1

Taking the Stage

James William Fulbright was born in Sumner, Missouri, in 1905, the fourth of six children. His parents, Jay and Roberta Waugh Fulbright, were both descended from moderately well-to-do families and graduates of the University of Missouri. Jay inherited land from his father, a rough-hewn, hard-driving sort, but opted for a career in business, specifically, banking. In 1906 Jay settled his family in Fayetteville, Arkansas, a community of some three thousand souls nestled in the foothills of the Ozark Mountains and the site of the state university. During the next twenty years the patriarch of the Fulbright family built a small business empire, including a dry goods store, a lumber company, a bottling enterprise, a bank, the local newspaper, and numerous properties. Meanwhile, the gregarious Roberta carved out a niche in Fayetteville society, presiding over frequent soirees made up of prominent townspeople and faculty and administrators from the University of Arkansas.

To all of his friends and family James William Fulbright was never anything but ''Bill.'' He was an intense, active child with an abundance of physical and psychological energy. Sticklers for education, Jay and Roberta decided to enroll Bill in the experimental grammar and secondary school operated by the university's College of Education. One of young Fulbright's classmates, Marguerite Gilstrap, recalled that the teachers at Peabody Experimental School were much influenced by the theories of educational pioneer John Dewey. Students were assigned material to master; in class they sat in embarrassed silence until they began to ask questions. The emphasis was on self-reliance and intellectual assertiveness. Gilstrap also remembered that the curriculum departed somewhat, though not entirely, from the classical. There were heavy doses of sociology, psychology, and political economy to go with language, math, and science. Apparently, the teachers at Peabody were particularly fond of the writings of Charles Beard.

Like his father, whom he admired greatly and whose approval he craved, Bill Fulbright was self-contained and independent even as an adolescent. And like Jay, Bill was regarded by his contemporaries as somewhat aloof. He did not run with a crowd but enjoyed the company of a few close friends, particularly Ed Stone, later known to the architectural world as Edward Durrel Stone.

Yet there was Huck Finn in Bill Fulbright as well as Tom Sawyer. Friends and family remember him as moody, at times given to an introspection that bordered on brooding. He also had a temper and knew how to fight. One of his lifelong acquaintances recalled how ''Bill beat the hell out of me with his fists'' after they had quarreled over a girl.[1] Fulbright was seventeen at the time.

During Bill Fulbright's tenure there, the University of Arkansas embodied the term ''provincial institution,'' but he never considered attending another school, and nothing in his experience caused him to regret his choice. In addition to starring as a halfback on the football team and captaining the tennis squad, he was president of Sigma Chi and a member of virtually every other campus organization that counted, including Marble Arch, the ''A'' Club, the Arkansas Boosters' Club, and the Glee Club. He graduated with a ''B'' average in the days when a ''C'' was truly an average grade. In May 1923 he was elected student body president by a margin of one vote.

Even as late as his junior year in college, there is little indication that Fulbright was giving serious thought to his future. He spoke vaguely of either teaching or entering the consular service abroad. There was no mention of a political career. To his peers and family, he did not seem overly ambitious. He was not an avid reader, and he made respectable grades because his father and mother expected them of him.

One day in the fall of 1924 Bill Fulbright was making his way across the campus when he encountered Professor Clark Jordan, dean of the graduate school. Fulbright had had Jordan for several English classes, and the academic had become a regular at Roberta's soirees. Jordan stopped his young protégé and informed him that applications for the Rhodes Scholarships had just come in. The opportunity seemed tailor-made for him, Jordan declared enthusiastically. The program called for candidates who could exhibit both academic achievement and athletic prowess. What would he have to do, Bill asked? Nothing, Jordan replied. Selections were based on record, letters of recommendation, and an interview.[2] In his elegantly self-deprecating way, Fulbright recalled that there were only nine applicants all told, not one of whom, including himself, was particularly outstanding. When the Rhodes Scholarships were announced on December 14, Bill Fulbright's name was on the list. He attributed his selection to his exploits on the athletic field – ''since two or three had better academic records than I'' – and to his mother's considerable political influence.[3]

Bill Fulbright arrived at Oxford at a fortunate time. World War I had wrought great changes on English society and on Oxford. A spirit of egalitarianism

1 Quoted in Haynes Johnson and Bernard M. Gwertzman, *Fulbright: The Dissenter* (New York, 1968), 27.
2 Interview with J. William Fulbright, Oct. 11–18, 1988, Washington, D.C.
3 Ibid.

prevailed, and Oxford in the early 1920s was crowded with young men and women of the middle as well as the upper ranges of the social strata. ''In January 1919,'' C. E. Mallett wrote in his three-volume history of Oxford,

> the Union Society was debating whether the world ought to be made safe for democracy or not. Undergraduates were returning to their old employments, their games, their clubs, their studies. In October 1919 there were gathered in Oxford more undergraduates than the University had ever seen before. The pressure on space was very great. The estimate of students in residence had risen in 1920 to four thousand, six hundred and fifty.[4]

Fulbright decided early on to attempt an Honors undergraduate degree in history and political science. He had the good fortune to have as his tutor Ronald Buchanan McCallum, a young Scotsman of singular intelligence and absolute commitment to his students. When he and Fulbright met in 1925, McCallum was in his maiden term at Pembroke. The college's newest fellow had spent the previous year on an Empire grant at Princeton and did not exhibit the anti-Americanism typical of so many of his colleagues. A Scottish Presbyterian and a devoted member of the Liberal Party, McCallum would earn a solid reputation as a scholar and teacher. His specialties were British elections and international organizations. He was, not surprisingly, a great admirer of Woodrow Wilson and throughout his long career would defend the concept of an international collective security organization as both practical and necessary. At twenty-seven, he was only seven years Fulbright's senior. ''My tutor is a scotchman and very pleasant,'' Bill wrote his sister Anne. ''He has not yet acquired the academic air.''[5] Until the twilight of Fulbright's career and the death of McCallum in May 1973, the two would maintain a close intellectual and personal relationship.

During the next three years the young American, a fellow of Pembroke College, lived a typical Oxford experience. He played rugby and lacrosse, severely damaging both of his knees in the latter sport as a member of the combined Oxford–Cambridge team that toured America in the spring of 1926. He was accepted as a member of the Johnson Literary Society, named, of course, for Samuel Johnson. He spent his summers in France ostensibly studying but, in reality, soaking up French culture and café life.

Fulbright graduated from Oxford in June 1928 with a high second in modern history. He became convinced in later years that the university had done for him what Cecil Rhodes intended that it do: He had been stretched intellectually and culturally. Even had he been so inclined, Fulbright would never be able to retreat into a cocoon of complacency. The march of civilizations

4 Charles Edward Mallett, *A History of the University of Oxford* (London, 1948), 486.

5 J. William Fulbright [hereinafter referred to as JWF] to Anne Teasdale, Oct. 23, 1925, Personal Papers of J. William Fulbright, Mullins Library, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Ark. [hereinafter referred to as PPF].

across history had dazzled him. The complexities of other cultures and the rage of his tutors and his fellow students to learn about them left an indelible mark. Most important of all, those with whom he associated assumed that they were going to make a difference in the world. In Great Britain, Oxbridge alumni dominated Parliament, the press, academia, and big business. Coupled with his mother's belief in public service, Fulbright's years at Pembroke disposed him to seize any and every opportunity to enter public life. His education, however, was not yet complete.

Following a quick tour of the Continent with his mother, who had come over for graduation, Fulbright decided to visit Vienna for an extended period. He frequented the opera, read, roamed the city, and of course, spent his evenings in the cafés. Viennese café life was only slightly less brilliant than that of Paris. It attracted writers, painters, actors, and intellectuals of all types. Topics of discussion ranged from the merits of postimpressionist art to the plight of the Weimar Republic under the Versailles Treaty to the psychoanalytic theories of a Viennese doctor named Sigmund Freud. Significantly, Fulbright spent more and more time at the Café Louvre. Situated near the telegraph station, the Louvre was the favorite hangout of foreign correspondents. There one could see William L. Shirer, Walter Duranty, Dorothy Thompson, John Gunther, and Frazier Hunt. It was at the Louvre in October that the young American met and made friends with Mikhail Fodor.

A stocky, balding, garrulous Hungarian–American, Mike Fodor was then the Balkan correspondent for The *Manchester Guardian*. In addition to being an able reporter, Fodor was an intellectual who could discuss the complex political life of Eastern Europe in depth and place it in historical perspective. In the spring of 1929 Fulbright and Fodor toured the chanceries and palaces of Sophia, Belgrade, and Athens, interviewing prime ministers and other high-ranking officials. Had he not come down with a severe throat infection, the young American might well have followed Fodor into the world of international journalism. As it was, his brief tenure with his remarkable host constituted an education in itself, his introduction to the real world of international politics.

Fulbright returned to Fayetteville fully intending, after he recovered his health, to run the family businesses. His father had died in 1923 after a sudden illness when Fulbright was in his junior year of college. Roberta protected and even improved on the family empire, but she longed for help and looked to her youngest son for support. But during a business trip to Washington, Bill met Elizabeth Williams, the only daughter of a well-to-do Philadelphia Main Line family. Fulbright was smitten. To be near Betty, he enrolled in George Washington Law School. Despite the objections of Betty's mother, who had never been west of the Appalachians, the two were married on June 15, 1932. For the next half century the couple would complement

each other as they worked to raise a family and carve out a niche in the political world. The outgoing, politically acute Betty was the perfect match for her, at times, introverted and acerbic husband.

Fulbright finished second in his class at George Washington and took a job with the Justice Department. During his brief tenure there, he helped try the famous *Schecter* case, which decided the constitutionality of the National Industrial Recovery Act. Early in 1935 Fulbright left Justice to take a position teaching at George Washington. If thoughts of running for public office crossed Fulbright's mind during this period, there is no evidence of it. He was not much given to taking his own temperature. Teaching seemed an admirable profession, in itself a form of public service, but as always he was open-minded about his future.

In 1937 Bill and Betty left Washington for Fayetteville. Roberta was again pleading for help with the family business, and northwest Arkansas seemed a good place to raise children. Within months of arriving, Betty gave birth to the second of two daughters, and Bill took a part-time teaching position with the University of Arkansas Law School. His mother, however, had bigger plans for him.

On September 12, 1939, the very eve of World War II, John C. Futrall, president of the University of Arkansas, was killed in an automobile accident. Roberta Fulbright was a close friend of the Futralls and, using the editorial page of the family-owned *Northwest Arkansas Times* as a platform, had become a political power in the state. During the weeks that followed Futrall's death, she used her considerable influence to have Bill named president of the University of Arkansas, making him the youngest college head in the United States. After two uneventful years in that post, during which he spent much time urging his fellow Arkansans to shake off their inferiority complex and move into the twentieth century, Fulbright was fired by Governor Homer Adkins. In axing Bill, Adkins was revenging himself on Roberta for opposing him in the 1940 gubernatorial election.

Six months following his dismissal as president of the University of Arkansas, Fulbright ran successfully for a seat in the House of Representatives. The third district, which he represented, included the top tier of northwest Arkansas counties, most of which epitomized the rural, upland South. The former Rhodes scholar did not know the names of all the counties and had never even visited six, but he and Betty set out in the family Ford, barnstorming through every hamlet and village. The initial run for Congress proved to be an invaluable political education for Fulbright. He learned firsthand about the principal concerns of his constituents, and most important, he learned to listen.

When Fulbright arrived in Washington in 1943, the Allied armies were on the attack on nearly every front. It was time, many congressmen and women believed, to begin planning for the peace. Fulbright decided that he was going to be part of that process. Like Theodore Roosevelt, who a half century earlier

had decided that overseas expansion was an issue whose time had come, Fulbright sensed that America was at long last ready for Wilsonian internationalism. Perhaps if he could define and articulate the direction America should take, he could simultaneously advance his own interests and those of his country.

Fulbright's old Oxford tutor, Ronald McCallum, had long since convinced him that the concept of the League of Nations had been sound; the organization had not worked because political figures on both sides of the Atlantic had never been willing to make a true commitment to the principles that underlay it and had attempted to use it for their own selfish political purposes. Fulbright made that point repeatedly in various speeches during his first year in Congress and suggested that the great conflict then reaching its climax offered America and the world a second chance. Underlying Fulbright's internationalism was the assumption that there existed a body of ideas and a constellation of economic and political institutions that together defined Western civilization, that the United States shared in these ideals and institutions, and that, therefore, it had an obligation to defend them. Isolationism, he repeatedly declared, was just a facet of old-fashioned nationalism, and nationalism was chiefly responsible for the endless cycle of competition and conflict that marred world history.

In a speech to the American Bar Association, Fulbright outlined his ideal institution: a global organization with a collective security mandate and a police-keeping force sufficient to enforce that mandate. In agreeing to participate in such an organization, he declared, the United States must realize that it would have to surrender a portion of its sovereignty. Once the charter of the new organization was ratified, the president, through his representatives, would have the authority – without consulting Congress or anyone else – to commit American troops to military action authorized by the world body. To this end, the freshman congressman from Arkansas cosponsored the Fulbright–Connally Resolution, which placed Congress on record as favoring participation in a postwar collective security organization.

Using his new-found national reputation as an internationalist as a springboard, Fulbright defeated Homer Adkins for a seat in the U.S. Senate in 1944. Adkins was a Bible-thumping fundamentalist and a segregationist. During the campaign he accused his young opponent of being a ''nigger-lover'' and a communist sympathizer as well as a draft dodger. Using the University of Arkansas alumni roles as a constituent base, Fulbright managed to defeat Adkins in a bitterly contested runoff.

J. William Fulbright's political achievements since his dismissal from the presidency of the University of Arkansas were stunning. With no organization and no practical experience, he had defeated two entrenched Arkansas politicos and gained favorable attention from both the national and international media. Roosevelt, Hull, and other administration figures decided that the Arkansan was a southerner with whom the administration could take pride in

being associated – for a change. The educated citizenry of Arkansas – liberal, moderate, and conservative – concluded that in Fulbright the state had a man that would possibly bring Arkansas the respect it had been so long denied. The parallels to Woodrow Wilson's symbolic importance to the South were striking. While reassuring voters that he would be mindful of their vested interests, Fulbright had campaigned and won as a ''national'' legislator. His victory over Homer Adkins reinforced his conviction that it was possible to immerse himself in the great questions of the day and simultaneously survive as an Arkansas politician.

Like many other Americans, Fulbright was disturbed by the apparent direction of U.S. foreign policy in 1945. To him the Yalta Accords seemed nothing more than a dressed-up spheres-of-interest deal, and the all-encompassing Security Council veto appeared to ensure that the projected world organization would be more of a four-policemen operation than a true collective security apparatus where each of the members surrendered a portion of its sovereignty for the common good. The Roosevelt administration, he decided, was not going to retreat from its commitment to internationalism if he could help it. ''American foreign policy should have two anchors,'' he proclaimed in a March 1945 speech, ''the Atlantic community [a concept then being touted by Walter Lippmann] and a collective security organization in which all nations were represented.''[6]

At this, the very dawn of the cold war, J. William Fulbright saw no reason why the Western democracies and the Soviet Union could not coexist peacefully. The Russians, he said, had given no evidence that they intended to dominate the world through force, as the Germans had attempted to do. Let capitalism and communism compete peacefully. The best system would win. Indeed, he observed, ''the highly emotional attacks upon communism and Russia by some of our public orators is an indication of the weakness of their faith in our system.''[7]

Although Fulbright failed in his attempt to secure a seat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC), his preoccupation with the future of the United Nations continued. The United Nations Conference on International Organization (UNCIO) was scheduled to open in San Francisco in late April 1945, and like many other Americans, the junior senator from Arkansas had grave doubts about the new president's ability to lead the nation and the world at such a crucial time in its history. No less than Franklin Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman was first and foremost a politician – but without Roosevelt's education or contacts in the eastern establishment. The president had selected the Missourian to be his running mate in 1944, largely because he was ac-

6 J. W. Fulbright, ''American Foreign Policy – International Organization for World Security,'' Mar. 28, 1945, BCN 24, F36, Senatorial Papers of J. William Fulbright, Mullins Library, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Ark. [hereinafter referred to as SPF].

7 Ibid.

ceptable to liberals as well as conservatives. By the time of Roosevelt's death, Harry Truman had earned a reputation for fairness, honesty, and some knowledge of Congress and budgetary matters, but no one would ever accuse him of being an expert on foreign affairs. Roosevelt had contributed to the problem by refusing to take Truman into his confidence and shutting him out of all discussions pertaining to war and postwar problems. To Fulbright's dismay, for the next year the new president oscillated back and forth between a policy of confrontation with and conciliation toward the Soviet Union. What he deplored most was the tendency of the United States to act unilaterally outside the confines of the United Nations.

Indeed, by the spring of 1946 Fulbright had become deeply disillusioned with the Truman administration's foreign policies. The White House and State Department seemed to be confused, distracted, and inept, unwilling or unable either to confront or to conciliate the Soviet Union. While Truman lectured Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov in late 1945 on his country's failure to live up to the Yalta Accords and then sponsored Churchill's bellicose Iron Curtain speech at Westminster College in the spring of 1946, he at the same time presided over a dramatic weakening of the U.S. military establishment and a diplomatic campaign of conciliation at the various foreign ministers' conferences held in the aftermath of World War II. Against the advice of his Senate colleagues, his wife, and his chief of staff, the junior senator from Arkansas opened up on the Truman administration the first week in April. American foreign policy was in shambles, he told the Senate. While paying lip service to internationalism, the White House and State Department had crammed Argentina (that nation had remained neutral during World War II and acted as a haven for fugitive Nazis) and the Baruch plan (which would freeze the atomic status quo) down Moscow's throat at the UN. At the same time, Washington had demanded the right to retain exclusive possession of island bases in the Pacific captured during World War II while denying the right of other nations to do the same.

''The people in the country are very conscious of the lack of direction given to our policy by the President,'' Fulbright observed to a constituent. ''My hope is that with a little prodding here and there, and with a little judicial criticism he may be encouraged to take a direct position and get some better men to advise him.''[8] In the view of the White House, Fulbright's criticism became somewhat less than judicious when, following the election of Republican majorities in both houses of Congress in the fall of 1946, he suggested that President Truman resign. The man from Missouri demurred, of course, and from that point on referred to the junior senator from Arkansas as ''that over-educated Oxford S.O.B.''[9]

8 JWF to J. Q. Mahaffey, Dec. 1, 1945, BCN 6, F38, SPF.

9 Lucille Mock, ''Truman and Fulbright, the Controversial Proposal for Resignation,'' Ms. on file, Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, Mo.

When exactly Fulbright began considering the idea of a foreign exchange program is unclear. He would claim that the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki focused his thoughts. In the new age of mass destruction, world leaders could not afford to miscalculate. Fulbright was not ready to abandon internationalism by any means, but over the fall and winter of 1945, he had begun to have doubts about the willingness of the nations of the world to rely on the collective security organization to safeguard their interests. Nationalism and unilateralism seemed more entrenched than ever. ''I do not think that mere amendments to the Constitution or Charter or any other mechanical step will automatically bring about a system of law and order,'' he confided to a friend. ''While these changes are necessary, they are only part of the picture. The prejudices and misconceptions which exist in every country regarding foreign people are the great barrier to any system of government.''[10]

On September 27, 1945, Fulbright rose on the floor of the Senate. ''I ask unanimous consent to introduce a bill . . . authorizing the use of credits established through the sale of surplus properties abroad,'' he requested of a near-empty chamber, ''for the promotion of international good will through the exchange of students in the fields of education, culture, and science.''[11] On April 12, 1946, just six weeks after subcommittee hearings, the Senate unanimously passed Fulbright's proposal with no debate and without a roll call vote. The House quickly followed suit. In 1948 the Fulbright exchange program got under way when 35 students and one professor came to the United States and 65 Americans ventured overseas. Two decades later, exchange programs had been set up with 110 countries and geographical areas under forty-nine formal exchange agreements. The total cost of the program to the United States during this period was $400 million, mostly in foreign currencies. Between 1948 and 1966, 82,585 individuals – 47,950 of them students – received Fulbright fellowships. Twelve million schoolchildren in the United States and abroad were taught by exchange teachers. As of 1987 the program could claim 156,000 alumni in the United States and abroad.

The exchange program was one of the few things in Fulbright's life that he felt passionately about. In its defense he could become emotional, irrational, and vindictive. During the course of his public life he would work assiduously to maintain and increase its funding. Those who wished to hurt him came quickly to realize that the way to do it was by damaging the exchange program. Indeed, international education became something of a religion for a man whom nearly everyone described as nonreligious. To his mind, it was a panacea for the world's problems. Its working would produce a kind of international talented tenth that would lead humankind into a new

10 JWF to George A. Horne, Feb. 6, 1946, BCN 24, F50, SPF.
11 Quoted in Johnson and Gwertzman, *Fulbright: The Dissenter*, 128.

era of cooperation based on mutual understanding. Its products would be public-spirited rationalists who would understand that war is the ultimate folly of *Homo sapiens*.

Despite his differences with the Truman administration, Fulbright enthusiastically supported the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan. At this point in his career, again in spite of his misgivings about the quality of executive leadership, he believed in an active, powerful presidency with the ability and will to conduct the nation's foreign relations. The legislative branch should limit itself to consultation and articulation of broad principles. Increasingly disillusioned with the leading members of the United Nations, if not the organization itself, the Arkansan became a leading advocate of a United States of Europe (USE). Indeed, he believed that aid provided under the European Recovery Program ought to be used as leverage to force the nations of Europe to integrate. He readily admitted that communism flourished in conditions of economic and social insecurity, but the Marshall Plan was not a cure-all. America could provide a minimal amount of aid, but if Europe were to attain lasting prosperity, and thus democracy, its various national components would have to integrate their economies. Moreover, unification in the political sphere could very well solve the age-old problem of aggressive nationalism. Within a federation of Europe, the victors of World War II could control Germany, ensuring that it did not use its industrial and technical might in another insane attempt to conquer the world. In turn, with its fears concerning German aggression laid to rest, the Kremlin just might cease its expansionist policies and remove its boot from the nape of Eastern Europe's neck. Indeed, persuaded by Walter Lippmann, with whom he was forming an increasingly close relationship, Fulbright avoided portraying the envisioned European federation as an overtly anti-Soviet bloc. A United States of Europe would preserve existing power relationships until the UN had a chance ''to succeed as a voluntary union of peoples'' and ''assist Russia to develop the self-restraint which is so patently lacking in her present philosophy of government.''[12]

Fulbright frequently complained that his senatorial duties did not leave him enough time to read, but compared to the average politician, the Arkansan was a bookworm. During the crucial period from 1947 to 1950, he read everything he could get his hands on pertaining to foreign affairs. Fulbright was particularly impressed with the reasoning and arguments of George Kennan, who as head of the policy-planning staff in the State Department emerged after World War II as America's foremost expert on East–West relations.

In the wake of the Berlin blockade of 1948–9 Kennan had put forward

12 *Congressional Record*, Senate, Apr. 7, 1947, 3138.