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Westwood, Richard

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Illustrated matter is indicated by italics.

A

abortion, 19, 21, 29, 108, 130, 194
Abzug, Bella, 112, 124, 159
Adkins, Ella, 79
Adkins, John, 79
Adondakis, Argie, 57
affirmative action, 85
AFL-CIO, 82, 90, 144, 161, 173, 179
African Americans, 105, 111, 155,
159, 164, 168, 169, 177
Ahearn, Irene, 183
Ahearn, John, 98, 183
Alberson, Wally, 191
Albert, Carl, 65, 66
Allen, Robert, 197
Aloia, Hank, 172
Alperstein, Arnie, 98
Amacker, Ann, 201
Amalgamated Clothing Workers,
144
Amalgamated Meat Cutters, 144,
179
American Federation of State,
County, and Municipal Employees
(AFSCME), 144
American Legion auxiliary for
women, 24, 91
American Newspaper Guild, 144
Americans for Democratic Action,
176, 212
Anderson, Bonnie, 72
Anderson, Jack, 67, 146
Anderson, Sunday, 72
Andrus, Cecil, 97
Antelope Island, 50
Anybody but McGovern (ABM)
(organization), 112–13, 115, 121,
122, 125, 127, 134, 137, 143, 149,
157, 171
Architects for McGovern, 139
Arizona Corporation Commission,
207
Arizona Enterprise Development
Corporation, 209–10
Arizona governor race, 1986, 203–4
Arvey, Jacob M. (Jake), 68, 86, 87, 88
Askew, Reuben, 149

B

Babbitt, Bruce
as attorney general, 195
attorney general campaign, 1974,
184
as governor, 196, 203, 204
gubernatorial campaign, 1982, 175,
197
in presidential race, 1988, 102,
211–13
as secretary of interior, 215
Bagley, Vicki, 191
Bailey, John, 168
Bailey, John M., 53, 55, 57, 78
Baker, Linn, 40, 59
Banks, Doris, 98
Barkan, Al, 105, 137
Barkowski, Monica, 155
Barnett, Carolyn, 155
Baron, Alan, 155, 156, 157, 158, 161,
166, 167
Bascom, Sid, 89
Bayh, Birch, 94, 105, 106, 187, 193
Beatty, Warren, 111
Bennett, Doug, 140
Bennett, Edna, 27
Bennett, Wallace, 173
Benson, Ezra T., 42
Bentsen, Lloyd, 187
Berg, Mary Lou, 134
Berman, Dan, 111–12
Berrigan, Polly Baca, 156
Bertot, Paulette, 159
Besoma, Richard, 156
Beta Sigma Phi, 24, 24
Bickel, Alexander, 84
birth control, 17–18
Black, Wayne, 68, 167
Bode, Ken, 84, 162
Boggs, Hale, 63, 64, 65
Bolin, Wesley, 195, 197
Bonker, Don, 107
Boothe, Val, 167
Boys’ State assemblies, 91
Brown, Chris, 96
Brown, Hugh B., 41, 42–43, 67
Brown, Jerry, 187, 193
Brown, Laurel (Brownie), 26, 30, 34, 39, 40
Brown, Ron, 210
Brown, Willie, 124
Brown, Zina B., 70
Bryan, William Jennings, 14, 56
Bull Moose Progressive Party, 13
Burke, Yvonne Braithwaite, 177
Burton, John, 124
Burton, Phillip (Phil), 122, 124
Bush, Dorothy, 82, 121, 134, 156, 168
Bush, George H.W., 75, 89
businessmen, politicians groomed by, 75–76
Butler, Paul, 163
Byrne, Jane, 162, 167, 168, 176, 186
Caddell, Patrick, 177
Califano, Joseph (Joe), 93, 122, 147, 156
campaign debts, 82–83, 92, 156
campaign finance act, 117
campaign reform act, 145
Campbell, Jack, 191
Cannon, Hugh, 188
Cannon, Martha Hughes, 56
Carter, Hodding, 179, 180, 186, 188
Carter, Jimmy
appointments of, 155, 195, 196
defeat of, 196
election campaign, 1976, 186, 187, 188, 192, 193, 194
presidential victory of, 90, 194
southern governors led by, 166
Casey, Carol, 84
Castro, Raúl, 106, 195
Cauthorn, Jo, 103
census data use in political campaigns, 160
Chavez, César, 98–99
Chicago riots, 1968, 64, 65, 66, 83
Chisholm, Shirley, 105, 108, 109, 110, 112, 130
Christian Science Monitor, 160
Church, Frank, 78, 97, 123, 132
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. See Mormon Church
Cipriani, Harriet, 155
citizen assemblies, 188, 189
citizen input on issues, 100–101
civil rights, 46, 60
Civil Rights Act, 85
Clark, Blair, 96, 155
Clark, Electra, 44
Clayman, Jake, 179
Clinton, Bill, 215
Clyde, George Dewey, 28
Cohen, Elizabeth, 14, 56
Cold War, 128
Cole, Joseph, 185, 191
Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection, 92, 114
Committee to Reelect the President (CRP), 1, 2
Communication Workers, 144
Compliance Review Commission (CRC) regulations, 185, 191
Connally, John, 89–90
Constitution, 111
convention chair, 116
Coons, Melba, 25
copper strike settlement, 57
Corcoran, John, 144
Crangle, Joe, 81, 82, 86, 87, 88, 190
Creer, John Preston, 40, 60
Criswell, John, 55
Cronkite, Walter, 125, 134
Cummings, Richard, 191
Cunningham, Walter, 140, 155, 170
Curtis, Ken, 192
Daley, Richard
Democratic National Committee, dealings with, 87
Democratic national convention, 1968, role in, 63, 64, 65, 66, 116, 125
friends and supporters of, 86
on JMW as Democratic Party chair, 167
JMW meeting with, 158
Sanford presidential campaign, 1976, undecided in, 186
staff of, 162, 176
Davies, Beth (Westwood) (daughter)
birth of, 18
education of, 27, 32, 33, 36, 40
engagement of, 34
marriage of, 5, 6, 40, 43, 46
motherhood, 48
political activities of, 159
Davies, Shanon (grandchild), 48
Davies, Vern (son-in-law), 5, 6, 32, 34, 43, 46, 48, 159
Dean, Ernest H., 35, 39, 47
De Berge, Earl, 197
DeConcini, Dennis, 195, 196, 200
DeConcini, Ora, 183
Dees, Morris, 97, 141, 156, 188
Degman, June, 96
DeGraw, Rick, 195, 196
delegates, female, adding, 94
delegates, selection process for,
36–37, 77–78, 84, 89, 94, 103, 104,
115, 116, 128
Democratic Digest, The, 56
Democratic midterm convention, 1974, 127, 128, 131
Democratic National Committee (DNC)
campaign conferences of, 53–54
chairmanship of, vii, 1–2, 35–36,
68, 70, 75, 78, 81, 86–88, 105, 127,
134–36, 192 (see also Westwood,
Jean Miles: as Democratic National Committee chair)
executive committee of, 78, 81, 87,
89, 93, 138
McGovern running mate, search for, 147–48
meetings, viii, 55, 57, 58
office break-in (see Watergate break-in, 1972)
political training promoted by, 30
reform movement, role in, 77, 82,
83–85, 89, 91–92, 93, 104–5, 111,
114, 116, 128
role of, expanding, 81, 88–89
structure of, 131
women’s campaign conferences held by, 45
Democratic national convention, 1964, 36–37, 38
Democratic national convention, 1968, 61, 63–66, 84, 87
Democratic national convention, 1972, 65, 77–78, 84, 89, 113, 115,
Democratic national convention, 1976, 184
Democratic national convention, 1980, 195, 196
Democratic Party (Arizona), 194, 195, 199–200
Democratic Party (U.S.)
chairmanship of, vii, 210
history of, 93–94
platform, 126, 127
reform within, 65, 77–78, 86, 89,
91–92, 93–94, 98, 116–17, 119–28,
173
vice chair, 137–38, 169
Democratic Party (Utah)
election, 1964, 39, 40
split in, 30, 35–36
Democratic state convention, Utah, 1968, 61–62, 62
Democratic Women’s Clubs, 45, 50,
53, 70, 72, 155
Democratic women’s study groups, 56
Dempsey, Jack, 38
Dempsey, Roberta, 37, 50, 63, 72
Derian, Patricia, 124, 186, 188
Dern, Charlotte B., 56
Dern, George Henry, 56
Deseret News, 174
discrimination, prohibition of, 77
Doctors for McGovern, 139
Dodds, Bill, 144, 161, 164, 168, 169
domino theory, 46
Donovan, Patricia, 119
Dooley, Jim, 60
Dooley, Joe, 86, 87
door-to-door campaigning, 25–26,
100–102, 107, 128, 160
Dougherty, Bill, 107, 111, 124
Douglas, Helen Gahagen, 18
Douglas, John, 5, 96
Douglas, Paul, 68
draft law, change in, 102
Dreyfuss, Robert, 82, 179
Dubrow, Evelyn, 144
Duchesi, Bill, 144
Dutton, Fred, 140
Duvall, Fred, 184
Dyk, Ted, 96

Eagle Forum, 111
Eagleton, Thomas (Tom)
  alcohol problem, alleged, of, 133, 146
  as McGovern running mate, 1, 132, 134, 143
  mental health history of, 143
  mental illness history of, 1, 140–41, 142, 145
  replacement for, 148
  resignation of, 147
Eaves, Joe, 99
Eaves, Marie, 64, 99
Eckstein, Paul, 197
economic development programs, 46
Eisenhower, Dwight, 163
Eisner, Susan, 155
Ely, Herb, 100, 103
EMBA, 50–51, 79, 80
English, Jack, 82, 155
equal rights, 108
Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), 6, 111–12, 137, 173, 175–76, 194

F
Face the Nation, 146
Factor, Max, 155
Fahrenthold, Frances (Sissy), 133, 134
Farley, Jim, 54
Federation of Technical Engineers, 144
Feminine Mystique (Friedan), 57
feminists, 111, 172
Flynn, Ed, 89
Foley, Tom, 179
Food for Hunger, 111
Frank, John, 103
Frank, Lorraine, 196
Fraser, Don, 94, 116, 126, 127, 131
Freeman, Jane, 45
Freeman, Orville, 45
French, Eleanor Clark, 64
Friedan, Betty, 57, 112, 172
Fullbright, J. William, 38
Fulton, Bob, 82
Furth, Fred, 185

G
Gardner, Kem, 155
Garrett, Duane, 102–3, 210
Gates, Chris (nephew), 191, 193
gay lobby, 131
gender divide in workforce, 15
gender politics, overcoming, vii
Geneva Steel union, 145
Gephardt, Joe, 155
getting out the vote, 26–27, 111, 160, 199
Gibson, Ken, 133
Gilligan, John, 64
Girls’ State assemblies, 91, 173
Glenn, John, 167
Goddard, Sam, 98, 183
Goddard, Terry, 102, 210–11
Goff, Jim, 191
Goldberg, Debbie, 191
Gotham, Victor, 144
Goulet, Robert, 111
governor’s balls, 49, 85
Grandmaison, Joe, 96, 109, 119, 148
Great Depression, 12, 15, 18
Great Society program, 45
Greenwood, Dave, 74
Greenwood, Max, 75
Griffee, Carolyn, 36, 54, 73
Griffiths, Wynne, 150, 155
Guadalupe, Arizona, 106
Gulf of Tonkin incident, 46
Gunderson, Jean, 12, 16, 18, 32, 184

H
Hagerty, Vicki, 191
Hammell, Chris, 184
Hansen, Phil, 40, 59–60, 68
Harrington, Tony, 185
Harris, Fred R.
  as Democratic National Committee chair, 81, 87
  Democratic National Committee involvement of, post-chair, 105
Democratic national convention, 1972, role in, 123
Democratic national convention, 1976, role in, 187
Democratic party reform, role in, 83, 84
in Kennedy campaign, 1968, 65
presidential ambitions of, 83
in presidential race, 1972, 94, 106
resignation of, 86, 89
Harris, LaDonna, 83
Harris, Patricia R., 105, 115
Hart, Gary
Democratic Party reform, role in, 93, 114, 115
on JMW as Democratic Party chair, 135
McGovern campaign, 1972, role in, 96, 102, 110, 117, 119, 121, 122–23, 130, 142, 143, 148, 149, 151, 153–54
McGovern defeat, reaction to, 165
in presidential race, 1984, 201, 202
vice president selection, input on, 131
Hart, Larry, 191
Hatch, George, 70, 72, 76
Hatch, Orrin, 75
Hatsis, Tony, 70
Hayden, Carl, 204
Haygood, Bob, 175
Haygood, Danielle, 175
Head Start programs, 45–46
Healed, Ellen, 78
Henry, Aaron, 138
Henry, Alberta, 60
Hess, Louise, 59
high school students, political and
government education for, 91
Hinckley Institute of Politics, 173
“hippie” movement, 60
Hispanics, 60, 106, 131, 156, 159
Hoff, Phil, 64, 184, 185, 186, 189–90, 192
Holater, Bill, 144
Holbrook, Don, 184
Holum, John, 119
homosexuality, 29
Hoover, Herbert, 12
Horbal, Koryne, 82
Howe, Allen, 177
Huerta, Delores, 98, 99
Hughes, Harold, 77, 94–95, 97, 105, 114, 187
Hughes, Howard, 87
Hughes, Richard, 77
Hughes Commission, 81
Humphrey, Hubert
awards and honors of, 195
campaign debt of, 82, 92, 156
debate, participation in, 110
Democratic National Committee
chair position offered to, 166
Democratic National Committee
involvement of, 86, 88, 105
Democratic party reform, partici-
pation in, 81
as Johnson’s running mate, 38, 39, 57–58
as McGovern supporter, 162
speeches of, 162
as vice president, 41, 54, 79–80
vice president spot offered by
McGovern, 132, 149
Humphrey, Muriel, 80
Humphrey presidential campaign, 1968
defeat of, 74
nomination of, 65, 66
obstacles faced by, 68–69
reflections on, 92
representatives of, 62, 62
speeches by, 61, 71, 72–74, 76
supporters of, 64, 70, 88, 99
in three-way race, 60
Vietnam War, position on, 65, 72, 73, 74
Humphrey presidential campaign, 1972, 132
California votes, 115
at primaries stage, 114
supporters of, 98, 103, 107, 130, 154, 183
unannounced, 106
Utah votes, 109, 139
Hunt, Howard, 160
Indefurth, Rick, 96, 119
individuality, 3, 4, 7
International Ladies Garment
Workers, 144
International Machinists and Aerospace Workers, 144
International Women’s Year convention, 194
Iran hostage crisis, 196
Ivins, Grant, 113

J
Jackson, Henry (Scoop)
Democratic National Committee involvement of, 105
JMW, attitude toward, 181
on JMW as Democratic Party chair, 137
in presidential race, 1972, 107, 108, 109, 122, 130, 132, 139
Vietnam War position of, 94
Jaffe, Eric, 156, 178
Jeffrey, Millie, 82, 84, 87, 113, 124, 155, 165
Jennings, Paul, 144
Jenson, Hyrum, 25, 26
Jenson, Marv, 26, 27, 30, 39
John Birch Society, 111
Johnson, Lady Bird, 45, 80, 151
Johnson, Lyndon
advisors to, 45
appointments by, 49, 53
copper strike settlement, role in, 57
Democratic National Committee, relations with, 55–56, 88
inaugural, 1965, 41
as McGovern supporter, 149, 150, 151
presidential race, 1968, decision not to run in, 58
in presidential race, 1964, 37, 38, 39, 40, 59
stepping down by, 80
as vice president, 31
Vietnam policy of, 46, 54, 65, 72, 73, 74
White House representation in absentia, 80
Jones, Kirby, 135

K
Keller, Jim, 155
Kennecott Copper Company, 57
Kennedy, Edward, 54
Kennedy, Eunice. See Shriver, Eunice Kennedy
Kennedy, Jackie, 38
Kennedy, John, 31, 38, 183
Kennedy, Robert F. (Bobby)
campaign debt of, 83
death of, 60, 61, 62
in presidential race, 1968, 38, 54, 55, 58–59, 60, 92
supporters of, 62, 84
Kennedy, Ted
Democratic National Committee involvement of, 105
as McGovern supporter, 162
in presidential race, 1980, 83, 195, 195–96
presidential race entry considered, 1976, 187
scandal of, 84, 96
staff of, 83
vice president spot rejected by, 131, 149
vice president suggestions considered by, 133
Kentucky Fried Chicken franchises, 50
Kern, Helmuth, 179
Kessler, Ernie, 191
Kimmelman, Henry, 96, 119, 135, 141, 156
King, Alan, 111
King, David
as ambassador to Malagasy, 49, 67
in Congress, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46–47, 53
reelection campaign, 1964, 38, 39–40
as Sanford supporter, 1976, 191
King, David, Jr., 67
King, Martin Luther, Jr., 60
King, Rosalie, 40, 43, 44, 45, 49, 67
Kirk, Paul, 210
Kissinger, Henry, 162
Klas, John, 89, 167, 184, 191
Kondrake, Morton, 163
Kopechne, Mary Jo, 84
Koster, Richard (Dick), 82, 186
Kostopulos, Nick, 155, 168, 169, 170
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Page References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>labor bosses</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larsen, Mildred</td>
<td>61, 98, 183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larsen, Sharp</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latinos</td>
<td>60, 106, 131, 156, 159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawrence, Carol</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawrence, Larry</td>
<td>158–59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawyers for McGovern</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>League of Women Voters</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lear, Norman</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee, J. Bracken</td>
<td>12–13, 23, 28, 70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee, Margaret</td>
<td>23, 24, 25, 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leland, George (Mickey)</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liddy, Gordon</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lie, Trygve</td>
<td>79–80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lilly, Scott</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lindsay, John</td>
<td>103, 105, 106, 107, 155, 157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucey, Patrick</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy, Bill</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyons, Dorothy</td>
<td>154–55, 166, 187, 192, 193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MacLaine, Shirley</td>
<td>111, 130, 159, 159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madame Chair (terminology)</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahoney, Alice</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahoney, Bill</td>
<td>106, 183, 193, 195, 196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahoney, Richard (Dick)</td>
<td>201, 211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>majority-takes-all rule</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>majority vote (defined)</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making of the President</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manatos, Andy</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manatos, Mike</td>
<td>57, 70, 80, 165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandate for Reform</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manett, Charles</td>
<td>165, 167, 170, 179, 186, 210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mankiewicz, Frank</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congress campaign</td>
<td>1972, 97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Party reform</td>
<td>role in, 114, 115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on JMW as Democratic Party chair</td>
<td>134, 165, 166, 167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vice president selection</td>
<td>input on, 133, 140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mansfield, Mike</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martindell, Anne</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mason, Tony</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mass-media outreach to voters</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matheson, Scott</td>
<td>89, 184, 196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maughan, Richard</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McCain, John</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McCarthy, Abigail</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McCarthy, Eugene</td>
<td>anti-violence planks of, 64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>campaign debt of, 82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic National Committee involvement of, 105</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in presidential race, 1968, 54, 55, 66, 92, 155</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>supporters of, 59, 60, 62</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vice presidential campaign, 1964, 38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McCarthy, Judy</td>
<td>194–95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McCord, James</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McDonald, Peter</td>
<td>156, 199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McGovern, Eleanor</td>
<td>95, 119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McGovern, George</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>appointments by, 134–35, 136, 137, 139, 142</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>background of, 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic National Committee involvement of, 105</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Party reform, role in, 83, 84, 93, 94, 95, 100, 167, 168</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>equal rights, minority rights and abortion, positions on, 108</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>staff of, 114</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam War, position on, 95, 100, 102, 106, 128, 138–39, 162</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on women’s issues, 124, 130, 154</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McGovern presidential campaign, 1968, 64, 65, 66</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McGovern presidential campaign, 1972</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in California, 109–10, 119–21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>debate, participation in, 110</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>defeat of, 163, 165</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>delegates, picking up, 103, 106–9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in New Mexico, 110–11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nomination, 122, 130, 134</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>opposition, 112–13, 115–16, 149–50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(see also Anybody but McGovern)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>platform representation, 114</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reflections on, 128, 193</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>running mate, selection of, 1, 131–34, 141, 142, 143, 145–48, 149</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
MADAME CHAIR

staff of, vii, 5–6, 96–97, 136–37, 142, 148–49, 153–56
supporters of, 102–3, 111, 139, 144, 166–67, 168, 184, 194, 196
women supporters, 154–55
McGovern Reform Commission, 114, 115, 116, 126, 128
McKay, Bill, 143
McKay, David O., 41
McKay, Gunn, 59
McKenzie, Barbara, 96, 119
Meany, George, 90, 137
Mecham, Evan, 204, 209, 210
Meet the Press, 146, 146–47, 212
Mensel, Frank, 40, 43, 191
mental illness, stigma of, 141
Merrill, Jerald, 61
Meyerson, Bruce, 175
Michener, James, 22–23
Miermet, Carolyn, 53
Mikulski, Barbara, 171
Mildred (cousin), 97
Miles, David (brother), 32
Miles, Frances Marion (Dick) (father), 10–11, 214
Miles, Grandfather, 10, 11
Miles, Grandma, 11
Miles, Nettie Potter (mother), 8–10, 9, 11, 61, 203, 214
Miles, Sam (uncle), 11
Miles, Shirley (Lee) (sister), 18, 22, 63, 98
Miller, Clyde, 40, 50, 59, 75
Miller, Fran, 155
Mills, Wilbur, 38
mining industry, 46, 48, 89
mining strike, 12
Mink, Patsy, 114
mink shows, 51, 52
minorities in political process, 83, 85, 103, 113, 116, 156
minority rights, 108
Mitchell, George, 82, 163, 165, 167, 170
Mitchell, John, 117
Mock, Byron, 61
Mofford, Rose, 195, 200, 210
Mondale, Walter, 132, 201, 213
Morgan, Barbara, 184, 186
Mormon Church

anti-abortion stance of, 19, 29
labor, views on, 12
missionary system of, 100, 101, 128
moral teachings of, 10–11, 29
political views within, 13, 41–43
race, policies on, 45
women’s position in, 6–7, 10, 21, 56–57, 112, 174
Morrison, Frank, 111, 134
Morton, Azie, 144, 155
Moss, Frank (Ted)
Antelope Island park project, 50
in Congress, 37, 39
fund use by, 43
Humphrey presidential campaign, role in, 69, 70, 73
JMW, relations with, 58, 167, 181
on JMW heading McGovern campaign, 5–6
presidential campaign, 1964, role in, 37, 40
presidential campaign, 1968, role in, 63
Rampton, relations with, 139
Redd, Lucy backed by, 53
Senate campaign, 1970, 93, 160
staff of, 41, 83, 155
Moss, Phyllis, 37
Mott, Stewart, 111
Muskie, Edmund
Democratic National Committee involvement of, 105
as Humphrey’s running mate, 1968, 66, 69, 72
JMW as chair, support of, 166
in presidential race, 1972, 92, 93, 98, 103, 106, 107, 114, 122, 130, 132, 162, 163
supporters of, 6, 99, 183
vice president spot offered to, 132, 149
Muskie, Jane, 70

N
Nabors, Charles (Chuck), 60–61, 62, 159, 170, 172, 175
Nabors, Joanne, 172
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), 60
National Education Association (NEA), 188–89
National Federation of Democratic Women, 196
National Order of Women Legislators, 173
National Organization for Women (NOW), 57, 111
National Press Club, 161
National Women’s Political Caucus (NWPC), 103, 111, 115, 124, 125, 133, 176, 196
Nelson, Gaylord, 123
Nelson, Robert, 84
New Deal, 94
New School for Social Research, 173
Nimoy, Leonard, 111
Nixon, Richard
businessmen supporters of, 75, 76
downfall of, 2
foreign policy of, 76
inauguration of, 80
presidency of, 83
in presidential race, 1968, 69, 74
in presidential race, 1972, 1, 2, 92, 95, 102, 103, 111, 117, 144
Vietnam War policy of, 162
Watergate scandal, 1, 87, 157, 160, 162, 173
nurturing versus leadership, 3, 4, 7, 216
NWPC. See National Women’s Political Caucus (NWPC)

O
O’Brien, Dorothy, 64
O’Brien, Lawrence (Larry), vii, 2, 65, 70
as Democratic National Committee chair, 78, 81, 82, 83, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 93, 134, 140
as Democratic National Committee chair nominee, 170
Democratic National Committee positions, role in filling, 105
McGovern campaign, 1972, role in, 137, 142, 195–96
and post-reform power structure, 107
presidential campaign, 1972, role in, 102, 117, 121, 122, 125, 126, 130, 134, 148, 149, 150, 150, 153
resignation of, 135–36
vice president, considered for, 132
on Watergate break-in, 143, 157, 158
O’Connell, Bill, 86
O’Connell, Catherine, 2, 3, 7, 8, 201, 216
O’Donnell, Kenneth, 64
O’Hara, James, viii, 93, 94, 116, 121, 122, 126
Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers, 144
Oliver, Spencer, 156, 157, 158
Owens, George, 70
Owens, Wayne
Humphrey supporters, meeting with, 62
on JMW as Democratic National Committee chair, 167, 170
Kennedy, Ted, work for, 83, 196
Kennedy campaign, 1968, role in, 58
as Moss’s representative, 43, 50, 53
on Platform Committee, 63
presidential campaign, 1968, role in, 64, 70, 159
Senate race, 177, 184

P
Parent-Teachers Association (PTA), 27, 28
Park City, Utah, 46
Paterson, Basil, 138, 144, 146, 146, 147, 155, 169, 170
Peace Corps, 54, 111, 149
Pearlman, Marian, 96–97, 119
Perlik, Charles, 144
Peterson, Donald, 82
Peterson, Esther, 45
Petrie, Donald (Don), 135, 139, 156, 178
Phelps, Dunny, 98, 107, 191
Phelps, Jack, 98, 107
Phillips, Channing, 66
Pine, Charles, 183
Pokorny, Gene, 96, 107, 109, 119, 148
political extremism, 60
political reform, funds for, 172
polygamy, 10, 13–14
Poole, Sam, 185, 189
Potter, Grandfather, 9, 10, 11–12, 13
Potter, Grandmother, 9, 11–12
Potursky, Jacob, 144
presidential advisor, 1st woman as, 45
Price, Utah, 6, 12, 16, 28
Printing Pressmen's Union, 144
Prisbrey, Grant, 60, 68
Prisbrey, Rex, 207
proportional representation, 84–85, 110, 113, 116
Pruett, Ray, 36, 37, 47, 48
PTA (Parent-Teachers Association), 27, 28

Q
quotas in employment (later affirmative action), 85, 108
quotas in political parties, 85

R
racial and ethnic minorities in political process. See minorities in political process
Rampton, Calvin L.
apointments of, 45, 47, 48, 74–75
Humphrey backed by, 58, 60, 61, 62, 68, 73–74
JMW, relationship with, 5, 6, 49, 75, 75, 99, 139, 166, 167, 180–81
McGovern, opposition to, 109, 112, 139
as Sanford supporter, 191
stepping down, 184
supporters of, 183
in Utah gubernatorial race, 1964, 35, 39, 40
in Utah gubernatorial race, 1968, 54, 59, 67, 68, 69, 71, 74
Randolph, Jennings, 39
Rawlings, Cal, 53, 58, 59, 62–63, 68
Reagan, Ronald, 75, 213
Redd, Lucy
conservative Democratic group, alignment with, 82
as Democratic National Committee member, 35, 36
in Interior Department, 53
JMW, lobbying against, 168
JMW accompanied to first DNC meeting by, 55, 57
as Johnson delegation chair, 37
resignation of, 54, 59
Redford, Robert, 175
Reese, Matt, 187, 188
Reese, Sevilla, 44, 47, 48
Reform Commission, 86, 93, 105, 161, 171, 191
Reinhardt, Steve, 78, 82, 87, 93
relief programs, 15
Relief Society, 14
Religious Right, 21, 29, 111, 173
Republican convention, 1972, 1, 113
Republican Party, founding of, 94
Reuther, Walter, 82, 90
Ribicoff, Abe, 123, 132
Riggs, Bill, 191
Robbins, Steve, 96, 119, 151
Roberts, Betty, 109
Robert's Rules of Order, 120
Roemer, Doris, 113
Roosevelt, Eleanor, 56, 210
Roosevelt, Franklin D., 12, 13, 54
Rose, Margaret, 190, 192
Ross, Galen, 60, 68
Rubin, Miles, 97, 111, 141
Rubin, Nancy, 97

S
Saathoff, Milt, 43
Salinger, Pierre, 119, 135, 136, 138, 139, 156
Salt Lake City, Utah, 69, 73
Salt Lake Tabernacle, 69, 72, 73
Samuels, Howard, 144
Sandack, Wally, 48, 59, 61, 184
Sanders, Susan, 195
San Diego, Calif., 31–32
Sanford, Terry
as Charter Commission chair, 161, 177, 178
Democratic National Committee chair, considered for, 81
presidential campaign, 1968, role in, 72
in presidential race, 1972, 109, 130, 139, 188
in presidential race, 1976, 182, 184–85, 186–89, 190–93
Sawyer, Grant, 89, 92–93
Scheer, Julian, 185
Schoo, John, 191
Schultz, Bill, 203
Schuster, Bob, 201–2
Searle, Eileen, 33
secretarial work, 15
Segal, Eli, 84, 115, 116, 119, 155, 166, 167
Segal, Phyllis, 124, 155
segregation, 46
Seigel, Paula, 191
self-realization, 7
sex education, 16
sexual freedom, 29
Shaul, Dennis, 191, 192
Shea, Andy, 93
Sheinwold, Albert, 158
Short, Bob, 82
Shriver, Eunice Kennedy, 149, 150, 151, 163, 176
Shriver, Sargent
Democratic National Committee chair, race for, 166, 167
as McGovern’s running mate, 149, 150, 151, 159, 163
as Peace Corps director, 54
Siegal, Mark, 171, 185
Simonson, Mary Ellen, 100, 175
Sirica, John J., 160
Smith, Amanda, 96
Smith, Hulett, 184, 185, 186, 189
Smith, Jeff, 97, 119
Smith, Margaret Chase, 163
Smurthwaite, Charles, 53
social changes, 3
social work, 15
Sorenson, Theodore, 64
Sperling, Godfrey, 160
St. Angelo, Gordon, 86, 87, 88
Stearns, Rick, 96, 117, 119, 125
Steinem, Gloria, 112, 172
Steinhoff, Ron, 191
Stevenson, Adlai, 163
Stewart, John, 175
Stillman, Guy, 98
Strauss, Robert (Bob)
as Carter administration ambassador, 196
DeConcini family, connection to, 183
as Democratic National Committee chair, 75, 171, 177, 178, 185, 191, 193–94
Democratic National Committee chair, run for, 140, 163, 166, 169, 170
as Democratic National Committee treasurer, 88, 89, 134, 139
JMW, attitude toward, 140, 180–81
Morton, Azie, as informant for, 144
picket line crossing by, 165
resignation from treasurer position, 135
tactics of, 90
as Washington insider, 76
Strike, John, 69
student riots, 60
Stump, Bob, 201, 202
suffrage movement (women). See woman suffrage movement
Sullivan, Karen, 194
Sullivan, Paul, 191, 192, 194
Symington, Fife, 210

T
Tanner, N. Eldon, 41, 42–43, 69
technology changes, 3
Tet offensive, 55
Texas oil money, 76
Textile Workers, 144
Thiokol Chemical (firm), 44
Thomas, Norma, 48, 61, 75
Thompson, Frank, 156
Today Show, 163
Tollackson, Anne, 174
Tollackson, Ken, 174
train stops, 110
Truman, Bess, 181
Truman, Harry, 152
Tsongas, Paul, 102

U
Udall, Morris, 99, 187, 190, 192, 193, 194, 195, 201
Udall, Stewart, 53, 60, 93, 99, 193
Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, 128
unions
in Democratic election campaign, 1972, 89, 117, 118, 127, 131, 144–45, 156
in Democratic election campaign, 1976, 194
in Great Depression, 12
working with, 90
United Auto Workers, 82, 90, 121, 144, 161
United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers, 144
United Farm Workers of America (UFA), 98
United Mine Workers, 39
United Nations, 210
unit rule, 65, 104, 110, 115, 147
uranium, case involving, 68
U.S. Congress, 176–77
U.S. Senate, 173, 174
Utah
as “right to work” state, 46
statehood, 10, 13, 14
women’s political involvement in, 14, 45, 50, 56
Utah Delegates for Johnson, 39
Utah Historical Society, 48
Utah Women’s Legislative Council, 28

V
Vance, Elizabeth, 53
Vance, Robert, 82
Van Winkle, Edith, 155
Vick, Paul, 189
Vidal, Dagmar, 82
Vietnam War
as election year issue, 1968, 60, 64, 65
ending, 128
negotiations on, 138–39
party disagreement on, 54
policy regarding, 46
protesters, 130–31, 131
public opinion on, 55, 83, 187
Volachek, Andy, 155

W
Wade, Richard (Dick), 84, 96
Wagner, Carl, 96, 109, 119
Walker, Alan, 172, 191
Walker, Weyman, 191
Wallace, Cornelia, 181
Wallin, Jean, 82
Walsh, Jim, 98, 99, 107, 175, 193
Walsh, Judy, 98, 175
Warner, Carolyn, 195, 203
Warnicke, Ron, 197
“war on poverty” programs, 45
Watergate break-in, 1972
investigation and lawsuit, vii, 1–2, 13, 117, 139, 160, 165
motivation for, 87
press coverage of, 143, 157–58, 173
public opinion on, 187
Watts, Glenn, 90, 144
Weaver, Dennis, 111
Weil, Gordon, 119
Weilenmann, Jane, 69
Weilenmann, Milton, 59–60, 68, 69
Weiner, Bob, 155
Weingrow, Howard, 156
Welsh, Matthew E., 86, 88
Western States Democratic Conference, 1968, 60–61
Western Writers of America, 211
West Jordan, Utah, 32
Westwood, Clyde (brother-in-law), 32, 33
Westwood, Jean Miles
abortion, views on, 21
Americans for Democratic Action vice president, 176
in Arizona, 183, 184, 194, 197–200, 198, 202–3
in Babbitt presidential campaign, 1988, 211–13
birth and family background of, vi, 2, 6, 8–13, 16
in business, 4
career of, 8
country club office holder, 204–9
death, vii
as Democratic convention delegate, 1964, 36–38
as Democratic National Committee chair, viii, 1, 75, 90, 159, 177, 183
on Democratic National Committee executive committee, 78, 81, 87–88, 93
Democratic National Committee involvement of, viii, 55, 57–58, 59, 77, 120
Democratic National Committee involvement of, post-chair, 171, 173, 176, 177–81, 185
as Democratic National Committee treasurer, 178, 181
as Democratic Party chair, vii,
Index

134–36, 137, 139–40, 142, 143–44, 150, 157, 158–70, 210 (see also as Democratic National Committee chair)

Democratic Party reform, position on, 81–82, 90

depressions, 2, 8, 21

Eagleton resignation, call for, 146–47

education issues, involvement with, 27–28

education of, 12, 16, 18, 22

on election night, 1972, 164

Europe, travels in, 51, 79–80

feminism of, 7, 12

foreign policy views of, 128

Gahagen, Helen, work for, 18

in Goddard mayoral and governor campaigns, 210–11

Hart campaign, 1984, 201

Hawaii, trips to, 5, 32–33, 43

head injury of, 177, 180

health problems, vi, 2, 7–8, 12, 19, 20, 21, 200–201, 208, 210, 212–13, 214, 215

interviews of, vii, 212

as Kennedy supporter, 1980, 195, 195–96

marriage, vi, vii, 4, 7, 17–18, 53, 57, 215, 216

McGovern, attitude toward, 128, 193

McGovern, call from, 5–6, 96

McGovern campaign aid as DNC chair, 142, 146, 150, 150–54, 160


in mink business, vi, 6, 18–19, 21, 31, 32, 34, 41, 43, 48, 52, 53, 61, 76, 78–79, 80, 91

motherhood, vii, 4, 7

newspapers, work for, 16–17

personality and psychological profile, 3, 7, 216

political involvement (general), vi–vii, 7, 51

political involvement (girlhood), 13

political involvement (local and county), 25–27, 27–28, 30, 31–32

political involvement (national), 34–40, 62–66, 63, 70–73, 74, 93, 129, 211–13

political involvement (regional), 60–61, 89, 99–100


political views, development of, 13, 16, 31

pregnancy complications and termination, 19–20

presidential candidates, evaluation of, 1972, 94–95

prominence, rise in, 57, 76

public office, ambitions for, 172, 173, 174, 176–77

public speaking of, 172–74, 175–76, 191

resignation from DNC chair position, 170

RW, dating, 16

in San Diego, Calif., 17–19, 31–32

Sanford presidential campaign, 1976, role in, 182, 186–89, 190–93

speeches of, 99, 108, 138

strokes suffered by, 2, 7–8, 200–201

Vice President spot offered to, 133

Vietnam War, views on, 46, 128

Wallace, George, meeting with, 152, 152

Watergate lawsuit, role in, 1–2, 13

Watergate revealed to, 157–58

in women’s clubs, 24, 24

women’s issues, involvement in, 4, 48, 56, 57, 112, 159, 172, 173, 175–76, 194, 215, 216

writings of, 7, 16–17, 18, 21, 22–23, 91, 191, 201, 214

Westwood, Jeneil (daughter-in-law), 30, 36

Westwood, Melvin (brother-in-law), 97

Westwood, Richard (Dick), 17

back injuries and aftermath, 6, 33–34, 91, 174–75, 176, 177, 190

health problems of, 190
JMW’s political involvement, support of, vii, 5, 30, 31, 36, 37, 38, 97, 119, 137, 140, 152
marriage, vi, 17–18, 57, 215, 216
in mink business, vi, 6, 18–19, 31, 41, 43, 48, 50–51, 53, 61, 78–79, 80, 91
postwar jobs of, 19
wartime work of, 16, 18
writings of, 18, 22, 214, 215
Westwood, Rick (son)
birth of, 18
education of, 33
marriage, 30
in ranching, 78
in school, 27
Westwood, Russell (brother-in-law), 32
Wexler, Anne, 84, 114, 119, 121, 124, 155
Whipple, Blaine, 97
White, Beverly, 43
White, John, 196
White, Kevin, 133
White, Theodore, 120, 122, 123, 153
Whitney, Bruce, 175
Whitney, Dorothy, 175
Widener, Warren, 109
Wilkins, Carolyn, 169
Wilkins, D. Frank, 36, 39
Wilkinson, Ernest L., 39, 42
Willens, Harold, 111
Williams, Edward Bennett, 10
Williams, J. D., 59–60
Williams, Roger, 10
Wise, Bob, 191
Wolbach, Robert, 59
woman chair (terminology), 137
woman suffrage movement, 10, 14, 94, 175–76
women
in arts, 14, 15
clubs and organizations of, 23–25, 70 (see also Democratic Women’s Clubs)
Depression impact on, 15
education for, 15–16, 22, 29
study groups for, 56
in workforce, 8, 9, 15, 22
women in politics
as candidates for office, 116, 133
delagation participation of, 85, 113, 115, 116
in early 20th century, 14
roles for, vii
Women’s Educational Action League (WEAL), 176, 206
Women’s Equity Action League (WEAL), 57
women’s issues (in Demo. Party), 96
women’s movement
benefits, unequal of, 29
candidates supporting, 124, 130
firsts, 1
history of, 14–15
legislative action in, 57, 111–12, 175–76
marriage and careers, combining, 3
post-World War II, 56
understanding of, 8
women’s roles, restrictions on, 22, 24–25
women’s roles, shift in, 3
Woodcock, Leonard, 121, 161
Woolf, Carolyn, 56
World War II, 17
Wurf, Jerry, 144

Y
Yarbrough, Ralph, 160
Yorty, Sam, 105
Young Democrats, 53, 159, 191
youth participation in political process, 60, 102, 116, 127

Z
Zah, Peterson, 103, 198, 198–99, 199
Ziffren, Paul, 164
Zion Park, Utah, 44
Jean Miles Westwood was the first American woman to chair a national political party. Nineteen seventy-two may be remembered best as the year Nixon’s plumbers burglarized Democratic national headquarters at the Watergate. It was also a year of inclusive political reform, in which civil rights, antiwar, and women’s rights activists achieved unprecedented power in the Democratic Party. George McGovern was their candidate, and Jean Westwood was his choice to run his campaign and then chair the Democratic National Committee. Although she had achieved that position due to her ability to organize and campaign effectively, largely by outworking the opposition, neither she nor anyone else could overcome the barriers McGovern’s campaign faced and created for itself. In Madame Chair, Westwood tells a political insider’s story of that fateful year in America and recounts how a Mormon woman from small-town Utah rose to the apex of liberal politics, becoming a visible symbol in an era of feminist struggle and achievement.