

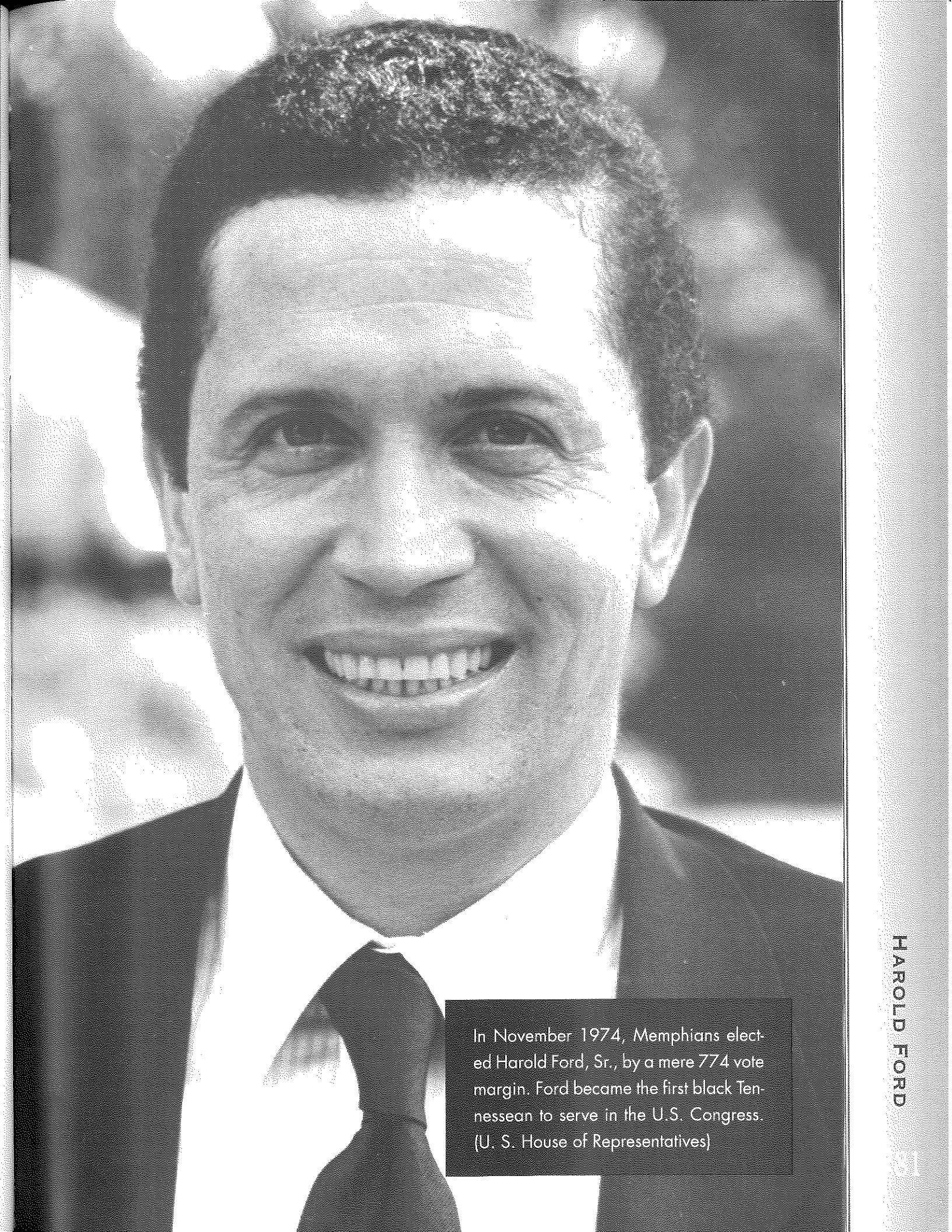
*"A DEMOCRAT FOR ALL THE PEOPLE":
The Historic Election of
Harold E. Ford, Sr., to the United
States House of Representatives*

BY STEVEN A. KNOWLTON

On November 5, 1974, incumbent U.S. Representative Dan Kuykendall, a white Republican from Memphis, stood before the television cameras exulting in his re-election to a fifth term by a margin of nearly 5,000 votes. Viewers watched as the on-air hosts interrupted coverage of Kuykendall's victory speech to announce that totals had been revised—and that Kuykendall had been unseated by State Representative Harold Ford, a black Democrat.¹ The margin of victory was at first believed to be a mere 600 votes; in the final recount, Ford won by 774 votes out of 135,136 cast in Tennessee's Eighth Congressional District. Ford's count was only 0.6% higher than his opponent's. The intrigue of the night's events was heightened when Ford revealed that the 5,000 votes that put him over the top had come out of six unopened ballot boxes from majority-black precincts, discovered in the basement of the Shelby

County Administration Building. Ford's campaign workers, it seemed, had observed more votes cast than the press had reported, and had gone looking for uncounted ballots. Thus it was on a night of high electoral drama that Memphis elected the first black Tennessean ever to serve in the U.S. Congress.²

Ford was among a small group of trailblazing black representatives from the South. Since Reconstruction, only Andrew Young of Atlanta and Barbara Jordan of Houston (both elected in 1972) had joined the House of Representatives. The streets of Ford's neighborhood of South Memphis filled with peaceful revelers and Ford succinctly summarized the key to his victory: "The people gave me the most votes."³ He was elected from a district that for over a century had stood as a bastion of urban segregation and white supremacy. Demographic shifts, party realignment, and reapportionment,



In November 1974, Memphians elected Harold Ford, Sr., by a mere 774 vote margin. Ford became the first black Tennessean to serve in the U.S. Congress. (U. S. House of Representatives)

however, had turned the district into one with a majority of Democratic voters and a near-majority of black voters. It opened the door for a black man to ascend to the highest level of legislative power. And Harold Ford became that man through a combination of dissatisfaction with the Republican Party, local political savvy, and shrewd rhetoric.

Events of the 1960s primed Memphis for electing a black candidate. As happened across the nation, black voters aligned with the Democratic Party and various reforms (including abolition of the poll tax in Tennessee and the 1965 Voting Rights Act) increased the black franchise. In Memphis, this increase was less spectacular than elsewhere in the South, owing to the fact that in the first half of the twentieth century, as historian Elizabeth Gritter notes, "an unusually large number of black Memphians could vote compared with their counterparts in the rest of the South, and many African Americans, both in the South and elsewhere, saw Memphis as a model for political mobilization." In a trend similar to other Southern districts, many white voters were switching to the Republican Party. The black population of Memphis boomed in real numbers as mechanization of cotton fields forced rural blacks into the city to seek work, and also in proportion to the overall population as court-ordered busing to achieve racial integration in schools led many white families to move into the suburbs. Finally, the state legislature drew district boundaries in response to the 1962

U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Baker v. Carr*. That decision required that legislative districts be as nearly equal as possible in population so that all votes had equal weight. (This doctrine was summarized in the phrase "one man, one vote."⁴)

Black politicians had broken the color barrier in 1964. In a city with at-large elections where white voters routinely refused to support black candidates, the only chance for a black candidate to win was the "one-shot" technique. In a field of many white candidates but only a single black candidate, black voters were asked to restrict their vote to the single black candidate. In theory, concentrating the votes for the black candidate might give him enough support to squeak past the threshold. Although this technique was tried numerous times between 1951 and 1964 it was successful only twice, when Democrat A.W. Willis was elected to the state House of Representatives and H.T. Lockard was chosen to serve as a judge in 1964. The black press characterized the victories of Willis and Lockard as owing to an "all-out effort" to mobilize the black community, whose votes provided the margins of victory over white support for Republican candidates. Despite the growth of the black Democratic electorate, party leaders in Memphis made no efforts to align white Democratic and black Democratic campaigns.⁵

By eliminating at-large county elections and imposing district voting, the *Baker* ruling meant that previously exclud-

ed minorities—in Tennessee, blacks and Republicans—gained power proportional to their share of the population. Blacks in urban districts made immediate and lasting gains beginning in 1966. The number of black Tennessee legislators increased from one in 1965 to nine, or nearly one-tenth of the General Assembly, in 1971. In the long term, the opportunity for black politicians to gain office and make connections in Nashville allowed them to build on their experience to ascend to higher office.

Harold Ford was not the first black politician to sense the possibility of victory in the Eighth District, but he succeeded where James Oglethorpe “J. O.” Patterson, the pioneering black candidate for the seat, had failed in 1972. Ford was a campaigner and politician uniquely able to exploit the politics of a racially mixed electorate.

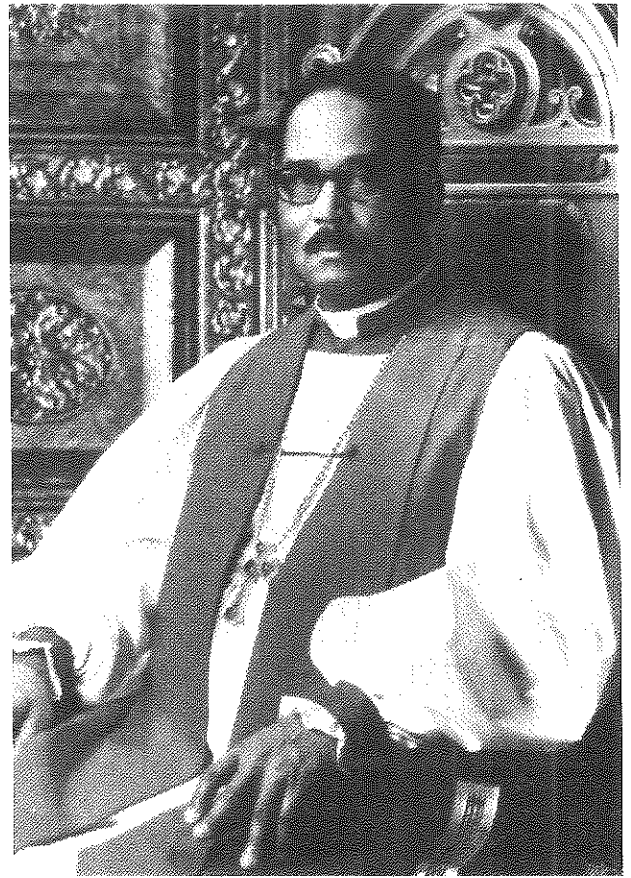


In response to *Baker* and related rulings, the Tennessee legislature carved out districts in 1966 that produced a Republican majority in the Ninth Congressional District and divided the black electorate among three districts. The new boundaries allowed for Republican Dan Kuykendall to defeat incumbent Democrat George Grider in 1966 and enjoy increasing margins of victory through 1970. However, the full impact of “one man, one vote” was felt only

after the 1970 census, following which the state legislature redrew boundaries to reflect updated population figures.

It also engaged in a political battle over redistributing constituencies over fewer districts. The 1970 census reduced Tennessee’s Congressional delegation by one seat, and elections that year returned Democratic majorities in both houses of the state legislature. In the 1972 legislative session, those majorities drew new boundaries to produce as many Democratic-majority districts as possible—specifically “to increase the party’s 5 to 4 margin over Republicans in the national House of Representatives to a 6 to 2 ratio. This plan would leave Shelby [County] divided into three sections—two of them represented by rural congressmen—and would draw a strong Democratic district for Republican Dan Kuykendall so that he couldn’t get re-elected.” Although many white voters had switched to the Republican Party, enough white Democrats remained to establish a strong Democratic district—once black voters were included.⁶

Kuykendall put on a brave face about the redistricting, telling a party gathering, “I shall run in the district in which I live and, with your help, I shall be re-elected in November.” Nonetheless, it was widely expected that the 1972 redistricting meant a loss of the seat for the Republicans. The press reported “Kuykendall Loses in Redistricting,” and after Kuykendall later did lose his seat, he stated, “I was defeated in 1974, primarily as a result of



Dan Kuykendall was the first Republican ever elected from his district 1966. In 1972, J.O. Patterson pioneered as the first black candidate to challenge a white candidate for the seat. (Kuykendall, from U.S. House of Representatives, and Patterson, from Memphis/Shelby County Public Library)

redistricting by the state legislature.”⁷ In the Eighth District in 1972, black voters constituted only 39% of the registered electorate—fewer than anticipated during the redistricting debate. Nonetheless, 98% of the black community lived in the district, giving them powerful influence in the electoral process.⁸

Democratic activist John Bakke recalls that party leaders had no expectation that a black candidate would win nomination in the new district.⁹ With the newly created Democratic-majority district, however, the black political class quickly gathered

around a single candidate for the U.S. House race in 1972. State Senator J.O. Patterson announced his candidacy on April 10, and state Representative Harold Ford followed on April 26. In response to concerns that his campaign would “split the Black vote,” Ford remarked that he was “the people’s choice” and would emerge victorious in the primary. In short order, however, Ford had a change of heart, which Bakke attributes to an informal deal in which Patterson would run in 1972 with the understanding that if he were unsuccessful, then Ford would

have a clear path to the nomination among black candidates in 1974.¹⁰

Patterson, a lawyer and scion of a prominent Church of God in Christ bishop and who held a city council seat as well as a state senate post, cruised to the Democratic nomination with 63% of the vote. The general election revealed the power of racial bias to trump party loyalty, however. It was reported that “a number of long-time Democratic leaders have said they can’t vote for Patterson, and have declared support of Kuykendall.” Kuykendall “frankly” said “his hope for victory lies with the 59 per cent white voters. He believes Patterson will get most of the black votes and that he (Kuykendall) will get most of the white votes.” Although Patterson expected to receive the votes of at least a quarter of the white population in his district, he lost the general election to Kuykendall, 55% to 45%. While in the early 1970s, incumbency (isolated from other factors) conferred a built-in advantage of about two percent of the vote to a Congressional candidate, Kuykendall’s 1972 victory was attributable to more than the incumbency effect. The number of white Democrats voting for Kuykendall clearly exceeded the expectations of the state legislators who envisioned the district as a Democratic stronghold. As the relatively liberal white-oriented *Press-Scimitar* remarked in a postmortem editorial, “A funny thing happened on the way to the polls. Yesterday’s results show Kuykendall the

winner by 20,000 votes. At the same time, redistricting threw enough conservative voters into the Sixth District to help [Republican Robin] Beard upset the four-term [Democrat William R.] Anderson.” Other observers called it “a classic example of a redistricting plan backfiring on its creators.” Even so, there were plenty of political lessons to be learned from the Patterson defeat. In 1974 Harold Ford would prove an avid pupil.¹¹



Harold Eugene Ford was born in 1945 as the seventh of twelve children to Newton J. (“N. J.”) and Vera Ford, who lived in poverty in a semi-rural area south of Memphis. N. J. Ford operated a funeral parlor, where he and his children made important connections.¹² The Fords embraced their roles as community servants, both in undertaking and in politics, and established a reputation for attentive service to clients and constituents. As scholar Susan E. Smith has detailed, black funeral directors were often active in campaigns for justice, which lent them credibility in black politics. N. J. Ford ran for the Democratic nomination to the state House of Representatives in 1966 but lost to the incumbent, A.W. Willis. Harold, then a college senior, served as his father’s campaign manager.¹³

Ford graduated from Tennessee State University in 1967 and briefly pursued a career with IBM in Philadelphia before

returning to Memphis to work full-time at the funeral home. The requirements of the undertaking business led him to earn a degree in mortuary science in 1969. Throughout this period he remained active in the non-violent civil rights movement. By his own account, he “marched in all Dr. Martin Luther King’s demonstrations, worked in the NAACP, Shelby County Democratic Club and the Southern Christian Leadership Council.”¹⁴

Ford’s first campaign, to unseat State Representative James I. Taylor from the 96th District, relied on little in the way of print advertising—he seems to have purchased just a single ad in the black-oriented *Memphis World* that played on the contemporaneous slogan of the Ford Motor Company. He relied instead upon his family’s network of acquaintances and sought supporters among what he described as “the silent majority—through churches, civic clubs, PTAs” and other groups. Even in his first foray into the political arena, his tireless effort attracted notice as “an all-out campaign.” He received the endorsements of the *Press-Scimitar*, the conservative white-oriented *Commercial Appeal*, and the black-oriented *Tri-State Defender*. Hard work and an agenda were not Ford’s only assets: political reporter Null Adams wrote that he “looks like a page out of *Esquire* [the men’s fashion magazine], and may well be the best-dressed man in the Tennessee legislature.”¹⁵

No stranger to knocking on doors—he supplemented his mortician’s wages by selling encyclopedias—Ford “visited every home twice, attended every neighborhood rally, and appeared in every church and on every street corner” in his district. Ford won the nomination with 63% of the vote in the almost all-black district. Although he faced no Republican opposition Ford had to campaign against Taylor once more, as the latter filed as an independent for the general election. Ford continued his campaign, “working with his wife at bus stops in the morning and going house to house at night seeking a heavy turnout of voters in the general election.” In that general election, 25-year-old Ford won 74% of the vote and a seat in the Tennessee House of Representatives.¹⁶

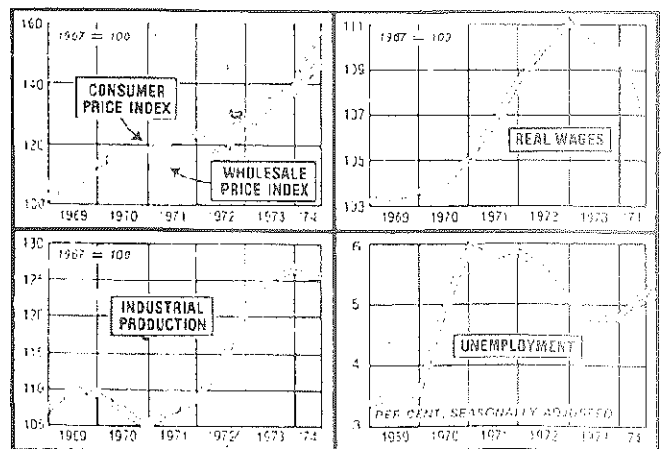
As a new legislator, Ford quickly proved that his networking skills were not limited to South Memphis. He was appointed to the important post of majority whip, an unusual position for a freshman representative.¹⁷ Thereafter he established his *bona fides* as a legislator. In early 1971 he participated in coordinated actions by all six black House members to boycott legislation until black-sponsored bills were brought to the floor. Ford’s bill was a measure to “prohibit Memphis Light, Gas, and Water division [MLGW, the city’s public utility] from assessing late charges on accounts prior to 25 days after the billing date.” This would prove to be his signature accomplishment as a

By 1974, public dissatisfaction with the Nixon economy was high. Nixon's efforts, such as placing Sammy Davis, Jr., on the National Advisory Council on Economic Opportunity, had not improved his popularity as food costs burgeoned. (Chart from *Newsweek*, August 19, 1974, and Davis with Nixon, July 1, 1971, Library of Congress)



THE NIXON ECONOMY

In 1969, Richard Nixon inherited a booming economy plagued by inflation. Then came a recession followed by a recovery. But when Mr. Nixon left office last week, the economy was again in a slump—with prices rising faster than ever.



ture” and noted that his family had built “an election machine almost unbeatable in the black community.” He coupled “the money and position of the Ford family name” with “tempered militancy in the predominantly black district to maintain a strong voting base.” It was in this period that the Ford organization introduced the “Ford ballot.” Candidates seeking his endorsement would provide cash payment, and in return their names would appear on a sample ballot printed by the Ford campaign. The money was not used for Ford’s personal enrichment—it underwrote the printing of literature, helped with payroll for campaign workers, and paid for refreshments for those working on the campaign. The “Ford machine” also delivered tangible goods to voters in targeted neighborhoods, such as baskets of food at Thanksgiving.²⁰

In 1973, Ford was chosen by his colleagues to be Secretary of the House, and was appointed to the rules committee. He guided bills through the legislature to improve rat-infested housing, provide for statewide kindergarten, and establish a school for the deaf in Memphis. He also continued to appear in newspapers, both for his investigations of MLGW’s service in poor neighborhoods and for a “direct action” incident involving the Memphis City Council. Council member John Ford, Harold’s brother, had declared in February 6 meeting that the chair, Thomas Todd, was failing to recognize him in a timely manner. As another

council member interrupted John said, “Why don’t you just shut the hell up?” Upon which, Todd threatened to have John Ford removed from the chambers. A week later, Harold Ford and around 100 supporters appeared before the city council during a hearing on zoning matters. They asked for a waiver of the rules of order to allow several demonstrators to speak in support of John Ford and to call for Todd’s resignation (public addresses to the council were reserved for the end of meetings.) When the demonstrators were refused the podium, they persisted in passive interruption of the meeting with loud massed humming, growing to rhythmic clapping and choruses of “We Shall Overcome” and “Lift Every Voice and Sing” in response to repeated requests from the chair for quiet. Their spokesman Harold Ford was defiant. Eventually police were called and the demonstrators left without incident. Reactions to the protest were racially polarized. The *Press-Scimitar* wrote that the Fords were seeking to “harass” Todd and “proved nothing except that they are capable of creating a disturbance.” The *Tri-State Defender*, by contrast, hailed “Right On, Mr. Ford,” claiming that the sentiment throughout the black community was in support of John Ford. “As long as people like Councilman Todd attempt to ignore the voices of Blacks,” the paper’s editor wrote, “they will get the brand of new Black static that has been the vanguard of every significant movement that has

taken place in this country in the past ten years.”²¹

Entering the election year of 1974, then, Harold Ford found himself positioned as an important leader in the black community of Memphis, but with a reputation of antagonism toward the white-led establishment.



In early 1974 several black politicians came to Ford and urged him to seek the Democratic nomination to oppose Kuykendall. Their entreaty came at the right time, as Ford was thinking of stepping away from the state legislature. “He was tired of the full-time work and part-time salary of a legislator” and was seeking to improve his financial situation, perhaps by expanding the mortuary business. Ford figured that his chances were better in 1974 than two years before, and his vacating his state house seat would give his brother Emmitt a chance to run.²²

The Eighth District, and the nation, had changed a great deal in two years. For one thing, demographics had been altered by white reactions to court-ordered busing to achieve substantial racial integration in the Memphis public schools (token integration had begun in 1961 but in 1973 almost all students still attended segregated schools). The busing decision, implemented in the 1973–1974 academic year, had provoked outrage and dissension among parents of both races. It became

the issue that “dominated the political and social life of Memphis during the 1970s and well into the next decade,” according to political reporter John Branston. Moreover, that period was characterized by what historian Sharon Wright calls a “power struggle” between black and white political factions. Even before busing began in January 1974, but at an accelerated pace afterward, white families moved out of the city school district; in a single year, more than 20% of the students in Memphis City Schools—most of them white—had enrolled elsewhere. By 1974, the Eighth Congressional District had changed to 47.5% black in population, bringing the number of white votes needed for a Democratic victory closer to 11% of the white electorate—much fewer than the 25% Patterson had needed but more than the 9% Patterson actually received.²³

In addition, 1974 was a good year to be challenging an incumbent Republican. Public dissatisfaction with the economy was high. Since the beginning of the Richard Nixon administration in 1969, prices had climbed 60% while wages had only increased 7%, and unemployment was above 5% (a rate that was considered appalling at the time.) Particularly distressing was an embargo of oil exports by the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries from October 1973 through March 1974, which led to shortages, rationing, and a doubling of gasoline prices. Food costs burgeoned, in part because of the “Russian Wheat

Deal.”²⁴ Headlines offered a steady drip of bad economic news: families requiring a 10% boost in income simply to stay even; General Motors’ profits plummeting 73%; a drought devastating the cotton crop, the price of sugar tripling in a year, public utilities threatening to run out of electricity, and even a strike by professional football players.²⁵ In addition, President Nixon was embroiled in the Watergate scandal. Many Republican members of Congress, Kuykendall included, had defended Nixon as unjustly accused. Kuykendall even appeared on the House floor in 1973 brandishing a noose to decry the “legislative lynch mob” that was the House committee investigating Watergate.²⁶

Overall, many observers found the United States in a dispirited mood. For Harold Ford, however, general malaise would not win him a victory—he needed to address the specifics of his constituency. Despite the fact that “the influence of black people had boomed in Memphis and Shelby County since the beginning of the civil rights movement,” no other city had an electorate as racially polarized as Memphis. Not only did the Patterson/Kuykendall Congressional race in 1972 find 90% of blacks supporting the Democrat and 90% of whites supporting the Republican, but so did the George McGovern/Nixon presidential contest.²⁷

Considering the challenges facing him, Ford sought to learn the lessons of Patterson’s defeat. If Patterson had

seemed aloof and lazy, Ford would be visibly hardworking. If Patterson had allowed rifts in the black community to continue, Ford would solidify the black vote. If Patterson had taken for granted his liberal base, Ford would cultivate it. If Patterson had suffered defection among white Democrats, Ford would cleave to the party. And if Patterson had alienated undecided white voters, Ford would woo them. Above all, Ford needed to fight the election on the merits (and demerits) of Kuykendall’s record; appeals for votes on the grounds of racial justice had very little resonance for the white voters of Memphis.²⁸

The first step, of course, was to win the primary in August. Ford maintained his public profile through work on behalf of black interests—such as pressuring the Tennessee Board of Regents to create a position of executive vice president to advocate for black university students and faculty; investigating whether police drug raids in South Memphis were unconstitutional; organizing demonstrations in favor of higher wages for disabled state employees; and continuing to investigate whether MLGW engaged in discriminatory practices.²⁹

Patterson had won the black vote in the 1972 primary, of course, but had captured only 91% of the black vote in the general election. Partly, this was due to Patterson’s lack of coordination with organizations such as the South Memphis-centered Shelby County Democratic Club

(SCDC), many of whose leaders “sat on their hands” during the 1972 election. Exacerbating Patterson’s plight was an outright breach with Cornelia Crenshaw, an influential leader of the North Memphis-based Kennedy Democratic Organization, who bitterly and publicly opposed some of Patterson’s decisions as a city council member. But most of all, Patterson had taken for granted the black and liberal vote, commenting, “Where else will they go?”³⁰

Through the primary season Ford cultivated his image as a black populist, not only through his use of his office to influence public affairs, but through functions and soirees. A gala dinner in his honor on January 5 drew stalwarts of black leadership such as Maxine Smith, executive secretary of the Memphis NAACP, and Maceo Walker, president of the Universal Life Insurance Company. Ford maintained a steady schedule of appearances at community events and demonstrations.³¹ Although he did not announce his candidacy for Congress until March 18, it must have been known among legislators earlier. A bill introduced in February to revise the boundaries of the Eighth District—ostensibly to correct an oversight in the 1972 law that left two otherwise unattached precincts as Eighth District enclaves within the Sixth District, but which would have had the effect of increasing the black share of the Eighth District’s population to about 48%—acquired the nickname of “The ‘Elect Harold Ford’ Bill.”³²

In keeping with his emphasis on black political power, the kickoff event for Ford’s primary campaign was a banquet in April that drew 2,000 attendees. His guests of honor included three black mayors—two from small cities and Tom Bradley of Los Angeles. Ford had several prominent white Democrats speak as well. Almost every notable black leader in Memphis was in attendance, including Lt. George W. Lee, Memphis’s leading black Republican. The soul music superstar Isaac Hayes provided entertainment. Ford projected his campaign theme in terms of empowerment: “The people have been shut out of government long enough, too long. The people of Memphis have been denied true representation in Washington and I am here to change all of that.”³³

From the start of his campaign Ford maintained a steady focus on the flaws of the incumbent. He blasted Kuykendall for peddling influence, for failing to address rising crime, and for catering to special interests at the expense of urban needs. “I think Memphis, being an urban city, cannot afford having a congressman representing it on a federal level whose only concern is to milk dairy people, the oil industry, ITT, and support the Nixon administration,” thundered Ford. He also continued to proclaim his allegiance to black interests in Memphis, which he identified with anti-poverty programs. He emphasized his efforts to improve housing in poor neighborhoods and condemned the military budget. When discussing a

plan to extend the I-40 freeway through Overton Park in Memphis, he wondered, "How can we talk about spending millions of dollars on a road when hundreds of thousands of people in this city live in substandard housing?" He further called for increased federal spending on schools, and insisted on closing tax loopholes for the rich to reduce the tax burden on lower incomes. On the most pressing issue, inflation, Ford asserted that a change in federal spending priorities from military outlays to public services would slow the growth of upward price pressures.

Throughout the campaign Ford insisted that his solutions were programs for all Memphians. "Inflation knows no color," he repeated at every stop. A newspaper ad labelled "Memphis Needs a Friend" summarized his positions, none of which were focused on racial issues: "a return to reasonable food prices; a mass rollback in the high cost of gasoline; more federal dollars for housing; increased spending for our children's education; a veto-proof Congress; a decent income for working people guaranteed by a higher minimum wage; a Social Security reform bill that works; programs that deal with the causes as well as the effects of crime."³⁴

Ford's primary campaign was relative-ly de-racialized because he had secured the support of the black political establish-ment early on and could focus on sway-ing undecided white voters. Although early indications were that several other black candidates were interested in filing



Ford drew stalwarts such as Maxine Smith, then executive secretary of the Memphis NAACP, to support his 1974 Congressional campaign. (Memphis/Shelby County Public Library)

for the seat, in the end Ford faced just five white opponents in the primary. The *Washington Post* reported, "Black churches recently helped raise \$40,000 for him by sponsoring a rally at which singer Isaac Hayes performed." Ford received the endorsements of "every one of the black organizations, without excep-tion." Prominent black officials from out-side Memphis campaigned on his behalf.

A certain degree of adulation occurred. Blair T. Hunt, pastor of the Mississippi Boulevard Christian Church and long-time mainstay of accommodationist black politics, declared, "I have met some fine men in my time but none of them even compare to Harold Ford." The *Tri-State Defender* raved about his "dynamic presentation and understanding of the problems of the neighborhood," as well as his "beautiful family" and many accomplishments. Art Gilliam, one of his campaign staffers, wrote an editorial defending the Ford organization by saying, "The Fords may well be on their way to becoming political 'bosses.' But if that is what it takes to unite the black community and to make the effort to bring a more progressive philosophy to local politics, then 'bossism' may not be such a bad thing."³⁵

Ford maintained a vigorous schedule of personal campaigning, while projecting an image of success with status symbols such as fashionable clothes and late-model vehicles. The *Washington Post* recorded a typical day in the primary campaign: "A young black mortician, driving a new Cadillac, answers the phone in his car, talks briefly, then pulls over to the curb and hops out, hailing strangers to talk about inflation and impeachment." The paper also noted a recent tour of his district with a "motorcade of 30 cars that included an escort of hired security guards on motorcycles and a band on a flatbed truck." In this way, Ford provided some reassurance to supporters of Patterson

who felt that his 1972 campaign had been undermined by the candidate's "laziness." The contrast to Ford's busy schedule and visible outreach was notable—Ford "put together caravans that were hugely popular and effective in the black community. A dozen vehicles would wind slowly through residential neighborhoods carrying campaign workers who would put up yard signs and hand out candy to kids. Harold would be there on the back of a flatbed truck, smiling and making speeches." Even though the *Press-Scimitar* declined to endorse him, the paper commended Ford "for an especially energetic and clean campaign."³⁶

Rarely did Ford's closeness to the black community emerge as a rhetorical device to put down white opponents. One of his rivals for the nomination was Sister Mary Anne Guthrie, a Dominican nun with a history of community service to the poor in black neighborhoods of Memphis. At a campaign event where both Guthrie and Ford were in attendance, Guthrie emphasized that she knew the needs of the community as well as any candidate, but that she stood a better chance to defeat Kuykendall in the fall. Ford's reply called upon black pride and racial justice:

I don't think I have tried to make an issue out of race... It boils down to who is interested in the community. I live in this community which I came from. I will not come to you during

the day and work for you then go home at night and sleep in the white community. It is going to take a man in the halls of Congress who can speak out for your needs... I don't know why it is in the black community we always have to hand over our votes to the whites at election time. It is time to go to the white community and tell them that a black man is qualified to represent them too. Who can honestly say in a community that is 45 percent black, that a black man cannot win in November?³⁷

Although some reporters observed a "lack of enthusiastic support from many of the city's black leaders," the extent of Ford's backing by the black establishment may be seen in a single image: the *Tri-State Defender*, newspaper of record for the Memphis black community, placed its endorsement of Ford on the front page, above the masthead, for both the primary and the general election.³⁸

At the final count, Ford's assertiveness, relentlessness, and political savvy within the black community won him the nomination. Detailed estimates of the racial breakdown in the primary election are unavailable. However, in balloting on August 1 that "appeared to be more than 50 per cent black," Ford received 63% of the vote—more than all his white opponents combined. The primary election also found John Ford unseating J.O. Patterson for the state Senate nomination

and Emmitt Ford nominated to run for Harold's state House seat. The three districts overlapped, and the brothers had pooled campaign resources to boost voter turnout from South Memphis. The "Ford ballot" had been important, too. In the gubernatorial primary, losing candidate Jake Butcher had allied with the Ford organization. Because Butcher was one of the best funded of the candidates, his contributions to the Ford ballot were substantial and boosted Ford's ability to get out the vote.³⁹

Ford's next task was to turn his attention to defeating Kuykendall in November. The challenge was formidable, even if the summer of 1974 had exposed some of the incumbent's weaknesses. Kuykendall had faced primary challenges from three other candidates, although he defeated them with about 82% of the vote. Worse, the Watergate scandal deepened to a crisis, as the U.S. House Judiciary Committee considered articles of impeachment for Nixon. Although Kuykendall had been a staunch supporter of Nixon, even boasting of his personal friendship with the president, on August 7 he was forced publicly to state his support for impeachment after tapes emerged on which Nixon was heard confessing to obstruction of justice. Nixon announced his resignation the next day, and was succeeded in office by Vice President Gerald Ford. But Kuykendall's closeness to Nixon placed him in embarrassing positions during the final days of Watergate and afterward.⁴⁰

Ford's ad "Memphis Needs a Friend" summarized his positions in the campaign, with focuses on food and gas prices, housing, education, a veto-proof Congress, higher wages, Social Security, and crime. (*Tri-State Defender*, June 29, 1974)

**Memphis Needs a Friend
Harold FORD is a Friend of Memphis**

INFLATION KNOWS NO COLOR



MEMPHIANS WANT HONESTY IN GOVERNMENT



BETTER HOUSING WILL MAKE MEMPHIS A BETTER CITY



Harold FORD stands for...

- A return to reasonable food prices
- A mass rollback in the high cost of gasoline
- FORTS Federal dollars for housing
- Increased domestic economic development and education
- A veto-proof Congress
- A decent income for working people guaranteed by a higher minimum wage
- A Social Security reform bill that works
- Programs that deal with the causes as well as the effects of crime

ELECT Harold FORD to CONGRESS

Kuykendall's fall campaign was hampered not only by the economy and Watergate, but by a Congressional session that ran long (it did not recess until October 17, although Kuykendall returned to Memphis for campaign events on weekends) and his own failure to consider Ford a serious threat. Bakke reports that Kuykendall felt that Patterson, with his education and more formal affect, was a more formidable challenger than Ford with his "blacker" style, and

Kuykendall had comfortably dispatched Patterson. Consequently, Kuykendall did not organize his campaign with as much rigor as he had in 1972. He spent some of his time working the Republican dinner circuit in other states. Compounding his absence was Kuykendall's lackadaisical fundraising: although incumbents in U.S. House races typically outstrip challengers in fundraising at every phase of the campaign cycle, Ford narrowly edged the incumbent in fundraising. The tally at the

end of October showed Ford having raised \$102,859 and Kuykendall \$101,688. In contrast, Kuykendall's 1972 campaign spent \$124,860, far more than Patterson's \$90,509. Perhaps more telling is that Ford spent most of his funds on staff payroll, while Kuykendall devoted his budget to radio and television advertisements. It was a sign of complacency that Kuykendall did not dedicate himself to establishing the "ground game" of poll watchers, ward heelers, and canvassers that was in place for his challenger.⁴¹

Ford faced considerable obstacles on his own part. He had to attain unity within his Democratic Party after a contentious primary. He had a brother in politics whose reputation in the white community was that of a racial provocateur. And he had to win over the undecided white vote. Ford pursued party unity early and often during the general election campaign. Patterson had witnessed a number of defections among white Democratic leaders, but Ford fought against that by going to the top of the ticket. On September 8 he met with Gene Blanton, a representative of the Democratic nominee for governor, Ray Blanton. The two publicly "pledged support for the entire Democratic ticket." Ford performed radio ads for Blanton that aired on black-oriented stations and Blanton supported Ford in ads on white-oriented stations. The Ford campaign distributed literature and yard signs for both candidates. In some white neighborhoods a Blanton sign would be offered first,

and then Ford would add, "Are you sure you don't want one of my signs, too?" According to Bakke, Ford stressed being "seen as a Democrat first and a black second."⁴²

Working closely with Blanton would have been difficult for many black politicians—he had a conservative voting record on civil rights that O.Z. Evers, a prominent black Democrat, said "should be an insult to decent thinking people." But Ford's firm support from the black rank-and-file gave him credibility that allowed for alliances with unlikely partners. Far from being a surreptitious combination, this partnership was hailed by Blanton: "The polls show that Harold is ahead at this point. I think his race will help the Democratic ticket here."⁴³

Ford also pulled together the strands of white Democratic politics that had been laid out in the primary. By the end of September he had retained primary opponents Guthrie and Joan Best on his (nominal) campaign committee. Newspaper ads that ran in October included all of his primary opponents on the list of his supporters. It helped that Democrats sensed that 1974 would be a good year for them and so were willing to exert extra efforts to promote party unity. The effort was noticed by the Memphis press, who recorded that "Democrats are lined up solidly behind their nominee as never before in our memory," and "seldom have so many white leaders taken the stump for a black candidate as in the cur-

rent race.” Ford did his part, working into his schedule at least a dozen Democratic unity events between Labor Day and Election Day. Nationally prominent Democrats including Andrew Young and Robert Byrd also campaigned on Ford’s behalf. He received the endorsement of Patterson late in October.⁴⁴

The Democratic unity events were only part of Ford’s hectic campaign schedule. He continued his personal door-to-door canvassing for as many as eighteen hours every day. By his own account, toward the end of the campaign he was making thirteen speaking appearances in a single day. The pace certainly was draining. Observers reported that he appeared visibly fatigued at events later in the campaign, and he was hospitalized for exhaustion after Election Day. However, Ford’s vigor was attractive to a certain type of young voter: a white campaign volunteer recalls that she was drawn to Ford’s “dynamic personality” and interest in promoting Memphis, and that his youth, attractive family, and appearance of standing against the establishment all contrasted favorably with “stuffy old” Kuykendall. She remembers placing his campaign signs at prominent intersections in white neighborhoods. Ford combined his youth appeal with his campaign themes by airing a radio ad featuring his four-year-old son Harold, Jr., advocating improvements to schools and housing as well as “lower cookie prices.”⁴⁵

Reaching white voters was important. Ford spoke often at campaign events, and his words were occasionally reported in the daily newspapers and on television news. But he had difficulty garnering invitations to appear before civic organizations whose memberships were primarily white. In late September, Ford challenged Kuykendall to joint appearances—including two debates—at venues where whites were likely to attend.⁴⁶ He expected white voters to be, either silently or overtly, hesitant about his candidacy. Primarily, there was concern that white voters would object to his race. Compounding this was a perception that John Ford was a black radical. Harold Ford conceded that his brother’s image was “just a bomb in this city.” In his meetings with Kuykendall, and throughout his campaign, Harold Ford developed a rhetorical strategy to deflect racial objections and associations with John Ford, and to press Kuykendall on his record. The strategy, developed by Ford and Bakke, was to “make Ford tolerable to the white community and at the same time make Kuykendall’s image a negative one.” The idea was to convince uncertain white voters to cast a negative vote against Kuykendall (voting for Ford or for independent candidate Louis Porter), or to simply stay away from the polls altogether.⁴⁷

Ford and Bakke developed this rhetorical strategy specifically in response to their observations of the racial tone of the 1972 election. Patterson had

tried to appeal to white guilt about past discrimination, calling on voters “to set an example by electing a black congressman from Tennessee.” This allowed Kuykendall to counter that Patterson’s “only positive claim of why he should be elected is that he is black.” Kuykendall injected coded racial appeals in his messages, such as his plea to white voters to turn out for the election lest they “let someone else speak for you.” Kuykendall repeated his racial appeals in 1974. His billboards and flyers urged voters to re-elect “your” Congressman, with “your” underlined twice, and attacked Ford for wanting to be “boss of the new Memphis political machine.” Kuykendall also made strong efforts to associate him with the unpopular (among whites) John Ford.⁴⁸

Ford certainly employed his plan to downplay race and emphasize Kuykendall’s record through media advertising. He did not buy any television ads on the advice of Andrew Young, who felt his losing 1970 campaign for Congress had been undermined by exposing his face to voters who might otherwise have been unaware he was black. (He also was concerned that making his race more visible might inspire otherwise indifferent voters to come to the polls: “We don’t want to bring them out to vote against us.”) But most of Ford’s rhetoric was developed and revealed in his confrontations with Kuykendall.⁴⁹ In three crucial encounters Ford directly confronted Kuykendall on issues of his choosing. On October 5, the

candidates attended a luncheon hosted by former mayor Henry Loeb. Ford took the opportunity to distance himself from his controversial brother by emphasizing his independence: “I am Harold Ford. My name is not Gerald Ford or John Ford.” To demonstrate the shared economic plight of black and white Memphians he used humor to call the audience’s attention to the inflation crisis: “My wife sent me shopping last week. When I checked out it came to \$29. When I walked to the car, the man asked me where to put the groceries. ‘Just put them in the glove compartment,’ I said.” Ford deliberately tried to downplay the fraught issue of busing to achieve school integration: “Some of my friends are for busing and some of my friends are against it and I’m with my friends.” But most of his time was spent attacking Kuykendall’s record, listing numerous critiques, from Kuykendall’s taking money from lobbying groups to his voting contrary to the interests of Memphians. A charge Ford would repeat throughout the campaign was that Kuykendall was a “rubber stamp” for Nixon’s legislative priorities. Ford certainly did not sail through the conversation—for example, he was flustered by a question about admitting women to the service academies—but all reports agree that the debate centered on the issues and on Kuykendall’s record rather than Ford’s race.⁵⁰

By the time of their next meeting, at the Junior Chamber of Commerce on October

17, Ford and his staffers had gathered documentation about Kuykendall's voting record, placing particular emphasis on votes that went against the popular opinion in Memphis and also conflicted with votes of representatives in neighboring Mid-South districts. Ford also had on hand ratings of Kuykendall by pressure groups such as the National Council of Senior Citizens and the National Education Association. Using the low ratings (which Kuykendall claimed pride in, citing his votes as examples of fiscal responsibility), Ford could declare, "Working people of America, we must have more in Congress than Dan Kuykendall. We need someone in the halls of Congress who cares." The debate was so acrimonious that one observer called it "little more than a shouting match."⁵¹

The next day, Ford and Kuykendall debated live on radio station WWEE. Ford, armed with his documentation of Kuykendall's record, was thoroughly briefed on the issues. Kuykendall, by contrast, continued to hold Ford in low regard and was not prepared to rebut his challenger's points. Ford aggressively pressed the charges while Kuykendall, perturbed and offended, shouted over him. Press coverage continued to focus on Kuykendall's record and Ford's charges, while repeating Ford's assertion that Kuykendall "has not represented black people or white people but big business." The contrast to the 1972 campaign press, in which Patterson's race was a constant topic of coverage, is notable.⁵²

In reaction to what he claimed was Ford's lying and lack of respect for "time frames," on October 18 Kuykendall cancelled all future debates with Ford. Kuykendall explained that newspaper coverage failed to convey that Ford "keeps misrepresenting the facts... I think I will get the truth printed better" without the debates. Ford felt that the move was designed to limit his opportunities to appear before white audiences. To counter this he contacted the organizations that had planned to host debates and offered to appear regardless of Kuykendall's attendance. Kuykendall responded by making joint appearances, in which Kuykendall would speak and then leave the facility before Ford came on stage, but they never directly addressed one another again. Kuykendall's decision opened a new line of attack for Ford, who began to claim that Kuykendall was "so frightened about his own record that he would run out on me."⁵³

Appearances before largely white audiences gave Ford opportunities to urge a vote against Kuykendall while at the same time presenting his own credentials as a populist who had a role in easing MLGW fees and implementing statewide kindergarten. He pressed Kuykendall on his support for the Russian wheat deal, his close ties to Nixon, and his voting record "in the interests more of big corporations than in the people of the Eighth District." Transcripts of several joint appearances suggest he was success-

WHO WILL REPRESENT YOU BETTER IN CONGRESS?

DAN KUYKENDALL or **THE FORD
MACHINE**



DAN KUYKENDALL . . .
has been your Congressman for 8 years. He has consistently fought wasteful government spending to control inflation and has been awarded the "Watch dog of the Treasury" trophy for each of his four consecutive terms.

DAN KUYKENDALL . . .
has shown immense concern for humanity as demonstrated by his work with St. Jude Hospital as well as his work with infant nutrition at John Gaston Hospital to prevent permanent brain damage in children.

DAN KUYKENDALL . . .
His brick and mortar record is probably best demonstrated by the new IRS center, the new bulk mail center, and the expansion of the Memphis airport.

DAN KUYKENDALL . . .
has fought to keep the country strong, to get our forces out of Vietnam with honor, and to see that our prisoners were returned with their heads high.

HAROLD . . .

wants to be boss of the new Memphis political machine. His major accomplishments include a nothing record in the state legislature and hiring \$2,000 worth of armed guards during the recent primary!

JOHN . . .

You have seen him on TV many times. He's the messy one on the City Council who wants to have a second job as a state senator!

EMMITT . . .

Other than being Harold's and John's life brother, it is hard to learn anything else about him. He simply wants to be the third cylinder of the Ford machine!

Printed for the use of the United States Senate by Lithographic Arts, Inc., Washington, D.C. 20540



One of the Kuykendall 1974 campaign flyers especially attacked the "Ford Machine." It criticized Harold Ford's brothers Emmitt and John, hurling charges of bossism. (Courtesy of the author)

ful in shifting the framework of the election. Audience questions to Kuykendall, it seemed, began to echo Ford's charges. For example, at the Jewish Community Center on October 22, audience members quizzed Kuykendall on his voting record regarding inflation and his reluctance to suspect Nixon of wrongdoing. And at Memphis State University on October 23, Kuykendall was asked about campaign contributions from lobbying groups, his

low ratings from pressure groups, and his voting for defense budgets suspected of contributing to inflation.⁵⁴

Kuykendall used some of his time at the last joint appearance at the University of Tennessee's medical school in Memphis, on October 31, to hurl charges of corruption and bossism at Ford. He claimed that Ford's organization had misused funds to purchase a car for Emmitt Ford's wife and that Ford was receiving

illegal campaign contributions. Ford was prepared with a list of all his contributors that he read to the audience, and a copy of the pink slip for the car, showing it was on loan to the campaign. He also used humor to deflect the charges, referring to Kuykendall's campaign literature:

I agree that John's a little noisy on the City Council. But I go to Emmitt Ford. "Other than being Harold and John's little brother it's hard to learn anything else about him. He simply wants to be the third cylinder in the Ford machine." Emmitt is my big brother, he's older than me and he weighs about one hundred pounds more. That just goes to show you how much Dan Kuykendall and his organization know about Harold Ford. That he doesn't know any more about his opponent than that you can just imagine how much he knows about the business of this country. And I say that we must reject Dan Kuykendall... And I'm asking all of you to join with Harold Ford and let's go to the polls on November fifth and reject the man who will not face his opponent face-to-face.⁵⁵

Ford pounded Kuykendall as the "worst Congressman" on Capitol Hill, exaggerating his low ratings from pressure groups into "at least seven non-partisan organizations have rated my opponent as the worst Congressman to ever serve in

the United States Congress." A frequent accusation was that Kuykendall had not written one bill that had become law. Positioning himself as a tribune for Memphians, Ford promised to pursue legislation that would support "human needs" instead of industrial interests, and serve all his constituents, "black and white, rich and poor, young, old." This tied to Ford's campaign theme: "A Democrat for All the People," which was displayed prominently in advertisements. An important part of Ford's presentation was a technique that professional fund-raisers call "making the ask": having made his case, Ford directly and personally appealed for the audience to take a specific action. "We must reject this type of Congressman who's only served the needs of his buddy Richard Nixon," argued Ford. "We must reject him on November fifth. We must turn the Eighth Congressional District over to new leadership."⁵⁶

This is not to say that Ford completely downplayed issues of race when raised by others. In a question-and-answer session following a campaign speech at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship on October 26, an audience member asked him about his earlier attacks on the University of Tennessee Medical School for discriminatory admission practices. The questioner wondered how many "qualified" blacks had applied. Ford bristled at the phrasing of the question: "I don't want to hear about qualified," he

responded, elaborating that use of such terms allows prejudice to pass under cover of judgment calls. This line, in turn, provoked another audience member to ask whether the election of Ford might further polarize the races. Ford turned the question back to his campaign themes: he agreed that the races should come together, but noted that Kuykendall had said he did not get many minority votes so he did not owe anything to minority constituents. Referring to himself in the third person, as he frequently did, the candidate declared, "Harold Ford will be a Congressman to represent the needs of all the people of the Eight Congressional District, whether they be black, white, rich, poor, male or female." He further emphasized, "Harold Ford's gonna be visible in his Eight Congressional District, you can count on that. You might not have to come see Harold; Harold might be at your doorstep."⁵⁷ There were limits to his inclusivity, to be sure. When pressed on gay rights, for example, Ford evaded the issue. He claimed not to understand the question, and then averred that nothing could be done about it on a federal level, and finally stated that he had not discussed the issue with any other voters.⁵⁸

In the final push to Election Day on November 5, Ford kept up his door-to-door canvassing while enjoying the media attention that accompanied visits from nationally prominent Democratic leaders. He also continued his get-out-the-vote efforts with an innovative radio campaign

on Election Day. Stations aimed at black audiences would broadcast advertisements that sounded like news bulletins from the polls. Ford, or one of his well-known supporters such as Isaac Hayes, could be heard saying something like, "It's eleven o'clock and voting is light in South Memphis. It appears that Kuykendall may be pulling ahead." The aim was for such spurious reports to impel black voters to the polls.⁵⁹

The election night drama, far from being a sinister conspiracy to suppress a black candidate, appears to have been a misunderstanding. Kuykendall was never really 5,000 votes ahead of Ford in the official count. One of the Jaycees who volunteered to gather vote totals from the precincts for estimation by the press simply "made up" figures for four precincts because he could not be bothered to travel to the South Memphis precincts assigned to him. And the ballots in the basement of the Shelby County Office Building were misplaced by poll workers but would have been counted when the election commission double-checked its tallies. Nonetheless, the fact that the Ford campaign was able to point to the gap in vote tallies is a testimony to its efficiency and organization.⁶⁰

Although most white voters did not vote to reject Kuykendall, white voter turnout was low, which had been one of the aims of Ford's rhetorical strategy. Post-election analysis showed a "light turnout in the predominantly white



On Election Night of November 5, 1974, Ford (far left) revealed that his staff had found six unopened ballot boxes in the basement of the Shelby County Administration Building. (Mississippi Valley Collection, University of Memphis Libraries)

and affluent precincts that have been the stronghold of Republican Rep. Dan Kuykendall.” More impressively, Ford’s year-long effort to consolidate the black vote resulted in his winning 94% of the vote in precincts with more than 95% black voters. Even with light turnout in white districts and Ford winning almost all the black vote, the race would still have been a victory for Kuykendall had voting patterns remained the same from 1972 to 1974. But Ford won 11.2% of

the vote in precincts more than 95% white, and in racially mixed precincts Ford prevailed with 61.5%. The key to Ford’s victory was his economic appeal to lower-middle class voters—a group which was 60% white but which gave Ford 47.5% of the vote. Overall, Ford gained between 15 and 17% of the white vote. Independent candidate Louis Porter received 994 votes, mostly in white precincts. His vote count was larger than Ford’s margin of victory; his

votes may have been protest votes against Kuykendall as well.⁶¹

Post-election analysis celebrated Ford's victory as a sign of racial reconciliation. Ford himself said that Memphis had "turned the corner" and did not "think Memphis will have to be two communities anymore." The *Commercial Appeal* found "a new arithmetic based on the idea that more whites than have previously been expected will vote for a black if they are dissatisfied with a white," and who warmed up to a candidate like Ford who "was just as willing to ask for a white man's vote as he was a black man's."⁶²

Black Memphians recalled Ford's victory as a momentous event. Marie Fort thought of it as a time when "black people started fighting back," leading to "people getting kinder now." Joe Kearney, who had lived through a century of Memphis history, never thought he would see a black man elected to Congress in Memphis: "They've got colored people where I didn't think they would ever be." He expected that the presence of Ford in Congress would lead to more opportunities for blacks in Memphis. "If you do that and get along," he said, "why, you'll do more after a while."⁶³

More opportunities did come to black Memphians through Harold Ford. During his eleven terms in the House of Representatives he established a constituent services office famed for its effectiveness and outreach, especially in black neighborhoods. And the Ford political

organization was a potent force for delivering votes to support black candidates. Ford, in fact, was a key player in the 1991 campaign that made Willie Herenton the first black mayor of Memphis. But true to his promise to be a Democrat for all the people, Ford pursued policies favored by a wide cross section of Memphians. In all his subsequent elections he never received less than 57% of the vote, and several times he enjoyed majorities of more than 80%.⁶⁴

The forces that allowed Harold Ford to claim his place in history as Tennessee's first black Congressman were many and varied. Although he owed his favorable electorate to the machinations of redistricting, and had an advantage in the anti-Republican mood of the country in 1973 and 1974, he still faced considerable white opposition. In the face of a racially divided electorate, Ford used rhetorical stances to target Kuykendall's weaknesses, sedulously canvassed all neighborhoods to reinforce his campaign theme of inclusion, and made efforts to achieve solidarity across the black community and within the larger state Democratic Party that helped shore up votes. In some ways, Ford's campaign exhibited the hallmarks of any successful Congressional run, relying on party machines, patronage, and voter turnout efforts to ensure that Democratic-leaning voters turned out at the polls. But Ford and his advisors also developed techniques of public address that were calibrated to reach out to disaf-

fected white voters and ease their fears of electing a black Congressman.

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1. "Kuykendall" is pronounced "Kirk-endoll." In this paper, the racial terms "black" and "white" are used to harmonize the narrative with quotations from sources of the period; Mary Ann Lee, "Kuykendall's Loss Told as Cameras Whirr," *Memphis Press-Scimitar* (hereafter abbreviated *PS*), 6 November 1974.

2. Lynn Lewis, "Harold Ford Stuns Kuykendall," *Memphis Commercial Appeal* (hereafter abbreviated *CA*), 6 November 1974; Dwight Lewis and Doug Hall, "State's First Black Elected to Congress," *Memphis Tri-State Defender* (hereafter abbreviated *TSD*), 6 November 1974.

3. Thomas BeVier, "Ford's Win Sparks Scene Reminiscent of '60s—Without Anger," *CA*, 6 November 1974; Joseph Weiler, "Vote Count Proved an Upset," *CA*, 7 November 1974.

4. Brian D. Feinstein and Eric Schickler, "Platforms and Partners: The Civil Rights Realignment Reconsidered," *Studies in American Political Development* 22 (2008); Lewis L. Laska, *The Tennessee State Constitution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 112; Elizabeth Gritter, *River of Hope: Black Politics and the Memphis Freedom Movement, 1865–1954* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2014), 1; Charles S. Bullock and Ronald Keith Gaddie, *The Triumph of Voting Rights in the South* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009), 286; Charles Edmundson, "Turnout in GOP, Negro Precincts Pushes Shelby Vote to New High," *CA*, 6 August 1966; Earl Black and

Merle Black, *The Rise of Southern Republicans* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002); Clark Porteous, "The Notable—And Dramatic—Progress of Blacks," *PS*, 12 February 1976; Roger Biles, "A Bittersweet Victory: Public School Desegregation in Memphis," *Journal of Negro Education* 55, no. 4 (1986): 470–83; Gene S. Graham, *One Man, One Vote: Baker v. Carr and the American Levelers* (Boston: Little Brown, 1972), 283.

5. G. Wayne Dowdy, *Crusades for Freedom: Memphis and Political Transformation of the American South* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010), 107; David M. Tucker, *Memphis since Crump: Bossism, Blacks, and Civic Reformers, 1948–1968* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1980), 137; "Leaders Tell Memphis Voters: Time to Put a Negro In Office," *Memphis World* (hereafter abbreviated *MW*), 5 August 1964; "Democrats Preparing For Bigger '66 Vote," *TSD*, 14 November 1964; John R. Vile and Mark Eaton Byrnes, *Tennessee Government and Politics: Democracy in the Volunteer State* (Nashville, Tenn.: Vanderbilt University Press, 1998), 124.

6. Null Adams, "Redistricting and Med College Become Party-Splitting Issues," *PS*, 9 February 1972.

7. "Last Gasp Expected," *PS*, 14 April 1972; Johnnie Vaughan, "Kuykendall Loses in Redistricting," *PS*, April 6, 1972; Dan Kuykendall, interview by Charles W. Crawford, 17 May 1976, transcript, Mississippi Valley Collection, University of Memphis Libraries.

8. Null Adams, "Kuykendall Drops Redistricting Lawsuit," *PS*, 18 April 1972.

9. Bakke's logic: in only a few cases had black Democrats in Memphis united around a single black candidate to attempt to push him to the top in city-wide races. John P. Bakke, in discussion with the author, November 2013.

10. "Patterson Drops 'Hat' for 8th District Seat," *TSD*, 4 April 1972; Null Adams, "Harold Ford Plans 8th District Race," *PS*, 26 April 1972;

"Ford, Butler, Elion Enter Races," *TSD*, 6 May 1972; Null Adams, "Rep. Ford Quits Congress Race," *PS*, 24 May 1972; Edward L. Topp, "Party Lines Being Ignored in Eighth District Race," *PS*, 27 October 1974; John P. Bakke, in discussion with the author, November 2013.

11. William B. Street, "Blanton to Face Baker; Patterson is Nominated as Voting Pattern Shifts," *CA*, 4 August 1972; Debbie Dennie, "Black Wins Nod for House Seat," *TSD*, 12 August 1972; Robert S. Erikson, "The Advantage of Incumbency in Congressional Elections," *Polity* 3, no. 3 (1971): 395-405. "To the Victor..." *PS*, 8 November 1972; Barone, Ujifusa, and Matthews, *Almanac 1974*, 939.

12. As Charles Bernson described it, "Almost everyone in South Memphis knew N. J. and Vera, or one of their 12 children. Many had relatives or friends who had been buried by the Fords, sometimes for free." Charles Bernsen, "Political Machine of Ford Clan Took a Century to Build," *CA*, 1 July 1990.

13. *Black Americans in Congress, 1870-2007*, Office of History and Preservation, U.S. House of Representatives (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2008), 472-77; Charles Bernsen, "Ford Team Scored Big in 1974," *CA*, 2 July 1990; Suzanne E. Smith, *To Serve the Living: Funeral Directors and the African American Way of Death* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2010); Christopher Leevy Johnson, "Undertakings: The Politics of African-American Funeral Directing" (PhD Diss., University of South Carolina, 2004), 276-77.

14. Bernsen, "Political Machine"; *Black Americans in Congress*, 472; Null Adams, "Harold Ford Had to Beat the Same Man Twice," *PS*, 25 November 1970.

15. "Vote for (Harold) Ford," *Memphis World* (hereafter abbreviated *MW*), 25 July 1970; *Black Americans in Congress*, 472; "Predict Big Black Vote," *MW*, 1 August 1970; "Tri-State Defender's Political Endorsements," *TSD*, 1 August 1970; "Press-Scimitar Election Choices," 4 August 1970;

"We Recommend," *CA*, 5 August 1970; Adams, "Harold Ford Had to Beat."

16. John P. Bakke, "The Art of the Campaign: Communication Perspectives in Tennessee Politics," unpublished manuscript; "Taylor to Run Again," *TSD*, 12 September 1970; "An Unexpected Race," *CA*, 23 October 1970.

17. "House Democratic 'Whip' Post Goes to Harold E. Ford," *MW*, 9 January 1971.

18. "Ford, King and Murphy Scare House Democrats," *MW*, 29 May 1971; "Big Victory For Rep. Ford; LG&W Cuts Late Fees in Half," *MW*, 1 January 1972.

19. W.A. Sengstacke, "Tenn. Delegates Satisfied," *TSD*, 18 March 1972; Alex Poinsett, "Black Power in State Governments," *Ebony*, April 1972: 98; "What Brought on Netters' Defeat?" *MW*, 16 October 1971; "Canale Calls Hayes Death a 'Crime', Says 'Important Evidence' Recovered," *PS*, 19 October 1971.

20. Johnnie Vaughan, "Legislative Races Boil Down to Battle Between Parties," *PS*, 9 October 1972; Bakke, "Art of the Campaign"; Charles Bernsen, "Machine Delivers at Ballot Box," *CA*, 3 July 1990; Jim Balentine, "The Ford Family: See How They Run the Political Show in Shelby," *PS*, 10 July 1982; "John Ford Accused of 'Pollution' Here," *TSD*, 19 August 1972.

21. Harold Ford, quoted in Charles Bark, "Rhetorical Strategies of the 1974 Tennessee Eighth District Congressional Race" (master's thesis, Memphis State University, 1976), 187; "Worst Legislature Closes," *TSD*, 5 May 1973; Thomas Stone, "Noisy Protest Staged by Rep. Ford, 100 Followers at Council Meeting," *PS*, 14 February 1973; "First, Let There Be Order," *PS*, 15 February 1973; "Right On Mr. Ford," *TSD*, 17 February 1973.

22. Bernsen, "Ford Team Scored Big."

23. Many white families who remained in Memphis enrolled their children in private schools that sprang up in church basements and other make-do facilities; Roger Biles, "A Bittersweet Victory: Public School Desegregation

in Memphis," *Journal of Negro Education* 55, no. 4 (1986): 470–83; John Branston, "Battering Ram: The Tragedy of Busing Revisited," *Memphis* 35, no. 12 (2011): 36–46; John Branston, "Innocence and Integration," in *Rowdy Memphis: The South Unscripted* (Nashville: Cold Tree Press, 2004), 117; Sharon D. Wright, *Race, Power, and Political Emergence in Memphis* (New York: Garland, 2000), 85; *Congressional Districts in the 1970s*, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, 1974), 184.

24. In the summer of 1972 the United States sold to the Soviet Union as much wheat as was typically exported to all other countries combined. Wheat prices subsequently tripled and other grains more than doubled.

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26. Marjorie Hunter, "Trouble Far From Over," *New York Times*, 24 October 1973.

27. Porteous, "The Notable—and Dramatic—Progress of Blacks"; Michael Barone, Grant Ujifusa, and Douglas Matthews, *The Almanac of American Politics 1976: The Senators, the Representatives, the Governors—Their Records, States, and Districts* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1975), 808;

28. Wright, *Race, Power, and Political Emergence*, 87–90; Bakke, "Art of the Campaign".

29. "Minority Bills Fail in House," *PS*, 27 March 1974; "Patterson Blasts Ford," *TSD*, 26 January 1974; Jim Willis, "Harold Ford Calls for Probe in Recent City Drug Raids," *PS*, 27 June 1974; "Ford Hits Drug Raid," *TSD*, 6 July 1974; "Ford Backs Blind Workers," *TSD*, 2 July 1974; "Rep. Ford to Investigate," *TSD*, 15 July 1974.

30. Bakke, "Art of the Campaign"; "Internal Conflict Wracks Politics," *TSD*, 13 January 1973; "COST Declares Two Victories," *TSD*, 23 June 1973.

31. "A Night Out with a Wonderful Father," *TSD*, 12 January 1974.

32. The bill, which was ultimately passed and appealed through the courts, had no effect on the election, as a panel of judges refused to consider any changes to boundaries before the vote was held; "Harold Ford Will Announce Bid Tomorrow," *PS*, 17 March 1974; Wendell Potter, "Governor Expected to Veto 'Elect Harold Ford' Bill," 28 February 1974; "Judges Refuse Primaries' Halt," *CA*, 27 July 1974.

33. Bradley's connection to Ford came through Harold's brother Lewie, a Pasadena haberdasher who worked on Bradley's campaign; white Democrats supporting Ford included Tennessee Attorney General David Pack, House Speaker James McKinney, and Larry Sneed, President of the National Young Democrats; Jerome Wright, "Ford Will Run for Congress," *CA*, 21 April 1974; Debbie Dennie, "Portrait of Woman Behind Ford Clan," *TSD*, 10 August 1974; "Rep. H. Ford Honored," *TSD*, 17 April 1974; "Bradley Hypos Campaign," *TSD*, 27 April 1974; "Rep. Ford Opens Race Against Kuykendall," *PS*, 22 April 1974.

34. "Rep. Ford Charges Kuykendall Lobby," *PS*, 22 March 1974; "Rep. Ford Opens Race Against Kuykendall," *PS*, 22 April 1974; Dwight Lewis, "Ford Optimistic on Chance for Victory, Hits Opponent," *TSD*, 4 July 1974; Henry H. Haizlip Jr., "Women Hear 6 Candidates," *CA*, 16 June 1974; "Ford to Congress: Accelerates Election Plans," *TSD*, 29 June 1974; Brown Alan

Flynn, "Candidates in Eighth District Quizzed on Tax Loopholes," *PS*, 23 July 1974; Brown Alan Flynn, "Candidates Offer Views on Inflation," *PS*, 19 July 1974; Bill Terry, "Nun, Mortician Vie in Tenn. Hill Race," *Washington Post*, 1 August 1974.

35. Null Adams, "Three Blacks May Oppose Ford in 8th District Race," *PS*, 19 April 1974; Terry, "Nun, Mortician"; Null Adams, "How the Black Organizations Stand on Aug. 1 Candidates," *PS*, 24 July 1974; Joseph Weiler, "Ford, Sister Mary Anne Clash in Black-Vote Bids," *CA*, 27 July 1974; "Bradley Hypos"; "Ford to Congress: Accelerates"; Dennie, "Portrait of Woman"; Art Gilliam, "'Bossism' Might Not Be Bad," *CA*, 5 August 1974.

36. The view that Patterson was "lazy" may have been a misimpression based on Patterson's relatively low public profile during the campaign and his habit of arriving late for events. Bakke recalls that Patterson was shy and reluctant to campaign personally by visiting neighborhoods, but that he did work hard on preparing literature and producing television commercials—"he worked very hard in doing the things he wanted to do and felt comfortable in doing instead of working hard doing the things that needed doing." Regardless, Patterson's 1972 run was perceived as a "low-keyed campaign" that failed to "get over to the Black voters;" Terry, "Nun, Mortician"; Bakke, "Art of the Campaign"; Bernsen, "Ford Team Scored Big"; "For Kuykendall and Jones," *PS*, 26 July 1974.

37. Weiler, "Ford, Sister Mary Anne Clash."

38. On election night at Ford's campaign headquarters, "The only figure in attendance who took a major leadership role in the civil rights movement of the 1960s was Rev. H. Ralph Jackson" (Thomas BeVier, "Harold Ford: An Inevitable Change," *CA*, 13 November 1974); in contrast to the front page endorsement of Ford, the endorsement of Patterson had been a single column on an internal page; Joseph Weiler, "Amid Angry Rhetoric, The Kuykendall-Ford Race is

Tight—And Both Know It," *CA*, 28 October 1974.

39. Thomas Jordan, "Kuykendall, Ford to Vie for House Seat," *CA*, 2 August 1974; Bernsen, "Ford Team Scored Big."

40. For example, Kuykendall was among those in attendance at the White House for Nixon's maudlin resignation-eve address, and he appeared sympathetic to Nixon in press reports, saying, "I was not prepared for the emotions... I don't know how to tell this without sounding corny. Nixon cried like a baby." Kuykendall's attachment to Nixon made national headlines another time during the campaign when it was reported that on August 27 Nixon had placed a phone call to the congressman seeking solace in his exile: "Dan, do you think the American people want to pick the carcass?" Kuykendall changed the subject; "Kuykendall Coasts to Win," *Jackson Sun*, 2 August 1974; Morris Cunningham, "Nixon's Mid-South Support Erodes Amidst Calls for His Resignation," *CA*, 7 August 1974; "Mid-South Politicians Express Compassion, Relief," *CA*, 9 August 1974; Brown Alan Flynn, "Nixon Quizzes Kuykendall: Do They Want to Pick Carcass?" *CA*, 27 August 1974.

41. Bakke, "Art of the Campaign"; "Memphis Lawmaker to Speak at Skubitz Dinner," *Fort Scott Tribute*, 12 September 1974; Jonathon S. Krasno, Donald Philip Green, and Jonathon A. Cowden, "The Dynamics of Campaign Fundraising in House Elections," *Journal of Politics* 56, no. 2 (1994): 459-74; "Demos Outstrip Republicans in Collecting Campaign Funds," *PS*, 23 October 1974; "Reports Show Ford Receives More Funds Than Kuykendall," *PS*, 30 October 1974; W. Pat Jennings, *The Annual Statistical Report of Contributions and Expenditures Made During the 1972 Election Campaigns for the U.S. House of Representatives* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1974), 141.

42. "Ford Stresses Party Unity," *TSD*, 8 September 1974; Bakke, "Art of the Campaign."

43. In fact, there were never any opinion polls taken in this Eighth District race; Null Adams, "Black Council Gives Support to Alexander," *PS*, 15 October 1974; "Blanton Says Harold Ford Helps," *Nashville Banner*, 10 October 1974.

44. "Ford Names Nun, 2 Others as Chairmen," *CA*, 29 September 1974; Null Adams, "Ford's Supporters," *PS*, 30 September 1974; "Vote for Harold Ford," *CA*, 27 October 1974; R.W. Apple, "GOP Facing Loss of 25 to 45 Seats in Race for House," *New York Times*, 4 November 1974; Null Adams, "Shorter Ballot—November Voting Will Be Easy," *PS*, 12 October 1974; Null Adams, "Eighth District's Dan Kuykendall is Fighting His Toughest Battle," *PS*, 23 October 1974; Null Adams, "Election Proved Winners Had More Than Money Going for Them," *PS*, 14 September 1974; Wendell Potter, "'This is Year for Demo Party,' Blanton Says at Reception," *PS*, 18 September 1974; Tim Wyngaard, "Blanton, Others Demos Attend 'Unity Session' in Washington," *PS*, 26 September 1974; Null Adams, "Runoffs in All Elections Among Blanton's Proposals," *PS*, 3 October 1974; Wendell Potter, "Blanton Reveals 'Dirty Tricks' Claims," *PS*, 11 October 1974; Jerome Wright, "Democrats Seek Unity with Campaign Dinner," *CA*, 17 October 1974; "Fiddling Byrd Plugs Democrat Entries," *CA*, 31 October 1974; John Haile, "Democrats Make Show of Unity," *Nashville Tennessean*, 1 November 1974; Wendell Potter, "Brock and Blanton Make Predictions," *PS*, 1 November 1974; "Alexander, Blanton Await Verdict," *CA*, 5 November 1974; "Harold Ford Gets Support of Patterson," *PS*, 30 October 1974.

45. Bark, "Rhetorical Strategies," 112; Harold Ford, "The Special Interest Congressman," address delivered as part of the Memphis Unitarian Universalist Lectures, 26 October 1974 (tape recording available in the Mississippi Valley Collection, University of Memphis Libraries); "Harold Ford Going Home," *PS*, 26 November 1974; Lisa Dattel, in conversation with the author, October 2013; Miriam DeCosta-Willis, *Notable*

Black Memphians (Amherst, N.Y.: Cambria Press, 2008), 125.

46. Bark, "Rhetorical Strategies," 20–22.

47. The latest in a long string of incidents involving John Ford that provoked negative press reports was an October 8 contretemps over parking at City Hall, during which John Ford told his matronly colleague Gwen Awsumb to "go to hell;" he escaped censure from the council by a single vote; Haynes Johnson, "Nixon's the One Hurting the GOP," *Washington Post*, 27 October 1972; "Censure of John Ford Asked for Remark to Mrs. Awsumb," *PS*, 8 October 1974; Jefferson Riker, "8-0 Council Vote Fails to Pass Ford Censure," *CA*, 16 October 1974; Bark, "Rhetorical Strategies," 85.

48. Edward L. Topp, "Party Lines"; Joseph Weiler, "Patterson Says Race Injected by Kuykendall," *CA*, 13 October 1972; "Patterson Dwells on 'No Stand,' Kuykendall on Vote Turnout," *PS*, 2 November 1972; Campaign flyer, 1974, Dan Heflin Kuykendall Papers, Mississippi Valley Collection, University of Memphis Libraries.

49. Bakke, in conversation with the author, November 2013; Johnson, "Nixon's the One."

50. Beth J. Tamke, "Ford, Kuykendall Trade Barbs at Lunch," *CA*, 7 October 1974; Ford, quoted in Bark, "Rhetorical Strategies," 24.

51. Bakke, "Art of the Campaign"; Joseph Weiler, "Ford, Kuykendall Square Off in Voting-Record Word Battle," *CA*, 18 October 1974; Joseph Weiler, "Kuykendall Brings Debates with Ford to Premature End," *CA*, 19 October 1974.

52. Bark, "Rhetorical Strategies," 26–27; Wendell Potter, "Kuykendall Defends His Voting Record," *PS*, 18 October 1974.

53. Weiler, "Kuykendall Brings Debates"; Bakke, "Art of the Campaign"; Ford, quoted in Bark, "Rhetorical Strategies," 97.

54. "Watergate 'Morality' Rapped," *CA*, 23 October 1974; Joseph Weiler, "Amid Angry Rhetoric"; Bark, "Rhetorical Strategies," 148–84.

55. Bark, "Rhetorical Strategies," 208–29; Jim Willis, "Kuykendall, Ford Exchange Verbal Bows at U-T Political Forum," *PS*, 31 October 1974; Ford, quoted in Bark, "Rhetorical Strategies," 162–63.

56. Ford, quoted in Bark, "Rhetorical Strategies," 195; "Watergate 'Morality' Rapped," *CA*, 23 October 1974; "Ford, Kuykendall Tell Stands on Issues," *CA*, 20 October 1974; Ford, quoted in Bark, "Rhetorical Strategies," 223, 161. That Ford's rhetoric touched a chord with certain white voters can be seen in letters sent to him early in his first term by voters with addresses in white neighborhoods. One wrote that she commended him for aligning himself with groups that "reflect the views and desires of more people than do the lobbies for banking, medicine, trucking, etc., all combined." Another noted that she "never much thought it'd be worth the stamp to write your predecessor" and that she felt satisfied that he would take positions that would be "most responsible for the greatest number of people." Dorothy Jennings to Harold Ford, 7 January 1975, Harold Ford Papers, Mississippi Valley Collection, University of Memphis Libraries; Nancy Wood to Harold Ford, 30 January 1975, Harold Ford Papers.

57. Ford, "The Special Interest Congressman".

58. *Ibid.*

59. Bark, "Rhetorical Strategies," 32; Bakke, in conversation with the author, November 2013.

60. Wendell Potter, "Figures 'Made Up' in Reports on Ford-Kuykendall Election," *PS*, 12 November 1974; Joseph Weiler, "Vote Count Proved an Upset," *CA*, 7 November 1974.

61. Van Pritchatt Jr., "Mixed Precincts Gave Ford the Edge," *PS*, 6 November 1974; Joseph Weiler, "Vote Count Proved an Upset," *CA*, 7 November 1974; BeVier, "Harold Ford."

62. Wendell Potter, "Ford 'Dedicated' to Bringing Races Together," *PS*, 8 November 1974; BeVier, "Harold Ford."

63. Marie Fort, interview by Charles W. Crawford and Ann Knox, 23 August and 1 September 1989, transcript, Mississippi Valley

Collection, University of Memphis Libraries; Joe Kearney, interview by Charles W. Crawford, 18 November 1975, 12 and 26 February 1976, and 8 and 14 February 1977, transcript, Mississippi Valley Collection, University of Memphis Libraries.

64. Charles Bernson, "Machine Delivers at Ballot Box," *CA*, 3 July 1990; Marcus D. Pohlmann and Michael P. Kirby, *Racial Politics at the Crossroads: Memphis Elects Dr. W.W. Herenton* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 162; Wright, *Race, Power and Political Emergence*, 91.