

CHICKASAW
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E L E M E N T A R Y

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CARL ALBERT

HIS CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE CHICKASAW NATION
AND THE STATE OF OKLAHOMA

A black and white portrait of Carl Albert, an elderly man with short, dark hair, wearing a white dress shirt and a dark tie with a small, light-colored pattern. He is looking directly at the camera with a serious expression. The background is a plain, light-colored wall. The text "CARL ALBERT" is overlaid in large, white, sans-serif capital letters across the lower part of his chest.

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E L E M E N T A R Y

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

- Who was Carl Albert, and what were his contributions to Oklahoma and to the Chickasaw Nation?
- How did Carl Albert fight for the equality of all people?
- What is a biography, and how are biographies important to the study of history?



LEARNING GOALS/OBJECTIVES:

- To examine the characteristics of Carl Albert by utilizing biographies.
- To recognize the significant contributions Carl Albert made to the state of Oklahoma and to the Chickasaw Nation.
- To explain the important role an elected leader can play in ensuring equality for all citizens.
- To define civic virtue and responsibilities of the citizen at the local, state and tribal levels.



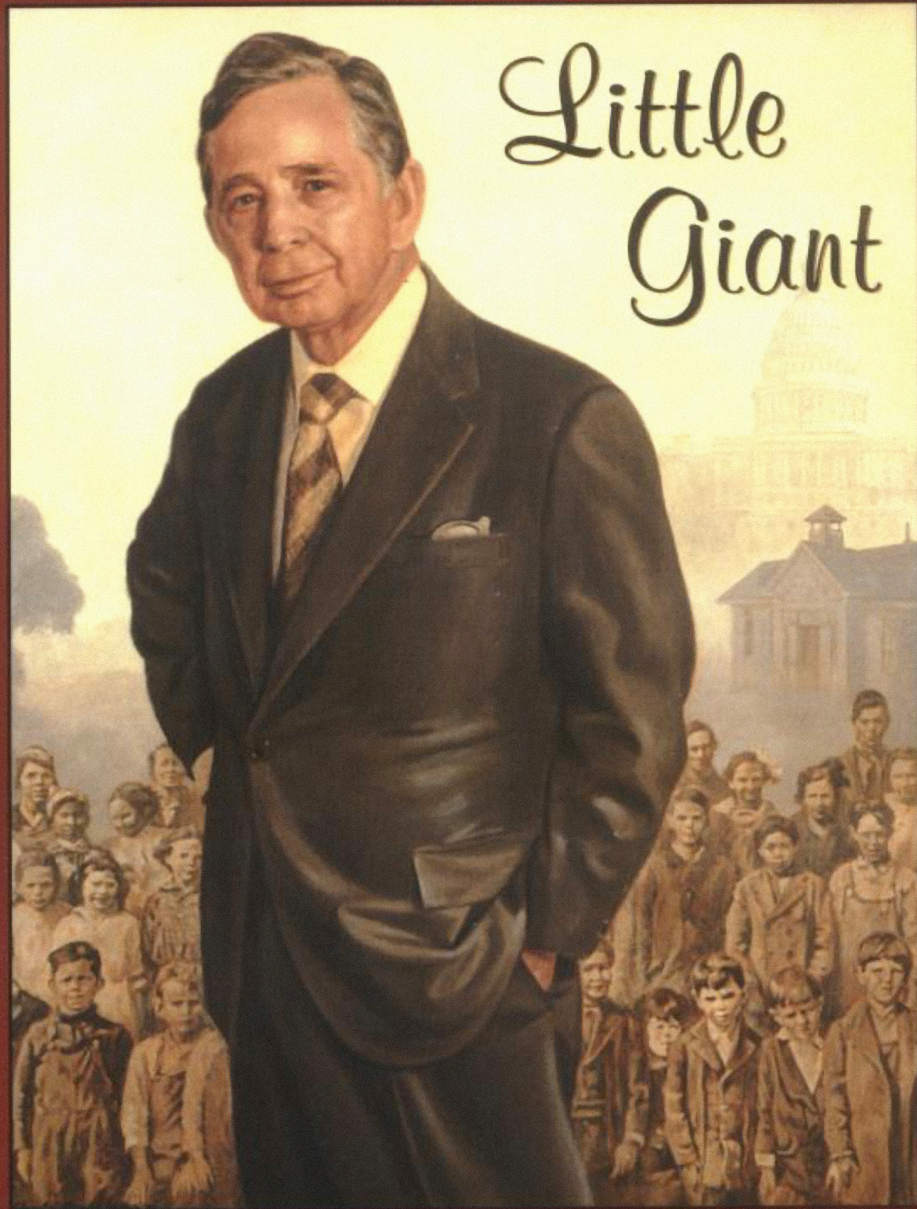
BACKGROUND:

Carl Albert was an American lawyer and politician who served as the 46th Speaker of the United States House of Representatives and as a Democratic congressman from Oklahoma for 30 years. Carl Albert was born in McAlester and raised in Bug Tussle, Oklahoma, a small town north of McAlester. He graduated from McAlester High School in 1927 and attended the University of Oklahoma where he majored in political science. He graduated from college in 1931 as the top male student and studied at the University of Oxford on a Rhodes Scholarship. In 1935, he opened a law practice in Oklahoma City, and worked as a lawyer until 1941, when he was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Army Air Force.

In 1946, he left the army and was soon elected to Congress. Throughout his time in Congress, he worked on issues such as Social Security and Medicare. Also during this time, he worked in tandem with Chickasaw grassroots leaders to address self-determination and access to quality health care, among other issues. These grassroots leaders included many Chickasaw activists, ministers and citizens, including Overton James, Jesse and Vinnie May Humes, Jonas Imotichey, Abijah Colbert and Mary Stone McClendon (Ataloo), working to gain cooperation from the federal government. In 1968, the efforts of the grassroots leaders and Albert were heard, and the Indian Health Service (IHS) opened the first health care facility within the Chickasaw Nation called 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 members of the grassroots leaders, worked tirelessly to address it.

In 1971, when House Speaker John McCormack retired, Carl Albert was elected as the Speaker of the United States House of Representatives. Following Albert's retirement as speaker in January 1977, he returned to Oklahoma and continued the advocacy work with the Chickasaw Nation. In 1980, the Carl Albert Indian Health Facility opened in Ada, Oklahoma. This health facility quickly enhanced the overall quality of life of Chickasaws and other Native Americans. Carl Albert remains the highest ranking official of any Oklahoman in Congress in American history. The cooperation and support Albert gave to the Chickasaw Nation, Indian Country, the state of Oklahoma and to the United States, is a demonstration to his civic virtue and character. Carl Albert died at the age of 91 on February 4, 2000.

Biography of Carl Albert



THE LIFE AND TIMES OF SPEAKER
CARL ALBERT

EARLY LIFE

Carl Bert Albert was born May 10, 1908, in McAlester, Oklahoma. Nicknamed the “Little Giant from Little Dixie” because of his height (5 feet 4 inches), he was able to accomplish many things in his lifetime. Albert was born less than one year after Oklahoma became a state. His hometown of McAlester was named after J.J. McAlester, a storekeeper and trader with Native Americans, who opened the town’s first coal mine.

Albert grew up with his family in a small, rural community northeast of McAlester called Bug Tussle. He helped his family in the fields, both before and after school. Collecting and carrying 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. This diverse community gave Albert the opportunity to experience different cultures, perspectives and values. In the early 1900s, segregation, the enforced separation of different racial groups, was normal throughout the state and country, and Albert quickly took notice of the differences in treatments it caused. He felt segregation was unfair, unhuman and un-Christian (Albert and Goble 379). Knowing this, he did not let other’s civic virtues, or one’s action towards another person or group based on what they believe is right, decide who he would befriend.



Figure 1: Young Carl Albert posing for a picture. State Museum Collection. Margaret Lakey Collection. Photo courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.



Figure 2: Carl Albert with his father and mother. Carl Albert Collection. Photo courtesy of the Oklahoma Historical Society.

Albert became good friends with Joe Thomas, a young African-American boy who lived nearby in a community known as Reams Prairie. Albert and Thomas walked to school together each day, but the two young 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 seeing the many differences between the white and black schools, Albert made a promise, "I promised myself that if I were ever in a position to do something about it, I would (Albert and Goble 34)."



Figure 3: Carl Albert makes a return visit to the Bug Tussle school in September 1946. Photo courtesy of *Tulsa World*. AP file photo 1946.

POLITICAL CAREER

One year after serving in the army, Albert's political career began. During his political career Albert served as an Oklahoma State Representative from 1947-77 in the U.S. House of Representatives (Kotlowski 17). He also served as the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives (the presiding officer of the House of Representatives) from 1971-77. During his political career in Washington, D.C., Albert experienced some of the hardest 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 civic values and committed to the American people, including those he believed were treated unfairly because the color of their skin.



Figure 5: Young Carl Albert. Margaret Lakey Collection, State Museum. Photo courtesy of Oklahoma Historical Society.

CARL ALBERT AND THE STATE OF OKLAHOMA

In 1953, Congress adopted the policy of “termination” which turned over federal responsibility and jurisdiction of some Native American governments to certain state governments. Termination policy took away official recognition by the U.S. government and restricted tribal sovereignty (the ability for tribal nations to make decisions for themselves).

The United States aggressively worked to assimilate (to take in or absorb) all Native Americans into the American culture in hopes to eliminate tribal identities, cultures, languages and lands. This issue was nothing new to Albert, because the population of his home state was one-quarter Native American (Kotlowski 17-18). Albert was known for eagerly listening to both his fellow politicians and those who voted for him. Albert listened to his Native American voters as they strongly encouraged politicians to end termination. Albert asked the federal government to take away the stronghold they had on tribes, thereby making sure tribes could govern themselves.

Slowly the United States began a shift of policy from termination toward self-determination, the process of tribal nations taking a more active role in governing themselves, beginning in 1963. This would directly affect tribal nations by taking over programs offered by the United States government and administering those programs themselves. On July 8, 1970, President Richard Nixon eagerly spoke to Congress regarding the health and well-being of Native Americans. Specifically, his message singled out the idea of terminating tribes. Nixon, along with other American leaders, including then United States Speaker of the House of Representatives Albert, worked to promote self-determination. Nixon argued to Congress that they had no right to deny Native Americans their rights guaranteed by treaty and law, than they did to deny the rights of any other American citizen (Morgan 4).



Figure 6: Speaker Carl Albert, right, and Vice President Spiro Agnew, left, applaud President Richard Nixon during the State of the Union address on January 20, 1972. Collection of the U.S. House of Representatives, Photography Collection. *Oklahoma Historical Society.*

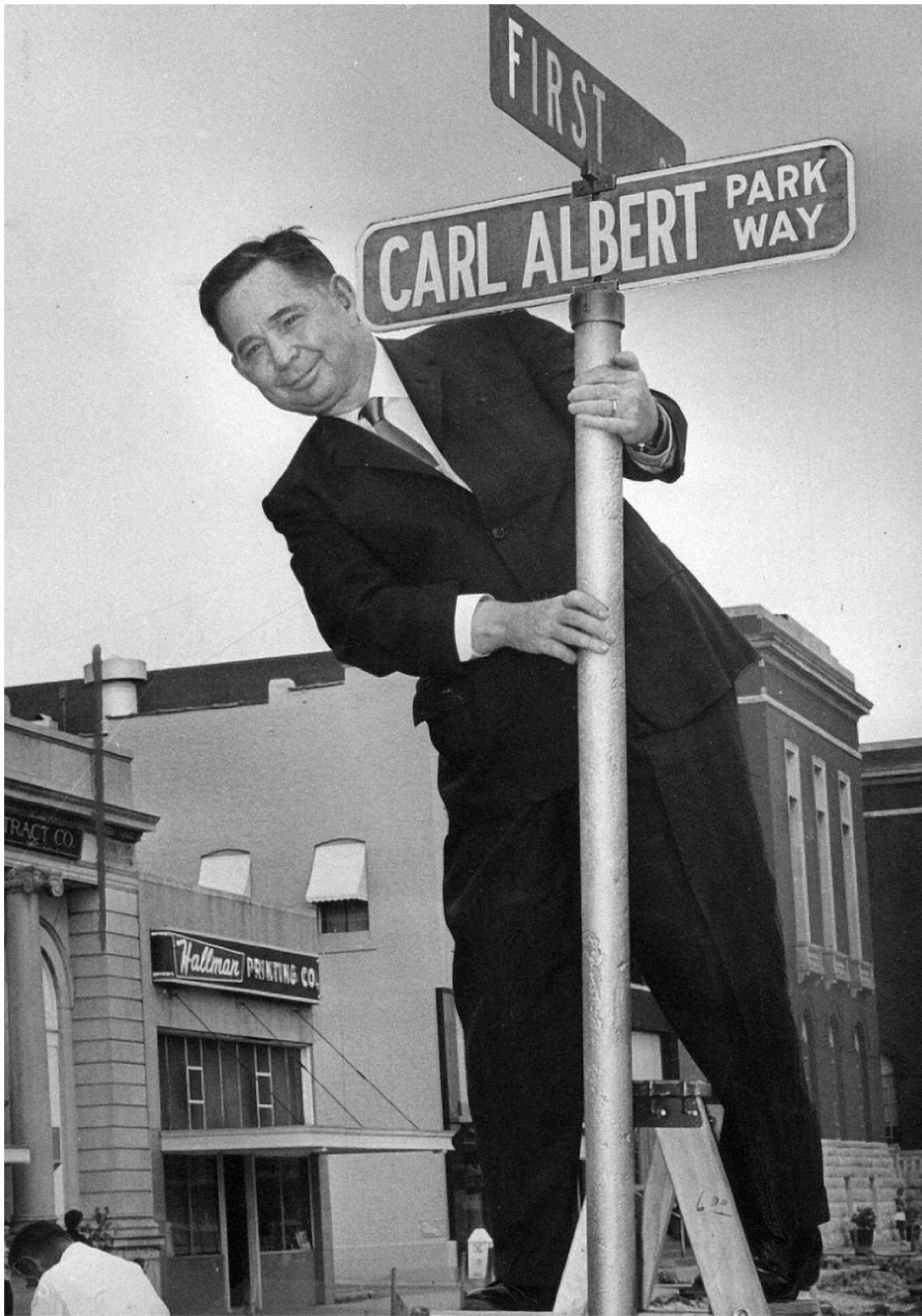


Figure 7: Former U.S. House Speaker Carl Albert climbs a step ladder to peer down McAlester's Grand Avenue in this undated file photo. The street was renamed Carl Albert Parkway. Photo courtesy of *Tulsa World*. AP File photo 1964.

CARL ALBERT AND THE CHICKASAW NATION

The Chickasaw Nation, along with many other Native American tribes in Oklahoma and throughout the United States at this time, did not have access to quality health care and other services promised to them through treaty stipulation.

In 1963, as the national government began transferring more power and programs to Native American nations, the President of the United States, John F. Kennedy, appointed Overton James as Governor of the Chickasaw Nation. Albert worked with Governor James and the Chickasaw Nation to provide better access to quality health care for Chickasaws and other tribal nations. Many Chickasaw activists, ministers and citizens, including James, Jess and Sadie Humes, Jonas 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).

Through the efforts of Governor Overton James and the grassroots leaders, including Albert's support, a competitive proposal was won to locate a new Indian Health Service clinic (IHS) inside the Chickasaw Nation. In 1968, the first health care facility within the Chickasaw Nation boundaries called the Chickasaw



Figure 8: Gov. Overton James and Speaker Carl Albert. Photo courtesy of the Chickasaw Nation Collection.



Figure 9: Speaker Carl Albert, middle, and Governor Overton James, right, during a dedication ceremony. Photo courtesy of the Chickasaw Nation Collection.

Nation Tishomingo Health Clinic, located in Tishomingo, Oklahoma, opened (Morgan 6). The clinic was a huge step forward for the Chickasaw Nation and its citizens. Shortly thereafter, the demand for health services exceeded the clinic's capabilities. Again, Albert and the grassroots leaders went to work advocating for the need of additional health care services for Chickasaws and other Native Americans. Although Albert retired as Speaker of the House of Representatives in January 1977, he continued to work alongside the grassroots leaders to see a new health facility open within the Chickasaw Nation.

On June 14, 1980, the Carl Albert Indian Health Facility, located in Ada, Oklahoma, was opened. The hospital was named for Albert in honor of his commitment and support of the Chickasaw Nation's citizens and heritage. For Indian Country and the Chickasaw Nation, health services had quickly improved. Along with advocating for Native American nations, Albert stood up for equality of all people in Oklahoma. Albert's childhood friend, Joe Thomas, played an important role in the way Albert viewed the existing racism. Albert contributed to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which made major forms of discrimination against African Americans, women and other persons of color illegal, including segregation. The dark days of segregation and racism that plagued the United States and Albert's hometown of McAlester was now illegal.



Figure 10: Photo of Carl Albert Indian Health Facility approaching the emergency room entrance. Photo courtesy of the Chickasaw Nation Collection.

THE LEGACY OF CARL ALBERT

Carl Albert passed away February 4, 2000. The cooperation and support Albert gave to the Chickasaw Nation, Indian Country and the state of Oklahoma is a demonstration to the character he established 72 years prior in a small, rural community called Bug Tussle. In one of his last public speeches, Albert remarked on the changing times and how pleased he was with the progressions in public policy that provided greater opportunities for all. In July 1987, while speaking at the funeral of his dear childhood friend, Joe Thomas, 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 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).

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 (Correspondence, 2016). Albert provided Thomas-Wyatt the opportunity to work in the U.S. House of Representatives as an elevator operator (Correspondence, 2016). In addition, Albert mentored her on public policy, and she attended joint sessions of Congress with President Lyndon B. Johnson, where she often spoke with members of Congress, including Gerald Ford, Morris Udall, Bob Dole, Tip O’Neill and James Roosevelt (Correspondence, 2016).

Albert’s legacy (memorable contributions made) lives on within the Chickasaw Nation. On November 17, 2015, the former 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 new use of the building is a testimony to Albert’s respect and love of education, and his dedication to the Chickasaw Nation.



Figure 11: Speaker Carl Albert and childhood friend Joe Thomas’s daughter, Gloria Thomas-Wyatt, pose for a picture in McAlester, year undated. Photo courtesy of Thomas-Wyatt Collections.



Figure 12: Chickasaw Nation Governor 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. Photo courtesy of the *Chickasaw Nation Collection*.

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CARL ALBERT BIOGRAPHY

Name: Carl Albert

Nickname:

Hometown:

Born:

Died:

Beliefs and Values:

Early Life:

Political Positions Held:

Impact on Oklahoma:

Impact on the Chickasaw Nation:

STUDENT EXIT TICKET

Which of the following are examples of Carl Albert's civic virtue?

(Choose all that apply)

- ✓ Served 30 years as Oklahoma representative in the U.S. House of Representatives, 1947-1977
- ✓ Served as Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, 1971-1977
- ✓ Contributed to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964
- ✓ Promoted self-determination of tribes
- ✓ Stood up for what he believed was right
- ✓ Refused to listen to other's views
- ✓ Utilized his leadership to stay involved and to help others
- ✓ Only tried to help himself
- ✓ Served in the U.S. Army, 1941-1946

What is civic virtue?



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