



12-15-1984

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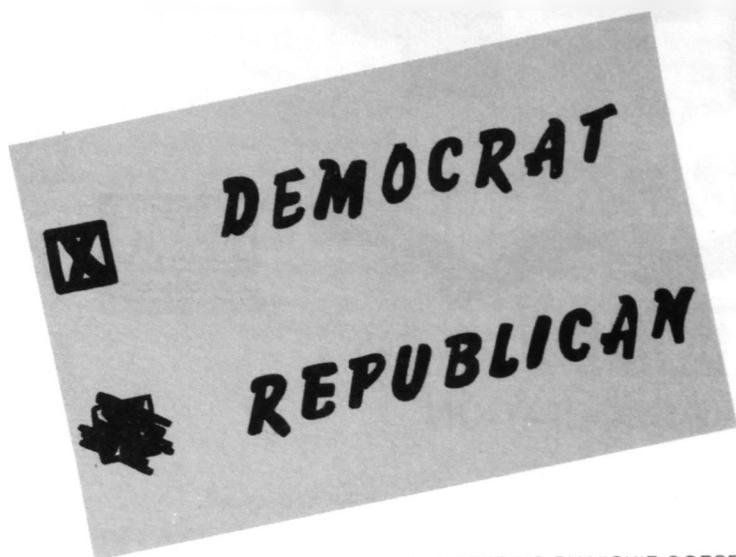
### Recommended Citation

Whitney, Inez Schneider (1984) "Why I'm a Democrat," *Westview*: Vol. 4 : Iss. 2 , Article 7.  
Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/westview/vol4/iss2/7>

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# Why I'm a Democrat



HAND LETTERING BY VICKIE GORSE

Politics often monopolized the conversation when I was growing up on our farm in Oklahoma. My Irish grandfather, Mama's father, was a Republican from Indiana. My German grandfather, Papa's father, was Democrat from Nebraska. I can hear my two grandfathers yet in heated discussions, talking louder and louder, until they were shouting at the top of their voices. Papa, who never took part in these arguments, would be off at one side muttering, "The old fools."

Mama once told me that before she and my father were married they agreed never to argue over politics since they were in complete disagreement. Mama's grandfather, a devout Republican, still lived in Indiana. He was extremely upset when Mama and her sister both married Democrats after they moved to Oklahoma.

My mother and father were married in 1901 but Oklahoma did not have full woman's suffrage until 1918 so the first presidential election in which my mother could vote was in 1920, when Warren G. Harding was the Republican nominee and James M. Cox was on the Democratic ticket.

How well I remember that election day. I was fourteen and quite proud that my mother could cast her vote for president for the first time. She was excited and looked forward to this dramatic experience. It had been raining for almost a week and that morning it was still pouring down.

Papa said, "It's a real gully washer. We can never get there in our Model T. We'd sure get stuck in the mud. I'll have to hitch up the wagon."

I watched them as they started off, sitting side by side on the wagon seat, with Mama holding the umbrella. Mama voted for Harding and Papa voted for Cox. They might as well have stayed at home but they believed

voting was a citizen's duty.

I eagerly waited for my twenty-first birthday and went the very next day to register. I had known Mrs. Jordan, the registrar, a long time since she had children my age.

She prepared the necessary papers and then asked, "Are you a Democrat or a Republican?"

"I really hadn't thought about it," I replied.

"Well, I have to put down one or the other. Would you rather come back later?"

I thought a minute. "No," I said. "Put me down as a Republican."

As soon as I reached home I handed Mama my registration slip. I knew that she would be pleased that I was now a Republican like her.

She looked at it with a frown and said, "Whatever did you do that for? You'll never be able to help elect any of the county or state officials. No Republican is ever elected to county or state offices in Oklahoma."

"But Mama, I thought you were a Republican."

"I am a Republican and always have been and always will be, but I'm registered as a Democrat. Oklahoma has closed primaries. That means that in the primaries you can vote only for a candidate in the party in which you are registered. I like to help choose the officials who run our state and country. Now you go right back and have Mrs. Jordan change your registration."

And that is what I did and I've been a Democrat ever since. That doesn't mean I vote a straight ticket. It has been great to vote in Virginia where you are not handicapped by the closed primary. I pick the person I think will do the best job regardless of party. I'm beginning to lose confidence in my judgment though. I voted for Nixon and after that fiasco voted for Carter, which was also a disaster.

Who did I vote for in 1980? Reagan of course. At least I've picked three winners. You know the old saying "The third time's a charm." The future looked brighter. If Reagan kept his promises and abolished inflation, balanced the budget, and solved the energy crisis, he'd rank next to Abraham Lincoln and Franklin D. Roosevelt. I thought I might even become a bonafide Republican, but right now I'm still a Democrat.

## Postscript

In later years Republicans have been successful in running for office in Oklahoma. Although Oklahoma became a state in 1907, it was 1963 before a Republican governor, Harry Bellmon, was elected. Up to this time Oklahoma had elected only three senators and very few representatives for the Republican party.

At present the governor is a Democrat while one senator and one representative are Republicans.