albert Congressional Research and Studies Center (hereafter CACRSC), University of Oklahoma (hereafter OU).

83. "Sooner Senator's Wife Wows Them," *Wichita Eagle*, March 20, 1965, 6B.

84. LaDonna Harris, interview, September 25, 2001. It is important to note that LaDonna Harris's own definition of assimilation means to no longer exist. For her, assimilation into mainstream society would be to give up her existence as a Comanche Indian.

85. Jean Simpson, "Sooner Senator's Comanche Spouse Captivates Capital Crowd," *Tulsa Tribune*, March 27, 1965, 2.

86. "LaDonna Harris Loves Role of Key Aid to Senator," *Oklahoma Journal*, September 10, 1965, 5.

87. Ibid.

88. Charles Mangel, "Warpaint for the Senator's Wife," *Look Magazine*, April 4, 1967, 24.

89. Fred Harris, "American Indians—New Destiny."

90. Mangel, "Warpaint for the Senator's Wife."

91. Mary Ann Weston, *Native Americans in the News: Images of Indians in the Twentieth-Century Press* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 163.

92. Ibid.

93. Mangel, "Warpaint for the Senator's Wife."

94. MacPherson, *Power Lovers*, 326.

95. Ernest Woods to Fred Harris, May 1, 1967, emphasis in original, Folder 1, Box 68, FHC, CACRSC, OU.

96. Statement of Robert Kennedy about the testimony of Mrs. Harris on behalf of the American Indian, 90th Cong., 1st sess., *Congressional Record—Senate* 113, pt. 14 (July 13, 1967): 9581.

97. Dan Blackburn, "LaDonna Harris is a Senate Wife with More on Her Mind than Mid-Afternoon Teas," *Washington Post/Potomac* May 24, 1970, 26.

98. See Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1963). This book is largely credited with sparking the second-wave feminist move-

ment. Friedan exposed the sense of emptiness many women felt in the socially constrained role of wife and mother and ultimately shaped both scholarship on women and the public discourse on gender roles. See also Sara M. Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979); Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).