



Beloved Women: The Political Lives of Ladonna Harris and Wilma Mankiller

Sarah Eppler Janda

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In an era when minorities struggled for recognition, LaDonna Harris and Wilma Mankiller furthered the interests of Native Americans and forged a new place for women in politics by astutely playing accepted notions about ethnicity and gender to their own advantage. In *Beloved Women*, historian Sarah Eppler Janda examines the public identity these two women created for themselves and how, in turn, their respective identities shaped their political fortunes.

Moving beyond the conventional role of a 1950s U.S. senator's wife, Harris discovered opportunities to call attention to the inequalities facing Native Americans. A Comanche, Harris founded activist organizations, testified at congressional hearings, and served on scores of federal committees concerning both women and Native Americans. At the same time, by attributing her humanitarian efforts to tribal values, Harris asserted the relevance of Indian beliefs and customs in modern society.

During the heyday of the women's rights movement, Mankiller linked feminist ideas to Cherokee tradition. Indian culture, she asserted, esteems women, as proven by the legendary Beloved Woman who fulfills familial expectations yet also assumes political duties. Mankiller adopted this role when she became the first female chief of the Cherokee Nation in 1985, a position she held for a decade.

Harris and Mankiller became national leaders, Janda concludes, in large part because their complex persona—Indian and woman—enabled them to challenge social and political norms.

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