MAXIMUM FEASIBLE PARTICIPATION:

THE WAR ON POVERTY IN

TULSA, OKLAHOMA,

1965-1970

By

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Introduction

President Lyndon B. Johnson envisioned a "Great Society" for the United States. This Great Society demanded "an end to poverty and racial injustice." Johnson called it "a challenge constantly renewed."[1] It was Johnson's broad and often ambiguous domestic program, and it had the goal of going "beyond the liberal tradition of the New Deal." Johnson wanted to disperse America's wealth, or at least the means to achieve wealth, to all Americans. He wanted to accomplish this large task while at the same time to leave his imprint on United States history.[2]

As part of his initiative, Congress passed the Economic Opportunity Act (EOA) in 1964 to fight a "war on poverty." Called both a "noble experiment"[3] and "one of the great failures of twentieth-century liberalism,"[4] the EOA was at the very least an attempt to alleviate the struggles of a large group of Americans. The act created community action programs as a means to win the newly declared war on poverty. Community action programs (CAPs) varied from city to city because the framers of the EOA believed that local residents knew the needs of their communities best.[5] President Johnson "made community action the centerpiece of his war on poverty. Directed by a new agency, the

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[1] Quoted in Irving Bernstein, *Guns or Butter: the Presidency of Lyndon Johnson* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996): 132.
[2] Ibid., 133.
[3] Ibid., 113.
[4] Allen J. Matusow, *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984): 220.
[5] See Leila Meier Rice, "In the Trenches of the War on Poverty: the Legal Implementation of the Community Action Program, 1964-1969," Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1997.

Office of Economic Opportunity, community action would bypass old-line agencies and provide services directly to the poor."[6] The EOA called for community action agencies "to be developed, conducted, and administered with the maximum feasible participation" of the poor in fighting the war on poverty.[7] Despite the variety in methods of implementation, CAPs often experienced conflict between federal officials, local elites, and the poor.[8] The war on poverty in Tulsa, Oklahoma, experienced such conflicts and, therefore, serves as an example of why the Great Society failed in so many ways to achieve its stated goals. The war on poverty in Tulsa also functions as an example of the unique local circumstances of anti-poverty programs, which provided both opportunities for conflict and consensus that led to both success and failure.

Tulsa was a medium-sized city, characterized by highly segregated neighborhoods. The distribution of wealth in Tulsa was very disparate between black and white Tulsans. With a general population of 471, 466, blacks made up only eight percent of the citizens of Tulsa.[9] Approximately thirteen percent of Tulsans lived below the poverty level; however, 42.2 percent of black Tulsans were living below the poverty line. Twenty-five percent of Tulsans living in poverty were black. This was an obvious example of disproportionately poor minority group.[10]

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[6] Jill Quadnago, *The Color of Welfare: How Racism Undermined the War on Poverty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994): 31. Exactly what defined poverty was in question. When formulating the war on poverty programs, President Johnson largely relied on the statistical findings of Leon Keyserling. Keyserling defined poverty levels as a family having a yearly income of under four thousand dollars a year or an individual having a yearly income of under two thousand dollars. See Bernstein, *Guns or Butter*, 87.

[7] *Economic Opportunity Act of 1964*, Public Law 88-453, 42 U.S. Congress 2701, p. 9.

[8] See Ronald T. Boland, "The War on Poverty in Fort Wayne, 1965-1975: A Case Study" (Ph.D. diss., University of Kansas, 1981); Mark Edward Braun, "Social Change and the Empowerment of the Poor" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 1999); Rice, "In the Trenches."

[9] There were 37, 926 black people living in Tulsa. See U.S. Department of Commerce, Social and Economic Statistics Administration, *Supplementary Report—Low-Income Neighborhoods in Large Cities: 1970, Oklahoma City and Tulsa, Okla.* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1974): iii.

[10] Ibid.

In Tulsa, the newly-created federal program often ran afoul of local politics and politicians. The City of Tulsa and the mayor co-opted the war on poverty by filling the boards of antipoverty agencies with local elites. Tulsa was one of only five cities where local officials or agencies had requested and had received the power to veto proposed antipoverty projects.[11] This gave an enormous amount of power to local officials at the expense of the poor. The idea of maximum feasible participation of the poor proved to be problematic in Tulsa's war on poverty, as it was in many other cities. Exactly what maximum feasible participation of the poor meant was vague and open to interpretation. Because of the ambiguity, Congress passed the Economic Opportunity Amendments of 1966, requiring the poor to choose one-third of the administrative boards of community action agencies and to be representatives of the poor.[12] Despite this clarification or perhaps because of it, Tulsa's war on poverty continued to struggle for acceptance and support from the city's elected leaders, who remained intent on exercising control of the CAPs. Maximum feasible participation never received a fair trial in Tulsa, a circumstance repeated in other United States cities.[13]

Contemporary critics blasted the war on poverty for not going far enough in its undertaking. The editors of a work on urban poverty observed that, "the national antipoverty effort is discouraging as much for what it might have been and for what it seems to be evolving into."[14] Had there been greater support and funding, CAPs could have achieved greater success. Instead, the local political hierarchy often thwarted the

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[11] Louise Lander, ed., *War on Poverty* (New York: Facts on File, 1967): 51.
[12] Ibid., 38.
[13] See Boland, "The War on Poverty in Fort Wayne"; Braun, "Social Change and the Empowerment of the Poor"; Rice, "In the Trenches."
[14] Warner Bloomberg, Jr. and Henry J. Schmandt, eds., *Urban Poverty: Its Social and Political Dimensions* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1970): 368.

efforts of the war on poverty. As early as 1967, the Chamber of Commerce of the United States was ready to abandon the war on poverty. In an evaluation of several war on poverty programs, the members of the Chamber of Commerce of the United States called for closing the OEO and transferring some of the programs into other divisions of the government and eliminating the majority of the programs.[15]

Although some critics believed the war on poverty ought to be more comprehensive, other critics praised it for its innovative approach to ridding the United States of poverty. While Robert A. Levine, a historian, called community action programs "the most controversial program" in the war on poverty, he also called CAPs "the most successful of antipoverty programs" because they created new services and institutions.[16] Levine also argued that, "the War on Poverty has been a success compared with what would have been without a War on Poverty."[17] This kind of hypothesizing is questionable; however, he raises a valid question.

Daniel P. Moynihan was, possibly, the strongest critic of the war on poverty. He argued that the war on poverty was not the government's war to wage. Whether it had gone too far or not far enough were moot points to Moynihan. He believed that poverty was more an issue of individual ability and responsibility than an issue of structural inequality. He claimed that, "it was understood by all that the antipoverty program ... was in trouble" due to a lack of funds and support as well as conservative opposition.[18] Moynihan also associated the antipoverty effort with "the cause of Negro [sic]

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[15] U.S. Chamber of Commerce, *Youth and the War on Poverty: an Evaluation of the Job Corps, Neighborhood Youth Corps, and Project Head Start, prepared for the Chamber of Commerce of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Chamber of Commerce of the United States, 1967).
[16] Robert A. Levine, *The Poor Ye Need Not Have with You: Lessons from the War on Poverty* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1970): 167.
[17] Ibid., 188.
[18] Daniel P. Moynihan, *Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding: Community Action in the War on Poverty* (New York: The Free Press, 1969): 154.

betterment" and contended that the war on poverty was stirring up racial problems in cities across the United States.[19] Moynihan eventually became President Richard M. Nixon's primary advisor on the antipoverty program and greatly influenced the restructuring of the OEO and its programs.[20]

United States Representative Page Belcher, the congressional representative of the Tulsa area, agreed with Moynihan's assessment of the war on poverty. Belcher stated that he had voted against war on poverty bills because, "I don't believe this is the way to make war on poverty. The best way to cure poverty is to create an economy and a business climate where people can get jobs and take care of themselves."[21] Perhaps a southern attitude influenced Belcher's opinion of the causes of poverty. Political scientist Andrew Cowart argues that, "perception of any public policy as a program benefiting Negroes [sic] substantially minimizes potential support for the policy." This perception was particularly characteristic of southern states.[22]

More recent assessments of the war on poverty tend to be more even-handed, acknowledging both its failures and successes. Irving Bernstein argues that the framers of the war on poverty and specifically the EOA "deserve an accolade for their accomplishments."[23] The EOA attempted to face squarely the existence of poverty in a society of plenty. John Andrew, however, contends that the EOA was not accolade-worthy but rather that the act "suffered from hasty preparation, an absorption with racial

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[19] Ibid., 131.
[20] See Quadnago, *The Color of Welfare.*
[21] Letter from Page Belcher to Harry R. Aschan, 29 March 1967, Folder 1g. Box 121, Page Belcher (PB) Collection, Carl Albert Center for Congressional Research and Study (CACCRS), University of Oklahoma (OU), Norman.
[22] Andew T. Cowart, "Anti-Poverty Expenditures in the American States: A Comparative Analysis," *Midwest Journal of Political Science* 13 (May, 1969): 227.
[23] Bernstein, *Guns or Butter*, 113.

and urban problems, and a failure to confront the underlying causes of poverty."[24] Both Andrew and Bernstein agree that the war on poverty was not a true war, but a skirmish.[25] Although Andrew argues that the war on poverty did not end poverty, he acknowledges its success in clearly identifying that the alleviation of "poverty and joblessness as the responsibility of the federal government."[26]

Jill Quadnago asserts that the true legacy of the war on poverty was "the creation of a cadre of black political leaders."[27] The war on poverty and its community action programs were a proving ground for a new generation of black leaders. The idea of maximum feasible participation relayed itself into opportunities for black Americans to take part in policymaking decisions that affected their communities. Quadnago observes, "empowering African Americans politically meant more than including them on community action boards. It also meant using federal funds to circumvent local politicians, local educational institutions, and local welfare authorities."[28] Certainly, this was true in Tulsa. African Americans in the areas of Tulsa that the war on poverty servedbecame increasingly involved in community action as well as in running the programs themselves at a grass roots level. The programs also employed many community residents who received both training and job experience that would serve them long after the CAPs ceased to exist.[29]

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[24] John A. Andrew III, *Lyndon Johnson and the Great Society* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1998): 70.
[25] See Andrew, *Lyndon Johnson*, 71; Bernstein, *Guns or Butter*, 98.
[26] Andrew, *Lyndon Johnson*, 93.
[27] Quadnago, *The Color of Welfare*, 58.
[28] Ibid., 41.
[29] See *Tulsa World*, 3 December 1969.

Michael Katz agrees with Quadnago that the war on poverty "lowered barriers to political participation, employment, housing, and education for black Americans."[30] By doing so, "community action programs reshaped urban politics."[31] Katz defines community action as a "novel and explosive strategy," especially in that "it defined powerlessness as one key source of poverty."[32] Community action was a means of ending the powerlessness that many poor Americans, especially poor African Americans, felt. However, Katz argues that the war on poverty did not end discrimination or racism nor did it eliminate the causes of poverty. Indeed, he asserts, "the nation fought a war on poverty and poverty won."[33]

Did poverty win? In Oklahoma, poverty declined of 20.3 percent between 1969 and 1979, the decade following the implementation of many antipoverty programs.[34] Lowell Gallaway, of the Ohio University Economics Department, argued before Congress that, "antipoverty policies ... have significantly reduced poverty."[35] The Division of Economic Opportunity in the Office of the Governor of the State of Oklahoma issued a statistic shows a decline in the actual number of poor people in Oklahoma, from 679, 517 to 464, 931, although there was an increase in the general population of Oklahoma in the period from 1960 to 1974, from 2, 328, 284 to 2, 559,

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[30] Michael B. Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America*, 10th Anniversary Edition (New York: Basic Books, 1996): 262-3.
[31] Ibid., 263.
[32] Ibid., 267.
[33] Michael B. Katz, *The Undeserving Poor: From the War on Poverty to the War on Welfare* (New York: Pantheon, 1990): 79.
[34] U.S. Congress, Senate, *War on Poverty—victory or defeat? Hearing before the subcommittee on monetary and fiscal policy of the joint economic committee*, U.S. Congress, 99th cong., 1st sess., 20 June 1985 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1986): 51.
[35] Ibid., 84.

229.[36] The war on poverty, then, did help to reduce but not to eradicate poverty in Oklahoma.

As the literature shows, the war on poverty did not bring the end of poverty in the United States. What it did was awaken Americans to the complexity of the problems of poverty and define new ways of addressing the effects and causes of poverty.[37] It also brought many African Americans and other minorities into local politics.[38] In Tulsa, this phenomenon of increased minority participation in local politics was especially true. New Day, Incorporated, one of the community action programs in the city, operated primarily under the direction of residents of the community it served.[39] As a result of New Day's activities, a group of residents formed Citizens for Progress, a civic organization aimed at involving citizens in policymaking decisions in their community.[40]

The path to indigenous community involvement was not an easy one in Tulsa or in other cities. Along the way, there were continual struggle between local politicians and the new federal agencies.[41] Tulsa clearly represents this struggle. The mayor and the City of Tulsa attempted to take control of the war on poverty by sponsoring the city's main community action program, the Tulsa Economic Opportunity Task Force (TEOTF).

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[36]Letter from Robert White to Representative John "Happy" Camp, 27 March 1974, John N. "Happy" Camp Collection, Folder 24A, Box 3, Series I, CACCRS, OU, Norman.

[37] See Andrew, *Lyndon Johnson*; Kenneth B. Clark, *A Relevant War Against Poverty: a Study of Community Action Programs and Observable Social Change* (New York: Metropolitan Applied Research Center, 1968); Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse.*

[38] See Quadnago, *The Color of Welfare*; Joseph A. Califano, Jr., *The Triumph and Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson: the White House Years* (College Station, TX: Texas A & M University Press, 2000); Rice, "In the Trenches;" Jon C. Teaford, *The Rough Road to Renaissance: Urban Revitalization in America, 1940-1985* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1990); J. David Greenstone and Paul E. Peterson, *Race and Authority in Urban Politics: Community Participation and the War on Poverty* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1973).

[39] Letter to Senator Fred Harris from William Richter (head of Southwest OEO in Austin, Texas), 24 December 1968, Folder 26, Box 103, Fred R. Harris (FRH) Collection, CACCRS, OU.

[40] See below, Chapter One.

[41] See Quadnago, *The Color of Welfare;* Rice, "In the Trenches"; Braun, "Social Change"; Moynihan, *Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding*; Boland, "The War on Poverty in Fort Wayne."

The mayor's effort to control the task force troubled the Office of Economic Opportunity, and tensions arose between Tulsa's CAP and the Southwest OEO Regional Office in Austin.[42]

The mayor of Tulsa, Republican James M. Hewgley, Jr., was unable to retain control of the TEOTF. In another attempt to maintain some sense of control, he filled the board of directors of TEOTF with prominent local elites.[43] This was a common strategy of local politicians as they felt their control being usurped by the new federal agencies.[44] By putting elites in control of the boards of antipoverty programs, Mayor Hewgley and his counterparts in other cities undercut the idea of maximum feasible participation.

Another way in which local politicians sought to exert their influence on the war on poverty was by professionalizing the programs. Community action programs were often inefficient and costly. However, CAPs were not necessarily supposed to be efficient. Rather, they were to address the needs of the community as the community defined their needs. Often this locally implemented approach resulted in a disorganized situation. In Tulsa, the city commission conducted an investigation of TEOTF programs in 1969. It found a great waste of resources in some of the programs and called for implementing business-like practices to increase the efficacy of service delivery. While this was a valid concern, the suggestion angered many of the people involved in TEOTF programs because it would mean bringing in professionals to run the programs instead of using community residents.[45] This attempt to professionalize the anti-poverty effort was a unique quality of Tulsa's war on poverty.

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[42] See below, Chapter Two.
[43] See below, Chapter Two.
[44] See Quadnago, *The Color of Welfare*; Moynihan, *Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding*.
[45] See below, Chapter Three.

Dissension, strife, and limited progress characterized the national history of the war on poverty. The history of the war on poverty in Tulsa appears as a microcosm of the national story, with some unique variations. The creation of well-financed federal programs threatened the power and control of local politicians, in Tulsa as elsewhere. Placing local elites in charge of the boards of community action programs undercut the intent of maximum feasible participation, that is, the inclusion of poverty-stricken residents in planning anti-poverty programs. Elected officials in Tulsa, who often felt that the new federal programs threatened their power, thwarted maximum feasible participation. Their effort to frustrate local participation caused the war on poverty in Tulsa to achieve only limited success. They also used the strategy of professionalizing the programs to stifle, in effect, the CAPs with unwanted and unneeded attention. Both strategies of resistance to the war on poverty in Tulsa made the goals of the Great Society virtually unobtainable. In this light, the few successes of Tulsa's war on poverty appear all the more remarkable and laudable.

Chapter One

New Day, Incorporated and Volunteers in Service to America

The war on poverty in Tulsa consisted of various fighting units, including VISTA.[46] VISTA, or Volunteers in Service to America, was a domestic Peace Corps. It presented volunteers "the opportunity to take a personal stand against poverty by using their skills and services in communities striving to solve economic and social problems." The Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) recruited volunteers, often college-aged youths, and trained them on location. Volunteers received a monthly living stipend and a token payment at the end of their service. The Nixon administration transferred VISTA to ACTION, another federal agency, in mid-1971.[47]

New Day, Incorporated--a local non-profit organization, sponsored VISTA. After receiving the approval of the national VISTA office in Washington and Governor Bellmon's office in Oklahoma City, VISTA was eventually to bring up to sixty volunteers to the disadvantaged neighborhoods during 1966 and 1967 in Tulsa. Lena

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[46] VISTA in Tulsa received $330, 679 in federal funds from fiscal year 1967 through fiscal year 1970. The author compiled this total from figures provided by Office of Economic Opportunity, Executive Office of the President, *Summary of Federal Programs for the State of Oklahoma: A Report of Federal Program Impact on the Local Community, FY 1967* (Springfield, VA: Clearinghouse for Federal Scientific and Technical Information, 1967): 292; Office of Economic Opportunity, Executive Office of the President, *Federal Outlays in Oklahoma: A Report of the Federal Government's Impact by State and County, Fiscal Year 1968* (Washington, DC: National Technical Information Service, 1968): 387; Office of Economic Opportunity, Executive Office of the President, *Federal Outlays in Oklahoma: A Report of the Federal Government's Impact by State, County, and Large City, Fiscal Year 1969* (Washington, DC: Federal Information Exchange System, 1969): 418; Office of Economic Opportunity, Executive Office of the President, *Federal Outlays in Oklahoma: A Report of the Federal Government's Impact by State, County, and Large City, Fiscal Year 1970* (Washington, DC: Federal Information Exchange System, 1970): 253.

[47] *Preliminary Inventory of the Records of the Office of Economic Opportunity, Record Group 381*, National Archives and Records Service, General Services Administration (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1977): 2.

Bennett, a dedicated black community activist, was the supervisor of the VISTA workers. Reverend Ben H. Hill, a black pastor and activist, and other Tulsans formed New Day in 1965 to "improve the lot of the poor." New Day, Inc. was not associated with the Tulsa Economic Opportunity Task Force (TEOTF), the official community action agency of Tulsa. However, the TEOTF director called for joint action by TEOTF and New Day to have a "significant impact on poverty." Bennett also indicated that the Republican mayor, James M. Hewgley, Jr., was supportive of VISTA's efforts. These seemingly auspicious beginnings went through a severe trial in early 1967.[48]

By August 1966, there were seventeen VISTA workers in Tulsa. A Republican state senator, Dewey Bartlett, found VISTA to be praiseworthy in its early existence. Bartlett went so far as to call the workers "merchants of hope" and "candle lighters" at a gathering of VISTA workers and Tulsans during his gubernatorial campaign. The senator emphasized the idea of maximum feasible participation when he stated that the goal of working with Tulsa's poor "should be to involve the Tulsa community with the problems found."[49]

VISTA, like other branches of the war on poverty in Tulsa, had difficulty establishing itself in the largely Republican city. Both of the city's major daily newspapers, the *Tulsa Tribune* and the *Tulsa World*, were strongly pro-Republican.[50] Despite Bartlett's support, the newspapers often reported VISTA's activities unfavorably. One of the first mentions of VISTA in the *Tulsa World* carried the inflammatory

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[48] *Tulsa Tribune*, 19 May 1966.
[49] Ibid., 20 August 1966.
[50] David R. Morgan, Robert E. England, and George C. Humphreys. *Oklahoma Politics and Policies: Governing the Sooner State* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991): 188.

headline, "3 Felony Suspects Here Get VISTA Under Way."[51] The article covered a VISTA program whose function it was "to release first felony defendants so they may return to their jobs, if they are employed, and not lose their salaries if they cannot make bail."[52] The article portrayed the program, a beneficial one to the poorer community in Tulsa, as a threat to the community at large. This hostile press coverage adversely affected VISTA's activities and especially community support.

In March 1967, VISTA workers distributed handbills in North and West Tulsa, two of the most poverty-stricken areas in the city. The handbill in North Tulsa contained this message:

> YOU ARE NEGROES, NOT TULSANS. Southside Children play in beautiful parks while Negro children play in streets. DOES CITY HALL CARE? No parks, no movies, no recreation at all. Funny thing about North Tulsa, there's nothing for Negroes, nothing for nobody, just nothing. HAS CITY HALL CONDEMNED THE NORTHSIDE? Vacant condemned houses plague North Tulsa. When kids don't play in grass, they play in glass. Come to a meeting on Wednesday, March 15, 7 pm, Old St. Monica's School, 619 E. Newton Pl. Discuss your complaints about vacant, condemned houses, grocery prices that are too high, landlords who are unfair, and any other problems of our part of town, and be prepared to take action.[53]

The handbill distributed in West Tulsa contained a similar message, headed "You Are Nothing but the Trash of Tulsa."[54] Not surprisingly, these provocative handbills caused an uproar in the city. VISTA workers distributed approximately fifteen hundred handbills in North Tulsa alone. Lena Bennett, VISTA supervisor, defended the techniques, saying, "This was to arouse people to become interested enough to attend the meeting. Just knocking on doors will not get the fellow there that we need to come. We

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[51] *Tulsa World*, 11 August 1965.
[52] Ibid.
[53] VISTA Handbill, New Day, Inc., March, 1967, Folder 53 A, Box 68, FRH Collection, CACCRS, OU.
[54] *Tulsa Tribune*, 18 March 1967.

have to use a language he understands. The truth sometimes hurts."[55] She continued that there was "no intent to create an inflammatory situation." The only actions taken at the meeting were to agree to future meetings and to invite administrators of anti-poverty programs and city officials to address their meetings.[56] Around sixty people attended the meeting advertised in the North Tulsa handbill, far more than any previous similar meeting. Joe Dempsey, board spokesman for VISTA, supported the volunteers. He asserted that it was his understanding that the regional director of VISTA supported the activities resulting from the handbills. Dempsey stated, "The truth is that these documents have encouraged orderly, democratic and productive neighborhood meetings. Surely such results cannot be said to be a breakdown in race relations or an incitement to riot."[57] Parrish Kelly, a twenty-one-year-old volunteer from the Dallas area, said that the comments in the handbill did not intend to be an assault on City Hall. Rather, "the complacency of Tulsa's poor has been observed," and the volunteers were searching for a way to stimulate the interest of the poor. Parrish charged, "There is complacency all over town about the problems of the poor." Certainly, this incident and the outpouring of indignation challenged that complacency.[58]

In a work on the Great Society, historian John Andrew argues that, "perhaps the appearance of a more strident militancy among civil rights groups, youthful activists, and antiwar protestors led middle-class voters to value social peace over social change." The handbill was a strident approach, and the resultant outcry among South Tulsans displayed a sense of disenchantment with the war on poverty by average Americans. President

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[55] Ibid., 17 March 1967.
[56] *Tulsa World*, 18 March 1967.
[57] Ibid., 20 March 1967.
[58] *Tulsa Tribune*, 17 March 1967.

Lyndon Johnson had seemingly failed in his attempt to convince the middle class that the elimination of poverty would require no sacrifice on their part, even if that sacrifice was the simple acknowledgement of the existing inequality of their city.[59]

The West Tulsa handbill, distributed a few weeks earlier than the one in North Tulsa, did not create as much public commotion. Some volunteers suggested that this lack of concern with the West Tulsa handbill was because West Tulsa's poor were primarily white,[60] while North Tulsa was a largely black area. Perhaps acknowledging racial tension in their city while other cities burned with race riots was frightening to many Tulsans. The West Tulsa handbill resulted in the formation of a council that was to meet bimonthly. Larry Connolly, a VISTA worker from Boston, defended the handbill, and VISTA in general, by saying that "it is not a subversive group conspiring to overthrow the local government. It does hope, however to voice legitimate complaints to the city and state political structures."[61]

On March 18, 1967, the *Tulsa World* reported that Mayor Hewgley and recently-inaugurated Governor Dewey Bartlett were to meet and discuss the activities and the future of VISTA. Other state officials, including United States senators, closely watched the situation. United States Senator Mike Monroney, a Democrat, said that he would ask VISTA headquarters in Washington to "define more closely the assignment they (the Tulsa VISTA workers) were sent to Tulsa to fill."[62] Republican Representative Page Belcher was more critical of the incident, stating in a letter to a constituent that "stirring up race troubles is bad enough. But when it is done by Government [sic] employees who

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[59] Andrew, *Lyndon Johnson and the Great Society*, 76.
[60] Letter to Page Belcher from James R. Cox, 20 April 1967, Folder 1g, Box 121, Page Belcher (PB) Collection, CACCRS, OU, Norman.
[61] *Tulsa Tribune*, 18 March 1967.
[62] *Tulsa World*, 18 March 1967.

are sent out to help solve these problems, it is terrible."[63] He also stated that Tulsa had had "comparatively small race trouble," apparently forgetting about the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921.[64] Tulsa indeed has had a long history of race troubles.[65]

The handbill incident attracted the attention of both the national Office of Economic Opportunity and the regional OEO, located in Austin, Texas. William Crook, national VISTA director, pledged to investigate the incident to see if the handbill had violated VISTA guidelines against political activity. The regional OEO would conduct the investigation. In defense of VISTA, attorney Maynard Ungerman, Treasurer of New Day and Tulsa County Democratic chairman said that, "criticism of City Hall could not be a partisan political move because we have three Republicans and two Democrats on the City Commission and the auditor is a Democrat which makes the representation 50-50." He further argued that the handbills "would not lead to racial disturbances and that it was the only feasible technique to be used in the context of Tulsa," a largely segregated city.[66]

Although reporters attempted to convey the incident and its aftermath in an unbiased manner, Tulsa newspaper editors hit hard at VISTA and the war on poverty in general. In an editorial headed, "Tulsa's Clouded 'VISTA,'" *Tulsa Tribune* editor Jenkin Lloyd Jones stated, "the 'Poverty Program' is in a mess all over the country, and Tulsa is no exception." He called the VISTA workers "drop-outs," and denigrated their youthful sincerity, saying that they do "not yet know much about the complexities of human

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[63] Letter from Belcher to H.K. Zink, 28 March 1967, Folder 1g, Box 121, PB Collection, CACCRS, OU, Norman.
[64] *Tulsa World*, 18 March 1967.
[65] See Alfred L. Brophy, *Reconstructing the Dreamland: The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921: Race, Reparations, and Reconciliation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Tim Madigan, *The Burning: Massacre, Destruction, and the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001); or James S. Hirsch, *Riot and Remembrance: The Tulsa Race War and Its Legacy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002).
[66] *Tulsa Tribune*, 18 March 1967.

motivation," and "sincerity isn't enough." He concluded that, "most Tulsans want nothing to do with either Black Power or White Power" and never acknowledged that the handbills contained some truth.[67] The *Tulsa World* also issued a damning editorial regarding the handbill incident. Entitled "Pack Up And Go Home!," it called for VISTA volunteers to "be sent packing, pronto." The editorial also attacked the national OEO office, saying, "if the true aim [of VISTA] is racial agitation, that should be made clear," and Tulsans "should invite the OEO to de-VISTA our City and let us try to work out our problems without such dubious help."[68] This attitude was evidence of a general distrust of the new federal programs in Tulsa.

In reaction to such negative press opinions, a group of North Tulsa residents met at the Community Action Center, near the headquarters of VISTA. The group, predominantly black, accused the press of "distorting the facts rather than admitting those situations [mentioned in the handbills] exist." Bob Eaton, acting co-chairman for the Citizens for Community Action, "blasted the press, lauded VISTA workers, and called for action" on the part of North Tulsans.[69]

As the gathering of North Tulsans demonstrates, VISTA was not universally condemned. Many constituents sent letters to their representatives in support of the VISTA's work. Mae Kathryn Copeland wrote to Democratic U.S. Senator Fred Harris in support of VISTA, arguing, "VISTA workers work well with the poor and are appreciated by them." She defended the handbills, saying that they were not riotous, but rather provocative in their attempt to get local people involved in solving their own

[67] Ibid., 20 March 1967.
[68] *Tulsa World*, 20 March 1967.
[69] Ibid., 24 March 1967.

problems.[70] In a letter to U.S. Senator Mike Monroney, Tulsa resident Troy Gordon stated his hope that the incident would not interfere with efforts to "better the lot of the Negro in Tulsa." He went on to state that because of the handbills, North Tulsans realized that they must participate to right racial wrongs in their city.[71] The handbill incident was one of the most effective ways of involving Tulsans in the war on poverty in their city. Elizabeth Saxby, a South Tulsa resident, wrote to U.S. Representative Page Belcher, calling for him to "get information on the whole VISTA program in Tulsa and the good they have done before you consider any drastic measures." Saxby praised the work of VISTA and, specifically, Lena Bennett.[72] In response, Belcher agreed that some work that VISTA had done was "a good thing," but that he disagreed with their approach and accused the program of igniting racial hatred.[73] Attorney Waldo Jones, Jr., a leader of the Tulsa chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, called the handbill "mild and child's play compared to what has been done in other cities." Jones also noted, "if these people [the mayor, city commissioners, and representatives in Congress, the Senate or state government] would get as excited about the conditions that exist in North Tulsa (as they did about the handbill), we wouldn't need a handbill."[74]

Mayor Hewgley called for an apology from VISTA and New Day to the city and to his administration for the handbills.[75] In the results of his investigation of the handbill

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[70] Letter to Harris from Mae Kathryn Copeland, 18 March 1967, Folder 53A, Box 68, FRH Collection, CACCRS, OU, Norman.
[71] Letter to Monroney from Troy Gordon, 19 March 1967, Folder 17, Box 85, Mike Monroney (MM) Collection, CACCRS, OU, Norman.
[72] Letter to Belcher from Elizabeth Saxby, 18 March 1967, Folder 1g, Box 121, PB Collection, CACCRS, OU, Norman.
[73] Letter to Saxby from Belcher, 29 March 1967, ibid.
[74] *Tulsa Tribune*, 23 March 1967.
[75] Ibid.

incident, he concluded that it "was a mistake in judgement [sic] on the part of the VISTA board."[76] The federal investigation, however, concluded differently. National VISTA director William Crook said that he was "convinced the public outcry against the circulars pinpointed real problems in Tulsa and believes some good will come out of it now that tempers have cooled." Crook praised VISTA's overall objectives and observed, "Mistakes are bound to occur in VISTA ... because fighting poverty is a brand new art ... and we haven't mastered it."[77] James R. Cox, regional VISTA administrator in Austin, and his investigating team concluded that the handbill incident showed "no indication that such efforts were intended to arouse animosity between racial and ethnic groups in Tulsa."[78] A regional VISTA administrator did note that "there was some unfortunate wording in the leaflet, and we certainly cannot endorse it, but we have been impressed with the hard work local VISTA volunteers have attempted."[79] However, the administrator promised tighter supervision of the Tulsa VISTA program. Hewgley, unhappy with this solution, said that the VISTA representatives from Austin "clearly indicated they would like to forget the handbill incident."[80]

In response to Hewgley's call for an apology, Reverend Ben Hill, president of New Day, said he saw "nothing to apologize for." He claimed that the handbills were not taking personal aim at the mayor or his administration "but at the community's attitude that the northside is an afterthought." Hill also objected to the suggestion of closer

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[76] Letter to Harris from J.M. Hewgley, Jr., 21 March 1967, Folder 53A Box 68, FRH Collection, CACCRS, OU, Norman.
[77] Clippings from Vertical Files, Tulsa VISTA file, Tulsa City-County Library.
[78] *Tulsa Tribune*, 20 March 1967.
[79] *Tulsa World,* 21 March 1967.
[80] *Tulsa Tribune*, 21 March 1967.

supervision of the VISTA workers, contending that supervision of their work could not be any closer "unless we babysit with them."[81]

When the city had finally calmed, there were several lasting results of the handbill incident. Perhaps the most significant was that many North Tulsans became more politically active in improving their community. The meetings advertised in the handbills led to the formation of a community organization, Citizens for Progress. The group set out to organize committees to strike at problem areas in their community. They identified these as parks and recreation, consumer prices, city services, fair housing, fair employment, and condemned housing—almost all of which the handbills had acknowledged.[82] James Cox, regional administrator of VISTA, called these meetings "orderly commendable examples of community action." The meetings were an example of maximum feasible participation at its best. Cox also observed that the incident had "contributed significantly to the establishment of dialogue between these citizens [in North Tulsa] and responsible officials of the city of Tulsa."[83]

Another significant result of the handbill incident was an increasingly antagonistic relationship with City Hall. There was increased pressure on TEOTF to take over control of VISTA away from New Day. Maynard Ungerman, Treasurer of New Day, worried that the proposed transfer would be detrimental to VISTA's work. In a letter to United States Senator Harris, Ungerman wrote, "I think it is extremely important that the VISTA program remain under the supervision of the New Day Board and not be put under the supervision of the Task Force which in turn is under the authority of the Mayor. The

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[81] Ibid., 22 March 1967.
[82] Ibid., 30 March 1967.
[83] Letter to Belcher from James R. Cox, 20 April 1967, Folder 1g, Box 121, PB Collection, CACCRS, OU, Norman.

Mayor has definitely been using some of these federal programs for local patronage."[84] This antagonistic relationship was common in other United States cities during the war on poverty. Jill Quadnago notes, "as community action became an agent of equal political opportunity, mayors and city commissions found their authority usurped by upstart civil rights groups.... Not surprisingly, they [the mayors and city commissions] rebelled against a program that empowered the poor."[85] In August, following the handbill incident, Mayor Hewgley warned newly-arrived VISTA volunteers that anti-poverty programs are "only as good as the people in them and the people who direct them."[86]

A final result of the handbill incident was pressure to remove Bennett from her supervisory role. Ungerman wrote to Senator Harris, stating that there were problems between the regional office in Austin and Tulsa's VISTA program. He believed that the Austin office wanted Bennett to resign, and that Tulsa's VISTA program was suffering from a shortage of new volunteers as well as a lack of funding.[87] In a letter from Bennett to William Crook, dated December 21, 1967, she complained of a lack of support from the regional VISTA office. In confirmation of her complaints, she stated that there had been no federal grants for three months, thus her salary was delinquent. In the letter, she implied that the withholding of grants was a tactic to force her to resign. Bennett assured Crook that such tactics would not work.[88] In response to such accusations, Crook asserted that Bennett was not performing her administrative duties and that the VISTA

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[84] Letter to Harris from Maynard Ungerman, 5 April 1967, Folder 53A, Box 68, FRH Collection, CACCRS, OU, Norman.
[85] Quadnago, *The Color of Welfare*, 33.
[86] *Tulsa Tribune*, 21 August 1967.
[87] Letter to Harris from Ungerman, 29 August 1967, Folder 53A, Box 68, FRH Collection, CACCRS, OU, Norman.
[88] Letter to William Crook from Lena D. Bennett, 21 December 1967, ibid.

volunteers were unhappy with her. Crook stated, however, that there was no intention to close New Day.[89] The charge that VISTA volunteers were unhappy with New Day and Bennett did have some credence. In an article in the *Tulsa Tribune*, Parrish Kelley, a former VISTA worker, called for a change in approach to Tulsa's VISTA program. He called New Day's method of using VISTA workers "a waste of the volunteer's time and [it] has a minimal effect on the thousands of poor here." He believed that the board members of New Day were unaware of what really happens in the poverty-stricken areas. Although Kelley and perhaps other volunteers were unhappy with New Day and Bennett, the accusation that New Day board members were not aware of the circumstances of those whom New Day was serving had little basis in fact. Many New Day board members were also members of the community. While there were some local elites on the board, such as Maynard Ungerman, elites did not overrun the board.[90] Although not without its faults, New Day was truer to the intent of maximum feasible participation than Tulsa's other anti-poverty agency, the TEOTF, would prove to be.[91]

Kelley called for a more defined program for the volunteers. He was supportive of the handbill incident and called it New Day's "finest hour."[92] The regional office's campaign to remove Bennett also affected other operations of New Day. Reverend Hill wrote to United States Senator Monroney for assistance in getting New Day's programs re-funded. Hill stated that New Day's credit was in jeopardy because the regional office had reneged on a promise to re-fund New Day.[93]

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[89] Letter to Harris from William H. Crook, 1967 [?], ibid.
[90] *Tulsa Tribune*, 6 July 1967.
[91] See below, Chapters Two and Three.
[92] *Tulsa Tribune*, 6 July 1967.
[93] Letter to Monroney from Reverend Ben H. Hill, 29 September 1967, Folder 17, Box 85, MM Collection, CACCRS, OU, Norman.

Despite criticism from the regional office, Bennett had supporters. Dr. Walter Mason, director of Oklahoma City's war on poverty, acknowledged his admiration for Bennett's work with VISTA. He called the work of the VISTA staff "outstanding."[94] Maynard Ungerman and Reverend Ben Hill, both New Day Board members, were also supportive of Bennett's continued supervision of VISTA. In spite of funding cutbacks, Bennett moved forward with VISTA. She organized presentations of movies in the North Tulsa area and established enrichment programs for poor women.[95]

In December 1967, the *Tulsa World* ran a series of six articles on VISTA. In rehashing the handbill incident, the reporter noted that VISTA continued to defend the handbill, although volunteers admitted that they were "sick of hearing about it."[96] The volunteers wanted to move past the stigma associated with the handbills and to continue to fight their part of the war on poverty. The series noted that VISTA had not changed its direction in light of the handbill incident. While the OEO "cautions VISTAs against becoming embroiled in controversy," it allowed the local volunteers to direct their own programs and initiatives. In the series' conclusion, the author stated that, "the Volunteers in Service to America are apt to remain one of the more controversial branches of one of the government's more controversial domestic programs."[97]

Tulsa's VISTA program continued its work in Tulsa throughout 1968 uninterrupted by controversy. In late 1969, however, VISTA again made headlines. This time it was not because of inflammatory literature, but because of VISTA's impending demise. Richard Nixon, was the new, more conservative president in the White House by

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[94] *Tulsa Tribune*, 21 August 1967.
[95] *Tulsa World*, 31 August 1967.
[96] Ibid., 10 December 1967.
[97] Ibid., 17 December 1967.

this time, and many Great Society programs experienced rollbacks.[98] In mid-October, Lena Bennett reported that it appeared that VISTA would be "phased out by default." Although New Day had applied for more volunteers, they did not receive any in the September-October training cycle, and Bennett did not expect any new workers in the next two training cycles. The continuance of the program was not a question of funds, because New Day had received an allocation of $37 million dollars, a $5 million dollar increase over the previous year.[99] The remaining seven VISTA volunteers were to complete their terms. Many of these volunteers worried that their tasks would remain unfinished if VISTA did not continue its programs.[100]

Because of the confusion surrounding the phasing out of Tulsa's VISTA program, the New Day board demanded that the national VISTA office investigate the regional offices in Austin. New Day board members accused the regional office of ending New Day's sponsorship of VISTA without notifying the board and without an opportunity for a hearing. The New Day board attributed this to accusations that the local VISTA program was "working on politically-oriented projects."[101] By this time, Reverend Lee O'Neil, a white Catholic priest and social activist, had replaced Reverend Ben Hill as President of New Day. O'Neil said that he and Bennett did not learn of the reassignment of VISTA sponsorship until they telephoned John Duffy, head of the state poverty programs and former president of TEOTF. O'Neil and Bennett alleged that Governor Bartlett granted the sponsorship transfer despite a "gentleman's understanding that no change would be made in the VISTA sponsorship here without notification to the New

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[98] See Quadnago, *The Color of Welfare*, 57.
[99] *Tulsa World*, 16 October 1969.
[100] Ibid, 29 October 1969.
[101] *Tulsa Tribune*, 27 October 1969.

Day Board and an opportunity for a hearing."[102] Sponsorship of VISTA was to be transferred to the TEOTF, despite the Task Force board members' vote to leave sponsorship with the New Day board. Maynard Ungerman argued that the entire VISTA concept was changing. He charged the Nixon administration with using professionals "who want another year before being drafted, but have no contact with the poor whom they are supposed to be serving."[103] VISTA administrators in Austin predictably denied the charges leveled at them by the New Day board.[104] On October 30, the regional VISTA office announced that a decision regarding the possible termination of the New Day VISTA program would arrive in two to six weeks. The three possible solutions were "to terminate the program, ... phase out the program as volunteers end their periods of service, [or to] ... make specific recommendations for changes and assign new volunteers."[105]

The final recommendation by the regional office was to finance VISTA tentatively for six months, in effect finally compensating Bennett for her work. The regional office did not, however, assign any new volunteers. The remaining volunteers' terms would expire before the six months was up.[106] In response, New Day appealed to the United States House and Senate to launch an investigation of the regional VISTA office. The New Day board had voted "to resist the nonnegotiable demands" of the regional administrator. In addition to tentative financing, the regional office instructed that future VISTA activities be limited to "rural communities outside of Tulsa." Bennett

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[102] *Tulsa World*, 27 October 1969.
[103] Ibid., 30 October 1969. The new Nixon administration was de-emphasizing maximum feasible participation, as this demonstrates.
[104] *Tulsa Tribune*, 27 October 1969.
[105] Ibid., 30 October 1969.
[106] *Tulsa World*, 19 November 1969.

and the New Day board believed it was their role to determine the work of the VISTA workers in Tulsa. This call for rural work would phase out several of VISTA's programs, including Bail Bonds and Neighbor for Neighbor transportation. Both of these programs helped poor Tulsans maintain their jobs and provide an income for their families. Bail Bonds released first-time offenders awaiting trial so that they could keep their jobs.[107] Neighbor for Neighbor arranged for assistance in transporting persons to and from work who did not have alternative means of transportation. Edward De La Rosa, the regional VISTA administrator in Texas, called these activities "not practical or possible."[108] De La Rosa also hinted at the possibility of sending new volunteers to Tulsa if New Day met his demands.[109] Father O'Neil wrote a letter to President Nixon pleading for intervention on New Day's behalf. In explaining the situation, O'Neil observed that New Day had "been denied a copy of the evaluation, in fact we have been tried, judged, condemned, without a chance to confront our accusers, without trial and without counsel." He asked Nixon to tell De La Rosa that New Day would continue to be the principal sponsor of VISTA in Tulsa and to send new volunteers.[110] Although there is no record of Nixon's response, if he responded at all, in April 1970, VISTA received assurance from the Executive Office of Congressional and Governmental Relations that an assignment of additional volunteers was in sight. While the Bail Bonds program did not receive refunding, Neighbor for Neighbor did, as were various other projects.[111]

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[107] See Ibid., 11 August 1965.
[108] *Tulsa Tribune*, 26 November 1969.
[109] *Tulsa World*, 26 November 1969.
[110] Letter from Lee O'Neil to President Nixon, 18 December 1969, Folder 4d, Box 146, PB Collection, CACCRS, OU, Norman.
[111] *Tulsa World*, 16 April 1970.

Antagonistic relationships with both the city government and the regional offices characterized Tulsa's VISTA program. Accused several times of sponsoring political activities,[112] the program persisted in its goal of alleviating the struggles of poor Tulsans. Like other agents of community action, VISTA "originated as a program to consolidate social services and improve service provision." As the agency matured, however, "it rapidly became an agent in the struggle for political rights."[113] This shift in objective was not an intentional one; rather, it was the natural growth of a group wholly involved in the lives of the poor and true to the intent of maximum feasible participation. The legacy of VISTA in Tulsa was an increased involvement of the poor in fighting for their rights. The group that formed as a result of the handbill incident, Citizens for Progress, was a testament to that legacy. The involvement of the poor was a difficult battle in the war on poverty, yet Tulsa's VISTA provided a means for achieving that goal. Clark observed that the poor's "lack of experience with organizations and their suspicion of all organizational procedures" was an obstacle in their involvement. VISTA personalized organizations, and thus made involvement more appealing.[114] The Nixon administration transferred Tulsa's VISTA, along with other programs across the United States, into the control of a federal agency, ACTION, in mid-1971, effectively ending New Day's involvement.

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[112] The handbill incident was one such activity, although exactly how it was political is questionable. See above.
[113] Quadnago, *The Color of Welfare*, 11.
[114] See Kenneth B. Clark, *Relevant War on Poverty: A Study of Community Action Programs and Observable Social Change* (New York: Metropolitan Applied Research Center, Inc., 1968): 88.

Chapter Two

Tulsa Economic Opportunity Task Force

In mid-1965, the City of Tulsa submitted an application for a Community Action Program Development Grant from the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO).[115] The OEO approved the application and initially funded the development of Tulsa's community action program (CAP) for $85,174.[116] In its application, the City of Tulsa defined the directives of the Tulsa Economic Opportunity Task Force (TEOTF), the new CAP. The directives clearly outlined the goals and objectives of the TEOTF. These included investigating poverty's incidence and characteristics in Tulsa, analyzing existing services and agencies, preparing "proposals for the organization, financing, scope, and content of a community action program for Tulsa," and developing "means by which residents of the areas and members of the groups to be served may participate effectively

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[115] The Tulsa Economic Opportunity Task Force (TEOTF) received approximately $7, 419, 493 in federal funds from fiscal year 1967 through fiscal year 1970, including funds for Head Start, Legal Services, and Neighborhood Health Centers, all of which TEOTF sponsored.. The author compiled this total from figures provided by Office of Economic Opportunity, Executive Office of the President, *Summary of Federal Programs for the State of Oklahoma: A Report of Federal Program Impact on the Local Community, FY 1967* (Springfield, VA: Clearinghouse for Federal Scientific and Technical Information, 1967): 292; Office of Economic Opportunity, Executive Office of the President, *Federal Outlays in Oklahoma: A Report of the Federal Government's Impact by State and County, Fiscal Year 1968* (Washington, DC: National Technical Information Service, 1968): 387; Office of Economic Opportunity, Executive Office of the President, *Federal Outlays in Oklahoma: A Report of the Federal Government's Impact by State, County, and Large City, Fiscal Year 1969* (Washington, DC: Federal Information Exchange System, 1969): 418; Office of Economic Opportunity, Executive Office of the President, *Federal Outlays in Oklahoma: A Report of the Federal Government's Impact by State, County, and Large City, Fiscal Year 1970* (Washington, DC: Federal Information Exchange System, 1970): 253.

[116] Letter to Governor Henry Bellmon from Robert Burke Jones (Oklahoma Coordinator of the Division of Economic Opportunity of the Office of the Governor), 14 June 1965, Folder 14A, Box 8, FRH Collection, CACCRS, OU, Norman.

in the development, conduct, and administration" of the CAP. The task force was also to "mobilize the resources of the community, public and private, to execute and implement ... the attack on poverty."[117] The directives set far-reaching and often unattainable goals for the nascent CAP, and the task force continually struggled to reach these goals. While sometimes successful, the TEOTF largely failed in its directives, particularly in its implementation of maximum feasible participation of the poor.

From its beginning, the task force strove to find its place in Tulsa. As Jill Quadnago notes, "mayors had their own ideas who should run community action. Instead of appointing the poor, they filled the poverty boards with prominent locals."[118] Tulsa's antipoverty effort proved this contention. Its first chairman, appointed by the mayor, was James E. Hughes, vice-president of Western Supply Company, while the vice-chairman was Mrs. Gerald Westby, a prominent socialite and philanthropist.[119] They certainly were not residents of the community that the task force was formed to help. Board involvement of wealthy prominent citizens was often the subject of criticism.[120] Maynard Ungerman, a local attorney and chairman of the local Democratic Party, accused the mayor of using the task force as patronage and of controlling the task force.[121] Reverend Ben H. Hill, a North Tulsa Baptist pastor and board member of another anti-poverty agency, New Day, sent a telegram to United States Senator Fred Harris regarding the failure of the task force to achieve its stated goals. Hill wanted Harris to know that the Tulsa branch of the OEO "is consistantly [sic] taking unfair

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[117] City of Tulsa, *Application for Community Action Program* (Tulsa: The City of Tulsa, 1965): 2.
[118] Jill Quadnago, *The Color of Welfare*, 35.
[119] *Tulsa Tribune*, 1 March 1965.
[120] Approximately one-half of the board members resided in South Tulsa, an area largely unaffected by poverty. The other half resided in various parts of Tulsa and surrounding communities, including North Tulsa. See *Tulsa Tribune*, 27 December 1968.
[121] Letter to Harris from Ungerman, 5 April 1967, Folder 53A, Box 68, FRH Collection, CACCRS, OU, Norman.

advantage of the people who are to be helped by the act. The local task force is inequitably constructed and not a single neighborhood project has been approved to date."[122] By appointing local elites, the mayor undermined the intent of community participation in the war on poverty.

Not only did the task force have to face this kind of criticism, but the battle between the federal and state governments also affected it. In August 1965, the United States Senate voted to remove a governor's right to veto war on poverty projects. The governor of Oklahoma, Henry Bellmon, called this move a "sinister sign of federal usurpation." Senator Harris disagreed with Bellmon and observed that under Bellmon's control there had been a "bungling of war on poverty projects" in the state.[123] With the Senate's vote, the Tulsa task force no longer was subject to state control, only to local and federal supervision. A few months later, however, Republicans in the United States House of Representatives sought unsuccessfully to sever ties between city hall and local CAPs. Because many city governments were under the control of Democratic machines, removing power over the war on poverty from the urban Democrats would "pour more oil on the flaming dispute between the poverty-fighters here and Democratic politicians in the cities." The House Republicans believed that this strategy would lead to the downfall of the war on poverty.[124] Tulsa, however, did not fit this mold. Tulsa, a largely Republican city, had a Republican mayor, J.M. Hewgley, Jr., and Republicans made up the majority of the task force's membership.[125]

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[122] Letter to Harris from Reverend Ben H. Hill, 10 December 1965, Folder 14A, Box 8, ibid.
[123] *Tulsa Tribune*, 18 August 1965.
[124] *Daily Oklahoman*, 6 December 1965.
[125] Samuel A. Kirkpatrick, David R. Morgan, and Thomas G. Kielhorn, *The Oklahoma Voter: Politics, Elections, and Parties in the Sooner State* (Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1977).

Control over the task force continued to be in dispute through its first year. In mid-1966, the Tulsa city commission agreed to relinquish its right to appoint members of the task force. Commissioners, however, still retained the power to veto proposals submitted to the OEO by TEOTF. The regional OEO in Austin objected to the latitude of power exercised that the city commission exercised and to the possibility that City Hall would be in charge of hiring the task force's administrative staff. Cristobal Aldrete, of the regional OEO, "advocated from the beginning that the local anti-poverty effort be operated by a non-profit group free of supervision from City Hall." The commissioners argued that they would be unable to accept responsibility for the anti-poverty effort without retaining some kind of authority. The compromise reached between the regional OEO and Tulsa's city hall pleased neither party.[126]

A few days later, Tulsa city commissioners tried to reassert their authority over the task force. They appealed to the state director of the OEO, Robert Haught. Haught, however, did not side with them. Instead, he indicated his support of the regional OEO's insistence that the commissioners surrender their authority to screen task force job applicants. In a letter to Mayor Hewgley, the regional OEO proposed to give the city commission authority only in the selection of the executive director of the task force. Haught also stated that he was in favor of the idea that the task force should be under the control of a private non-profit agency independent of City Hall. He observed that Tulsa had the only government agency-controlled community action program in the state, from a group of fifty-three programs. Private agencies operated the other fifty-two programs.

[126] *Tulsa World*, 10 June 1966.

Although he supported the regional office, Haught stated that he would not interfere in the dispute between the regional OEO and Tulsa officials.[127]

On June 23, Mayor Hewgley and City Attorney Charles Norman flew to Austin for a conference intended to resolve the dispute. The City of Tulsa claimed that it had yielded all power that the city charter would allow.[128] They also argued that the city commission had approved every proposal that the task force had sent to the commission.[129] As a result of this conference, William Crook, regional director of the OEO, and Mayor Hewgley issued a press release stating, "general accord has been reached on points previously in dispute between the city of Tulsa and OEO." Crook announced that the OEO would fund the City of Tulsa's antipoverty program on an interim basis while the task force "restud[ied] its structure in view of the funding and program advantages of a nonprofit corporation." The City of Tulsa would sponsor any resultant nonprofit agency, a proposal towards which Hewgley was sympathetic.[130]

That fall, the task force found a home for its operations. The Tulsa Diocese of the Catholic Church offered the campus of St. Monica School, at 619 East Newton Place in North Tulsa, to the task force to use "for the good of the poor." The school had closed, but the diocese wanted to use the property for the benefit of the surrounding community.[131] The old St. Monica School became the Community Action Center (CAC). It served as a meeting center and neighborhood office. The CAC eventually housed the

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[127] Ibid., 14 June 1966.
[128] Letter to Senator Mike Monroney from Dale Speer (Reporter at the *Tulsa World*), 20 June 1966, Folder 20, Box 62, MM Collection, CACCRS, OU, Norman.
[129] Letter to Sargent Shriver from Dale Speer, 13 June 1966, ibid.
[130] Press Release, 23 June 1966 (?), ibid.
[131] *Daily Oklahoman*, 1 September 1966.

CAC staff, the Target Area Action Group,[132] VISTA volunteers, Choice Buying Club, Legal Aid, Follow-Up Mobilization Service, and Jobs Unlimited, all of which were subsidiary agencies of TEOTF and New Day.[133]

In addition to finding a new home, the reorganized task force also found a new president of the board of directors. John Duffy, the president of Murphy Oil Company of Oklahoma, had previously served on the task force as a board member. This was another example of filling the board with prominent locals.[134] Duffy viewed fighting the poverty war as an obligation and responsibility of wealthier community residents. He observed that, "the price of not fighting poverty can be staggering" and pointed to racial "explosions in Watts and Chicago." Duffy urged greater involvement of the Tulsa community, including residents of both the poor and wealthy areas. He believed that Tulsa was particularly unreceptive to the antipoverty effort and sought to change that by increasing community participation.[135] Robert Haught, state coordinator of the OEO, agreed with Duffy that wider community effort was the only way to achieve success. Haught acknowledged the difficulty that TEOTF had faced in its establishment[136] but was optimistic about the new nonprofit agency formed to operate the task force. He believed that although Tulsa was "a year behind" because of the controversy with the regional OEO office, the city was "ripe to produce some tangible results from the community action program."[137]

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[132] The Target Area Action Group was the citizen's participatory group for Tulsa's Model City program, another branch of the war on poverty.
[133] *Tulsa World*, 2 December 1969.
[134] See above.
[135] *Tulsa Tribune*, 2 September 1966.
[136] Duffy was referring to the difficulties between the regional OEO and the city commission in the origins of the task force. See above.
[137] *Tulsa Tribune*, 7 October 1966.

The formation of the nonprofit agency did not, however, end the task force's troubles. The governor wanted to transfer the state OEO out of the Office of the Governor to the University of Oklahoma. The *Tulsa Tribune* called the OEO a "lush political vehicle used to fund all war on poverty projects in the state." Governor Bellmon denied the suggestion that the proposed move was political. The newspaper also accused the Bellmon administration of spreading "its power to all areas of the state through the various poverty projects." Transferring the office would prevent the firing of Bellmon's team when his successor came into office in January. Federal officials objected to the move as well.[138] In the end, the move did not occur, but it brought more controversy to the state's—and thus Tulsa's—war on poverty.[139]

The previous chapter discussed some of the troubles between TEOTF and New Day, another local anti-poverty agency. As a result of the VISTA handbill incident,[140] there was pressure to transfer control of VISTA from New Day to the task force.[141] The task force formed after the establishment of New Day, which had occurred when the war on poverty was very new. When the city organized the task force, it wanted to consolidate all antipoverty efforts. New Day objected to this suggestion, noting that their staff and board had established relationships with the community in which they were serving and that it would be counterproductive to introduce a new agency to a population

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[138] Ibid., 18 October 1966.
[139] There is a tradition in Oklahoma of a linkage between universities and politics. For example, Oklahoma State University's former President Bennett had ties to the Democratic Party. As another example, former Senator David Boren is now the president of the University of Oklahoma. See Morgan, England, and Humphreys, *Oklahoma Politics and Policies* for more information.
[140] See above, Chapter One.
[141] *Tulsa World*, 21 March 1967.

already hostile to organizational procedures.[142] Both programs remained in operation although their relationship continued to be antagonistic.[143]

Democratic United States Senator Mike Monroney contributed to TEOTF's troubles when he blasted the salaries of antipoverty officials. Monroney proposed to limit the administrative costs of CAPs to 15 percent of the total budget. He also proposed requiring local elected officials to be included on the boards of community action agencies.[144] John Duffy, task force president, responded to these accusations, albeit in a vague manner, observing that, "our administrative staff as a whole, I think, receives a very, very low wage."[145] Billy Leathers, TEOTF executive director, answered the charge by pointing out that some salaries "are so low that the worker can qualify for poverty aid."[146] Monroney's suggestion of including elected officials on the board was not usually a successful approach. As Daniel P. Moynihan observes, "it might be said that the CAPs most closely controlled by City Hall were disappointing, and that the ones most antagonistic were destroyed."[147] The task force struggled to find a balance between those two alternatives. Monroney eventually changed his mind regarding these proposals, but his criticism was another obstacle the task force had to overcome.[148]

Despite such obstacles, many of the efforts of the task force met with approval and support. In late 1967, a petition bearing over seven hundred signatures circulated in

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[142] Letter to Harris from Maynard Ungerman, 5 April 1967, Folder 53A, Box 68, FRH Collection. See also Kenneth B. Clark, *Relevant War on Poverty: A Study of Community Action Programs and Observable Social Change* (New York: Metropolitan Applied Research Center, Inc., 1968). Clark observed that the poor's "lack of experience with organizations and their suspicion of all organizational procedures" was an obstacle in their involvement (88).

[143] Letter to Harris from Ungerman, 19 October 1969, Folder 19, Box 147, FRH Collection. Ungerman noted continued fighting between the two agencies. The task force was continually accusing New Day of working for political purposes.

[144] *Tulsa Tribune*, 27 September 1967.

[145] Ibid., 28 September 1967.

[146] Ibid., 29 September 1967.

[147] Moynihan, *Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding*, 131.

[148] *Daily Oklahoman*, 5 October 1967.

Tulsa. Community residents were fearful of cuts in federal funding and sought to save TEOTF programs by petitioning their congressional representatives. The national OEO also recognized the efforts of the task force. The president, vice president, and treasurer of TEOTF received Urban Services Awards in recognition of their work in early 1968.[149]

In a board meeting on the new Model City program,[150] the task force stressed the importance of citizen participation in designing programs that would affect their community. Many task force officials strove for community involvement because they did not believe programs would be successful "unless the people affected have a hand in carrying it out."[151] There were also complaints of a lack of communication between TEOTF and community participants in neighborhood councils.[152] The task force suggested forming another antipoverty agency to work solely on citizen involvement. Even this suggestion met with criticism. Father Lee O'Neil, pastor of St. Monica's Church and member of the New Day board, charged that, "poverty program officials, by receiving a salary for representing the poor, are canceling the usefulness of any organization speaking for the community to be served."[153] O'Neil argued that the existing OEO groups should "negate the necessity for any new organization representing the poor." He continued, "Why do you have to go out and get another staff? If Mr. Leathers [TEOTF director] doesn't represent the poor, who does?" Billy Leathers countered this attack by contending that the current staff was inadequate to handle the

[149] *Tulsa Tribune*, 19 January 1968.
[150] See below, Chapter Four.
[151] *Tulsa Tribune*, 25 January 1968.
[152] For example, see letter to Fred Harris from Loretta Welch, 13 March 1967, FRH Collection.
[153] *Tulsa Tribune*, 25 January 1968.

needs of the community. The board meeting settled down, but tensions remained heightened. Certainly, both men's contentions had validity.[154]

Eventually, Leathers won out. By May 1968, TEOTF's staff had grown from five employees to thirty-six, not including approximately two hundred field workers from delegate agencies.[155] The Model City program was underway, concentrating antipoverty efforts in a North Tulsa neighborhood.[156] Leathers believed that the poverty war in Tulsa finally had "some sense of direction." He attributed this newfound purpose to greater community involvement, both from the residents of poorer communities and from private industry. The task force organized a concentrated employment program with assistance from the state Employment Service.[157] Low-rent housing and rent supplement programs were established as well as a consumer buying club that sought to organize low-income families so that they could buy goods at wholesale prices.[158] Another outgrowth of the task force was the establishment of a credit union.[159]

Although the task force was able to move forward with many antipoverty projects, criticism was never far. The regional OEO in Austin suggested that the TEOTF board of directors take a retreat so that they could address problems that the board only superficially addressed at the monthly board meetings. Most board members favored this idea, acknowledging that "too often ... board members merely 'rubber stamp' questions put to a vote" without much consideration.[160] However well intended the retreat was, it

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[154] Ibid., 26 January 1968.
[155] Ibid., 24 May 1968.
[156] See City Demonstration Agency, *Tulsa Model Cities Program: A Comprehensive Demonstration Program to Improve the Quality of Urban Life* (Tulsa, OK: City Demonstration Agency, 1969); also see below, Chapter Four.
[157] The concentrated employment program (CEP) will be discussed in further detail below, Chapter Three.
[158] *Tulsa Tribune*, 24 May 1968.
[159] The task force credit union will be discussed in further detail below, Chapter Four.
[160] *Tulsa Tribune*, 27 December 1968.

met with disapproval. The *Daily Oklahoman* reported "plush state lodges scanned for group studying poverty." The newspaper reported that the cost of such a retreat would be significant—sixteen dollars a day as well as reimbursement for mileage at ten cents per mile.[161] This article, while factual, was selective in its reporting. State lodges were an option for the retreat; however, most board members voted to hold the retreat in Tulsa to reduce the cost. Nonetheless, the task force once again received criticism and negative press coverage.[162]

In an evaluation of Tulsa's war on poverty, the regional OEO in Austin mixed criticism with praise. The regional team of evaluators observed that Tulsa had "won some battles in the war on poverty," despite having "suffered from fights within the city as well as the basic conservatism and distrust of federal programs that characterize the city." Their report also acknowledged that poverty was largely a black issue in Tulsa, stating that, "being raised on the wrong side of the tracks in Tulsa is being raised black." As a result, most war on poverty efforts had been concerned almost entirely with the black poor. The team criticized the lack of assistance for poor whites in Tulsa.[163] The report praised the task force for having the support of the mayor's office and other public officials. Despite this praise, often the support of the mayor was equal to control by the mayor. This was a definite weakness in Tulsa's war on poverty.[164] The team also reported that there needed to be a clearer delineation between the Model Cities program and the task force; confusion and lack of communication existed between the two branches of the war on poverty. Despite some improvements in community involvement,

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[161] *Daily Oklahoman*, 27 December 1968.
[162] *Tulsa Tribune*, 27 December 1968.
[163] *Tulsa World*, 31 January 1969.
[164] See Moynihan, *Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding.*

the team said that Tulsa businessmen and other civic leaders "do not participate in the poverty programs to the degree that they could and should."[165]

The task force also had to address personnel issues. Lillie Loftin, a local black resident, was the receptionist at the TEOTF offices in 1968. The task force terminated Loftin's employment in mid-November because of alleged "inability to efficiently perform the duties" of her job. In the letter of termination, O.B. Jeffrey (business manager of the task force) outlined the duties that the task force felt that Loftin had not performed. These included not answering the phone promptly, transferring calls to the wrong extension, leaving callers on hold, and not recording messages properly. Instead of giving Loftin two weeks' notice, the task force enclosed a check for two weeks' salary.[166] Loftin appealed her termination, arguing that her superiors had never disciplined her nor had she had an opportunity to present her side of the matter. She also addressed every alleged incident of misconduct. She requested the reversal of her termination.[167] Loftin charged that the board had denied her rights that were set forth in the personnel policy. Loftin did not receive a reply to her appeal. This lack of response caused Loftin's husband, Howard, to appeal to United States Representative Page Belcher, a Republican. Mr. Loftin contended that the task force, supported by federal funds, was acting in a manner unworthy of the federal government. He stated, "I have been employed by the U.S. gov't for 9 yrs, and never have I witnessed such tactics by a Federal supported agency."[168] Belcher appealed to William Richter, director of the regional OEO in Austin. Richter responded with the results of his investigation of the

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[165] *Tulsa World*, 31 January 1969.
[166] Letter to Lillie Loftin from O.B. Jeffrey, 19 November 1968, Folder 4g, Box 146, PB Collection.
[167] Letter to Board of Directors of TEOTF from Lillie Loftin, 21 November 1968, ibid.
[168] Letter to Belcher from Howard Loftin, 30 November 1968, ibid.

incident. Billy Leathers and Joe Cain, Deputy Director of the Tulsa Community Action Agency, told Richter that Loftin's superiors had informed her of her deficiencies, and her work continued to be unsatisfactory. They also reported that the involved parties had reached an agreement to the satisfaction of all. Loftin was to receive an additional two weeks' salary.[169]

Despite this assertion, the Loftins were unhappy with the agreement. Mr. Loftin again appealed to Belcher. Loftin contended that he and his wife had received threats because of their complaints about the task force. He also argued that Mrs. Loftin's former employers instructed her coworkers to cooperate with the action taken against her. He called this "a method used to coerce the employees into cooperating for fear of the same action being taken against them." The Loftins had been unable to read alleged complaints from other employees during her hearing. The task force had not yet paid the additional two weeks' salary previously agreed upon. Mr. Loftin stated that the director and deputy director of the task force had purposefully misled Richter. Mr. Loftin argued that, "it is obvious to me that the Director and Deputy Director are lying in order to keep harmony between the regional offices and their own." Mr. Loftin continued that, "these examples of mismanagement of employees and consequently mishandling of government funds must not go uncorrected." He requested an investigation by Belcher.[170] In response, Belcher informed the Loftins that he would investigate the matter but that he wanted to wait until the new Nixon administration had taken office.[171] True to his word, Belcher sent the information regarding Mrs. Loftin's dismissal to Donald Rumsfeld, the new OEO director under President Nixon.

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[169] Letter to Belcher from Walter Richter, 6 January 1969, ibid.
[170] Letter to Belcher from Howard Loftin, 14 January 1969, ibid.
[171] Letter to Loftin from Belcher, 22 January 1969, ibid.

In the midst of the controversy surrounding Mrs. Loftin's dismissal, the task force faced another personnel problem. The task force had hired John Milvo, also a local black resident, as personnel officer in August of 1969. The task force let him go after thirty days. Milvo argued that his superiors never made clear to him the duties of his position. Because he was let go while he was still a probationary employee, he was aware that he had no legal rights to appeal the dismissal. However, Milvo felt that it was his "duty as a citizen to point out the manner in which the local Community Action Agency is being administered." Similar to Mrs. Loftin's situation, Milvo argued that he had not received any correction from his superiors before the termination of his employment. Milvo also stated that he did not have the opportunity to address the accusations made against him.[172] Like Mrs. Loftin, Milvo answered his termination with a rebuttal of every charge leveled against him.[173] Milvo also appealed to Representative Belcher. Belcher again requested the assistance of Rumsfeld. Belcher believed that "a very thorough review should be made of the employment practices of the Tulsa Economic Opportunity Task Force."[174] Because of this appeal to the national OEO, the regional OEO hired a consulting firm to conduct an investigation of the TEOTF's personnel policies.[175] Those findings suggested that the personnel policies were adequate.[176] The task force, however, tried to address the problems by meeting with Milvo. As a result of this meeting, the task

[172] Letter to Fred D. Baldwin (Regional CAP Administrator, Southwest Region, Austin) from John Milvo, 19 September 1969, ibid.
[173] Letter to Joe Cain from John Milvo, 18 September 1969, ibid.
[174] Letter to Donald Rumsfeld from Belcher, 26 September 1969, ibid.
[175] Letter to Belcher from Richter, 9 October 1969, ibid.
[176] Letter to Hamah King (Metro Team Supervisor, OEO Southwest Region, Austin) from Robert G. Failing (Arthur Young and Company), 10 October 1969, ibid.

force board decided to consider Milvo's suggestions in formulating a new personnel policy.[177]

Both Milvo and Mrs. Loftin were African Americans residing in the community that the task force was to serve. Charges of incompetence, like those leveled at Milvo and Loftin, were widespread in community action programs. Because of the emphasis on maximum feasible participation, CAPS often hired unqualified residents to work in the programs.[178] By firing Milvo and Loftin, the task force lost sight of the original intent of community action programs and maximum feasible participation. In effect, the task force was thwarting community involvement by criticizing the local residents for being incompetent. The hindrance of community involvement was critical because the success of a community action program was not manifest in its efficiency but in its development of civic responsibility in and participation of local residents.

The troubled history of the Tulsa Economic Opportunity Task Force was not quite finished. The next chapter will discuss the final major controversy of the TEOTF and the demise of the OEO. By 1973, the Community Affairs Division in the Nixon administration co-opted community action groups across the nation, including the Tulsa task force, when Nixon unceremoniously abolished the OEO.[179]

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[177] Letter to King from Robert McGowen (TEOTF Board President), 14 October 1969, ibid.
[178] See Kenneth B. Clark, *Relevant War on Poverty*, 88.
[179] See Quadnago, *The Color of Welfare*, 57.

Chapter Three

The Report to the City Commission

Near the end of 1969, the Tulsa Economic Opportunity Task Force faced its greatest challenge. Jack O'Brien, City Finance Commissioner, conducted an investigation of TEOTF programs. The investigation primarily focused on the Concentrated Employment Program (CEP), although it also studied other programs. During the first week of December, O'Brien released his report. At the same time, the *Tulsa World* and the *Tulsa Tribune* both ran a series detailing the findings of the report. O'Brien conducted the investigation because federal officials asked the City of Tulsa to review programs up for refunding in fiscal year 1970. A secondary motivation for the investigation was that "a number of criticisms, complaints, and charges have been made concerning the management of operations" of some of the TEOTF programs.[180] The findings of the report caused an uproar in the community as well as in the task force itself. As a result, the task force board conducted its own probe of the programs under attack in the report.

In the first of four articles in the *Tulsa World*, Dale Speer reported on "problems of the multi-million dollar local war on poverty." These problems included numerous thefts from the task force's Community Action Center, increased cost of office space for

[180] Jack O'Brien, *A Report to the Board of Commissioners of the City of Tulsa*, page 1, 2 December 1969, Folder 20, Box 187, FRH Collection, CACCRS, OU, Norman.

CEP, and misuse of funds designated for a Summer Youth Program. Many of the thefts went unreported for up to three weeks. The lease for the CEP program's headquarters had changed three times within six months, increasing rent payment by almost double. Speer argued that this rent increase was irregular, at the least. The Summer Youth Program had earmarked funds for its activities that were to begin in June. Spending of those funds, however, began in February. TEOTF board directors paid for a two-day workshop from the youth funds. The youth funds also paid for a banquet for the TEOTF directors.[181]

In his second article, Speer discussed the administrative costs of the task force and its programs. Most programs had increased administrative salaries at the sacrifice of programs. The Summer Head Start program operated by TEOTF received a cutback for 1970 by $48,000, while the TEOTF administrative staff received a collective salary increase of $50,000. Speer argued that Jobs Unlimited[182] was one of the TEOTF's most effective programs, and yet it was not set to receive an increase in funds for salaries. The executive director of the task force, Billy Leathers, would receive a salary increase of $2,500 while Joe Cain, deputy director, would get a $1,500 raise.[183]

The third article in the series discussed in depth the thefts and problems at the Community Action Center (CAC). At least thirty-one typewriters and seven air conditioners had been stolen over a period of about eighteen months. The Community Action Center housed many of the task force's subsidiary agencies, including Jobs Unlimited, some VISTA volunteers, TAAG, Legal Aid, Follow-Up Mobilization Service,

[181] *Tulsa World*, 30 November 1969.
[182] Jobs Unlimited was a job placement agency that worked under the task force's direction.
[183] *Tulsa World*, 1 December 1969.

Choice Buying Club, and the CAC staff.[184] The previous May, a federal evaluation team had recommended transferring the CAC staff's duties to another agency. The team remarked that the CAC staff was ineffective, and TAAG or other antipoverty agencies could better use its resources. Despite this recommendation, the CAC staff and its programs remained in place under the direction of Leathers and Cain. Another problem facing the CAC was an eviction notice from the Catholic diocese. The diocese issued the notice as a result of the task force's alleged failure to maintain the building.[185]

In the fourth and final article in the series, the *Tulsa World* published excerpts from Commissioner Jack O'Brien's investigative report.[186] The report justified the investigation by noting

> serious allegations have been made that: Some program administrators have abused the public's trust, that some poor people have been exploited, that terms of the TEOTF, Inc. contract with the City of Tulsa have been violated, and that some programs have been used to promote causes that work against the best interests of our city and nation.

O'Brien continued by saying that,"such charges cannot be ignored."[187] He explained that "the concept of 'poverty' programs is not an issue" and that "there are poor people living in our community who need the help that 'poverty' programs operating in Tulsa should be able to provide – we want them to receive that help." O'Brien also noted that this was a limited evaluation of task force programs. While the commission had preferred an in-depth investigation of all TEOTF programs, there were mitigating circumstances. For instance, the information that the programs made available to the commissioners was erroneous, limited, and faulty in detail. Also, some program administrators adopted a

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[184] Legal Aid was branch of the war on poverty that provided legal assistance to poor citizens. The other programs housed in the CAC will be discussed below.
[185] *Tulsa World*, 2 December 1969.
[186] Ibid., 3 December 1969.
[187] O'Brien, *A Report to the Board of Commissioners*, 1.

"suspicious and defensive attitude" that "created barriers" inhibiting the investigation. Other staffers "expressed fear of retaliation if they 'talked' to anyone at City Hall." Finally, time was lacking. Thus, the report was limited in its scope. O'Brien accused the program administrators who were defensive of being either "unable or unwilling to accept the fact that the public has a right to know whether programs financed by the public, for the benefit of the public, are being operated in a manner that meets public approval."[188]

The first section of the report discussed the Concentrated Employment Program (CEP). The U.S. Department of Labor financed CEP, but TEOTF sponsored the program locally. It began operation in April 1968 as a project to create job opportunities for the hard-core unemployed.[189] One of the problems at CEP was confusion about reporting techniques. Often other manpower agencies placed CEP participants into jobs, yet both agencies reported placement.[190] Thus, there was a duplication of services and confusing reporting techniques.[191] O'Brien also found fault with the handling of funds. According to CEP's reports, job placement cost in excess of $10,000 per job. Compared to another TEOTF manpower agency, Jobs Unlimited, CEP's use of funds seemed to be out of control. Jobs Unlimited had placed more participants into jobs than CEP, but on a budget of $85,742 compared to CEP's $2,515,970 budget. Jobs Unlimited had only eight staffers, while CEP employed between seventy and ninety people on its administrative

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[188] Ibid., 2.
[189] Ibid., 3-4. In the eighteen-month period preceding O'Brien's report, CEP had enrolled 1,261 persons in the program while Jobs Unlimited, in the same time period, had enrolled 2,503 persons. See ibid., 6.
[190] For example, see ibid., 5. Another manpower agency, the National Alliance of Businessmen (NAB), created 231 of the job opportunities of the 449 job placements that CEP recorded. Both CEP and NAB reported those 231 job placements, resulting in a reporting of 462 jobs created instead of the actual number.
[191] Ibid., 5.

staff.[192] O'Brien concluded that CEP's "value of assistance to the 'hard-core' unemployed has been very limited."[193] This assessment ignored the fact that CEP itself employed some of the 'hard-core' unemployed. Also, O'Brien argued that the "price to the public has been too high," especially when compared with the efforts of other social agencies. Finally, he concluded that the "supervisory personnel of CEP and the administrative guidance of TEOTF, Inc. demonstrate a lack of ability or willingness to employ common-sense techniques in developing a practical program."[194] In addition to his conclusions, O'Brien reported several allegations made against CEP. The allegations included: the use of narcotics and alcohol on CEP premises during business hours, the diversion of CEP resources for personal gain, the use of program enrollees for work on the private properties of CEP personnel without pay, "questionable and unjustified salary increases" for certain CEP employees, the use of CEP classrooms as "a forum to preach hatred for the white race, and to advocate revolution and violent overthrow of our government," and the practice of partisan political activities by CEP employees during the 1968 presidential election among other allegations. O'Brien acknowledged that he could "not personally speak to the truth" of the allegations, but believed that "their nature is such that they can not be ignored."[195]

The second program that the commission report investigated was the Community Action Center (CAC). The CAC program had two main objectives: one was to maintain and manage the center, and the second was to operate the Follow Up Mobilization Service (FUMS), a referral and assistance organization restricted to a five square block

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[192] Ibid., 6.
[193] Ibid., 7.
[194] Ibid., 8. This possibly was the result of the lack of experience of many staffers who were local residents not formally trained to work in administration. See Clark, *A Relevant War Against Poverty*.
[195] O'Brien, *A Report to the Board of Commissioners*, 8-9.

area surrounding the center. The old St. Monica School, owned by the Catholic diocese, housed the center. According to the lease agreement, the task force would only pay $1 per year in rent in exchange for maintaining the property. In late October, the diocese notified the task force that it must vacate the premises because the task force had not maintained the buildings outlined in the lease agreement. Obviously, the CAC program failed in its first objective. As far as the second, the operation of FUMS, O'Brien concluded, "the degree to which it has ever served any function of major practical service is questionable."[196] O'Brien pointed to a report by the Southwest Regional OEO evaluating TEOTF programs. This report called FUMS "limited in scope" and argued that it had "no real impact in the Model Cities Neighborhood." The report also recommended delegating the maintenance of the CAC to another agency focused primarily on coordinating center activities rather than on FUMS.[197] Despite these recommendations from the regional OEO, the task force chose not to change the program's goals or operating procedures. O'Brien also discussed other aspects of the CAC that needed further investigation, including the "inordinate amount of thefts" at the CAC, a large poster bearing the message, "THE RACIST DOG POLICEMEN MUST BE REMOVED FROM OUR COMMUNITY," prominently displayed in the office of the CAC director. It also called for an examination of travel vouchers. O'Brien concluded that "the program reflects gross mismanagement," that the program was ineffective in helping the poor, that the director's attitude "does not lend itself to creating better community relations," and that the CAC program was wasting taxpayers' money.[198]

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[196] Ibid., 10.
[197] Excerpts quoted in Ibid., 11.
[198] Ibid., 14.

In the conclusion of the report, O'Brien remarked that he had met with or talked with "dozens of people who have knowledge of, and experience with, the 'War on Poverty' programs sponsored by the TEOTF, Inc. – and, who have expressed grave reservations about the manner in which these programs are being conducted." The main concern of these people was that, while the concept behind the programs was good, the programs themselves were not effective in "coping with the needs of the poor and disadvantaged." He went on to argue that, "it seems patently apparent that the poverty fighters are deriving a good many benefits from these programs, but the extent to which people in poverty are deriving benefits is in doubt."[199] O'Brien also noted that many members of the Board of Directors of TEOTF had little, if any, knowledge about the many allegations and complaints against task force programs. He attributed this lack of knowledge to a failure on the part of program staff members to bring them to the attention of the board. This failure may simply have been a lack of experience with organizational procedures.[200] He commended only one program operated by TEOTF, Jobs Unlimited, and declared that all other task force programs "reflect, in varying decrees, some of the problems revealed in this report."[201]

The report recommended that the board of directors of the task force suspend seven task force or delegate agency administrators pending a complete investigation of TEOTF. These seven were Billy Leathers, TEOTF Executive Director; Joe Cain, TEOTF Deputy Director; Richard Groepper, CEP Executive Director; Frank Persson, CEP Associate Director; Roosevelt Ratliff, CEP Assistant Director; and Bobby Lloyd Eaton,

[199] O'Brien failed to observe that many of the "poverty-fighters" were local poor residents.
[200] See Clark, *A Relevant War Against Poverty*, 88.
[201] O'Brien, *A Report to the Board of Commissioners*, 15.

CAC Executive Director.[202] O'Brien argued that the investigation would be unsuccessful if those under investigation were still in control of the programs. The report also recommended that the City of Tulsa establish a board of inquiry to conduct the investigation. Another recommendation was the establishment of a permanent evaluation board, members of which would be responsible to represent the citizens of Tulsa "by auditing the performance of each program operating under the 1966 contractual agreement executed by the City of Tulsa with TEOTF, Inc." To fund the permanent evaluation board, O'Brien recommended that each delegate agency's budget request change to include an amount equal to 2.5 percent of each program's annual budget. O'Brien reiterated that the goal of the investigation was not to terminate the antipoverty programs; but rather to improve the way in which they operated. O'Brien was essentially advocating an overhaul of the war on poverty's basic approach. Although he had good intentions, he failed to grasp the intent of maximum feasible participation. O'Brien wanted to streamline the efforts of the task force to increase efficiency in service delivery. While service delivery was one aspect of the war on poverty, its main emphasis was on involving local citizens in the decision-making process. O'Brien's emphasis on efficiency would eliminate the need for citizen participation. Finally, the report suggested that the Board of Commissioners of the City of Tulsa request the assistance of the governor and congressional representatives in "implementing these and any other

[202] This group of administrators was composed of educated activists, both black and white. Leathers, Groepper, and Persson were white. Leathers was formerly a high school principal in Caddo where he also led the antipoverty effort. Cain, Ratliff, and Eaton were black. Ratliff had briefly worked with the Black Panther party, and all were activists. See *Tulsa World*, 3 December 1969.

appropriate actions," and "forestalling any attempt that 'might' be made to cancel or remove the operations of any of the subject programs from our community."[203]

In the days following the release of O'Brien's report, Tulsa newspapers ran countless articles discussing the report and its recommendations. Just a couple days after receiving the report, the city commission decided to create a five-member committee to explore and evaluate further the task force and its delegate agencies. O'Brien's other recommendation, the suspension of task force officials, did not meet with the same success. O'Brien continued to assert that his informants were not only "being harassed but had been threatened with physical violence" and that it was imperative to suspend the officials mentioned in the report. Nonetheless, the officials remained in place.[204]

The investigative committee was to consist of two members appointed by Mayor Hewgley, two appointed by the TEOTF board, and then the first four members were to select the fifth member. The staffs of the antipoverty programs had no representation on the committee. The mayor's appointees were subject to City Commission approval.[205] Mayor Hewgley, not yet having read the report himself, argued that the report should be available to the task force board of directors because the task force and its agencies were the board's responsibility.[206] The board, "composed of substantial, influential appointees from all over the city," found offense with O'Brien's suggestion that his informants were afraid to appear before them. The board contended that they were impartial and able to deal with the charges made in the report.[207]

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[203] O'Brien, *A Report to the Board of Commissioners*, 17-18.
[204] *Tulsa Tribune*, 3 December 1969.
[205] Ibid.
[206] *Tulsa World*, 3 December 1969. The mayor appointed thirteen of the thirty-nine board members.
[207] *Tulsa Tribune*, 3 December 1969.

The officials at CEP reacted to the report by discounting the complaints against them as "petty and vague." Richard Groepper, CEP director, stated that CEP's progress and programs pleased him. Roosevelt Ratliff, the assistant director at CEP and black community activist, was the subject of a number of the complaints in the report. Accused of "teaching racial hatred in black history classes" at CEP, Ratliff acknowledged that he had taught about Malcolm X and other black leaders, but defended his teachings by stating that, "before any impoverished persons can begin to think of himself as a worthwhile person, he has to have an attitudinal change. He has to become proud of what he is. He has to know that there is something about his race of which he can be proud." Ratliff denied the allegation of the charge of political activity in the 1968 presidential election. He stated that he was very careful not to discuss political issues. Groepper went on to defend the CEP program and argued that the program underwent "a trial by the press." He urged Tulsans to look at the program for themselves and see what CEP was accomplishing.[208]

Public interest in the report and its findings continued to grow. An editorial in the *Tulsa Tribune* declared Tulsans' "right to know a lot of things. They have a right to know whether persons with serious criminal records have been hired as instructors in a program devoted to uplift." It continued that, "they have a right to know if it is or is not true that race hatred and rationales have been incorporated in instruction paid for by public money."[209] On another front, a group of Tulsans called for a county grand jury investigation because they believed that the proposed five-man committee would not work. Some of these Tulsans calling for a grand jury investigation were participants or

[208] Ibid., 2 December 1969.
[209] Ibid., 3 December 1969.

staff members, past and present, of task force agencies. Many of them did not want their identities known because they said they feared harassment or violence from the staff members of task force agencies, who were often their neighbors in the North Tulsa area. The Tulsans calling for a grand jury investigation believed that many witnesses would "refuse to appear before the five-member committee, but would consent to appear before a grand jury." Although there may have been some truth in their contentions, a grand jury would only be able to investigate violations of state law. Because the task force and its delegate agencies received federal funds, many of their activities fell outside the jurisdiction of a grand jury. The petition to form a grand jury eventually failed; however, it highlighted the fear and distrust that existed among many people involved with the task force and its agencies.[210]

As O'Brien noted in his report, the board of directors was often unaware of the daily happenings of most of its agencies. In an editorial, the editor of the *Tulsa World* acknowledged that "many fine Tulsans" were on the board, but "few of them can devote enough time to dive into the actual day to day operations of the war on poverty." The editorial backed O'Brien's call for an independent board of inquiry, independent of both the task force and the city commission.[211] The vice president of the board, Fred Davis, agreed. Davis, a supporter of O'Brien, charged the task force board of directors with surrendering its power to the staffs of the antipoverty agencies. He argued that, "the board is working for the staff instead of the other way around, as it's supposed to be." The president of the board, Robert McGowen, disagreed with Davis and said that Davis's statement was "merely his opinion." McGowen contended that while the board would

[210] Ibid., 4 December 1969.
[211] *Tulsa World*, 4 December 1969.

"function to support the staff," board members were also the "biggest critics in this community of their performance." Davis continued to disagree, and noted that, "the board has not functioned as an evaluative agency, which we, as directors, are supposed to be. Everybody is not subject to us. We are subject to them." Davis also argued that he had attempted to evaluate two programs, and staff members and their defensive attitudes had sidetracked him. McGowen dismissed this contention, and likened the task force and its agencies to an "awkward teenager" who had grown up too rapidly. This was an oversimplification, at best, of the numerous troubles facing the board of directors.[212]

Despite his cooperation with the city commission, Mayor Hewgley was not convinced of the validity of O'Brien's report. He argued that while "there are some points in the report which obviously require complete and impartial examination," the majority of the report appeared "to be the kinds [sic] of comments anyone familiar with public life hears almost every day, but which are seldom found to be substantial." Hewgley also called for the disclosure of names of witnesses to the alleged misconduct of the task force and its delegate agencies, despite the claim that many witnesses felt threatened by the suggestion. The mayor wanted the five-member investigative committee to have the right to subpoena witnesses and documents, a move that would give a considerable amount of power to the investigative committee.[213]

In a meeting finalizing the creation of the five-man committee, the city commissioners surprisingly voted unanimously to relinquish their sponsorship of the committee. Instead, the task force board of directors became the official sponsor of the investigation. The commissioners retained their right to appoint two of the members of

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[212] *Tulsa Tribune*, 5 December 1969.
[213] *Tulsa World*, 5 December 1969.

the committee. Although the city commissioners did not give a reason for relinquishing their sponsorship, there was speculation by the press that had the committee operated under the city's sponsorship, the state's open meeting law would apply. However, if it operated under the task force's control, the task force could protect the privacy of accusers and witnesses.[214]

Although O'Brien's report called for an in-depth and thorough investigation of all war on poverty agencies, the board of directors of TEOTF voted to restrict the activities of the five-member committee to personnel grievances and the charges outlined in the report. The board of directors explained this limitation by noting that, "evaluation is a responsibility of this board." Thus, the board argued, a separate evaluative body was unnecessary. O'Brien was getting little of what he had recommended. The board had not made any suspensions nor was there going to be an in-depth, comprehensive evaluation of the task force and its agencies.[215] The members of the five-member committee were Joe Glass, an attorney; Charles Halstead, project director for North American Rockwell; Waldo Jones, Jr., another attorney; and Amos Hall, a district court judge. The fifth member, chosen by the first four, was Dr. Byron Shepard, a local physician.[216] The board of directors requested that the committee submit a report of their findings by December 31, in three weeks.[217]

Jack O'Brien's report and the surrounding controversy had an impact on antipoverty agencies not involved in the inquiry. Billy Leathers, executive director of the

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[214] *Tulsa Tribune*, 8 December 1969.
[215] Ibid., 9 December 1969.
[216] Jones had worked with another TEOTF program, the Tulsa County Legal Aid Society, in the past. The other members of the committee had little or no experience with the antipoverty effort in Tulsa. See *Tulsa World*, 7 January 1970.
[217] *Tulsa World*, 9 December 1969.

task force, urged a quick resolution to the problems "for the good of the entire program." The task force operated a credit union that loaned money to applicants who would have had trouble getting a loan elsewhere in the city. Leathers argued that the publicity concerning the task force was increasing withdrawals from the credit union. Another task force program hurt by the negative publicity was the Tulsa Federation of Buying Clubs. This program made it possible for disadvantaged citizens to band together and buy products wholesale. Leathers contended that the buying clubs were losing community and private support as a result of the report.[218]

Mayor Hewgley was also critical of the report and the investigative committee. Because the city had relinquished its sponsorship of the investigation, Hewgley's influence was limited. The mayor argued that the probe was going to be ineffective because the committee did not have the power to subpoena witnesses or documents. He joined the group of Tulsans who were calling for a grand jury investigation because he believed that the grand jury would be more effective in compelling testimony.[219]

In response to criticism, the TEOTF board of directors broadened the scope of the five-member committee's investigation. The redefined jurisdiction of the committee was as follows:

1. Make findings and recommendations concerning individual performance relative to management.
2. Make findings and recommendations regarding individual conduct relative to personnel policy as well as specific charges of misconduct.
3. Review and make findings regarding strength and weaknesses relative to their effectiveness towards reaching program goals.
4. Make findings and appraisals of the utilization of funds to determine if those funds might better be handled by the particular agency in order to maximize benefits to those designated by congress [sic] as the legal recipients.

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[218] *Tulsa Tribune*, 9 December 1969.
[219] *Tulsa World*, 11 December 1969.

The board of directors had realized that the original goals of the committee were untenable. Also during this meeting of the board of directors, Fred Davis, vice president of the board and task force critic, requested to exclude TEOTF staff members from attending board meetings except by invitation. This was an attempt to stifle community participation. He charged that, "professional staff employees took charge of a recent board committee meeting, overrode the chairman, and told committeemen what they could and couldn't do." Davis argued that the board was unable to evaluate the agencies and agency staffs if they were present and vocal in meetings. The board did not grant his request; instead, they supported the intent of maximum feasible participation.[220]

Although the scope of the committee expanded, it continued to have difficulty achieving its goals. In early January 1970, Waldo Jones, Jr., one of the members on the five-member committee, resigned his position. He decided that he was unable to maintain "the proper level of objectivity" in his role because he learned that many of the persons involved were his personal acquaintances. Jones had previously worked with the Tulsa County Legal Aid Society, an agency affiliated with the task force. The committee did not schedule the selection of his replacement until mid-January, further delaying the probe.[221]

The investigative committee faced another problem with the dismissal of CEP's executive secretary. Richard Groepper fired Mary Dugger, his executive secretary, on January 5 for alleged time and attendance violations. Dugger, a well-off South Tulsa resident, argued that her firing was actually due to her determination to pursue a grievance about her salary and also because of her testimony before the five-member

[220] *Tulsa Tribune*, 18 December 1969.
[221] *Tulsa World*, 7 January 1970.

committee investigating CEP. She filed a grievance with the task force personnel committee. The personnel committee ruled that the reasons for termination were not adequate, her termination did not follow proper procedures. The committee recommended that Dugger receive a comparable position in a task force agency. Groepper denied that her termination had anything to do with her testimony before the investigative committee. Amos Hall, a member of the committee, suggested that Groepper take a lie detector test regarding his reasons for firing Dugger. Groepper said he would be willing to do so, although it never got that far.[222] He also offered his resignation at the meeting of the personnel committee; the board of directors of the task force rejected his offer.[223]

A month later, however, Groepper resigned as CEP director. Although his letter of resignation stated "personal reasons" for his departure, the controversy surrounding CEP certainly contributed to it. McGowen, task force board director, declared that Groepper was the "sacrificial lamb and a scapegoat for charges leveled against the board." McGowen continued by stating his hope that Groepper's resignation would bring more positive support for task force staffers. He argued that the board had been "derelict in its defense of the charges made regarding certain aspects of our program and in support of our many fine project directors and staff." McGowen, an advocate for community participation, called for the board to "recognize its prior failing and begin to assume its responsibilities to the disadvantaged of Tulsa. No longer can we remain a target for the irresponsible charges and unauthorized intrusions by those not responsible" for antipoverty programs. The last statement was an obvious jab at Jack O'Brien and the

[222] *Tulsa Tribune*, 16 January 1970.
[223] *Tulsa World*, 16 January 1970.

city commissioners.[224] Groepper, however, did not blame the city commissioners for the controversy surrounding CEP. Instead, he said, "the community is failing the program by its lack of support." Along with the community, he placed blame on the directors of TEOTF, stating that the board, made up of local elites instead of community residents, did not really understand the goals and problems of CEP.[225]

Surrounded by controversy, CEP attracted the attention of the United States Department of Labor, the agency funding CEP. A Department of Labor representative argued that a change in sponsorship of the program might improve it. The representative implied that the TEOTF board had "weaknesses which made its continuing sponsorship of CEP questionable."[226] A petition calling for the City of Tulsa to take over sponsorship of CEP circulated in town. The petition described CEP as "a dismal failure." Approximately two hundred people signed the petition. The petition also criticized the task force for failing to provide assistance to disadvantaged Mexican-Americans, Indians, and whites. O'Brien favored city sponsorship of CEP, despite Mayor Hewgley's support of TEOTF.[227] This conflict between the poor, federal officials, and local elites was not unique to Tulsa.[228]

The results of the five-member investigative committee were due by April 1. However, they did not release their findings until April 20, after seventeen weeks and more than one thousand pages of testimony. Before the committee even released the report, there was a disagreement between the mayor and O'Brien about how to handle the report. Mayor Hewgley advocated the creation of a new advisory board to oversee CEP.

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[224] Ibid., 28 February 1970.
[225] Ibid., 3 March 1970.
[226] Ibid., 25 February 1970.
[227] *Tulsa Tribune*, 11 March 1970.
[228] See Braun, "Social Change and the Empowerment of the Poor," 7; Rice, "In the Trenches," 4.

O'Brien thought that city commissioners should see the report before making any decisions. The committee members agreed with O'Brien and suggested that the commissioners and mayor review the report before naming members of a new advisory board.[229]

The committee's report was "heavily critical" of Tulsa's war on poverty agencies. Despite the criticism, the report found many positive aspects of the task force's efforts. One of the recommendations and findings of the boards was to investigate all Tulsa antipoverty agencies. The committee also recommended eliminating or transferring the staffs of the CAC and FUMS, in effect, closing those agencies. Another criticism was that the OEO program in general was teeming with administrative and supervisory personnel. The committee called for streamlining the administration of antipoverty agencies. Many members of the administrative staffs were members of the community. Often they were untrained and were, thus, less efficient.[230] But again, efficiency was not the goal of community action programs, a point that escaped the committee members. Specifically, they demanded the replacement of Billy Leathers. In agreement with O'Brien's original recommendation, they argued for the creation of a permanent committee of inquiry to execute an ongoing investigation of all OEO agencies. The committee believed that the board of directors of TEOTF ought to be restructured and downsized to fifteen members instead of thirty-nine. The committee had specific criticisms of the CEP program, including the use of political propaganda in CEP classes. In general, they called for streamlining the war on poverty effort and applying a business approach to its agencies. They believed a more professional approach would eliminate

[229] *Tulsa Tribune*, 16 April 1970.
[230] See Kenneth B. Clark, *A Relevant War Against Poverty*, 90.

duplication of services as well as save the taxpayers' money. By reducing administrative staffs, more money would be able to benefit the poor. The committee concluded by acknowledging that the ideas behind the war on poverty were good but that Tulsa had a long way to go in its administration to make it more effective and efficient. The committee also chastised those who had protested the investigation and noted that, "fear or resentment of criticism, evaluation, or of suggested changes will sap the program of all vitality," resulting in self-destruction.[231]

O'Brien praised the committee's report. He acknowledged that although the committee had done its job, the implementation of the report's findings was left to the discretion of the task force board of directors and the city commission. He was especially pleased that the committee had recommended establishing a permanent board of inquiry. The recommendation that Leathers be replaced also satisfied O'Brien. Leathers, however, withheld comment on the report and its recommendations.[232]

The task force board of directors met to discuss the report. Robert McGowen, board president, acknowledged that the responsibility of discharging the report's recommendations belonged to the board. McGowen asked board members to review the report and respond with their comments in a week to ten days. McGowen charged the board with determining which suggestions were beneficial and possible to implement. They scheduled their next meeting for April 29, when they would further discuss the report.[233]

At that meeting, McGowen discussed the "basic philosophical differences" between the committee's recommendations and war on poverty concepts. He argued that

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[231] *Tulsa Tribune*, 22 April 1970.
[232] Ibid.
[233] Ibid., 23 April 1970.

the report called for "greater management efficiency and business-like practices," while the precepts behind the war on poverty required "widespread community participation." The committee's recommendations and the war on poverty concepts were divergent because the committee encouraged the use of educated professionals to administer the programs at the expense of the input of local citizens. By advocating streamlining antipoverty agencies, the committee was undermining the intent of maximum feasible participation. The recommended professionalization of antipoverty programs was a unique facet of Tulsa's war on poverty. In the meeting, the board shelved discussion of replacing Billy Leathers. They voted to accept the report and expressed their appreciation for the five-member investigative committee. Overall, the board accomplished very little in the meeting.[234]

In their next meeting on May 6, the board continued to skirt the report. They discussed the recommendation that both the committee and O'Brien had made for the establishment of a permanent inquiry board, but did not agree how to implement such a board. Some board members argued that the board should appoint members, while others suggested that the city commission appoint members. They again shelved discussion of replacing Billy Leathers as well as discussion of CEP. As the *Tribune* reporter noted, "Task Force directors take no probe action."[235]

Despite public criticism, the task force chose not to implement the committee's recommendations. Although the committee's recommendations contained opportunities to improve the efficiency of delivering services to the poor, the task force board did not act. Instead, they argued that they were staying true to the original concepts of the war

[234] Ibid., 30 April 1970.
[235] Ibid., 7 May 1970.

on poverty by maintaining a grassroots outlook. Despite this contention, the board ultimately failed those whom they were supposed to serve. The board, largely made up of prominent Tulsa citizens,[236] was not a true representation of the poor. Local citizens had not been able to participate on the investigative committee, nor did they have any input as far as implementing the committee's recommendations. There was not "maximum feasible participation" but rather a defensive attitude that hindered many war on poverty efforts.

[236] See above.

Chapter Four

Other Programs and Conclusion

Although Tulsa's war on poverty faced many challenges unsuccessfully, there were some successes. The Head Start program, still enriching children's lives today, started as part of President Johnson's war on poverty.[237] Head Start was a success across the nation, but Tulsa had specific achievements in the war on poverty as well. The task force in Tulsa formed a credit union designed to assist low-income people in getting loans. The Tulsa Task Force Federal Credit Union provided financial assistance for countless Tulsans during the years of its existence.[238] Another success in Tulsa's war on poverty was the creation of a comprehensive health program in North Tulsa, sponsored by both the task force and the Tulsa City-County Health Department. The health program included medical care, x-ray and laboratory facilities, mental health care, and dental care.[239] These successes helped to reduce the effects of poverty in Tulsa; however, the overall achievement of Tulsa's war on poverty was limited. Tulsa was also one of sixty-three cities named a Model City.[240] Like many battles of the war on poverty in Tulsa, the Model Cities Program was largely limited in its success. In 1970, Congress

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[237] *Daily Oklahoman*, 28 May 1965. For more information on Head Start, see Edward Zigler and Jeanette Valentine, eds., *Project Head Start: A Legacy of the War on Poverty* (New York: The Free Press, 1979).
[238] *Tulsa Tribune*, 5 June 1968.
[239] Office of Economic Opportunity, Executive Office of the President, "OEO News Summary," 27 October 1969, IV-34 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office): 5.
[240] Ibid., 20 November 1967, II-36, 4. The Model Cities program was one of the expansions of the War on Poverty. It started with just a few cities, fully funded to numerous cities partially funded. It is an example of pork barrel politics as well as of the budget problems faced by many Great Society programs.

introduced the Oklahoma Plan, an experimental plan in which the OEO allowed state control of community action programs. The Oklahoma Plan was, in effect, a prelude to the demise of the war on poverty.[241]

Head Start was a program designed to assist underprivileged children when they started school. It operated on the premise that low-income children were at a disadvantage compared with their wealthier counterparts when they entered school. All poor children, regardless of race or religion, were to receive service. Oklahoma got "a head start on Project Head Start" in 1965 when Oklahoma received a national preview of the program. Oklahoma's original grant funded 372 Head Start centers in forty-nine counties, including Tulsa County.[242]

Tulsa's Head Start experienced challenges and successes in its early years. The Tulsa task force teamed with Tulsa Public Schools in establishing Head Start. In its first few years, Tulsa had the fourteenth largest Head Start in the nation. It had over two thousand children enrolled at twenty-seven sites. The program not only addressed educational aspects of children's development but also dealt with their health and social progress.

In 1967, Head Start experienced the first of many funding cuts. Tulsa's enrollment dropped from over two thousand to nine hundred. By 1971, only five hundred children were receiving assistance. Despite the challenges Head Start faced, it survived through the 1980s and 1990s. As of 2001, Head Start was serving thirteen hundred children in the Tulsa area.[243]

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[241] *Daily Oklahoman*, 11 March 1970.
[242] Ibid., 28 May 1965.
[243] *Tulsa World*, 21 July 2003.

The task force established the credit union in 1966. The Oklahoma Credit Union League, along with the task force, sponsored the credit union. The credit union's goals were not only to provide loans to low-income persons but also to educate the poor about money management and financial issues. The credit union's membership was open to persons who met poverty standards set by the OEO. When the credit union reached a set level of deposits, it made loans.[244] The credit union eventually financed the establishment of businesses in North Tulsa as well as helping to finance consumer buying clubs.[245] By mid-1970, the credit union stabilized and had substantial financial gains, following a mini-run on the credit union after the public investigation of task force programs.[246]

The Comprehensive Health Program in Tulsa provided much needed health services to low-income residents of North Tulsa. Established in 1967, it created jobs for community residents as aides in addition to providing services. It served over 7,500 patients a year and provided transportation to and from the center. The health program had 115 staff members, ten physicians, three clinical psychologists, 3 dentists, and numerous nurses, aides, and technicians.[247] In 1967, it moved to a renovated and modernly-equipped building.[248] When the task force closed its doors, the Tulsa City-County Health Department took over the Neighborhood Health Center.[249]

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[244] Ibid., 1 June 1966.
[245] Office of Economic Opportunity, Executive Office of the President, "OEO News Summary," 3 November 1969, IV-34 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office): 4-5.
[246] *Tulsa Tribune*, 29 April 1970. The credit union had assets of a quarter million dollars in its first eighteen months. The records of the credit union were unavailable, thus there is a scarcity of information or statistics regarding the credit union.
[247] *Tulsa Tribune*, 7 November 1969.
[248] OEO, "OEO News Summary," IV-34, 27 October 1969, 5.
[249] See *Tulsa Tribune*, 1 October 1970.

The Model Cities program was an experimental effort to concentrate services provided by antipoverty agencies in a designated area. The Model Cities program worked alongside existing antipoverty agencies in addition to creating new services, often dealing with housing issues and urban renewal.[250] Some of Model Cities' programs included family planning programs, dropout and delinquency prevention programs, health care, senior citizens' projects, credit counseling, and relocation programs. Model Cities also was active in establishing parks and recreational areas in the poverty-stricken area. Urban renewal efforts and highway construction were displacing many residents in the Model Cities area. One of the main programs of Model Cities, with the assistance of HUD (Housing and Urban Development Department) was to relocate these residents.[251]

Like other aspects of war on poverty in Tulsa, the Model Cities program was not free from controversy. The City Commission and the Target Area Action Group (TAAG), a body containing representatives from the Model Cities area, struggled for control of the program. J. Homer Johnson, TAAG director, sparked public outrage by wearing a Black Panthers' button to a meeting with the mayor. TAAG wanted a larger role in the decision-making process in the program and called for the power to approve and screen personnel and staff in the program as well as to approve projects. Those powers were in the hands of Mayor Hewgley and the city commission.[252]

In response to TAAG's requests, Mayor Hewgley suggested that the thirty thousand Model Cities residents hold a referendum vote on whether or not to keep the program. Several TAAG leaders had implied that if TAAG did not have control over the Model Cities program, then Tulsa should scrap the program. The City Commission did

[250] City Demonstration Agency, *Tulsa Model Cities Program.*
[251] *Tulsa Tribune*, 11 April 1970.
[252] Ibid., 3 April 1970.

not grant TAAG's request to have approval over personnel and staff decisions, stating, "the City Commission cannot relinquish the final authority on any project or personnel problem. We are the people who are held responsible for this program."[253] Because the issue was so emotional, there was no referendum. Instead, the Model Cities program continued to operate as it had before, but with heightened sensitivities on both sides. Like many TEOTF programs, Model Cities was a good idea, but its actual implementation proved difficult in Tulsa.[254] It also represented the reluctance of entrenched local political powers to yield to the idea of maximum feasible participation.

In May 1970, the Oklahoma Plan began as an experimental approach to the control of community action programs. Funded for two years, the plan turned control of CAPs over to the state government.[255] The outlay of federal resources in the war on poverty had "greatly extended the role and responsibilities of the federal government and altered the relations between citizens and the state," and the Oklahoma Plan was an attempt to restore the previous political hierarchy of state control over social service agencies.[256] The plan also basically overrode Congress's intent regarding state control of the war on poverty. In late 1969, the Quie-Green amendment to the Equal Opportunity Act of 1964 failed to pass Congress. The amendment had proposed turning over control of OEO programs to the states, as the Oklahoma Plan did. This blatant circumvention of congressional power especially concerned United States Senator Fred Harris, as evidenced by his testimony before the Senate Subcommittee on Appropriations for the

[253] Ibid., 9 April 1970.
[254] Ibid., 23 April 1970.
[255] *Daily Oklahoman*, 5 May 1970.
[256] Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 266.

Departments of Labor and Health, Education and Welfare.[257] The Oklahoma Plan also troubled Jerry Mash, president of the Oklahoma City and County CAP. In his testimony before the subcommittee, he stated, "we want the State's involvement. We want the State's commitment. We want the State's assistance. But we are opposed to the State's intermeddling without local participation, without the quality of planning otherwise demanded [by the OEO], and without the State's dedication of substantial resources." Mash continued by stating his willingness to cooperate with the Oklahoma Plan, but also his belief that the plan was "ill-conceived and hastily implemented."[258]

Indeed, Mash quickly cut to the chief concern of many antipoverty workers by noting that the Oklahoma Plan would eliminate the call for "maximum feasible participation" of the poor by circumventing local involvement. Maximum feasible participation was a cornerstone of the war on poverty as designed by Lyndon Johnson. Although it was vague and often difficult to implement, participation had helped many urban residents, in Tulsa and across the nation, to "focus on political activism and pressuring city government" to achieve goals.[259] By turning power over to state control, the Oklahoma Plan reduced the tensions between the new federal agencies and state governments that had been present since the establishment of the war on poverty. In addition, by giving states the control, there was no longer a need for a federal agency, the OEO, to oversee the programs.

Despite some successes in the war on poverty, Tulsa, like many other U.S. cities, struggled in its attempts to alleviate poverty. Head Start is one of the few remaining

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[257] Copy of Statement of Fred R. Harris before the Senate Subcommittee on Appropriations for the Departments of Labor and Health, Education, and Welfare, 18 June 1970, FRH Collection.
[258] Copy of Statement of Jerry L. Mash before the Senate Subcommittee on Appropriations for the Departments of Labor and Health, Education, and Welfare, 18 June 1970, ibid.
[259] Teaford, *The Rough Road to Renaissance,* 182.

programs from the era. Community action did not end urban poverty, but it did provide opportunities for black Americans and other minorities to engage in civic participation.[260] Often these opportunities met with obstacles, such as the struggle between the City of Tulsa and community participatory groups like TAAG. Nonetheless, the war on poverty left a legacy of civic involvement.

In conclusion, Tulsa's war on poverty failed because it did not embrace the idea of maximum feasible participation. The city's reluctance to accept community involvement, coupled with the continual struggles for power, caused Tulsa's anti-poverty effort to achieve little lasting success. While the power struggles and resistance to accept the involvement of the poor were common in the national war on poverty, Tulsa was unique in its quest to professionalize antipoverty agencies.[261] The attempt to professionalize the war on poverty was ultimately a rejection of maximum feasible participation. By advocating the use of professionals to administer antipoverty agencies instead of the local citizens, Tulsa and the task force board of directors undercut the intentions of the framers of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964.

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[260] See Rice, "In the Trenches."

[261] See J. David Greenstone and Paul E. Peterson, *Race and Authority in Urban Politics: Community Participation and the War on Poverty* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1973); Louise Lander, ed. *War on Poverty* (New York: Facts on File, 1967); Rice, "In the Trenches"; Boland, "The War on Poverty"; Braun, "Social Change."

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VITA

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Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Thesis: MAXIMUM FEASIBLE PARTICIPATION: THE WAR ON POVERTY IN TULSA, OKLAHOMA, 1965-1970.

Major Field: History

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Durango, Colorado, on September 20, 1980.

Education: Graduated from Memorial High School, Tulsa, Oklahoma, in May 1998; received Bachelor of Arts degree in History from Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, in May 2002. Completed the requirements for the Master of Arts degree with a major in History at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, in December 2004.

Experience: Interviewer, Bureau for Social Research, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, 2001-2004; Supervisor, Bureau for Social Research, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, 2004-2004; Teaching Assistant, Department of History, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma, 2002-2004.

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