



The Chickasaw Nation
Secondary Student Curriculum
(Student Edition)

Unit 3: Lesson 3

Carl Albert and the Chickasaw Nation

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Reference Material

Biography of Carl Albert, former *Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives*

Born May 10, 1908, in McAlester, Oklahoma, Carl Bert Albert was an Oklahoma State Representative from 1947-77 in the U.S. House of Representatives, served as the majority whip in 1955 and was the majority leader in 1962 (Kotlowski 17). Additionally, he served as the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives from 1971-76. During his political career in Washington Albert experienced some of the most difficult times in American history, including the Vietnam War (1955-75), the American Indian termination period (1953-68) and the assassination of President John F. Kennedy (1963). While times were tough, Albert remained firm in his values and committed to the American people.



Figure 1: Young Carl Albert posing for a picture. State Museum Collection. Margaret Lakey Collection. *Oklahoma Historical Society*.

Nicknamed the “Little Giant from Little Dixie” because of his short stature (5 feet 4 inches), Albert was born during a time in Oklahoma history when towns and cities were being established. The town of McAlester, named after J.J. McAlester, a storekeeper and trader to American Indians who opened the first commercial mine, was founded two years prior to Albert’s birth (Albert and Goble 10). Coincidentally, Mr. J.J. McAlester

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married Ms. Rebecca Burney, a Chickasaw woman and sister to Benjamin Crooks Burney, the elected governor of the Chickasaw Nation from 1878-80 (Allen).

Albert grew up with his family in a small, rural community northeast of McAlester called Bug Tussle. Growing up in Bug Tussle provided Albert many unique



Figure 2: Carl Albert with his father and mother. Carl Albert Collection. *Oklahoma Historical Society.*

opportunities that would serve him well into adulthood. He assisted his family in working the fields, both before and after school. Collecting and hauling wood and water became a daily chore for Albert, as well as milking the cows,

chopping cotton, bailing hay and thrashing oats (Albert and Goble 23).

During Albert's youthful days, Bug Tussle was a melting pot of families from different backgrounds and all walks of life. Because of this, Albert experienced a wide range of cultures and values. In the early 1900s, segregation was prominent throughout the state and country, and Albert quickly took notice of how different ethnic groups were treated. He felt segregation was unfair, unhuman and un-Christian (Albert and Goble 379). Knowing this, he did not let other's ideas about race dictate who he would befriend.

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Albert became good friends with Joe Thomas, a young African-American boy who lived nearby in Reams, Oklahoma, which was 1 mile across the pasture from Bug Tussle. Albert and Thomas, in addition to Thomas’s siblings, developed a friendship that lasted their entire lives. Both Albert and Thomas walked to school together each day, and the two boys would eventually go in different directions—Albert went to the white school, while Thomas went to the black school (Albert and Goble 33). After witnessing the discrepancies between the schools, Albert made a pledge, “I promised myself that if I were ever in a position to do something about it, I would (Albert and Goble 34).”

Albert valued education from an early age, and he utilized educational opportunities to advance himself both personally and politically. Prior to graduating from McAlester High School in May 1927, Albert scholastically achieved the impossible for a “poor boy,” as he often referred to himself (Albert and Goble 42). He was named class valedictorian, student body president, homeroom president, Golden M. club president and poetry club president (Albert and Goble 42).



Figure 3: Portrait of young Carl Albert. Carl Albert Collection. Oklahoma Historical Society.

In August 1927, Albert enrolled in classes at the University of Oklahoma (OU) and excelled. His oratory skills provided him the opportunity to travel, compete and interact with some of Oklahoma’s earliest politicians and entrepreneurs. Albert graduated *Phi Beta Kappa* from OU in 1931, and then studied on a Rhodes scholarship at Oxford University in England, where he received two law degrees (Kotlowski 18). Shortly

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thereafter, Albert served in the United States Army from 1941-46 and earned a Bronze Star for his service in World War II (Kotlowski 18). With every adventure of his life, he was always committed to serving others.

One year after serving in the army, Albert's political career began, and it would go on to span the era of American Indian termination, gradual assimilation and self-determination. The issues of American Indians were nothing new to Albert. The population of his home state was one-quarter American Indian, and his district, the Oklahoma Third, included the Chickasaw, Choctaw and Seminole tribes (Kotlowski 17-18).



Fig. 4: Carl Albert. Margaret Lakey Collection, State Museum. *Oklahoma Historical Society.*

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The United States began to shift their ideals toward American Indians and self-determination, the process of tribal nations forming their own governments, between 1945 and 1975 (Kotlowski 17). Prior to this, the United States aggressively worked to assimilate all American Indians into the American culture. Albert intently listened to his American Indian counterparts as they urged the politicians to dismiss termination, or the loss of official recognition by the U.S. government. Instead, Albert asked the federal government to relinquish the stronghold they had on tribes, thereby ensuring tribal autonomy and self-governance. Albert was known for eagerly listening to both colleagues and his constituents (*voting members*), and he leaned toward the side of President Richard Nixon's support for American Indians.



Fig. 5: Speaker Carl Albert, right, and Vice President Spiro Agnew, left, applaud President Richard Nixon during the State of the Union address on January 22, 1972. Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives, Photography Collection. *Oklahoma Historical*

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On July 8, 1970, President Nixon aggressively spoke to Congress regarding the health and well-being of American Indians. Specifically, his message singled out the idea of terminating tribes. Nixon, along with other American leaders, including Albert, worked to promote self-determination without termination. Nixon argued to Congress that they couldn't deny American Indians their rights as guaranteed to them by treaty and law, any more than they could deny the rights of any other American citizen (Morgan 4). At this time, the Chickasaw Nation, along with many other American Indian tribes in Oklahoma and throughout the United States, lacked access to quality health care and other services promised to them through treaty obligations. Nixon addressed members of Congress, stating:

I believe that both of these policy extremes are wrong. Federal termination errs in one direction. Federal paternalism errs in the other. Only by clearly rejecting both of these extremes can we achieve a policy which truly serves the best interests of the Indian people. Self-determination among the Indian people can and must be encouraged without the threat of eventual termination. In my view, in fact, that is the only way that self-determination can effectively be fostered. . . . It is a new and balanced relationship between the United States government and the first Americans that is at the heart of our approach to Indian problems. And that is why we now approach these problems with new confidence that they will successfully be overcome (Office of the Federal Register, 1970, p. 576).

During this time, a representative of the Chickasaw Nation was appointed by the President of the United States. Overton James was appointed governor, and he aggressively worked with other Chickasaw leaders to provide access to quality health care for Chickasaws. A new grassroots movement emerged within the Chickasaw Nation, one that was actively working against termination-era policies. Many Chickasaw activists, ministers and citizens, including Overton James, Jess and Sadie Humes, Jonas

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Imotichey, Abijah Colbert and Mary Stone McClendon (*Ataloo*), worked to gain cooperation from the federal government and to seek greater access to health care (Morgan 5). In 1968, voices of Gov. James and other Chickasaw leaders were heard, and the Indian Health Services (IHS) opened the first health care facility within the Chickasaw Nation boundaries—the Chickasaw Nation Tishomingo Health Clinic, located in Tishomingo, Oklahoma.

While the newly opened clinic in Tishomingo was successful, the demand for health services exceeded the clinic’s capabilities. This concern was identified, and Albert, Gov. James and other Chickasaw leaders worked tirelessly to address it. In 1973, Gov. James led the way in winning a competitive proposal to locate a new IHS hospital inside the Chickasaw Nation (Morgan 6). The hospital was a huge step forward for the Chickasaw Nation and its citizens and launched three decades of steady industry and enterprise that have significantly transformed the economy and culture within the boundaries of the Chickasaw Nation (Morgan 6). The tribe’s response to their citizens remains a testament to the mission of the Chickasaw Nation—to enhance the overall quality of life of the Chickasaw people.



Fig. 6: Gov. Overton James and Speaker Carl Albert. *Chickasaw Nation Collections*.

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On June 14, 1980, the Carl Albert Indian Health Facility, located in Ada, Oklahoma was dedicated. The hospital was named for Albert in honor of his commitment to and advocacy for the Chickasaw Nation, its citizens and heritage. Among those on hand for the dedication ceremony were Gov. James, Albert, his successor Congressman Wes Watkins and Dr. Emery Johnson, IHS director. It was announced that the new hospital would serve approximately 50 inpatients and 175 outpatients daily, or about 25,000 to 30,000 American Indians annually living within a 50-mile radius of Ada.

Aside from the dignitaries, there were several groups who celebrated the long-awaited dedication. These included tribal employees and Chickasaw citizens, as well as American Indians from other tribes living within and around the Chickasaw Nation. For Indian Country and the Chickasaw Nation, greater health services had instantaneously improved.

The cooperation and support from Albert to the Chickasaw Nation and Indian Country is a testament to his character, which was established 72 years prior in a small, rural town called Bug Tussle. In one of his last public speeches, Albert remarked on the changing times and how pleased he was with the progression in public policy and greater opportunities for all. Speaking at the funeral of his dear childhood friend Joe Thomas in 1987, Albert remarked, “I told Joe’s family how happy I was that Joe Thomas and I had lived long enough to see it [segregation] end and how glad I was that Joe’s grandchildren



Fig. 7: Speaker Carl Albert, middle, and Gov. Overton James, right, during the dedication ceremony of the Carl Albert Indian Health Facility on June 14, 1980. *Chickasaw Nation Collections.*

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would have a better chance. I told them that I was thankful they had given me the chance to help make that true” (Albert and Goble 379).



Figure 8: Speaker Carl Albert and childhood friend Joe Thomas’s daughter, Gloria Thomas-Wyatt, pose for a picture.

Albert indeed helped make that dream come true in 1962, when Thomas’s daughter, Gloria Thomas-Wyatt, left segregated McAlester and moved to Washington to pursue a college education. Albert provided Wyatt the opportunity to work in the U.S. House of Representatives. There, he mentored Wyatt on public policy, and she attended joint sessions of Congress with President Lyndon B. Johnson and spoke often with members of Congress such as Gerald Ford, Morris Udall, Bob

Dole, Tip O’Neill and James Roosevelt.

Joe Thomas and his family played an important role in the way Albert viewed the existing racism. Albert’s leadership contributed to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which outlawed major forms of discrimination against African Americans, women and other individuals of color, including racial segregation. The dark days of segregation and racism that plagued the United States and Albert’s hometown of McAlester was now outlawed. The unfair, unhuman and un-Christian acts of segregation had come to an end, and Albert, Thomas and their families lived to see the historic legislation that helped change the world forever.

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Carl Albert's Legacy to the Chickasaw Nation

Continuing the mission to enhance the overall quality of life of the Chickasaw people, the Chickasaw Nation opened the doors to the new Chickasaw Nation Medical Center on July 19, 2010. The new facility encompassed a 370,000 square-foot, state-of-the-art health care facility, almost triple the size of the Carl Albert Indian Health Facility. Health care remains at the forefront of improving the lives of all Chickasaw people. Current Chickasaw Nation Governor Bill Anoatubby and Chickasaw leaders boldly continue to advocate and demand quality health care for Chickasaws and other American Indians. The visionary legacy of quality care continues to improve the lives of Chickasaws.

On November 17, 2015, the old Carl Albert Indian Health Facility building was renamed the Carl Albert Service Center (CASC). The CASC is dedicated to the training and education of Chickasaw employees and citizens. The revitalized building is a testimony to Albert's respect and love of education. His remarkable passion and leadership continues to positively influence Chickasaw lives today.

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Fig. 9: Chickasaw Nation Gov. Bill Anoatubby, center, is joined by tribal officials during the ribbon cutting ceremony of the Carl Albert Service Center, formerly the Carl Albert Indian Health Facility, on November 17, 2015. *Chickasaw Nation Collections*.

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Discussion Questions

1. Where did Carl Albert grow up, and how did he get the nickname “Little Giant from Little Dixie?”
2. What unique opportunities were presented to Albert as a child living in Bug Tussle?
3. Do you think Albert’s friendship with Joe Thomas motivated his support and encouragement of quality and accessible health care for the Chickasaw people?
4. Why was President Nixon’s 1970 speech to Congress important for the Chickasaw Nation?
5. What did the dedication of the Carl Albert Indian Health Facility mean to the Chickasaw people?

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Student Activity

Using the space below or a separate sheet of paper, prepare an essay that outlines the challenges presented to both Carl Albert and the Chickasaw Nation during the termination era. Be sure to indicate what termination for American Indian tribes was and reference President Nixon's 1970 speech that outlines the need for American Indian tribes having a balanced relationship with the federal government. Your essays should consist of three or more paragraphs with no less than five sentences per paragraph.

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Student Quiz

Complete the quiz below.

1. What was Carl Albert's nickname?
 - a. Little Giant from Big Dixie
 - b. Big Giant from Little Dixie
 - c. Little Giant from Little Dixie
 - d. Little Carl from Bug Tussle
2. Where was Carl Albert born?
 - a. Bug Tussle, Oklahoma
 - b. McAlester, Oklahoma
 - c. Washington D.C.
 - d. Ada, Oklahoma
3. What does sovereignty mean for tribal nations?
 - a. The right to bear arms.
 - b. The right to an attorney.
 - c. The right to govern themselves.
 - d. Voting members.
4. What university did Albert attend after high school?
 - a. University of Oklahoma
 - b. Oklahoma State University
 - c. Oral Roberts University
 - d. East Central University
5. What university did Albert get his two law degrees from?
 - a. University of Oklahoma
 - b. Oklahoma State University
 - c. Oxford University
 - d. East Central University
6. What was the American Indian population of Albert's home state when he served as an Oklahoma State Representative?

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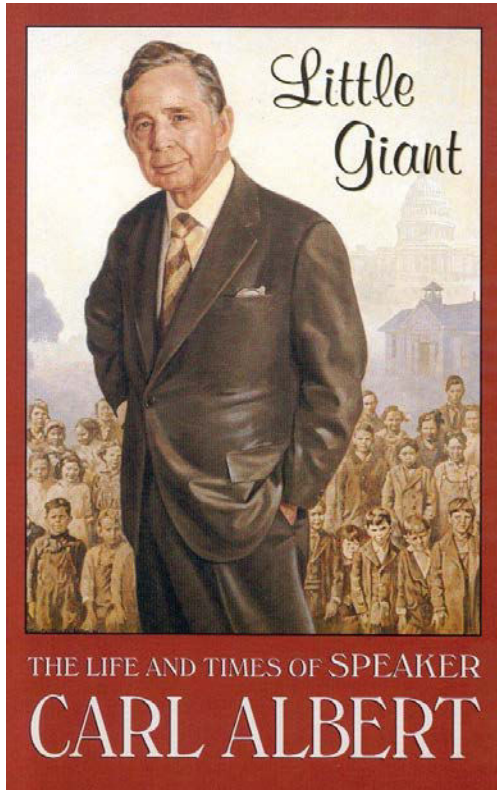
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- a. One-half
 - b. One-fourth
 - c. Two-thirds
 - d. Four-fourths
7. What president aggressively spoke to Congress regarding the health and well-being of American Indians on July 8, 1970?
- a. President Barack Obama
 - b. President Bill Clinton
 - c. President Richard Nixon
 - d. President Jimmy Carter
8. Which Chickasaw Nation Governor led the way in winning a competitive proposal to locate a new Indian Health Service hospital inside the Chickasaw Nation?
- a. Gov. Douglas H. Johnston
 - b. Gov. Palmer S. Mosely
 - c. Gov. E.B. "Hugh" Maytubby
 - d. Gov. Overton James
9. The Carl Albert Indian Health Facility was dedicated on what date?
- a. June 12, 1978
 - b. June 12, 1980
 - c. June 14, 1980
 - d. June 14, 1978
10. What is the current name of the former Carl Albert Indian Health Facility building?
- a. Carl Albert Service Center
 - b. Chickasaw Nation Medical Center
 - c. Chickasaw Cultural Center
 - d. Chickasaw National Capitol Building

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For more information, see the following sources:



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