

CREATING THE MODERN SOUTH: POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT
IN THE TAR HEEL STATE,
1945 TO THE PRESENT

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation describes the process of political development in North Carolina during the twentieth century. Beginning with the creation of the “solid South” in the early twentieth century, North Carolina’s unique one-party system featured a spirited rivalry within the Democratic Party that was largely absent throughout the South. The political rivalry between conservative and progressive Democrats profoundly influenced the course of North Carolina’s political development. Following the Second World War, the interaction between state and national politics played a significant role in the development of the state’s two-party system. By the end of the twentieth century, a competitive two-party system supplanted one-party politics. Historians have written extensively about political development in the twentieth-century South, but there are few state-specific studies focusing on political change in the modern South. Using manuscripts, newspapers, and interviews, this dissertation traces the process by which one southern state gradually cast aside one-party politics and developed a strong, competitive two-party system. As such, this research provides insight into the development of two-party politics in the modern South.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family and friends for all of their support.

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There are many people who deserve acknowledgment of the completion of this dissertation. First and foremost, my advisor, Kari Frederickson, has read numerous drafts of this dissertation and provided considerable feedback. When I found myself struggling to finish this project, it was her kind urging, guidance, and support that helped speed it to completion. Whether we talked about politics, sports, or movies, I have always valued our conversations. I would like to thank my dissertation committee, George C. Rable, Lisa Lindquist Dorr, David T. Beito, and Gordon E. Harvey for providing excellent feedback and asking important questions about this project.

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Morgan Jackson and Gary Pearce discussed politics with me, while former Governor James B. Hunt took time from his busy schedule to discuss his political career and North

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INTRODUCTION

In 1984, the two most powerful political leaders in North Carolina faced each other in the state's most important election in decades. Democrat Jim Hunt, the popular two-term governor, sought to unseat incumbent Republican Senator Jesse Helms, himself a popular two-term veteran of the United States Senate. This campaign marked the first time that the most prominent leaders of each political party faced each other in the state's new two-party system. The ensuing campaign was a battle of epic proportions, a clash of political titans, which had all of the makings of a legendary duel in the modern South. If any observers questioned the existence of viable two-party politics in North Carolina prior to 1984, its existence was manifest in the aftermath of the Helms-Hunt donnybrook.

The Helms-Hunt Senate race was just one campaign, but it was a pivotal event in the development of two-party politics in North Carolina. This campaign, set against the backdrop of a landmark presidential election and the transformation of American politics in the late twentieth century, firmly established the two-party system as a hallmark of North Carolina politics. It was hardly an aberration. Rather, it was the logical outcome of the state's political development and epitomized the competitive nature of its two-party system. It is the purpose of this dissertation to examine North Carolina's political development in the twentieth century, with an emphasis on the relationship between state and national politics, to place events such as the Helms-Hunt campaign in its proper context.

In order to understand North Carolina's political development in the twentieth century, it is first necessary to survey the voluminous literature of southern politics. In 1949, political scientist V.O. Key's landmark study, *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, was the first to examine in-depth the politics of the solid South.¹ A thorough analysis of the eleven southern states, *Southern Politics in State and Nation* emphasized race as the defining characteristic of the region's politics. Key argued that the one-party South, built upon race and class-based disfranchisement and suffrage restrictions such as the poll tax, the white-only primary, and the literacy test, left voters without a concrete alternative to the conservative Democratic political machines. The one-party system would remain in place, Key maintained, until the removal of these roadblocks.

V.O. Key praised North Carolina for its achievements in the fields of race relations, education, and economic development, while characterizing the state's political leadership as a "progressive plutocracy." According to Key, the state Democratic Party represented an actual political party, while the machine in most other southern states was "no party at all." The author highlighted the Democratic factionalism and strong Republican sentiment that distinguished North Carolina politics from much of the one-party South.² This progressive reputation, often overstated, also masked serious problems simmering beneath the surface of this "progressive plutocracy." Several scholars have questioned this "progressive" status and effectively debunked this myth. This label had more to do with the pro-business leanings of the Democratic elite than any support for economic and racial equality. According to historian William H. Chafe, "throughout the twentieth century, North Carolina's progressive image existed side by side with

¹ V.O. Key, Jr., *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (1949; Reprint, Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984).

² Key, *Southern Politics*, 205-228.

social and economic facts that contradicted profoundly the state's reputation... Thus, North Carolina represented a paradox: it combined a reputation for enlightenment and a social reality that was reactionary."³

The first volume to follow Key's influential volume was Alexander Heard's *A Two-Party South?*⁴ As the title suggests, the author questioned the future of the region's one-party tradition. Heard predicted the inevitable rise of the Republican Party as a major political force in the South. According to Heard, three important developments would ultimately create a two-party system. First, he observed that the conflict between conservative southern Democrats and the national Democratic Party, as demonstrated in the Dixiecrat challenge in 1948, had the potential to reshape regional politics. Second, conservatives would not be comfortable with the increasing number of African-Americans voting as Democrats. Finally, Heard pointed to the changing social and economic class structure of the postwar South. Heard maintained that in the South, the Republican Party was strongest in North Carolina, as demonstrated by the 1944 presidential election in which the state's voters gave Republican nominee Thomas Dewey one-third of the popular vote. In 1948, the Dixiecrats did not enjoy the same success in North Carolina as they did in the Deep South, largely because the state's Democrats feared a split ticket had the potential to result in a Republican victory.⁵

In his 1963 volume, *The Democratic South*, Dewey W. Grantham countered Key's claim that the region's one-party system left voters without a suitable alternative. Grantham viewed the third-party Populist challenge of the late nineteenth century as a liberalizing force in a region

³ William H. Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), esp. 3-10, quote on p. 5.

⁴ Alexander Heard, *A Two-Party South?* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1952), 15, 67, 195-198, 269-273.

⁵ Heard, *A Two-Party South?*, 54-73; Kari Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt and the End of the Solid South, 1932-1968* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 146-147.

dominated by conservative business interests. Despite its suppression by the Democratic Party, Grantham argued that the South was never “solid” internally and this event was a watershed for the region’s politics, for it made possible increased party competition.⁶ Whereas Grantham questioned the existence of the one-party South, historian George B. Tindall formally declared its death in *The Disruption of the Solid South*.⁷ According to Tindall, the 1948 election was a defining event in southern politics, for it marked the last time that the South voted en masse for the Democratic Party.⁸ Tindall demonstrated how the conflict between conservative and liberal southern Democrats resulted in a split that allowed the Republican Party to become a viable political party in the South. While neither Grantham nor Tindall based their interpretations on political developments specific to North Carolina, both provide context for the development of two-party politics in the South.

The first attempt to comprehensively update Key’s *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, incorporating the tumultuous decades of the 1950s and 1960s, was *The Changing Politics of the South*, a collection of eleven essays edited by political scientist William C. Havard.⁹ The editor and contributors employed the same state-by-state analysis as Key, but the South of the early 1970s was vastly different from the region that Key researched in the 1940s. In “North Carolina: Bipartisan Paradox,” Preston W. Edsall and J. Oliver Williams detailed the numerous challenges to the state’s one-party system, but ultimately concluded that it had yet to be supplanted by a

⁶ Dewey W. Grantham, *The Democratic South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1963), 28-40, 59-61.

⁷ George B. Tindall, *The Disruption of the Solid South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1972), 16, 19, 38, 44, 47, 53, 58-59.

⁸ The Dixiecrats were conservative southern Democrats who, despite their third-party campaign, did not believe they left the national Democratic Party. While the Deep South states that supported the Dixiecrats kept these electoral votes from going to President Truman, they likewise prevented the votes from benefiting the national Republican Party.

⁹ William C. Havard, ed., *The Changing Politics of the South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972).

viable two-party structure. Edsall and Williams observed that the state's new political culture would inevitably include Republicans, but they maintained that the party would face an uphill struggle to win statewide elections.¹⁰ Ironically, North Carolina Republicans enjoyed a landmark election in 1972, the year of this volume's publication.

In *The Two-Party South*, political scientist Alexander Lamis focused on political developments in the South following the civil rights movement. Lamis argued that initial Republican growth in the South during the 1960s was largely due to the white backlash against the national Democratic Party's support for civil rights legislation. Following the decline of the politics of race in the 1970s, however, Lamis surmised that future Republican successes in southern politics would not be achieved as easily. Lamis pointed to the budding political coalitions between moderate white Democrats and African-Americans that served as a potential roadblock to Republican growth in the former one-party South.¹¹

Building upon this tremendous outpouring of scholarship, political scientists Earl Black and Merle Black's *Politics and Society in the South* represented the most important and informative volume since Key's influential study.¹² *Politics and Society in the South* differed significantly from many of its predecessors. For example, by 1987, the Republican Party was an integral part of southern politics. Furthermore, the authors eschewed the state-by-state analysis employed by Key, Havard, and Lamis. In contrast to Key's emphasis on the politics of race, the authors emphasized the effects of the socioeconomic revolution on the reshaping of southern politics. The authors divide the South into two regions, the "Peripheral South" and the "Deep

¹⁰ Preston W. Edsall and J. Oliver Williams, "North Carolina: Bipartisan Paradox," in Havard, ed., *The Changing Politics of the South*, 366-426.

¹¹ Alexander P. Lamis, *The Two-Party South*, 2d exp. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990; First edition published in 1984), esp. 131-144, 249-252.

¹² Earl Black and Merle Black, *Politics and Society in the South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987).

South.” Accordingly, North Carolina, along with Florida, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia make up the former group, while the remaining states constitute the latter. The “Peripheral South” most clearly represents the region’s new political culture, as reflected in the expansion of the Republican Party, the rise of the suburban, educated middle class, and the declining significance of the politics of race.

Earl Black and Merle Black made significant contributions to the study of southern politics with two more volumes, *The Vital South: How Presidents Are Elected* and *The Rise of Southern Republicans*.¹³ In the former, the authors argued persuasively for the centrality of the South in national politics. Unlike the region that V.O. Key analyzed several decades earlier, the South during the 1980s proved more crucial to Republicans competing as a national political party. For example, if a Republican candidate sweeps the South, as Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan accomplished in 1972 and 1984, respectively, it essentially guarantees a national election victory. In *The Rise of Southern Republicans*, Black and Black examine the process by which the South abandoned one-party politics to become a competitive, two-party region. The tremendous influence of the South on national politics, and vice versa, brought about a profound transformation in state, regional, and national politics in the twentieth century. Black and Black view southern politics broadly, with much less of an emphasis on political developments in particular states.

More specific to North Carolina politics are Paul Luebke’s *Tar Heel Politics 2000* and Rob Christensen’s *The Paradox of North Carolina Politics: The Personalities, Elections, and*

¹³ Earl Black and Merle Black, *The Vital South: How Presidents are Elected* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); Earl Black and Merle Black, *The Rise of Southern Republicans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002). See also Michael Perman, *Pursuit of Unity: A Political History of the American South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), the first comprehensive synthesis of southern politics from the 1790s to 1990s.

Events that Shaped Modern North Carolina.¹⁴ Those familiar with Luebke and Christensen will likely recognize my debt to these authors and their impressive works. Moreover, I agree with much of what is contained in these two volumes. It is my hope that this dissertation will complement and supplement, rather than supplant, these important works. I believe this dissertation contributes an interpretive analysis of the development of two-party politics based heavily on primary sources, including manuscripts, newspapers, and interviews. Additionally, I discuss North Carolina's political development in the larger context of southern politics, a point that Luebke and Christensen sometimes overlook.

As Paul Luebke argues in *Tar Heel Politics 2000*, politics in North Carolina goes well beyond the simple labels of "Democrat" and "Republican." Furthermore, North Carolina's political evolution epitomizes the new politics of the modern South like that of few other states. North Carolina's voters have largely rejected political extremism in the post-1945 era. For example, moderate Terry Sanford defeated staunch segregationist I. Beverly Lake, Sr. in the 1960 Democratic gubernatorial primary at a time when other southern states embraced rabid white supremacists like Alabama's George Wallace and Ross Barnett of Mississippi. Although North Carolina's political leaders did much to oppose the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s, the state largely avoided the violent extremism and political battles that plagued much of the Deep South during this time. The lack of elected demagogues among North Carolina's political elite in the mid-to-late twentieth century helps to explain this absence.¹⁵

¹⁴ Paul Luebke, *Tar Heel Politics 2000* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Rob Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics: The Personalities, Elections, and Events that Shaped North Modern North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

¹⁵ Alabama voters elected George Wallace to his first term as governor in 1962. Along with Wallace, Mississippi Governor Ross Barnett and Senator James Eastland were two of the most outspoken opponents of the black freedom struggle in the South. Richardson Preyer explains that while the conditions were ripe for a demagogue to emerge in 1960, Lake focused instead on integration as it related to constitutional law rather than white supremacy. See Interview with Richardson Preyer by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, 1/28/1974, (A-137), in *Southern Oral History*

Since the reemergence of two-party politics in the 1970s, the primary competing forces vying for control of the state are the “traditionalists” and the “modernizers.” Traditionalists include economic, racial, religious, and economic conservatives, along with farmers, small business owners, and furniture and textile industrialists who view change and growth as detrimental to their interests. Modernizers, on the other hand, consist primarily of Sunbelt business leaders, bankers, lawyers, progressives, and retail merchants who believe they can profit from state-sponsored economic development. Paul Luebke correctly identifies Republican Jesse Helms as a “traditionalist” and Democrat Jim Hunt as a “modernizer.” However, these ideologies reach across party lines, as neither political party claims a monopoly.¹⁶

Paul Luebke, a sociologist at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and a member of the North Carolina General Assembly, relies heavily on newspapers and personal anecdotes from his experience as a state legislator. As befits the state’s leading political reporter, Rob Christensen makes excellent use of newspapers, interviews, and personal recollections from several decades covering North Carolina politics. Christensen uses few archival sources, while Luebke uses none. Additionally, Christensen focuses heavily on individual character portraits of several of the state’s leading politicians during the twentieth century. I have included some background information on key politicians, but much less than Christensen. Rather, I place a greater emphasis on their roles shaping the state’s political development.

Several themes inform this dissertation: First, North Carolina enjoyed a highly competitive political system throughout the twentieth century. Whether it was the one-party or two-party manifestation, a competitive political system was one of the essential characteristics of

Program Collection, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill [Hereafter cited as SOHP].

¹⁶ See Luebke, especially pp. 19-46 for an excellent discussion of these contrasting ideologies.

North Carolina politics. In the one-party system, the state Democratic Party contained a variety of factions that distinguished state politics from many other southern states. Likewise, in the two-party system, there exist several competitive Republican factions. Second, the relationship between state and national politics was just as significant in the one-party system as it was during two-party politics. During the Republican era in national politics (1896-1932), southern Democrats sustained the national Democratic Party during its long exile in the political wilderness. Following its revival in 1932, southern Democrats' influence in the national party had significant implications for the transformation of southern and national politics in the twentieth century. The party's New Deal-era resurgence revealed growing tensions between southern Democrats and the national party. Third, progressive southern Democrats found it increasingly difficult to provide an alternative to the politics of race. For better or worse, the decline of Democratic supremacy and the rise of southern Republicans was largely the result of the politics of race. Finally, the influence of national politics was crucial in shaping North Carolina's political development, as state and national politics enjoyed a reciprocal relationship. It was not until the transformation of national politics in the late twentieth century that two-party politics in the South became possible. Southern Democrats who left the party provided the national Republican Party with a political base in the South, thus making possible a vibrant two-party system throughout much of the former one-party South.

Chapter one examines state and regional politics from the forging of the Democratic South through the Second World War. It is primarily a synthesis of the first five decades of one-party politics and relies more heavily on secondary sources than does the remainder of the dissertation. The establishment of one-party politics made North Carolina, much like other southern states, a solid Democratic state built upon white supremacy and voter disfranchisement.

However, the state Democratic Party displayed a remarkable degree of party factionalism, which made for a surprisingly competitive political system. As a result, there were numerous challenges to the entrenched conservative political machines that dominated the state in the early twentieth century, the Simmons machine (1900-1930), followed by the Shelby Dynasty (1930-1948).

Although the politics of race was crucial in creating the one-party system, economic populism also proved a salient political force, first in the 1890s and again in the 1930s. In each case, national economic crises brought about several challenges from economic populists seeking representation in government. The conservative-progressive Democratic rivalry that manifested itself during the Great Depression and New Deal demonstrated the fluidity of one-party politics in North Carolina. The conservatives responded to the progressive opposition, most notably in 1932 and 1936, by marshaling their financial resources and control of the state party machinery to stymie the challengers. The progressive Democrats were not seeking racial equality, nor were they running a biracial political campaign akin to the Populists four decades earlier. Rather, they were seeking policy influence and a voice in a state government dominated by conservative business interests. Although the conservatives turned back many of their progressive rivals for statewide office, these challenges nevertheless weakened the conservatives' grip on state politics, which was never absolute, particularly during the Shelby Dynasty. The political factionalism that emerged due to the exigencies of the Great Depression set the tone for the state's postwar politics.

Chapter two focuses on the state's political development immediately following the Second World War (1945-1960). Although progressive Democrats enjoyed few electoral victories during the New Deal era, their influence increased considerably in the late 1940s. The

progressive Democratic faction celebrated its first significant victory when W. Kerr Scott won the party's gubernatorial nomination in 1948, defeating the machine candidate and ending the Shelby Dynasty's two-decade reign atop state politics. Scott's victory demonstrated the limitations of one-party, conservative machine politics. However, political and social forces revealed progressives' limitations in one-party politics, particularly as they related to political developments in the 1950s. The politics of race dominated southern politics throughout this decade, as debates over federal civil rights legislation and the U.S. Supreme Court-sanctioned end of legal segregation made for a tumultuous and conservative decade in North Carolina politics. North Carolina's conservatism, however, differed significantly from that of many other southern states. Governor Luther H. Hodges, for example, refused to endorse massive resistance or provoke a confrontation with the federal government. Hodges and the Democratic establishment worked to preserve the racial status quo while maintaining the state's pro-business environment, the hallmark of his administration. Democratic factionalism failed to subside, however, as the conservative-progressive rivalry continued with its typical ferocity throughout the decade, particularly as revealed in the 1950 and 1954 U.S. Senate campaigns. In stark contrast to the previous two decades of state politics, the politics of race loomed large throughout this decade. Despite its influence, however, progressive Democrats remained competitive and demonstrated the potential for an alternative to the politics of race, a trend that continued into the next decade.

Democratic Party factionalism and the rise of southern Republicans in the 1960s is the focus of chapter three. Political divisions within the Democratic Party and the increasing influence of southern Republicans foreshadowed the development of two-party politics in North Carolina. In his study of New Deal-era North Carolina politics, historian Elmer Puryear argued

that the conservative-progressive Democratic rivalry provided the state's voters with more options than the typical machine candidate.¹⁷ Puryear's insight on the fluidity of Democratic politics during the Great Depression applies just as easily to state politics in the decades that followed. In the 1960s, the Democratic Party fragmented even further, as conservatives, progressives, and segregationists battled for influence. The intense competition within the Democratic Party coincided with increasingly competitive political campaigns between Democrats and Republicans. Despite the Democrats' traditional dominance, conservative southern Democrats began the process of abandoning their traditional party loyalty in response to the influence of national politics. As the national Democratic Party embraced civil rights, the national Republican Party responded by moving away from its northern liberal leadership and abandoning its traditional support for civil rights. Prior to the reshaping of the national Republican Party, many conservative Democrats, and segregationists in particular, did not feel welcomed by conservatives or progressives. Consequently, disenchanted southern Democrats found the party more hospitable to their anti-civil rights and racial conservatism, forming the basis of an expanding Republican Party in state and national politics. The party's fast-paced growth made for an increasingly competitive political system in North Carolina.

The Republican Party's expansion in the 1960s culminated in the election of 1968, which I examine in chapter four. Democratic factionalism and Republican growth in the 1960s led to increasingly competitive political campaigns in North Carolina. This was most evident in the 1968 election, which revealed the influence of national politics in shaping the state's burgeoning two-party system. Furthermore, this election prompted the reshaping of both political parties due to the influence of national politics, a process that continued throughout the late twentieth

¹⁷ Elmer Puryear, *Democratic Party Dissension in North Carolina, 1928-1936* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962).

century. Republicans embraced the national party, while Democrats made significant efforts to distance themselves from the national party. Traditional party factionalism and southern Democrats' exodus from the party necessitated a remaking of the state party in response to national politics. The state Democratic Party refashioned itself a moderate political party, linked not to the national party, but state politics and the new political coalition that included moderates and African-Americans, who became an integral part of the new Democratic Party. The party's destiny depended on state politics rather than national politics. The state Republican Party, on the other hand, found itself more closely linked to the national party's fortunes. Similarly, the party discovered the potential for factionalism, but nevertheless waged a competitive gubernatorial campaign amid the Democratic Party's declining supremacy.

Chapter five contrasts the Democratic and Republican parties in North Carolina politics following the 1972 election. If 1968 demonstrated the potential for a viable two-party system in North Carolina, then the 1972 election revealed the unprecedented influence of national politics on the state's political development. This election formed the basis for two-party politics in North Carolina. Building upon its significant growth and political momentum in the 1960s, Republicans waged several competitive campaigns that ultimately brought the party into the political mainstream. In a state where Democrats easily outnumbered Republicans, the influence of national politics on Republican expansion was immeasurable. With President Richard Nixon at the helm of a popular national party, Republican electoral success contributed significantly to the establishment of two-party politics, while Democratic factionalism led to the state party's collapse. Nineteen seventy-two was a year of contrasts as Republicans enjoyed unparalleled success, while Democrats suffered historic losses. Most importantly, this election brought to office the political leaders most responsible for shaping North Carolina's two-party system:

Republican Senator Jesse Helms, Republican Governor Jim Holshouser, and Democratic lieutenant governor Jim Hunt.

North Carolina Republicans had little time to enjoy their triumph, however, as party factionalism and a toxic political climate undermined much of the party's initial success. Making matters worse was the collapse of the national Republican Party and President Nixon's declining popularity as a result of the Watergate Crisis. Southern Republicans benefited greatly from Nixon's popularity in the South, for he swept many to victory between 1968 and 1972. Just as southern Republicans rose with Nixon's success, so too did they suffer terribly with his downfall. Consequently, North Carolina Democrats filled the political vacuum, thanks in large part to an anti-Republican political environment and the emergence of new party leadership. By the end of the decade, the national Republican Party emerged from its post-Watergate exile to build upon its earlier successes. Reflecting the influence of national politics, the North Carolina Republican Party was most successful when it benefited from a strong national party to minimize party factionalism. Likewise, the state Democratic Party enjoyed its greatest success when party unity trumped factionalism. Unlike its Republican counterparts, the state Democratic Party did not rely upon the national party. This was evident in 1976 and 1980, two contrasting elections for the national party, but two successful elections for the state party. Between 1972 and 1984, the Democratic-Republican political system formally supplanted one-party politics, marking the first decade of two-party politics in North Carolina.¹⁸

¹⁸ On Jim Hunt, see Wayne Grimsley, *James B. Hunt: A North Carolina Progressive* (West Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2003), is the first biography of Hunt. Grimsley focuses on Hunt's early life and political career, but ends his biography in 1980. The author's decision to stop in 1980, at the conclusion of Hunt's first gubernatorial term, overlooks Hunt's role in the development of two-party politics over the following two decades. A more recent biography of Jim Hunt is Gary Pearce, *Jim Hunt: A Biography* (Winston-Salem, NC: John F. Blair, 2010). The standard biography of Helms is William A. Link, *Righteous Warrior: Jesse Helms and the Rise of Modern Conservatism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008). Although the author focuses on his role in the shaping of modern conservatism, particularly as it related to national politics, this biography also contains a wealth of

The development of two-party politics culminated in the 1984 Jesse Helms-Jim Hunt Senate race, the subject of chapter six.¹⁹ The Helms-Hunt campaign was a defining event in the state's political development, as was the entire 1984 election. This election, which epitomized the competitive nature of North Carolina's two-party system, had great implications for the state's political development. Following the 1972 election, the refashioned state Democratic Party, under the leadership of Jim Hunt, dominated state politics, while the Republicans, strongly influenced by Jesse Helms, proved most successful in national politics. Although both Helms and Hunt came to power in 1972, they were not political rivals. Hunt's focus on state politics and Helms's emphasis on national politics did not create a political rivalry since neither infringed on the other's political turf. In 1984, these rival political leaders and their organizations clashed in a bid to determine whose influence would shape state and national politics in the 1980s.

Nineteen eighty-four was a year of contrasts. The state and national Republican Party remained unified, with minimal party factionalism. Like Nixon before him, President Reagan's popularity united southern Republicans behind the national ticket, siphoning off many Democrats in the process. In contrast, the state and national Democratic Party found itself divided and weakened. Following his election in 1972, Jim Hunt built a broad Democratic coalition designed to rebuild the party and neutralize Republican growth. Under Jim Hunt, the Democratic Party was most influential at the state level, although North Carolina leaned Republican in national politics. In 1984, a weak national party did not necessarily doom the state party. Rather, North Carolina Democrats proved unable to unite behind the state party ticket

information on state politics. See also Ernest B. Furgurson, *Hard Right: The Rise of Jesse Helms* (New York: Norton, 1986).

¹⁹ William D. Snider, *Helms and Hunt: The North Carolina Senate Race, 1984* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985). Snider's volume is the only available work on this pivotal campaign. However, it is more a retelling of events rather than an analytical study of this election. Snider, a veteran political journalist and editor of the *Greensboro News and Record*, provides a detailed and valuable work, but he does explore the campaign's significance for two-party politics in North Carolina.

following a divisive and bitter gubernatorial primary. With a unified state party, North Carolina Democrats proved their ability to overcome a weak national party, as demonstrated in 1980.

Four years later, however, the party's failure to unite its warring factions, combined with a strong Republican Party, brought about an electoral disaster on par with the 1972 election. Nineteen eighty-four confirmed the significance of the state's two-party system.

The development of two-party politics in North Carolina was the result of the interaction of state and national politics in the twentieth century. The impulse for political change came from above as the national political parties adapted to the transformations wrought by the Second World War and the civil rights movement, and from below, as voters responded to these changes. In order to understand how North Carolina cast aside its loyalty to the national Democratic Party and became a competitive, two-party state, historians must understand the role played by the interaction of state and national politics. In North Carolina and throughout the South, the end of the trademark one-party system and emergence of two-party politics was a protracted and complicated process that continues to shape regional and national politics in the twenty-first century.

CHAPTER 1

“There are 300,000 Republicans in North Carolina:” The Democratic South through the Second World War, 1900-1945

The creation of the “solid South” in the early twentieth century had profound implications for the region during the twentieth century. Disfranchisement of blacks, poor whites, and Republicans erased any hope for organized two-party politics in the South. Political machines controlled state politics and fastened a conservative, undemocratic, and unresponsive political culture on the South. North Carolina was no exception to the larger trends that shaped southern politics in the twentieth century, complete with a one-party system that excluded much of the population from the political process. The concept of the “solid South,” however, ignores the fluidity of Democratic Party politics within the one-party system. Although North Carolina politics shared much in common with the Democratic South, it was also very different. Factionalism within the Democratic Party, combined with a strong Republican presence in the foothills and mountains, made certain that the Democratic Party could not take its position for granted. Unlike much of the South during the era of one-party politics, the Democratic Party in North Carolina experienced tremendous upheaval and internal struggles.

While the Democratic Party remained the state’s dominant political party for nearly a century, the one-party system was rife with party conflict, both within and between the traditional political parties. Although the Democratic Party held uncontested power for much of the twentieth century, there existed many ideological factions within the party. “The Democratic Party in North Carolina, even before we had got what we call a two-party system, was always a

two-party system,” said journalist and diplomat Jonathan Daniels. “We had the conservative and the [progressive] Democratic wings of the party. And they were just as clearly two different political parties almost as the Democrats and the Republicans.”¹ As Governor Robert W. Scott (1969-1973) observed, “when the Democratic Party was in power for so many years...they had a two-party system, it was just fought out within the Democratic Party, that is, the liberals and conservatives within the party.”²

In his study of Democratic Party factionalism in North Carolina politics during the early twentieth century, historian Elmer Puryear argued, “It appears, that at least from 1928 to 1936, the Democratic voters of North Carolina did have a very real choice in regard to leadership and philosophy of government.”³ In 1946, journalist Burke Davis suggested to Governor R. Gregg Cherry (1945-1949) that the state could benefit from a two-party system. Cherry’s infamous response, “What do you mean? We’ve got one. Why there are 300,000 Republicans in North Carolina,” underscored the fact that he could not afford to take his status as a Democrat for granted.⁴ Their presence in state politics provided “the nucleus of a Republican Party” that was largely absent from other southern states in the era of one-party politics.⁵ Political scientist V.O. Key, Jr. observed that due to a strong Republican influence, the Democratic Party in North Carolina “possesses a relatively high degree of discipline, and the party as a whole has a consciousness of being and of responsibility. In consequence, North Carolina has an

¹ Jonathan Daniels quoted in Rob Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics: The Personalities, Elections, and Events that Shaped Modern North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 77.

² Interview with Governor Robert W. Scott by Jack D. Fleer, 2/11/1998 (C-0336-2), in the Southern Oral History Program, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill [Hereafter cited as SOHP].

³ Elmer Puryear, *Democratic Party Dissension in North Carolina, 1928-1936* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962), v.

⁴ Cherry quoted in V.O. Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (New York: Knopf, 1949), 283.

⁵ Interview with Claude Sitton by Jack Bass, 12/11/1973, (A-0142), SOHP [“nucleus of a Republican Party”].

organization that can be called a Democratic Party, a condition that does not exist in such states as Florida, South Carolina, or Arkansas.”⁶ Conservative and progressive Democrats battled for control of their party from the era of the solid South through the advent of the two-party South. Democratic factionalism, along with the relatively strong Republican presence, made North Carolina the most politically competitive state in the one-party South.

The establishment of the solid South was not predestined following the formal end of Reconstruction, as Democrats never had complete control of state politics, and the one-party South did not come into existence until the early twentieth century. Furthermore, North Carolina did not become a one-party state following the end of Reconstruction. For much of the late nineteenth century, political alternatives existed with the potential to supplant the traditional party system. The Populist-Republican “Fusion” challenge to the Democratic regime in the 1890s threatened the entrenched Democratic oligarchy that emerged immediately following Reconstruction. While the Democrats controlled state politics, the large number of Republicans in North Carolina ensured that the Democrats’ dominance was never total. The state’s Republican strongholds, combined with the large number of poor farmers, black and white, in the agriculture-dominated economy of eastern North Carolina, prevented the Democratic Party from gaining unchecked power. For example, in each gubernatorial election between 1880 and 1896, the Democrats never received more than fifty-four percent of the votes.⁷ While hardly an impressive majority for the state’s leading political party, Democrats nonetheless dominated statewide elections following Reconstruction.

The economic depression of the 1880s and 1890s, and the subsequent political response by rural Americans, held within it the potential for a profound reshaping of state, regional, and

⁶ Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, 223.

⁷ Rob Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, pp. 1-25; Election results discussed on p. 9.

national politics.⁸ While North Carolina experienced unprecedented industrialization following the Civil War, the state remained largely rural and poor. The emergence of textile mills and the tobacco industry failed to bring about a profound structural reordering of the state's economy. In the end, those who profited from industrialization were few in number and limited to the state's Democratic Party elite, closely aligned with the manufacturing interests of the New South.⁹ The majority of North Carolina's citizens failed to benefit from the promises of New South boosters who pledged to end the region's traditional reliance on staple-crop agriculture and diversify the southern economy.¹⁰ For those who remained on the land, overproduction, competition, and the expansion of international markets brought about a steep decline in agricultural prices, leading to dire financial straits and declining crop production.

Seeking relief from the high freight and interest rates imposed by the banks and railroads, North Carolina farmers turned to the General Assembly for assistance, but to no avail.¹¹ The profoundly undemocratic pro-business leadership of the state legislature, representing the agricultural and commercial elite, refused to assist rural farm interests. Lacking an ally in Raleigh's political circles, farmers sought alternative forms of economic relief from the economic crises of the late nineteenth century. The founding of the North Carolina Farmers' Association by state agriculture commissioner Leonidas Polk in 1887, and subsequently incorporated into the National Farmers' Alliance, emerged as a powerful political group in North

⁸ Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment: A Short History of the Agrarian Revolt in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); Elizabeth Sanders, *Roots of Reform: Farmers, Workers, and the American State, 1877-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

⁹ William S. Powell, *North Carolina Through Four Centuries* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 422.

¹⁰ Paul Gaston, *The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking* (New York: Knopf, 1970); Gavin Wright, *Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy since the Civil War* (New York: Basic Books, 1986).

¹¹ Powell, *North Carolina Through Four Centuries*, 422.

Carolina. Shortly after its founding, the National Farmers' Alliance boasted one hundred thousand members in North Carolina, and three million in the South and the West, areas far removed from eastern commercial interests.¹² The National Farmers' Alliance counted in its ranks both Democrats and Republicans, but it quickly became apparent that the Alliance could not exert enough influence to reshape the traditional political parties. Rather, the Alliance leadership realized that its only hope of achieving meaningful agricultural and economic reform was the creation of a third political party to challenge the nation's two-party system.

The state's Democratic leadership felt threatened by the Alliance and Leonidas Polk's leadership. A Democrat and Confederate veteran, Polk ignited a firestorm of controversy among the state's conservative Democratic elite when the Alliance openly split with the Democratic Party and campaigned as a third party, the People's (Populist) Party in the 1892 elections. Marion Butler, Polk's successor as Alliance leader, had no qualms about challenging Democratic Party orthodoxy. "If Southern Democracy cannot secure justice for its people without a fuss," Butler argued, "then it [is] its highest duty to have a quarrel in camp."¹³ Butler rejected the pervasive corruption, fraud, and corporate influence plaguing the Democratic Party, claiming that the People's Party was the true inheritor of the Jeffersonian tradition long since abandoned by the commercial-oriented Democratic elite.¹⁴

¹² Paul Escott, *Many Excellent People: Power and Privilege in North Carolina, 1850-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 242. The dominance of the state's decidedly undemocratic political leadership from the late antebellum era through the dawn of the twentieth century is one of Escott's central themes.

¹³ Marion Butler quoted in Escott, *Many Excellent People*, 245.

¹⁴ James L. Hunt, *Marion Butler and American Populism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 53. Hunt's biography examines Butler's career as a Populist and the complexities of North Carolina Populism in more detail than it is possible to do in a brief overview. For a sociological perspective on populism and disfranchisement in North Carolina, see Kent Redding, *Making Race, Making Power: North Carolina's Road to Disfranchisement* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

In response to the 1892 national elections, an unmitigated disaster for the burgeoning People's Party, Democrats in the General Assembly essentially revoked the Alliance's charter when the legislature passed a law curtailing its business activities in North Carolina. While the Populists failed to challenge the dominance of the traditional political parties at the national level, they were most successful at the state level, and in North Carolina posed the greatest threat to the Democratic Party. The Populists responded to the Democratic stranglehold on state legislative policy by aligning themselves with the Republican Party in the 1894 elections, a successful strategy that resulted in the Populist-Republican "Fusion" alliance gaining a majority in both houses of the legislature. Reaching across class lines to undercut Democratic support, the new political alliance included in its ranks both white and black farmers and politicians. In 1896, the Fusion alliance added significantly to its success when voters elected Republicans Daniel Russell as governor and Marion Butler to the U.S. Senate.¹⁵

This election marked the greatest success of the North Carolina Populist crusade against the undemocratic interests that dominated state and national politics in the Gilded Age. The Populist-Republican policy agenda in the legislature included an increase in public financial support for public schools, election reform, as well as increased taxation of railroads and corporations.¹⁶ Among southern states, only in North Carolina did the Populist-Republican alliance win control of state politics and bring with it the potential to issue a strong challenge to the Democratic Party. The Fusionists threatened to remove the legitimacy of the conservative Democratic regime through political reforms and by requiring commercial interests to pay their

¹⁵ J. Morgan Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics: Suffrage Restriction and the Establishment of the One-Party South, 1880-1910* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), 184-187. One of the first acts of business in the Fusion-controlled General Assembly was the restoration of the Alliance charter. See Table 7.4 in Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics*, 186, for a breakdown of the North Carolina General Assembly by political party. Historian Robert Durden refers to 1896 as the "climax" of populism. See his *The Climax of Populism* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1966).

¹⁶ Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics*, 186-187.

fair share of taxes. With the Populist-Republican alliance in charge of state government, the manufacturing and railroad interests lacked an ally in the General Assembly. Not surprisingly, the Fusionist agenda provoked a terrible backlash from the Democratic elite fearful of losing its status in the political arena to an upstart, class-based, biracial political party.

In 1898, Democrats began their campaign to turn back the rising tide of Populism. The tremendous gains made by the Populist-Republicans in 1894 and 1896 at the state level were all the more remarkable given the weakness of the party nationally. The failure of the People's Party in the 1896 presidential election was a harbinger of its impending disintegration. The national party simply could not compete against the commercial interests of the two major political parties, and consequently, failed to achieve lasting agricultural, economic, and political reform in Congress. Without a national basis for the People's Party, it became exceedingly difficult to maintain the state-level organization. This only partially explains the collapse of the Fusionists in North Carolina, however, as the politics of race put the final nail in the coffin of the Populist-Republican alliance. Playing to fears of racial and sexual violence amid the declining significance of white supremacy through the biracial Populist-Republican alliance, the old guard Democrats sought nothing short of a complete and total restoration of their party to power.¹⁷

Led by the *Raleigh News and Observer* editor, Josephus Daniels, Charles Aycock and Furnifold Simmons, the Democrats struck back with considerable force and racial hatred. As historian C. Vann Woodward argued, "It became standard practice to support disfranchising campaigns with white-supremacy propaganda in which race hatred, suspicion, and jealousy were

¹⁷ For an astute analysis of the Populist challenge and Democratic response influenced by race, class, and gender, see Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1886-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), esp. 1-146. See also Michael Perman, *Struggle for Mastery: Disfranchisement in the South, 1888-1908* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), esp. 148-172.

whipped up to a dangerous pitch.”¹⁸ Employing the language of race baiting and the fear of black sexual violence as threats to white supremacy and southern white womanhood, these Democratic stalwarts sought to undermine the biracial, class-based foundation of the Populist-Republican alliance. In 1898, Furnifold Simmons stressed the sexual threat black men posed to white women, thus using race and sexuality as a means to forge fundamental white unity to challenge class-based Populism.¹⁹ Charles Aycock, a railroad lawyer, campaigned for governor on the platform of white supremacy, informing Democrats that voters had two choices in the upcoming election: “Anglo-Saxon heritage” and “white womanhood” versus “Negro rule” and a return to Reconstruction.²⁰ The Democrats’ use of racialized and gendered language provoked a tide of racial violence culminating in the Wilmington race riot of 1898, in which deadly white mob violence overthrew the biracial Populist-Republican city leadership with the full support and backing of the Democratic establishment.²¹ The Democrats regained power through a political revolution unique to the South. North Carolina was the only southern state in which the Populist-Republican alliance gained control of the state government; Democrats there believed it was necessary to respond with such a strong and violent use of force.

The white supremacy campaign of 1898 was the first step in the Democrats’ plans to regain power in North Carolina. It succeeded in not only restoring white leadership in

¹⁸ C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), 350.

¹⁹ Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 82. Gilmore argues convincingly that Simmons’s use of this racial and gendered language sought to make subservient local political issues under the larger Democratic fold, thus rendering less important the issues that brought Populists and Republicans, black and white, together in the Alliance.

²⁰ Aycock quoted in Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics*, 189; See also Oliver H. Orr, Jr., *Charles Brantley Aycock* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961), esp. 165-188.

²¹ Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 23-27; Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 91-117; Escott, *Many Excellent People*, 241-262; Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 301-304. See also David Cecelski and Timothy B. Tyson, eds., *Democracy Betrayed: The Wilmington Race Riot of 1898 and Its Legacy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

Wilmington and returning the Democratic Party to power in the General Assembly.²² Democrats promptly reversed the many Fusionist political reforms and restored their alliances with business interests. The Democrats followed this campaign with a successful effort to disfranchise blacks and poor whites along racial and class lines, thus sealing the fate of the third party Populist-Republican challenge in North Carolina. The Democrats' white supremacy campaign represented the triumph of money politics over liberal reform, a repeated theme throughout the twentieth century. Under Furnifold Simmons's supervision, Democrats drafted a constitutional amendment that required voters to complete a literacy test, write a specific section of the state constitution as chosen by the voting registrar, and pay a poll tax, in order to register to vote. The literacy test requirement affected blacks more than whites, as approximately fifty-three percent of North Carolina blacks were illiterate compared to only nineteen percent of whites.²³ The poll tax hurt white and black alike, as a majority of the state's citizens remained rural and poor. While the Tar Heel State was not the first to restrict voting rights, it was certainly not the last, as every southern state implemented limited suffrage at the dawn of the twentieth century.

With the disfranchisement of blacks, poor whites, and Republicans, the North Carolina Democratic Party consolidated power and began its long reign of uninterrupted one-party rule. Historians Julian M. Pleasants and Augustus M. Burns III argued that the white supremacy campaigns of 1898 and 1900 marked the first of four phases of Democratic Party dominance in North Carolina. The second phase coincided with Furnifold Simmons's career in the U.S. Senate from 1900 to 1930. Following Simmons's defeat in 1930, the "Shelby Dynasty" supplanted the Simmons machine as the state's dominant political organization. Under the leadership of

²² See Table 7.4 in Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics*, 186. Following the 1898 elections, Democrats held 94 seats out of 120 in the House, and 40 Senate seats out of 50, a stunning reversal given the Populist-Republican dominance of the two previous elections.

²³ Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 28; Kousser, *The Shaping of Southern Politics*, 55.

Governor O. Max Gardner (1929-1933), the Democratic Party centralized the state's bureaucracy in response to the Great Depression and New Deal. Kerr Scott's insurgent gubernatorial campaign in 1948 marked the end of the Shelby Dynasty as Scott's primary victory over Gardner-backed conservative Democrat Charles Johnson represented the triumph of rural liberalism and agrarian interests over the pro-business, corporate influence of the Shelby Dynasty.²⁴

Furnifold Simmons and North Carolina Politics, 1900-1930

As one of the chief architects of the white supremacist campaign to wrestle control of state politics away from the Fusionists and return the Democratic Party to power, Furnifold Simmons emerged as the most prominent Democrat in North Carolina. Elected to the U.S. Senate in 1900, Simmons became the dominant figure in state politics for the next three decades. Simmons essentially created the one-party system in North Carolina, and with his background in the Democratic resurgence of the late 1890s, Simmons was well suited for his role as a defender of white supremacy and the Democratic Party. Although he served in the U.S. Senate, the "Simmons Machine" enjoyed unrivaled control of state politics from 1901 through the onset of the Great Depression. Simmons's statewide political organization was so powerful that, with one notable exception, he selected every gubernatorial candidate during his thirty years in office.²⁵ The Simmons machine reinforced the anti-democratic methods of North Carolina

²⁴ Julian M. Pleasants and Augustus M. Burns III, *Frank Porter Graham and the 1950 Senate Race in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 1.

²⁵ Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, pp. 34-61, is an excellent overview of Furnifold Simmons's political career and his political machine; See also Escott, *Many Excellent People*, 241-262. V.O. Key, Jr., *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (New York: Knopf, 1949), 212. The one time in which the Simmons-backed candidate lost the Democratic gubernatorial primary came in 1908, when Congressman William W. Kitchen defeated Locke Craig. Four years later, Simmons defeated Kitchin in the Senate primary, Craig ran unopposed for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination, and Simmons regained control of the state Democratic Party.

Democrats in the early twentieth century, in which the machines rather than voters selected political candidates, and contributed to the state's unresponsive, conservative political culture.

The use of inflammatory racial rhetoric by Charles Aycock, Josephus Daniels, and Furnifold Simmons made it possible for the Democrats to reassert their authority and regain control of state politics following the Populist-Republican interlude. With Aycock and Simmons at the helm, the Democratic Party became the party of white supremacy in North Carolina. Race became the defining element of state and regional politics in the era of the solid South. At the 1900 state Democratic Convention, Simmons argued the constitutional amendment restricting black suffrage was essential to prevent any further challenges to Democratic hegemony and protect white North Carolinians. "As a result of the election of 1898[,] White Supremacy has been restored and we now have White Supremacy in the State," Simmons argued. "If the white people of the State would always stand together and vote as they did in 1898, we would always have White Supremacy without the necessity of a Constitutional Amendment, but the white people will not always stand together and vote as they did in 1898, and in that way preserve White Supremacy."²⁶ At the heart of Simmons's white supremacist ideology was a belief in the innate inferiority of blacks, and in order to protect his regime from further political interference, it was therefore necessary to amend the state constitution to reflect this view. Simmons claimed the suffrage restriction amendment was required to establish "white supremacy upon a permanent basis, and at the same time freeing the mind and conscience of the white man. The

²⁶ Furnifold Simmons, "Address at the Opening of the Democratic Convention" (4/12/1900), in J. Fred Rippy, ed., *F.M. Simmons, Statesman of the New South: Memoirs and Addresses* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1936), 90.

way in which it accomplishes its object can be stated in one sentence: It does it by disfranchising the ignorant negro without disfranchising the uneducated white man.”²⁷

Furnifold Simmons’s statements reflected the genuine fear among the Democratic elite that there existed the potential for another political insurgency. The Populist-Republican political alliance had the potential to dislodge Simmons and his lieutenants for decades. Reflecting the standard southern Democratic view of mistreatment at the hands of Yankee-dominated Republican Reconstruction, the Fusionist government, according to Simmons “was maladministration, it was corruption, it was negroes in office.”²⁸ With blacks removed from the political process, Simmons and his lieutenants believed that whites posed no threat to the system, thus making possible fundamental white unity. The Democratic Party believed they had restored stability to a volatile political climate with this disfranchisement amendment. Simmons, however, did not anticipate the factionalism that plagued the Democratic Party for decades, and on more than one occasion, threatened his dominance of state politics.

Less than a decade after Charles Aycock and Furnifold Simmons restored the Democratic Party to power in North Carolina, Simmons faced his first substantial challenge from within the party. Although the conservative faction dominated state politics, the progressive wing that laid claim to the populist tradition remained strong enough to challenge the Simmons machine. In 1907, E. J. Justice, the Speaker of the State House of Representatives, and Josephus Daniels of the *Raleigh News and Observer*, sparked a factional battle after they “advocated drastic legislation against the railroads and corporations” during the legislative session.²⁹ This no doubt

²⁷ “Address at the Opening of the Democratic Convention,” in Rippy, ed., *F.M. Simmons, Statesman of the South: Memoirs and Addresses*, 91.

²⁸ Furnifold Simmons, “Address at Raleigh, North Carolina” (10/25/1928), in Rippy, ed., *F.M. Simmons, Statesman of the New South: Memoirs and Addresses*, 179.

reminded many conservatives of the anti-corporate policies implemented by the Populist-Republican government in the 1890s. The following year, the party entered the state convention bitter and factionalized.³⁰ Congressman William W. Kitchin, a progressive Democratic leader, defeated Simmons-backed candidate Locke Craig in the Democratic gubernatorial primary election. Although he was not the machine candidate, Kitchin's status as a Democrat was more than enough to ensure his election, as no Republican had any real chance to win statewide office in 1908. Without an ally in the governor's office, Simmons subsequently lost his position as Democratic Party chair, and with it, control of elections and political patronage.³¹ As governor, Kitchin did not surrender to corporate interests, as had his Democratic predecessors, and refused requests by the railroads to raise passenger rates.³²

In 1912, William Kitchin tried to build upon his success as an insurgent Democratic governor in an effort to challenge Furnifold Simmons for the U.S. Senate. Joining Kitchin in the Democratic Senate primary was Charles Aycock, Simmons's political patron and elder statesman of the Democratic Party. Aycock, once his strongest political patron, disagreed with Simmons's support for big business interests and tariffs. Unfortunately, Aycock suffered from poor health and died before the Democratic primary.³³ Aycock's untimely death meant that he and Simmons would not engage in what would have been a political struggle, from which the non-machine candidate William Kitchin may have very well emerged victorious. Four years earlier, Furnifold

²⁹ *Washington Post*, 24 March 1907. While the conservative faction dominated the party, the "radical," or progressive, Democrats were strong enough to have their voices heard in the state Democratic Party platform.

³⁰ *Atlanta Constitution*, 5 April 1908; 22 June 1908; 26 June 1908; 28 June 1908; *Washington Post* 24 March 1907; 26 June 1908.

³¹ Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 46.

³² *Atlanta Constitution*, 31 January 1909; *New York Times*, 31 January 1909.

³³ Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 46.

Simmons lost control of the state Democratic Party and viewed this election as the opportunity to regain his foothold in state politics. In 1912, he ran a masterful campaign and used his stump speeches to inform voters that he did not benefit financially from his role as a supporter of business and railroad interests. Several decades before the emergence of modern political advertising, Simmons circulated 100,000 copies of this speech across the state in advance of the Senate primary. Simmons won the primary election with 57 percent of the vote, compared to 32 percent for Kitchin; N.C. Supreme Court Justice Walter Clark rounded out the field of candidates with 11 percent.³⁴ Kitchin's surprising triumph over Locke Craig in 1908 and his popularity as governor failed to carry him to victory over two-term Senator Simmons in 1912. This election cemented Simmons as the leader of the state Democratic Party and an important national Democrat during the administration of President Woodrow Wilson.

By the end of the decade, however, Furnifold Simmons again found his political authority challenged amid signs of his declining influence. For the third time in twelve years, insurgent Democrats defied the Simmons machine. In 1920, Lieutenant Governor O. Max Gardner challenged Simmons-backed candidate Cameron Morrison for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination. Gardner, a self-made lawyer and textile executive, enjoyed celebrity status in North Carolina as a college football player for both North Carolina State College (now University) and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Unlike Simmons, Gardner's political fortunes were not beholden to the legacy of the white supremacy campaigns that brought Aycock and Simmons to power. Moreover, he did not build his career on the politics of race and as had his

³⁴ Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 47.

Democratic predecessors.³⁵ What Gardner lacked in racial rhetoric, however, he more than made up for with fervent political partisanship.

The relationship between the South and the Democratic Party was one of the defining characteristics of the “solid South.” Like many of his Democratic contemporaries, Max Gardner disliked Republicans and issued strong condemnations of his political opponents in his 1916 campaign for lieutenant governor. Although the Republican Party had little hope of winning statewide office, Gardner and other Democrats remained firm believers in the supremacy of the Democratic Party and sought to strengthen their party while denigrating the minority party. Gardner called Marion Butler the “[Pancho] Villa of North Carolina politics,” and labeled the GOP the party of “Fusionism, Russellism, and Butlerism.”³⁶ Less than twenty years after the Democratic Party regained power in North Carolina, the wounds of the Populist-Republican government remained fresh for many Democrats. The Fusionist government, former Governor Daniel Russell, and Democrat-turned-Populist-turned-Republican Marion Butler, represented a tragic experiment in democratic politics to which they hoped never to return.

Max Gardner gained considerable support in his bid to supplant the Simmons machine from the General Assembly. As the presiding officer of the state Senate, Gardner, his biographer observed, quickly emerged as “a candidate for governor and everyone knew it.”³⁷ By 1919, Gardner built up enough political capital that he informed Congressman Claude Kitchin that sixty-five percent of Democrats in the General Assembly supported his candidacy. One year prior to the party primary, Gardner emerged as the leading Democratic gubernatorial candidate,

³⁵ Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 48; Gardner served as lieutenant governor under Thomas Walter Bickett, a Simmons ally.

³⁶ Joseph L. Morrison, *Governor O. Max Gardner: A Power in North Carolina and New Deal Washington* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1971), 24-25.

³⁷ Morrison, *Governor O. Max Gardner*, 25.

ahead of Simmons-backed Cameron Morrison.³⁸ Gardner and Morrison represented different factions and generations within the Democratic Party. Morrison, fifty years old and closely aligned with the Simmons political machine, cut his political teeth in the Democratic resurgence of the 1890s. As a member of the North Carolina Senate, he urged passage of the disfranchisement amendment and opposed progressive Democrats' reform efforts.³⁹ Gardner, on the other hand, was thirty-three years old, and endorsed women's suffrage and other progressive reforms loathed by the Simmons machine.⁴⁰ Although North Carolina was a one-party state, the gubernatorial primary campaign between Gardner and Morrison represented but one of many episodes resembling two-party politics in the solid South.

Although Furnifold Simmons briefly lost his grip on state politics during Kitchin's administration, he later regained control of the state Democratic Party and worked to ensure his faction's ideological and political dominance by whatever means necessary. Racism, voter fraud, and intimidation became the *modus operandi* of Democratic political machines, and Simmons perfected the use of these techniques to defeat the Populist-Republican alliance that temporarily supplanted his party in the 1890s. Disfranchisement and voter restriction became an integral part of the Democratic Party platform to exclude blacks and Republicans from politics, but these restrictions did not curtail party factionalism as much as Simmons hoped. The fundamental white unity Simmons believed possible from these restrictions did not translate into Democratic unity. In order to preserve the authority of their conservative faction, Simmons and his operatives led a vicious campaign against Gardner, a young political upstart.

³⁸ O. Max Gardner to Congressman Kitchin, 1/15/1919, cited in Morrison, *Governor O. Max Gardner*, 26.

³⁹ Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 48.

⁴⁰ Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 49; Morrison, *Governor O. Max Gardner*, 25; Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 208. Gilmore calls Gardner "an avowed woman suffragist."

The issue of women's suffrage, one that divided the state and national Democratic Party, became the major campaign issue in the 1920 Democratic gubernatorial primary. Cameron Morrison's opposition to suffrage contrasted greatly with Max Gardner's outspoken support for female voting rights. However, this went beyond women's suffrage as Morrison skillfully manipulated the issue to incorporate race and racism into the gubernatorial campaign. Morrison, a veteran foot soldier in the Simmons machine, was no stranger to the politics of race and did not hesitate to exploit the issues of race and gender to his advantage. Morrison, representing the political and economic elite, reflected the view of one historian who argues, "the planter class seemed convinced that woman suffrage would undermine the hard-fought disfranchisement and segregation campaigns."⁴¹ Southern women suffragists were themselves divided on the issue of voting rights. Those aligned with the national suffrage movement favored a federal constitutional amendment granting women the right to vote, while states' rights suffragists feared the expansion of federal power into matters reserved for individual states. Southern conservative white women believed that women should not gain voting rights, fearing the potential to undermine white supremacy and disrupt their privileged position within the race-based, gendered hierarchy of the southern household.⁴²

Cameron Morrison used the issues of race and women's suffrage to exploit divisions within the Democratic Party. Morrison and his surrogates claimed that enfranchising women would lead to black females' involvement in organized politics. Using the issue of "colored women" voters against Max Gardner, Congressman Yates Webb told Democratic voters that a

⁴¹ Elna C. Green, *Southern Strategies: Southern Women and the Woman Suffrage Question* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 55.

⁴² For more on the women's suffrage movement in the South, see also Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*; Green, *Southern Strategies*; Marjorie Spruill Wheeler, *New Women of the New South: The Leaders of the Woman Suffrage Movement in the New South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

suffrage amendment would “enfranchise 110,000 Negro women of North Carolina for the sake of letting a few active agitating white women in spots throughout North Carolina have the right to vote.” Additionally, anti-suffrage conservative Democrats warned that black female suffrage threatened to return the state to the biracial politics of the 1890s.⁴³ Morrison’s opposition to women’s suffrage won the support of conservative Democrats, but he did not win the gubernatorial primary on this issue alone. Rather, the Simmons machine relied on its usual tactics of electoral fraud to ensure Morrison’s primary victory over Gardner. Morrison narrowly defeated Gardner by fewer than one hundred votes, 49,070 to 48,983, with Congressman Robert Page collecting the remaining 30,180 votes. State election officials declared that Morrison defeated Gardner by eighty-seven votes after spending a total of eleven days counting the ballots. Morrison soundly defeated Gardner by 10,000 votes in the subsequent runoff, results that also raised questions about the fairness of this election.⁴⁴ For years, Gardner believed that the Simmons machine stole this election from its rightful victor and convinced him of the need for electoral reform.⁴⁵ Despite another close primary election for his political machine, Furnifold Simmons nonetheless maintained his control of state politics through the 1920s. By the end of the decade, however, Gardner enjoyed an unprecedented comeback in North Carolina politics that helped bring about the collapse of the Simmons machine.

The 1928 presidential election provided an unusual set of circumstances in North Carolina and southern politics. New York Governor Al Smith, the Democratic nominee, was an Irish-American Catholic who favored rescinding national prohibition, two positions not popular

⁴³ Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, 207-208; Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 49-50. Yates Webb quoted in Christensen, p. 50.

⁴⁴ Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 50.

⁴⁵ Morrison, *O. Max Gardner*, 32.

in the South. In addition, conservative southern Democrats remained suspicious of his involvement in New York City's infamous Tammany Hall political machine and its alleged "foreign" influences. Republican nominee and U.S. Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover was a Protestant who, despite his party affiliation, nonetheless counted among his strongest supporters conservative southern Democrats simply because he was not Catholic and publicly supported prohibition. In other words, Hoover seemed less threatening to traditional southern cultural values than Smith. This campaign split southern Democrats into two camps: those who supported Smith out of party loyalty and those who supported Hoover out of cultural affinity. Furnifold Simmons belonged to the latter group, and his rebuff of Smith and the Democratic Party contributed to his political demise.⁴⁶

The American South earned the moniker "solid South" not only due to the strength of the Democratic Party in the individual states, but also because of the party's dominance in presidential elections. The region was a reliable supporter of the Democratic Party although it was a decidedly Republican era in national politics, as Grover Cleveland (1893-1897) and Woodrow Wilson (1913-1921) were the only Democrats elected to the White House from the end of Reconstruction through the New Deal. The only exception to this rule was the election of 1928 in which the Democratic South fractured because of a split between northern and southern Democrats. Although the South returned to the Democratic fold, this election was not entirely an aberration. The Hoover-Smith campaign had tremendous implications for state, regional, and national politics. This election revealed the rift between northern and southern Democrats, foreshadowing the decline of the solid South several decades later. In addition, it demonstrated

⁴⁶ Puryear, *Democratic Party Dissension in North Carolina, 1928-1936*, esp. 3-46

the potential for top-down political realignment in the South that contributed to the development of two-party politics.⁴⁷

Although Furnifold Simmons was a dedicated Democrat, the election of 1928 made clear that there were limitations to party loyalty for southern Democrats. The issues that dominated national politics in the 1920s, including ethnicity, immigration, and prohibition, had a profound influence on North Carolina politics in 1928. Southern Democrats were wary of Al Smith for his ethnic ties and opposition to prohibition. Smith represented what some southern Democrats believed was a “foreign” wing of the Democratic Party, dominated by urban immigrants, Catholics, and alcohol interests. Southern Democrats, on the other hand, were overwhelmingly rural, Protestant, and favored prohibition. Simmons was no stranger to the politics of immigration as he earlier attempted to restrict their political influence. In 1906, Simmons promoted a constitutional amendment requiring a national literacy test for voters. This bill passed the Senate, but failed in the House of Representatives, a move which Simmons blamed on businesses that benefited from immigration.⁴⁸ Although the national Democratic Party long considered immigrants among their strongest supporters, especially in the urban North and Midwest, and southern Democrats remained suspicious of their influence, this issue did not split the Democratic Party. In 1928, the possibility of electing a president, even a Democrat, who represented these interests, was too much to bear for Simmons. Rather than simply refusing to support his party’s presidential nominee, Simmons led the charge against Al Smith and endorsed Republican candidate Herbert Hoover. Furnifold Simmons called for a Democratic Party

⁴⁷ Top-down political realignment in the South is best described as voting for GOP presidential candidates before supporting down-ticket Republicans, such as candidates for the U.S. Senate, the U.S. House of Representatives, and Governor. For more on this trend and its influence and the reshaping of southern politics in the twentieth century, see the following books by Earl Black and Merle Black, *Politics and Society in the South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987); *The Vital South: How Presidents Are Elected* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); *The Rise of Southern Republicans* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002).

⁴⁸ Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 57.

primary that he could use as a public platform to campaign against Al Smith.⁴⁹ The primary and subsequent party convention revealed the pro-Smith and anti-Smith factions within the state Democratic Party that divided the state, and the South, in 1928.⁵⁰

Breaking with decades of party tradition, Furnifold Simmons informed Democratic voters that they had no obligation to support Al Smith. Although he spent decades waving the Democratic Party banner and was responsible for returning the Democratic Party to power in 1901, Simmons believed that this election introduced a new set of circumstances that made party loyalty secondary. “I have denounced any attempt to round up the Democratic people of North Carolina like a flock of animals under the lash of the party whip,” Simmons said just a short time before the election. He claimed that he was “not a prejudiced man,” but Smith’s religion, immigration policy, and stand on prohibition weighed heavily in his decision to endorse Hoover. “I maintain that everybody in North Carolina, because of the extraordinary conditions that have arisen with regard to Mr. Smith’s repudiations and affiliations, is entitled to vote to his conscience, convictions, and judgment, without feeling any party restraint...In God’s name, do not place upon the untarnished brow of the Democratic Party the brand of Liquor, Alienism, and Plutocracy.”⁵¹

Not content to let his anti-Catholic and xenophobic sentiments dictate his support for Herbert Hoover, Furnifold Simmons also exploited the politics of race in his opposition to Al Smith. Just as Cameron Morrison tied the racial issue to women’s suffrage in the 1920

⁴⁹ *Washington Post*, 19 May 1928.

⁵⁰ *New York Times*, 17 June 1928.

⁵¹ Furnifold Simmons, “Address at Raleigh, North Carolina,” (October 25, 1928), in Rippey, ed., *F.M. Simmons: Statesman of the New South: Memoirs and Addresses*, 216-217; Simmons stated that Smith and Tammany Hall were “under the domination of the liquor interests,” called Tammany Hall “a great burden, a veritable body of death tied around Democracy,” and believed that Catholics would abandon the Democratic Party under orders from the church hierarchy should the South not support Smith. In effect, Simmons made it sound like Catholics were adversaries of the South. *Ibid*, 195, 212.

Democratic gubernatorial primary, Simmons linked race and religion to divide the electorate in 1928. Simmons claimed that white Catholic nuns taught black children and that the Catholic Church allowed black parishioners “such equality in church relations as is not extended to them by other religious organizations.”⁵² Through his calculating use of race and religion, Simmons reminded voters that the Catholic Church and its followers did not share traditional southern values such as segregation.

Al Smith may not have inspired southern Democrats as did Woodrow Wilson in 1912, but he was a Democrat, and many supported him out of party loyalty. Max Gardner was one of his many supporters. Gardner, who marked his surprising return to politics in 1928 by winning his party’s gubernatorial nomination, worked to help Smith carry the state in the wake of Furnifold Simmons’s defection. Gardner’s support of Smith, however, was also a matter of political pragmatism, as a mass exodus from the Democratic ranks threatened to defeat both candidates. Like many loyal Democrats, Max Gardner stood by his party’s presidential candidate despite his unpopularity in parts of North Carolina and the South. Gardner announced his unequivocal support for Smith in his first campaign appearance, stating, “I won’t desert the captain of my ship.”⁵³ Gardner cautioned Simmons that his decision to support Hoover had the potential to destroy his political career, comparing his actions to those of Theodore Roosevelt. “[He] bolted the Republican Party that had made him,” Gardner warned, “[and] he did what every bolter has to do, come back in sack cloth and ashes.” Walter Murphy, a North Carolina Democrat, called Simmons the “traitor, the Benedict Arnold, the Judas Iscariot of North Carolina

⁵² Richard L. Watson, Jr., “A Political Leader Bolts—F.M. Simmons in the Presidential Election of 1928,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 37 (October 1960), 536; cited in Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 58; Watson, “Furnifold M. Simmons: ‘Jehovah of the Tar Heels’?” *North Carolina Historical Review* 44 (April 1967): 166-187.

⁵³ Gardner quoted in Morrison, *Governor O. Max Gardner*, 50.

Democracy.”⁵⁴ Gardner and other supporters promoted Smith’s candidacy with a radio advertising campaign in a heavily Democratic state that was nonetheless hostile to Smith.⁵⁵ Gardner’s allegiance to the Democratic Party and his endorsement of Al Smith advanced his political career while Simmons’s backing of Hoover brought the downfall of his political machine.

Herbert Hoover carried seven southern states in 1928, including Florida, Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia. Although it was not evident at the time, this election marked an important turning point in southern politics, as the Republican Party breached the solid South and exposed cracks in the foundation of the one-party system. Hoover carried the state by 63,000 votes and his coattails brought two Republicans to Congress and forty-seven Republicans to the General Assembly.⁵⁶ However, the Republican Party did not immediately benefit from this development, as the onset of the Great Depression ended Hoover’s presidential career and led to the South repudiating its support for the GOP. The South returned to the Democratic fold and the White House to Democrat Franklin Roosevelt (1933-1945). Although it would be decades before the Republican Party swept the South, Hoover’s victory in 1928 nonetheless set an important precedent in North Carolina and southern politics.

The Shelby Dynasty, 1929-1948

Herbert Hoover carried North Carolina’s presidential vote in 1928, but his surprise victory did not derail Max Gardner’s bid for governor. Although he was one of a long line of

⁵⁴ Gardner and Murphy quoted in George B. Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), 249.

⁵⁵ Morrison, *O. Max Gardner*, 51; Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 57; *Atlanta Constitution*, 4 September 1928, 12 October 1928; *New York Times*, 4 September 1928, 7 October 1928.

⁵⁶ Morrison, *O. Max Gardner*, 51; Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 58; Gardner won by more than 70,000 votes, approximately 7,000 more than Hoover received in North Carolina. Smith won Cleveland County (Gardner’s political base) by only 200 votes, compared to Gardner’s 3,000 vote victory. Morrison, *O. Max Gardner*, 51.

Democratic governors, Gardner did not necessarily follow their example nor subscribe to their divisive political ideologies. His biographer noted that he was “the first post-Civil War governor not to run on a platform related to Reconstruction.”⁵⁷ Unlike Charles Aycock, Cameron Morrison, and others, Gardner did not employ race baiting in his second bid for the gubernatorial nomination. It is possible that the exigent circumstances surrounding the 1928 presidential election made Gardner acutely aware of the necessity of uniting, rather than dividing, the Democratic vote. Rather, Gardner campaigned on a reform platform. His earliest legislative proposals as governor included election and political reforms, tax relief, educational reform, and a workmen’s compensation law.⁵⁸

With the impending collapse of the Simmons machine, Max Gardner’s election marked the third phase of the “solid South” in North Carolina. He moved quickly to put his own stamp on state politics. In his inaugural speech, Gardner outlined an ambitious legislative agenda that focused on improving roads, schools, agriculture, and rural life in the state.⁵⁹ The first policy proposal that separated Max Gardner from the decidedly undemocratic methods of the Simmons machine was the Australian Ballot Bill, designed to provide voters with a secret ballot. Gardner’s campaign for the gubernatorial nomination in 1920 fell short in all likelihood due to irregularities in vote counting by the Simmons-controlled election machinery. As a result, he pledged to reform the state’s election machinery in order to prevent electoral fraud. In his bid to reform the political process, Gardner enjoyed considerable support from several of the state’s leading Democrats, including *Raleigh News and Observer* editor Josephus Daniels and legislative leader (and future governor) J. Melville Broughton, in his bid to reform the political

⁵⁷ Morrison, *O. Max Gardner*, 51.

⁵⁸ Morrison, *O. Max Gardner*, 52-53.

⁵⁹ *Atlanta Constitution*, 12 January 1929; *New York Times*, 20 January 1929.

process.⁶⁰ Gardner's belief in the necessity of a workmen's compensation bill required a delicate balancing act between the burgeoning labor movement and conservative industrial elite notoriously suspicious of state intervention in labor affairs. However, just as he gained widespread Democratic support for his ambitious political reforms, Gardner, labor leaders, and business leaders found common ground and negotiated a bill favorable to both workers and industries.⁶¹ While Gardner gained early legislative success for his policies, national economic collapse necessitated a shift in Gardner's policies and priorities.

The onset of the Great Depression dealt a serious blow to Governor Gardner's reform agenda. Gardner inherited a state government burdened by heavy debt because of the state's road-building boom and uncontrolled spending in the 1920s. As a result, \$77 million debt in 1920 ballooned to \$560 million by the end of the decade.⁶² Some remained skeptical of state spending, believing it brought few benefits to the people. One disgruntled Democrat upset with the excessive expenditures wrote to Governor Gardner, "What are we old people getting for our labors, paying rent to live in our own homes? The older we get the weaker and more burdens we have."⁶³ Not unlike the crisis of the 1890s, the state's agricultural economy suffered because of declining farm prices, consumer spending, and overproduction of staple crops that flooded the market. The prevalence of rural poverty in North Carolina pushed an already-troubled economy to the breaking point. Gardner's initial response to the Great Depression included a series of radio broadcasts to the state's citizens, where he promoted the idea of developing garden plots

⁶⁰ Morrison, *O. Max Gardner*, 53.

⁶¹ Morrison, *O. Max Gardner*, 53.

⁶² Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 64.

⁶³ A.R. Wayne to Governor Max Gardner, 23 January 1930, in Governor O. Max Gardner Papers, 1929-1933, General Correspondence, 1929-1933, Box 20, Folder "Political Correspondence, 1929-1932," North Carolina State Archives, North Carolina Office of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina [Hereafter cited as NCSA].

and keeping livestock to prevent starvation. He also suggested that the textile industry reduce its output to raise market prices.⁶⁴ However, like President Hoover's refusal to use the federal government to intervene in the national economic collapse, Gardner's reaction failed to correct the fundamental structural imbalances in the state's economy.⁶⁵

Governor Gardner's primary concern in the early years of the Great Depression was the state's declining revenue base. The state government relied entirely on local property taxes to finance its operations, but the agricultural and economic crisis meant that scores of North Carolina's citizens lacked the income to pay these taxes. Declining tax revenues set off an ever-increasing number of municipal bankruptcies across the state. In 1930, Governor Max Gardner took action to prevent the impending collapse of state government. In what is perhaps his most enduring legacy, Gardner called in the Brookings Institution to reorganize and streamline state government to increase its efficiency and reduce its dependence on property taxes.⁶⁶ The result was an unprecedented centralization of state government that helped create the modern state of North Carolina. The Brookings Institution recommended that the state assume responsibility for the financing of public schools and road construction and maintenance. Prior to the Great Depression, these responsibilities fell to municipal and county government. The report also proposed the creation of a central-purchasing agency, the consolidation of the state's three major public colleges into one organization of state-supported higher education, reducing the number

⁶⁴ Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 65.

⁶⁵ The best study of the southern economy in the early twentieth century is Gavin Wright, *Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy since the Civil War* (New York: Basic Books, 1986); for the region's agricultural economy, see Pete Daniel, *Breaking the Land: The Transformation of Cotton, Tobacco, and Rice Cultures since 1880* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985); Gilbert C. Fite, *Cotton Fields No More: Southern Agriculture, 1865-1980* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1984); Jack Temple Kirby, *Rural Worlds Lost: The American South, 1920-1960* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987).

⁶⁶ Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 66.

of state agencies and elective offices in state government.⁶⁷ Tax cuts resulted in a reduction of local property taxes by \$12 million, while the state government cut its expenditures by \$7 million by slashing salaries and other measures.⁶⁸ In a move that transformed state politics in the twentieth century, Gardner's restructuring took much of the power away from local officials and political machines and placed it in the hands of the governor and the legislature in Raleigh. Coinciding with the reorganization of state government was the timely demise of the Simmons machine and the emergence of a new political machine, the "Shelby Dynasty."⁶⁹

Furnifold Simmons won reelection to the U.S. Senate in 1924 and served two more years in office following his heretical endorsement of Herbert Hoover in 1928. Although seriously weakened as a political leader, Simmons's status as an incumbent U.S. senator stood as a roadblock to Max Gardner's quest to build a new Democratic Party in North Carolina. Regardless, Simmons's decades as party leader was nearing an end. One Democrat reported to Gardner that Simmons challenger Josiah Bailey "stands stronger in eastern North Carolina than any other party leader" and "I believe that our organization, if welded together more closely and put to work, will be the strongest power in the State of North Carolina for the next ten to twelve years."⁷⁰ The signs pointing to Simmons's downfall were indeed accurate as Josiah Bailey defeated Furnifold Simmons in the 1930 Democratic Senate primary. Surprisingly, much of Bailey's support came from counties that soundly rejected his 1924 insurgent gubernatorial

⁶⁷ Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 66.

⁶⁸ Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945*, 368.

⁶⁹ The "Shelby Dynasty" refers to the town of Shelby, North Carolina, which produced several prominent political leaders during its reign as the state's leading political machine.

⁷⁰ Hugh Dortch to Governor O. Max Gardner, 15 June 1929, in Governor O. Max Gardner Papers, 1929-1933, General Correspondence, 1929-1933, Box 20, Folder "Political Correspondence, 1929-1933," NCSA. Josiah Bailey's increasing popularity in eastern North Carolina was important because this was Simmons's home region and the base for his political machine. Dortch informed Gardner that North Carolina Democrats would unite behind a new generation of Democratic leadership because of Simmons and the Republican administration in Washington.

primary campaign against Simmons-backed candidate Angus McLean.⁷¹ In 1930, however, North Carolina Democrats could not feign loyalty to the state's Democratic Party chief and longtime senator who deserted his party to support a Republican. Josiah Bailey failed to unseat the leader of the state's dominant political machine in 1924, but circumstances six years later made for a much different result. Simmons's era of Democratic politics had come and gone, and his fateful decision to endorse Hoover in 1928 effectively ended his political career. With Simmons out of office and replaced by a politician who owed no allegiance to his political machine, Gardner was free to build his own machine unencumbered by Simmons loyalists.

Max Gardner's tenure as governor of North Carolina coincided with the end of the Republican era in national politics and the dawn of the "age of Roosevelt." Americans turned to the Republican Party as a means of coping with the failed hopes and bitter disappointments of Woodrow Wilson's administration (1913-1921), and the Democratic Party found itself the minority party in Congress. Throughout the 1920s, the national Democratic Party languished in isolation and public disapproval. The Democratic Party remained powerful in the South, but it lacked a national base as Republicans dominated national politics. The Great Depression helped return Democrats to the White House and gain unprecedented influence in Congress. With the landslide election of Democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1932, the Democratic Party emerged from decades of exile in the political wilderness as a national, rather than regional, political party. With their seniority in Congress, southern Democrats stood at the vanguard of the national Democratic resurgence and the New Deal.

As governor, Max Gardner promoted the Democratic Party as the party of progress and reform. In his 1930 address to the State Democratic Convention, Gardner praised the work of his party in the state's economic transformation in the early twentieth century. "This marvelous

⁷¹ Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, 227.

glory of transformation, my fellow Democrats, from an agricultural state into a commonwealth linked with industry and business and commerce could not have been written except for this living, breathing, controlling, humanizing agent we are having, called the Democratic Party. I am happy because it is your party, and my party, and God's party." Additionally, Gardner credited the Democratic Party with education, medical, and public health reform as an integral part of Democratic progressive reform.⁷² For Gardner and other southern Democrats, the Democratic Party made possible these achievements. Additionally, they believed their party was the only legitimate political party in the South. It was Democrats, after all, who redeemed the South from the evils of Republican rule in 1877 and 1900. Gardner's political reforms, however, like those of every Democratic governor prior to Kerr Scott (1949-1953), stopped short of disrupting the racial status quo or threatening the status of the state's economic and political elite.

As a loyal southern Democrat, Gardner promoted his party as the best hope of salvation from the disastrous Republican policies that contributed to the Great Depression. The growing unpopularity of President Hoover and the GOP in the months leading up to the 1932 presidential election made it much easier for southern Democrats to increase their anti-Republican vitriol, which became as much a centerpiece of their party's platform as Franklin Roosevelt's candidacy. Governor Gardner had no reservations about supporting Roosevelt in 1932 and was openly critical of Hoover and the GOP on the campaign trail.⁷³ Nowhere was party loyalty more evident than in the 1932 presidential election. Al Smith's candidacy in 1928 tested Democratic Party

⁷² Address by Governor O. Max Gardner, State Democratic Convention, 3 July 1930, in Governor O. Max Gardner Papers, General Correspondence, 1929-1933, Box 65, Folder, "Speeches, 1930," NCSA.

⁷³ *Charlotte News*, 3 November 1932; *Hendersonville Times-News*, 3 November 1932; *Winston-Salem Sentinel*, 2 November 1932, 3 November 1932; *Durham Herald* 4 November 1932; *Fayetteville Observer*, 3 November 1932; News Clippings, Governor O. Max Gardner Papers, General Correspondence, 1929-1933, Box 124, Folder "Correspondence and News Clippings, 1929-1933," NCSA.

loyalty among southern Democrats, but four years later, Franklin Roosevelt's candidacy restored the party to prominence in national politics. The special relationship between the South and the Democratic Party reached its zenith during the Great Depression and the Roosevelt administration.

Although the state constitution limited Max Gardner to one term in office, he campaigned strongly for Franklin Roosevelt in 1932 while serving his final year as governor. After leaving the governor's mansion, Gardner relocated to Washington, where he became a key player in New Deal politics in the Roosevelt administration. Gardner's departure for Washington, however, did not lessen his influence on state politics. Rather, Gardner's relocation only served to increase his influence. Like Furnifold Simmons, Gardner engineered the selection of his successors from afar in every subsequent gubernatorial election through 1944. This was as much a part of his political legacy as his achievements as governor. He worked to maintain party orthodoxy as Democratic Party chief while also facing challenges to his political authority.

Max Gardner set an important precedent as governor during the early years of the Great Depression that established the tenor of state politics during the 1930s. His plans to revive the state's economy did not call for outside intervention. In 1930, this would have been quite a radical measure and likely difficult for many to accept. Rather, he used the report produced by the Brookings Institution to restructure state government from within. From his new base of political power in Washington, Gardner appeared to be a staunch supporter of the New Deal. However, Gardner's support for Roosevelt's New Deal proposals came with strings attached. Gardner publicly supported the New Deal while also working with his successors and congressional representatives to manipulate federal policy so as not to disrupt the status quo in North Carolina politics. This two-faced approach sums up North Carolina politics during the era

of the Shelby Dynasty.⁷⁴ Political scientists Earl Black and Merle Black observed that the New Deal did not bring about a sea change in southern Democrats' ideology. "Southern whites became progovernment from sheer necessity; their options were limited and their short-term self-interest clear," argued Black and Black.⁷⁵ They were fundamentally conservative and the Great Depression did not necessarily alter their political philosophy. In other words, many southern Democrats who openly supported federal intervention reflected political realities and the desires of their constituents, while also privately, and sometimes publicly, working to curb its influence. President Roosevelt's tremendous popularity among southern Democrats did not always result in the election of genuine liberal reformers. By the end of the decade, Roosevelt's liberal policies resulted in the election of many anti-New Deal Democrats.

North Carolina provides a textbook example of the triumph of anti-New Deal ideology over liberal reform efforts. For example, the conservative pro-business interests that dominated state politics remained firmly entrenched throughout the Roosevelt administration. Roosevelt's popularity and New Deal reforms failed to dislodge conservative Democrats from Congress and state office. In his study of North Carolina during the New Deal, historian Douglas Carl Abrams argued, "The point is not that the New Deal failed but that North Carolina conservatives frustrated its goals." Despite tremendous federal spending in the state, improved tobacco prices, and vast number of public works projects, "more remarkable, however, was how little North Carolina's society, economy, and politics had changed by the end of the decade."⁷⁶ Textile

⁷⁴ The best study of North Carolina during the New Deal era is Douglas Carl Abrams, *Conservative Constraints: North Carolina and the New Deal* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1992). Abrams persuasively argues that Max Gardner and his successors limited the impact of the New Deal on North Carolina through the 1930s.

⁷⁵ Earl Black and Merle Black, *Politics and Society in the South*, 214.

⁷⁶ Abrams, *Conservative Constraints*, xvi; Although the federal government spent approximately \$440 million in North Carolina from 1933 to 1939, the state ranked last in the nation in federal allocations per capita during this period; Abrams, *Conservative Constraints*, xiii.

executives initially supported the National Recovery Administration, but soon opposed industry reforms by the NRA when federal intervention resulted in workers' unions, labor unrest, and increased wages. Agricultural reformers called for changes, but "like the New Dealism of the textile executives, [agricultural reformers] merely cloaked economic self-interest [as] there was little enthusiasm for genuine reform."⁷⁷ In addition, the absence of established liberals like Josephus Daniels campaigning for public office resulted in the entrenchment of conservative politics.⁷⁸ The New Deal did not bring about a wholesale transformation in North Carolina politics during the 1930s, as the conservative faction of the Democratic Party maintained control of state politics and turned back several challenges from pro-New Deal liberal reformers.

Max Gardner was closely involved in the creation of the "Shelby Dynasty." Although he could serve only one term in office, Gardner worked hard to ensure that the conservative faction dominated the major statewide offices, such as governor and the U.S. Senate. Gardner's first electoral opportunity to cement his post-gubernatorial political legacy and further the development of the "Shelby Dynasty" came in 1932. The outgoing governor threw his support behind conservative Democrat John C. B. Ehringhaus, a native of Elizabeth City in eastern North Carolina, a geographical location that allowed the Democratic Party to continue its election year tradition of alternating its gubernatorial candidates between east and west.⁷⁹ Ehringhaus was a

⁷⁷ Abrams, *Conservative Constraints*, xv.

⁷⁸ Abrams, *Conservative Constraints*, 15. Josephus Daniels wanted to run for governor in 1932, but he faced financial problems stemming from a bank failure and his wife's opposition to a campaign. Abrams believes that Daniels's absence deprived voters of "a gubernatorial contest based on a serious ideological discussion of the issues."

⁷⁹ Ehringhaus Biography, "J.C.B. Ehringhaus, Governor," in J.C.B. Ehringhaus Papers, 1933-1937, General Correspondence, 1933-1937, Box 18, Folder "Governor's Conference, Biloxi 1935," NCSA. The importance of geography in state politics can be traced back to the Second American Party System (1828-1854). The Whig Party, for example, enjoyed significant popular support across the state, allowing the party to select candidates representing the coastal plain East, the Piedmont, and the mountain West. Due to its strength in the East and weakness in the West, the Democratic Party nominated almost exclusively eastern Democrats. See Marc W. Kruman, *Parties and Politics in North Carolina, 1836-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), 6-7, 32-33.

dedicated foot soldier for Max Gardner and Al Smith in 1928 and worked to improve Gardner's standing in eastern North Carolina, where the Simmons machine dominated politics for decades.⁸⁰ He also supported the pro-business policies of the conservative faction of the Democratic Party. The insurgent candidate, Lieutenant Governor Richard T. Fountain, also hailed from eastern North Carolina, but he reflected the region's insurgent tradition rather than pro-business conservatism. Fountain promoted a tax policy favorable to the agriculture-based economy of his home region, one that called for increased taxation of corporations and lowering the tax burden placed on farmers, not a position favored by the pro-business conservatives.⁸¹

In a three-way primary, Ehringhaus received 162,498 votes, Fountain finished second with 115,127, Allen Maxwell finished last with 102,032 votes, with none of the candidates receiving a clear majority.⁸² Fountain called for a primary runoff against Ehringhaus, but he faced a difficult task in challenging Gardner's political machine. The state's major newspapers, such as the *Raleigh Times*, the *Fayetteville Observer*, and the *Charlotte Observer* endorsed Ehringhaus, while the *Wilmington Star*, the *Raleigh News and Observer*, and the *Winston-Salem Journal* remained neutral. Although these influential newspapers declined to endorse either candidate, their decision not to endorse Fountain likely hurt his chances to defeat the machine candidate.⁸³ Fountain exceeded expectations in the runoff and came close to defeating the Gardner machine, but ultimately lost to the Gardner-backed conservative Ehringhaus, 182,055 votes to 168,971.⁸⁴ Max Gardner's candidate won the campaign, but the 1932 gubernatorial

⁸⁰ Abrams, *Conservative Constraints*, 17.

⁸¹ Abrams, *Conservative Constraints*, 16; Puryear, *Democratic Party Dissension in North Carolina*, 92-120.

⁸² Puryear, *Democratic Party Dissension in North Carolina*, 106.

⁸³ Puryear, *Democratic Party Dissension in North Carolina*, 113.

⁸⁴ *North Carolina Manual 1932*, 91-92; Puryear, *Democratic Party Dissension in North Carolina*, 118-119.

primary election demonstrated that Gardner's grip on North Carolina politics remained tenuous. While the results were closer than expected, it was nonetheless a clear victory for the Shelby Dynasty. For the sake of building a new political machine, it was necessary for Gardner to follow Josiah Bailey's 1930 Senate primary victory over Furnifold Simmons with a series of successful campaigns in 1932. Gardner was only partly successful in this endeavor, however, as the Senate primary also revealed the potential for economic populism to triumph over machine politics in the midst of the Great Depression.

Max Gardner expressed concerns about the possibility of a populist upsurge among voters during the early years of the Great Depression. In a letter to Franklin Roosevelt, Gardner stated, "I am convinced that were it not for the known fact that we are in the process of preparing the people for an opportunity to express their convictions concerning their government in November [1932] we would be in the midst of a violent social and political revolution."⁸⁵ Franklin Roosevelt's landslide victory over incumbent Republican President Herbert Hoover spoke volumes about voters' desire for change in 1932. Richard Fountain's unsuccessful gubernatorial campaign revealed that many voters responded favorably to his economic populism, and that it had the potential to be an issue in North Carolina politics during the 1930s.

The success of the Populist-Republican ticket in the 1890s rested almost entirely on its economic populism and agenda of political reform. Conservative Democrats thwarted economic populism as a political issue, as evident in William Kitchin's 1912 Senate campaign, fearing that it had the potential to disrupt Democratic unity. In 1932, the social and economic conditions of the Great Depression created a fertile environment in which an authentic populist political movement could take root. In North Carolina, the poor and downtrodden found their champion

⁸⁵ O. Max Gardner to Franklin Delano Roosevelt, 22 July 1932, quoted in Morrison, *Governor O. Max Gardner*, 112; Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 77.

in Robert Rice Reynolds, the Tar Heel State's version of Louisiana populist Huey Long. Like Long, Reynolds had the potential to disrupt the state's political system, but his national influence was never as great as that of the "Kingfish" Huey Long. More importantly, Reynolds's candidacy for the U.S. Senate threatened Max Gardner's plans to expand the Shelby Dynasty and increase his grip on the North Carolina Democratic Party.

In 1932, Reynolds campaigned as an ardent New Dealer against the conservative, Gardner-backed former governor Cameron Morrison. As the machine candidate with the benefit of a statewide political network at his disposal, Democrats anticipated a Morrison victory without significant opposition. Morrison enjoyed the backing of Governor Max Gardner, while Senator Josiah Bailey privately supported Morrison, but chose to remain neutral in 1932, preferring to follow tradition and not publicly endorse a potential senator. However, Gardner failed to wage a strong campaign on Morrison's behalf, as he did not anticipate a strong challenge from within the Democratic Party. The Gardner machine did not deem it necessary to wage a full-scale political campaign on Morrison's behalf. As Robert Reynolds's recent biographer observed, "their limited participation provided a significant advantage to Reynolds."⁸⁶

The New Deal era marked the pinnacle of economic populism in twentieth-century southern politics. Never again would this issue dominate politics as it did in the 1930s and 1940s. During the 1932 Democratic Senate primary, Reynolds took full advantage of the state's economic conditions to wage a class-based, economic populist campaign against wealthy machine candidate Cameron Morrison. He campaigned as a man of the people at a time when voters responded energetically to these types of populist appeals. He attacked Morrison and big

⁸⁶ Julian M. Pleasants, *Buncombe Bob: The Life and Times of Robert Rice Reynolds* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 29. For Huey Long, see T. Harry Williams, *Huey Long* (New York: Knopf, 1969).

business, blaming the latter for the Great Depression, and provided the state's poor citizens with a voice in politics. Reynolds opposed prohibition, instead favoring the taxation and government control of the liquor supply, arguing that prohibition had failed to achieve its goals.⁸⁷ Reynolds played the "poor man" throughout the primary campaign and rode this platform to a shocking upset over the burgeoning Shelby Dynasty. However, Reynolds gained only a plurality, not a majority of the votes in a four-way race featuring two other minor candidates, Thomas Bowie and Frank D. Grist. In the runoff election, Reynolds proved that a primary campaign built on economic populism was not a fluke. With Bowie and Grist out of the way, Reynolds routed Morrison with nearly two-thirds of the vote, 227,864 votes to Morrison's 120,428.⁸⁸ Morrison's supporters blamed the Democratic Party for focusing its resources on the gubernatorial primary, where the Gardner machine also faced a tough challenge from another insurgent Democrat.⁸⁹

The election of 1932 brought mixed results for Max Gardner. Robert Reynolds's Senate primary victory over the Shelby Dynasty meant that Gardner would not enjoy full control of the state Democratic Party. He remained a powerful political leader whose unrivaled influence allowed him to be the state's kingmaker, but Democratic Party factionalism meant that Gardner would not necessarily have a blank check to rule the state or the party. Although Furnifold Simmons found his authority challenged on several occasions, his faction prevailed more often than not. What separated Simmons and Gardner, however, was that Simmons was in office during a time of greater stability. Gardner entered office just prior to the beginning of the Great Depression, which created tremendous economic and political instability across the nation.

⁸⁷ Pleasants, *Buncombe Bob*, ch. 2.

⁸⁸ Pleasants, *Buncombe Bob*, 41, 48. The vote total in the 1932 Democratic Senate primary: Reynolds, 156,548; Morrison, 143,176; Bowie, 38,548; Grist, 31,011; In the runoff, Reynolds captured 65.4% of the vote compared to Morrison's 34.6%

⁸⁹ Pleasants, *Buncombe Bob*, 41-42.

Reynolds entered the U.S. Senate as an ardent New Dealer, a position that often placed him at odds with Senator Josiah Bailey, whose acceptance of the New Deal in the early 1930s was lukewarm at best.⁹⁰ The 1930s and 1940s witnessed a series of insurgent campaigns challenging the authority of the Shelby Dynasty's control of state politics. This demonstrated that the Great Depression and New Deal era provoked considerable opposition to the dominance of the conservative political machine and its corporate backing in North Carolina. Although the two-party system of Democrats and Republicans would not emerge for several decades, this factionalism had profound implications in the emergence of two-party politics in the state.

In 1936, insurgent Democrats again challenged the Gardner machine for the gubernatorial nomination. Like Richard Fountain and Robert Reynolds's 1932 campaigns for governor and the U.S. Senate, respectively, economic populism remained a key issue in 1936. Liberal New Dealer Ralph A. McDonald waged a class-based campaign critical of the Shelby Dynasty and its relationship with corporate interests. McDonald attacked the state sales tax and proposed raising taxes for stock ownership and corporations. McDonald skewered the Gardner machine's ambiguous stance on the New Deal, arguing that the state administration was doing little to promote Roosevelt's policies. "While boasting of their loyalty to President Roosevelt, [they] are actually seeking to destroy the policies of the New Deal at every turn," said McDonald.⁹¹

Max Gardner relied on his brother-in-law, Clyde R. Hoey, to defeat the rising tide of economic populism promoted by Ralph McDonald. Like the Democrats of the 1890s, the Gardner machine felt threatened by the prospect of class-based politics in the 1930s. The progressives' criticism of business and taxation was a holdover from the Populists. The calls for increased taxation of corporate interests resonated strongly in the New Deal era left the Gardner

⁹⁰ *New York Times*, 8 December 1935.

⁹¹ McDonald quoted in Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 93.

machine vulnerable to accusations that it did little for the masses. Richard Fountain and Robert Reynolds employed this message and proved that progressive-leaning Democrats could compete against the conservative Democratic machine. Not unlike the candidates in the 1932 gubernatorial and Senate primary elections, the progressive Democratic candidates in 1936 gained enough votes in the first election to force a runoff. Max Gardner rallied the troops behind Hoey, using his influence to solicit contributions from the banking industry to prevent the McDonald insurgency from reaching the governor's mansion. This was not the first time that the state's corporate and political leadership combined their resources to defeat liberal reform, and it would certainly not be the last. Political scientist V.O. Key, Jr. made the following observation on the relationship between money and politics in the 1936 election: "When a full-fledged opposition candidacy has developed as it did in the person of McDonald, the weight of the whole financial community has been thrown against him. In North Carolina, as everywhere else, money talks in politics."⁹² In one of the campaign's many surprises, conservative Clyde Hoey emerged as a supporter of the New Deal in the runoff election as a way of drawing off Democratic support from McDonald.⁹³ Gardner's influence, however, ensured that his political machine would stifle the New Deal in North Carolina. Like the previous election, however, the entrenched political machine emerged victorious, having again turned back a strong challenge to its tenuous authority.⁹⁴

Senator Josiah Bailey stood as one of the most prominent anti-New Deal Democrats in the U.S. Senate. Bailey, who ran as a Democratic Party regular and Gardner-backed candidate in

⁹² Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, 214; Key argues that the influence of money prevented the rise of a progressive, populist Democrat in North Carolina akin to Alabama's Jim Folsom or Florida's Sidney Catts.

⁹³ Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 94-96.

⁹⁴ *Wall Street Journal*, 11 June 1936, 8 July 1936; Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945*, 646.

1930, represented a small but powerful faction of southern Democrats who held reservations about the New Deal and the expansion of federal power in the South. Contrary to many southern Democrats, Bailey opposed the Agricultural Adjustment Act and the National Recovery Administration, the centerpiece of Roosevelt's New Deal, arguing, "It is un-American to prescribe by law what a farmer may sell, a manufacturer shall make or a consumer shall pay." Furthermore, "It denies Liberty, which is the breath of our Republic's life. There is no half-way ground. We will stick to Liberty or go over to Communism."⁹⁵

Although Max Gardner and Josiah Bailey stymied the implementation of these policies in North Carolina, their opposition to the New Deal stood in stark contrast to Roosevelt's popularity in the South. Southern Democrats risked their political careers by openly campaigning as anti-New Deal politicians. Consequently, Bailey modified his stance on the New Deal in advance of his 1936 reelection campaign, maintaining that federal action was necessary to respond to the economic crisis of the Great Depression. "We will return to reliance upon private enterprise and individual initiative, but not to greed, not to unconscionable profits, not to speculation... This, as I understand, is the essence of the New Deal."⁹⁶ After winning reelection over pro-New Deal candidate Richard Fountain in 1936, Bailey did not hesitate to criticize the Roosevelt administration and the New Deal policies. Furthermore, the release of the *Report on Economic Conditions of the South* in 1938 provoked Hoey's criticisms of federal policies. Bailey received with considerable skepticism the conclusion that the South was "the

⁹⁵ Josiah Bailey quoted in Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945*, 611; John Robert Moore, "Josiah Bailey and the 'Conservative Manifesto' of 1937," *Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 31, No. 1, (February 1965); 21-29; Moore, "The Conservative Coalition in the United States Senate, 1942-1945," *Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (August 1967): 368-376; Moore, *Senator Josiah Bailey of North Carolina* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1968); James T. Patterson, "The Failure of Party Realignment in the South, 1937-1939," *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 27, No. 3, (August 1965): 602-617; Patterson, "A Conservative Coalition Forms in Congress, 1933-1939," *Journal of American History*, Vol. 52, No. 4 (March 1966): 757-772.

⁹⁶ Josiah Bailey quoted in *Raleigh News and Observer*, 8 July 1934; Cited in Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945*, 612.

Nation's No. 1 economic problem." The South, he believed, preferred to solve its problems on its own rather than relying on federal intervention to cure its ills. "Every instance of federal or other outside interference has tended to prove that such interference increases our difficulties and prevents solution."⁹⁷

Regardless of their disagreements with Roosevelt, Bailey and other conservative southern Democrats remained within the party fold. Bailey urged Democratic Party unity despite his criticisms of Roosevelt and the New Deal.⁹⁸ In the 1930s, leaving the Democratic Party was political suicide and simply not an option, even for the most vociferous opponents of the New Deal, such as Bailey, Virginia's Harry F. Byrd and Carter Glass. Party loyalty was particularly strong in the 1930s and Franklin Roosevelt's election in 1932 made possible southern Democrats' increased influence in national politics. The Democratic Party, the "party of the Fathers," was the mechanism that allowed the South to exercise political power, especially during the Republican era of national politics. Governor J.C.B. Ehringhaus, a staunch supporter of President Roosevelt and the New Deal, underscored the party's importance to the South. "It seems to me that the Lord Himself has answered people's prayers for a saving political philosophy by sending them the Democratic Party," said Ehringhaus.⁹⁹ In 1936, J. Melville Broughton argued, "It was under such tragic circumstances as these [Republican rule and the Great Depression] that the clarion voice of Franklin D. Roosevelt...rang across the Nation in

⁹⁷ Raleigh *News and Observer*, 11 September 1938, News Clipping, North Carolina Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Bruce J. Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development, and the Transformation of the South, 1938-1980* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 3-38; 44, 52; Anthony J. Badger, *The New Deal: The Depression Years, 1933-1940* (New York: Ivan R. Dee, 2002), 210, 262, 264, 269-271; Badger, 262, "Until Bailey was safely reelected in 1936 he was publicly obsequious to the president." See also Badger, "How Did the New Deal Change the South?" in Badger, *New Deal/New South: An Anthony J. Badger Reader* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2007), 40.

⁹⁸ Raleigh *News and Observer*, 11 September 1938, News Clipping, NCC, WL, UNC-CH.

⁹⁹ Raleigh *News and Observer*, 23 October 1934, News Clipping, NCC, WL, UNC-CH.

tones of courage and hope as he promised to the people of the Nation a program of action and rehabilitation.”¹⁰⁰ State Democratic Party leader D. Hiden Ramsey offered bountiful praise for his political party and Roosevelt. “The record of the Democratic Party in North Carolina since the turn of the century is heightened for us by the brilliant record of achievement which the national Democratic Party has written during all the eventful days since March 1933,” said Ramsey.¹⁰¹ It was clear that without the Democratic Party, the South lacked political power. However, the growing chorus of anti-New Deal conservatism had profound implications for the development of two-party politics in North Carolina and the South in the decades following the Second World War. With their concerns about federal intervention in the South, the size of government, and federal expenditures, these conservative Democrats foreshadowed the rise of the modern Republican Party in the late twentieth century.

In 1944, Ralph McDonald returned to politics to challenge Gardner-backed candidate R. Gregg Cherry for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination. This election marked the Shelby Dynasty’s pinnacle of power, and its time as the state’s dominant political machine was ending. Nevertheless, Max Gardner’s influence remained sufficiently strong that he was again able to win another confrontation between the conservative and progressive factions of the state Democratic Party. Cherry emerged victorious in the Democratic primary and took office as the Second World War was ending. The Gardner machine fended off several insurgent campaigns, but it had exhausted its resources by the late 1940s. The Shelby Dynasty, weakened by the

¹⁰⁰ J. Melville Broughton, Keynote Speech at Democratic State Convention, 12 June 1936, in Governor J.C.B. Ehringhaus Papers, 1933-1937, General Correspondence, 1933-1937, Box 15, Folder “Political Correspondence, 1936,” NCSA.

¹⁰¹ D. Hiden Ramsey, Address to the State Democratic Convention, 17 May 1940, in Governor Clyde R. Hoey Papers, 1937-1940, Conferences and Conventions, Box 73, Folder “Democratic Conventions, State and National,” NCSA.

intense factionalism within the Democratic Party, could not sustain itself as a viable political machine in the aftermath of the New Deal and the Second World War.

The rise and fall of the Simmons machine and Shelby Dynasty in the early twentieth century strongly reflected national political trends. As the Republican Party dominated national politics until the early 1930s, the Democratic Party held sway over the solid South. The “age of Roosevelt” found Democrats in control of Congress and the White House, with southern Democrats featured prominently in the party’s congressional leadership. Ironically, the relationship between the Democratic Party and the South under the Roosevelt administration inadvertently served, at least initially, to reinforce the dominance of Democratic political machines in the American South. The party’s unprecedented landslides of the 1930s exiled the Republican opposition to the political wilderness, not unlike the Democratic Party during the preceding decade. At the same time, however, the New Deal also provoked the rise of progressive reformers who, at times, genuinely threatened the party’s conservative leadership. In the South, the New Deal fostered both conservatism and liberalism, and the struggle between these factions shaped political developments in the postwar South. Ultimately, it was federal intervention during the New Deal and the Second World War that served to loosen the bonds of party loyalty.¹⁰²

Despite the progressive challenge to conservative rule in the early twentieth century, the Democratic factions united in their support for racial segregation, the cornerstone of the one-party South. Regardless of their disagreements over political philosophies, racial segregation was an accepted and widespread practice that no elected Democrat dared dispute. The absence

¹⁰² See James C. Cobb, *The Most Southern Place on Earth: The Mississippi Delta and the Roots of Regional Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), chapter 8; Kari Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt and the End of the Solid South, 1932-1968* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), chapter 1; Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt*, chapters 1-4; Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945*, chapters 18-19.

of Furnifold Simmons kept the politics of race out of organized politics in the 1930s, but this did not mark an ideological shift in race relations. Rather, it merely served to reinforce the myth of North Carolina's "progressive" reputation. In 1949, political scientist V.O. Key, Jr. called North Carolina a "progressive plutocracy."¹⁰³ This reputation dates back to Charles Aycock and his education crusade at the turn of the twentieth century. Although he was a committed white supremacist, Aycock believed it was necessary to extend educational opportunities to whites and blacks alike.¹⁰⁴ Aycock firmly believed that the state constitution required the education of both races, a potentially divisive issue within the Democratic Party. Although state spending for black students paled in comparison to white schools, it was nonetheless significant that Aycock made public education available to the state's citizens, regardless of race.¹⁰⁵

North Carolina's political leaders believed that their state provided the best model for race relations in the South. Despite racial segregation and disfranchisement, most assumed that blacks were genuinely content with the racial status quo. Governor Max Gardner believed that "we have the highest type of negro in that is to be found in the South, or in America." Gardner continued, "I cannot escape the conclusion that this condition is due to the fact that the dominant race in North Carolina, with the mutual concurrence of the colored race, has continuously cultivated a better understanding and worked towards a higher intellectual and moral development of the Negro race in this Commonwealth."¹⁰⁶ Gardner's successors echoed this paternalistic view of race relations vis-à-vis the state. Governor J. Melville Broughton argued

¹⁰³ Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, 205-228.

¹⁰⁴ Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 42-45; Orr, *Charles Brantley Aycock*, chapters 15-16.

¹⁰⁵ Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 45.

¹⁰⁶ Untitled Max Gardner Speech, 7 May 1929, in Governor O. Max Gardner Papers, 1929-1933, General Correspondence, 1929-1933, Folder, "Speeches, 1929," NCSA.

that the state's role in expanding health care, agricultural, educational programs, and abolition of the poll tax among others, made possible the state's harmonious race relations. Political leaders believed they had their best interests in mind and that these measures did not threaten white supremacy in North Carolina. The lack of racial violence meant that blacks and whites alike accepted the racial status quo and had no desire to see wholesale changes in race relations. Broughton contended, "There is no sentiment in the state for any other arrangement, either on the part of white or colored citizens" regarding the accepted practice of educational segregation.¹⁰⁷ On the state law forbidding intermarriage, Broughton argued, "we believe in a policy of purity and high standard as to both races and we recognize the principle that race distinction does not imply race discrimination."¹⁰⁸ Political scientist V.O. Key, Jr. reinforced this belief in his discussion of the state's politics, stating, "The state has a reputation for fair dealings with its Negro citizens. Its racial relations have been a two-sided picture, but nowhere has cooperation between white and Negro leadership been more effective."¹⁰⁹ The emergence of the civil rights movement exposed the progressive myth that defined race relations in the era of disfranchisement and shaped much of the state's politics in the decades following the Second World War.

Although North Carolina's political leaders did much to curb the influence of the New Deal, federal intervention nonetheless transformed the state's economics, politics, and social relations. The state's conservative leadership, which proved quite adroit in turning back

¹⁰⁷ Governor J. Melville Broughton to Mr. C.E. Clanton, 19 September 1944, in Governor J. Melville Broughton Papers, 1941-1945, Subject Files, 1941-1944, Box 82, Folder "Race Relations," NCSA; Governor J. Melville Broughton to William C. Newman, 28 July 1944, in Broughton Papers, Subject Files, 1941-1944, Box 82, Folder "Race Relations," NCSA.

¹⁰⁸ Governor J. Melville Broughton to Margaret C. McCulloch, 2 October 1943, in Broughton Papers, 1941-1945, Subject Files, 1941-1944, Box 82, Folder "Race Relations," NCSA.

¹⁰⁹ Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation*, 206.

meaningful reform efforts, could not contain the full impact of the New Deal and the Second World War. The struggle between the conservative and liberalizing political forces within the Democratic Party shaped North Carolina and southern politics in the decades that followed. The election of 1948 provided progressive Democrats with the opportunity to supplant the era of conservative machine politics and begin a new era in North Carolina politics.

CHAPTER 2

Progressivism, Conservatism, and the Politics of Race in the Postwar South: Kerr Scott to Luther Hodges, 1945-1960

The decade that followed the Second World War was crucial in shaping North Carolina's political development. The New Deal and Second World War set in motion forces that promoted socioeconomic and political change throughout the South. The decline and fall of the Shelby Dynasty demonstrated the potential for a viable alternative to machine politics, as this process manifested itself in North Carolina with the emergence of an influential progressive Democratic faction that challenged the entrenched political machine. Conservative and progressive Democrats remained at loggerheads throughout the 1950s, as party factionalism left both sides competing for influence. Democratic infighting coincided with increasing support for the national Republican Party, while legal challenges to segregation profoundly altered southern politics. North Carolina's political leadership did its best to navigate the political and social upheaval of the 1950s, but the potential for two-party politics was increasingly evident.

The end of the Second World War in August 1945 found the American South on the verge of a great transformation. The New Deal and Second World War were watershed events in the history of the twentieth-century South, accelerating economic, political, and social change in the region. In 1945, the one-party South remained firmly in place, but the New Deal and Second World War weakened its foundations. Federal agricultural policies such as the Agricultural Adjustment Act created a modern enclosure movement in which small farmers, tenant farmers,

and sharecroppers left the land in search of urban employment. Federal legislation led to increased industrial wages and a higher standard of living for working-class southerners. The growth of defense industries and military bases during the war brought economic diversification, population growth, and urban development to the moribund southern economy, thus creating the infrastructure of the modern Sunbelt. Returning veterans, black and white, challenged the authority of the mossback conservatives who dominated the ruling Democratic Party elite. Successful court challenges to the poll tax, literacy test, and the white-only primary gradually increased black voter registration and a shift in political loyalties to the Democratic Party. The socioeconomic transformation that began with the New Deal reshaped the region's political landscape, eventually leading to the rise of the Republican Party where the "Party of Lincoln" had never existed as a legitimate political party.¹

The New Deal and the Second World War fostered the paradoxical development of liberalism and the intensification of conservatism in the South. The Great Depression revealed to the nation the terrible economic and social conditions in the South, creating many opportunities for reform. Southern reformers took on a leading role in the struggle for economic

¹ The literature on the influence of the New Deal and Second World War is extensive. See Numan V. Bartley, *The New South, 1945-1980* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995); Jennifer E. Brooks, *Defining the Peace: World War II Veterans, Race, and the Remaking of Southern Political Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); James C. Cobb, *The Selling of the South: The Southern Crusade for Industrial Development, 1936-1990*, 2d ed., (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Pete Daniel, *Breaking the Land: The Transformation of Cotton, Tobacco, and Rice Cultures since 1880* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985); John Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day: The Generation Before the Civil Rights Movement in the South* (New York: Knopf, 1994); Gilbert C. Fite, *Cotton Fields No More: Southern Agriculture, 1865-1980* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1984); Kari Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt and the End of the Solid South, 1932-1968* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Jack Temple Kirby, *Rural Worlds Lost: The American South, 1920-1960* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987); William E. Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932-1940* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963); Bruce J. Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development, and the Transformation of the South, 1938-1980* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Patricia Sullivan, *Days of Hope: Race and Democracy in the New Deal Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); George B. Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967); Nancy J. Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln: Black Politics in the Age of FDR* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); Gavin Wright, *Old South, New South: Revolutions in the Southern Economy since the Civil War* (New York: Basic Books, 1986).

and racial justice as conservatives in Congress sought to undermine the more liberal elements of the New Deal. These progressive activists used a class-based message of reform in their quest, seeking to ameliorate the socioeconomic and political conditions left untouched by federal intervention. Their goals of increasing wages and the standard of living gained considerable support from black and white southerners alike. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) mounted legal challenges to segregation in the South, and the Southern Conference on Human Welfare (SCHW) launched voting registration campaigns in the 1940s, seeking full citizenship for disenfranchised southerners. It was an uphill struggle, however, for southern liberals to confront the realities of their region's race-based social order while lacking strong, native-born national leaders to promote their organizing efforts and, most importantly, southern Democratic supporters in Congress. Historian George Tindall characterized southern New Deal liberals as "generals without an army, leaders with little influence among the mass of workers, farmers, and middle class, and with almost no foothold in politics."² Southern liberals pinned their hopes on former Vice President and Secretary of Agriculture Henry Wallace's 1948 presidential candidacy on behalf of the Progressive Democratic Party. However, the Democratic Party's nomination of President Harry S. Truman in 1948 rather than Wallace marked the end of the progressive reform movement in the South.³

Conservative southern Democrats outnumbered their liberal counterparts among the South's elected officials, especially in Congress. President Franklin D. Roosevelt counted southern Democrats, including Alabama's Congressman William Bankhead, Senators John Bankhead, Hugo Black, and Lister Hill, and Florida's Claude Pepper, among his most ardent supporters. New Deal Democrats enjoyed their greatest influence in the early 1930s during the

² Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945*, 633.

³ Bartley, *The New South, 1945-1980*, ch. 2; Egerton, *Speak Now Against the Day*; Sullivan, *Days of Hope*.

earliest years of the Roosevelt administration. By the end of the decade, however, North Carolina Senator Josiah Bailey and Virginia Senators Harry F. Byrd and Carter Glass supplanted the liberal New Dealers and emerged as the most outspoken southern Democratic opponents of the New Deal. Congressional debates over anti-lynching legislation and voting rights in the exposed the underlying current of racial conservatism in southern political thought and the limitations of southern liberalism.

In 1938, Senator Josiah Bailey warned northern Democrats against supporting federal anti-lynching legislation the U.S. Senate. “In the hour that you come down to North Carolina and try to impose your will upon us about the Negro, so help me God, you are going to learn a lesson which no political party will ever again forget,” Bailey told his fellow senators. Adopting the tone of an unabashed southern Democrat, Bailey pledged to defend the South’s treasured institutions from outside interference, reminding his colleagues that “the civilization in the South is going to be a white civilization [and] its government is going to be a white man’s government.” Bailey cautioned his fellow Democrats of the consequences of targeting the South, reminding them of fate that befell the Republican Party following Reconstruction. This time, however, he believed it was Democratic legislation with potential to undermine the South’s traditional political loyalties. “Just when the Republicans in the [1860s] undertook to impose the national will upon us with respect to the Negro, we resented it and hated that party with a hatred that outlasted generations...just as that same policy destroy the hope of the Republican Party in the South, that same policy adopted by the [national] Democratic Party will destroy the Democratic Party in the South,” Bailey argued. While the South’s economic and political elite embraced the New Deal and the programs that benefited them financially, they nonetheless remained wary of federal intervention. The Mississippi Delta planter elite, for example,

supported the New Deal so long as they benefited from federal largesse, but they opposed programs that threatened to drive their African-American workers off the land or promote racial equality.⁴ Bailey's comments warning of the consequences of federal intervention in race relations foreshadowed the growing divisions between southern Democrats and the national party.

The development of southern conservative opposition to the New Deal in the 1930s, however, did not bring about an immediate political revolution in the South. While modern southern conservatism and two-party politics has its roots in the New Deal era, the Democratic Party nonetheless remained the dominant political party in the South. President Roosevelt was careful not to use the federal government to promote anti-discrimination or racial equality in the South, fearing that such action would provoke a backlash against the New Deal and the Democratic Party. He was not willing to sacrifice his plans for the sake of promoting divisive legislation targeting the South.⁵ Roosevelt relied heavily on the Democratic South and southern Democrats in Congress to promote his legislative agenda. Without their support, Roosevelt's ambitious New Deal proposals would have likely been for naught. By the late 1940s, however, Roosevelt's early caution gave way to the grim realities of postwar race relations, and the White House took the extraordinary step of calling for an intervention in the region's race relations.

President Roosevelt's successor, Harry S. Truman, made the conscious decision to promote federal civil rights laws regardless of its consequences. In 1948, deeply troubled by

⁴ Bartley, *The New South, 1945-1980*, ch. 3; James C. Cobb, *The Most Southern Place on Earth: The Mississippi Delta and the Roots of Regional Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); chs. 8-9; Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt*, chs. 1-2; Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt*, chs. 1-4; Senator Josiah Bailey quoted in *Congressional Record*, 12 January 1938; See also Earl Black and Merle Black, *The Rise of Southern Republicans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 32; Rob Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics: The Personalities, Elections, and Events that Shaped Modern North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 204.

⁵ Leuchtenburg, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal, 1932-1940*, 185-187.

reports of discrimination and racial violence involving returning African-American soldiers in the South, President Truman announced a bold civil rights agenda designed to remedy the problems of institutional racism. President Truman proposed a national commission on civil rights, a joint congressional committee on civil rights, the founding of a civil rights division in the U.S. Department of Justice, federal protection of voting rights, anti-lynching legislation, outlawing employment discrimination, and a prohibition on discrimination relating to interstate transportation facilities.⁶ If southern Democrats feared, but nonetheless tolerated as necessary, the unprecedented expansion of federal power in the 1930s, then Truman's civil rights edict struck them as a betrayal of southern Democrats' core principles.

North Carolina Senators Clyde Hoey and William B. Umstead, Josiah Bailey's successor, emerged as vocal opponents of Truman's civil rights proposals, targeting its anti-poll tax, anti-lynching, anti-segregation, and fair employment practice components. Hoey urged southern Democrats unite to "challenge the civil rights program at every step of the way," while Umstead called the civil rights proposals "an unwarranted invasion of state sovereignty."⁷ Despite the differences with their party's titular leader, neither Hoey nor Umstead advocated breaking with the national Democratic Party over this issue. Rather, Hoey emphasized the region's longstanding relationship with the national party. "The South needs the Democratic Party, and the Democratic Party needs the South," argued Hoey. Along with Truman's civil rights agenda, progressive Democrat Henry Wallace's 1948 presidential campaign sparked considerable fear

⁶ Bartley, *The New South, 1945-1980*, 76; Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt, 1944-1964*, 76; Sullivan, *Days of Hope*, 245.

⁷ *Raleigh News and Observer*, 29 February 1948 [Hoey and Umstead quotes], 20 March 1948, News Clipping, North Carolina Collection Clipping File, North Carolina Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill [Hereafter cited as NCC Clipping File]; *Washington Post*, 8 August 1948; See also "Statement by Senator William B. Umstead on So-Called Civil Rights Program," and "Address of Senator William B. Umstead", 12 May 1948, both in John William Harden Papers, Box 155, Folder 1848, "Sen. Umstead-1948 Campaign" (#1), Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (Hereafter cited as SHC).

among southerners fearful of federal intervention in the region's race relations. Wallace made racial justice the major issue of his campaign, a development that doomed liberal reformers' efforts to promote biracial, grassroots political reforms in the South. At the same time, Wallace challenged the traditional two-party system in American politics, conservative southern Democrats began to reassert their position within the national Democratic Party, likewise launching a national political campaign to accomplish this goal.

In 1948, with much of the Deep South in open revolt against President Truman's civil rights decrees, it appeared that Truman might very well lose his election campaign because of declining popular support from the Democratic South. A third-party campaign spearheaded by South Carolina Governor J. Strom Thurmond and Mississippi Governor Fielding Wright gained considerable traction among southerners fearful of expanding federal power and the emerging civil rights movement. The conservative States' Rights Democratic Party, or Dixiecrats, challenged President Truman's support of federal civil rights legislation, promising to defend the southern way of life against the encroaching liberalism of the national Democratic Party. The Dixiecrats maintained that the Democratic Party, led by President Truman, threatened the "traditions, customs and institutions" of the South.⁸ Strom Thurmond argued that Truman's civil rights proposals, if ratified by Congress, would "lead to a police state" in which the federal government endorsed the "forced mingling of the races on our trains and busses, in our restaurants, in our theaters, in our schools, and who knows where in the future."⁹ Mississippi Senator James O. Eastland warned that Truman's civil rights legislation demonstrated the danger

⁸ Motion of Governor J. Strom Thurmond, Governor of South Carolina, Southern Governors' Conference, Wakulla Springs, Florida, 7 February 1948; Governor J. Strom Thurmond to J. Frank Hobbs, both in Governor R. Gregg Cherry Papers, 1945-1949, General Correspondence, 1945-1949, Subject Files, 1945-1948, Box 80, Folder "Southern Governors' Political Committee," North Carolina State Archives, North Carolina Office of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina [Hereafter cited as NCSA].

⁹ Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt*, 140, 154.

of minority influence in the federal government, which he believed represented an attempt “to Harlemize the country.”¹⁰ The Dixiecrats won the popular vote in Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina. Not surprisingly, these states had the highest percentage of African-Americans in the South. Despite their victories in the Deep South, the Dixiecrats failed to win a majority of votes outside of these four states. President Truman carried the remaining seven states of the former Confederacy by considerable margins in his surprising victory over New York Governor Thomas Dewey.¹¹

President Truman and the Election of 1948 in North Carolina

The Upper South did not share in the enthusiasm of its Deep South counterparts in supporting the Dixiecrats’ bid to defeat President Truman. Moreover, the Dixiecrat campaign was a total failure outside of their Deep South strongholds. If the Deep South was hostile to Truman, the Upper South welcomed his candidacy with considerably greater enthusiasm.¹² Nineteen forty-eight was a unique year in national politics, as the Dixiecrats ran the first major third-party challenge to the nation’s traditional two-party system since Theodore Roosevelt’s 1912 “Bull Moose” campaign. Similarly, it was anything but politics as usual in North Carolina. Sharing top billing on the North Carolina ballot in 1948 were Truman and Democratic gubernatorial nominee W. Kerr Scott, both far removed from the racial demagoguery of the Dixiecrats. While many in the Deep South responded favorably to the Dixiecrats, North Carolinians countered the rising tide of southern conservatism with a strong vote in favor of

¹⁰ Bartley, *The New South, 1945-1980*, 82.

¹¹ Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt; North Carolina Manual 1951*, 195.

¹² Truman’s greatest electoral success in the South came in North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. However, the percentage of the Democratic vote in each state declined from Roosevelt’s 1944 victory. The GOP vote increased in each state, with the exception of North Carolina, where it declined. The Dixiecrats did not gain a large following in the Upper South, but this election revealed the growing strength of the Republican Party in these states. *North Carolina Manual 1947*, 183; *North Carolina Manual 1951*, 195.

Truman and a rejection of Democratic machine politics. The election of 1948 was a pivotal turning point in North Carolina's political development, with profound implications for the development of two-party politics in the South and the transformation of national politics in the twentieth century.

President Truman prevailed over the Dixiecrats in North Carolina for several reasons. First, Jonathan Daniels of the *Raleigh News and Observer*, the state's leading Democratic journalist, threw his influential support behind Truman. A staunch defender of the Democratic Party, Daniels led the charge against the Dixiecrats, Republicans, and Henry Wallace.¹³ Second, Democratic Party loyalty remained strong in 1948 and the state's political elite refused to back the Dixiecrats. While some Democrats expressed reservations with Truman's civil rights agenda, this was not enough to abandon their traditional allegiance to the Democratic Party. Additionally, there was no groundswell of popular support for the Dixiecrats among the state's voters. Unlike the pro-Dixiecrat states of Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina, the alleged threats posed by Truman's civil rights initiatives did not seem particularly dire, thanks primarily to the New Deal liberalism promoted by Kerr Scott. Finally, Truman and Scott enjoyed great popularity in North Carolina. With Truman and Scott running on the same ticket, this served to emphasize Democratic Party loyalty in an election year that found both the party and the Democratic South under duress.

President Truman had many detractors among southern Democrats, but Jonathan Daniels was not one of them. Daniels emerged as North Carolina's strongest defender of both President Truman and the Democratic Party. He had little room in his heart for the opposition, whether it was the Dixiecrats, Republicans, or Henry Wallace. Through his editorials in the state's leading

¹³ Charles W. Eagles, *Jonathan Daniels and Race Relations: The Evolution of a Southern Liberal* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982), 121-153.

newspaper, the *Raleigh News and Observer*, and his campaign efforts on behalf of the traditional Democratic ticket, Daniels helped preserve party unity in a critical election that found the national Democratic Party under siege in the South.

President Truman's civil rights agenda was the primary reason for the Dixiecrats' bolt from the national Democratic Party. Conservative southern Democrats expressed doubts about their future involvement in a party whose leader promoted federal civil rights legislation. Jonathan Daniels answered this criticism with a strong endorsement of Truman. While a faction of southern Democrats threatened to leave the national party over its civil rights platform, Daniels used Truman's position to hold the party together. Daniels argued that Truman's proposals were less threatening than those promised by Republican presidential nominee Thomas Dewey or Progressive Democratic Party nominee Henry Wallace. It was Dewey who "proposes even more sweeping changes in the field of civil rights" than those favored by Truman, said Daniels.¹⁴ He presented Truman's position as the middle ground between the reactionary conservatism of the Dixiecrats on one hand, and the racial liberalism of Dewey and Wallace on the other. Despite some reservations about Truman's civil rights proposals, Daniels endorsed Truman as "a man whose traditions are Southern" and "a friend of the South," and hardly the radical that the Dixiecrats portrayed him to be.¹⁵

Jonathan Daniels appealed to Democratic Party loyalty in his endorsement of President Truman. While the Dixiecrats believed that they had not left the national Democratic Party as

¹⁴ Eagles, *Jonathan Daniels and Race Relations*, 141; This sentiment is also reflected in John B. Tansil to Governor R. Gregg Cherry, 30 July 1948, in Cherry Papers, General Correspondence, 1945-1949, Subject Files, 1945-1948, Box 52, Folder "Civil Rights" (2), NCSA. Tansil notes that "I must say that I cannot see why the Southerners are showing such hostility toward President Truman and not saying a word against the Republican Party, which has the identically the same attitude."

¹⁵ Eagles, *Jonathan Daniels and Race Relations*, 139.

much as its platform failed to reflect traditional southern values, Daniels bought none of this.¹⁶ He argued that the benefits of bolting the Democratic Party were few. In his opinion, southern Democrats had nothing to gain and everything to lose should the Democratic South split its vote between the three major candidates. Daniels warned that Henry Wallace and Thomas Dewey would be the immediate beneficiaries of a divided Democratic South.¹⁷ As a loyal and influential North Carolina Democrat, Daniels labored to prevent the splintering of the state party. Jonathan Daniels was no doubt aware of the strong Republican sentiment in North Carolina. In 1944, one-third of the state's voters supported Republican presidential nominee Thomas Dewey in his first campaign for the presidency against Roosevelt.¹⁸ While these results were not enough to dethrone the Democratic Party, it nonetheless revealed that the strong Republican sentiment in North Carolina had the potential to upset the balance of power.

Jonathan Daniels recognized the importance of the Democratic Party to the South, for it was through this political party that the South was influential in national politics. The party's resurgence in the 1930s confirmed the region's influence in the national Democratic Party following several decades of Republican dominance in national affairs. Daniels argued forcefully that leaving the Democratic Party would prove disastrous for the South. Under his editorial guidance, the *Raleigh News and Observer* was highly critical of the Thurmond-Wright ticket. Daniels pejoratively labeled the Dixiecrats as "bush league secessionists" who, if

¹⁶ Governor Fielding Wright to Governor R. Gregg Cherry, 22 January 1948, in Governor R. Gregg Cherry Papers, 1945-1949, Addresses, Press Releases, Proclamations, Programs, and Statements, 1945-1948, Box 90, Folder "Records of R. Gregg Cherry, January-February 1948," NCSA. Wright explains to Cherry that while "the Southern States should take some action to defend our rights, I did not advocate secession" from the Democratic Party. Wright's letter epitomizes the major dilemma of the Dixiecrats. Although they did not believe they departed from the Democratic Party, many viewed their actions as such and were reluctant to join the Dixiecrat campaign.

¹⁷ Eagles, *Jonathan Daniels and Race Relations*, 137.

¹⁸ Alexander Heard, *A Two-Party South?* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1952), 54-73; North Carolina *Manual* 1947, 183. In the 1944 presidential election, Roosevelt received 527,399 votes while Dewey collected a total of 263,155 votes, one-third of the total votes cast in the election.

successful in their efforts to depose Truman, would remove the region from “any effective participation in the making of national decisions on the questions of race.”¹⁹ Without the influential voice in national affairs provided by the Democratic Party, the South would cast its future to the mercy of a minority faction of Dixiecrats, Republicans, and Progressive Democrats. For Daniels, like many party stalwarts, this was simply not an acceptable option.

At the 1948 Democratic National Convention, Jonathan Daniels convinced the state delegation to stand in support of President Truman. He declined to join conservative southern Democrats who walked out of the convention in protest of the party’s endorsement of civil rights.²⁰ Although it was unpopular even in some Democratic circles in North Carolina, Daniels campaigned vigorously on Truman’s behalf. Daniels invited Truman to Raleigh just a few weeks before the election and North Carolina Democrats turned out in droves to greet the president. While the Deep South was openly hostile to Truman’s candidacy, North Carolinians welcomed him as their party’s leader. Truman spoke to a crowd of seventy-five thousand on the opening day of the North Carolina State Fair in Raleigh on October 19, appealing for southern Democrats to unite behind their party’s banner, and reminding voters that Republican policies contributed to the Great Depression, but Democrats’ New Deal policies returned prosperity to North Carolina. Truman urged voters not to allow the party’s opponents to benefit from divisions in the Democratic ranks. Without mentioning his Dixiecrats opponents by name, he warned the crowd that a vote for a third-party candidate “is the same as a vote for the Republican candidate.”²¹

¹⁹ Eagles, *Jonathan Daniels and Race Relations*, 137.

²⁰ Eagles, *Jonathan Daniels and Race Relations*, 141.

²¹ *Raleigh News and Observer*, 20 October 1948, NCC Clipping File; *New York Times*, 19 October 1948, 20 October 1948.

President Truman remained in Raleigh for a dedication ceremony in honor of Andrew Jackson, James K. Polk, and Andrew Johnson, three Democratic presidents claimed by North Carolina. Truman attracted fifty thousand spectators to downtown Raleigh where he discussed the crises faced by these individuals while serving in the White House. Truman, fighting for political survival, no doubt pondered his presidential legacy while making this speech. His reelection campaign, the emergence of the Cold War, the atomic age, and the unique challenges these problems posed to the United States led Truman to reflect on his predicament and those of his predecessors. Speaking in front of a friendly Democratic crowd in the South, Truman put these challenges in perspective. “Each of these men did his duty as President of the whole Nation against the forces of pressure and persuasion which sought to make him act as a representative of a part of the Nation only,” said Truman, no doubt taking aim at the sectional Dixiecrat ticket. “Each of them provoked the wrath of some sincere and honest men—which is a serious thing. A President may dismiss the abuse of scoundrels. But to be denounced by honest men honestly outraged is a test of greatness that none but the strongest men have survived.”²²

President Truman’s triumphant visit to Raleigh was a major turning point in his reelection campaign and demonstrated that there remained strong Democratic Party sentiment in the South. According to Jonathan Daniels’s biographer, Truman’s excursion to Raleigh “helped break the political ice in the South for the Democratic candidate and spurred his victory in the state in November.”²³ In the immediate aftermath of his visit, the *Raleigh News and Observer* argued that Truman was not a threat to the South. “President Truman’s visit here must have dispelled one misconception—for all those not determined to retain former impressions. The idea of Harry S. Truman being a foe of the South and the foe of Southerners has always been

²² *Raleigh News and Observer*, 20 October 1948, NCC Clipping File.

²³ Eagles, *Jonathan Daniels and Race Relations*, 141.

fantastic to those who knew him. The idea must be fantastic to thousands of others after Mr. Truman's visit to the State." Regardless of the Dixiecrats' criticisms of Truman, it was evident that North Carolinians did not share these sentiments. "A large majority of North Carolinians have always found that they could best serve their country, their State and themselves within the Democratic Party," said the Daniels-influenced editorial. "It is increasingly clear that a majority of North Carolinians still feel the same way."²⁴ In waging a united front against the Dixiecrats, North Carolina's political leaders reflected the popular sentiment of the state's voters.

Governor R. Gregg Cherry was one of many prominent Democrats who worked to promote Truman's candidacy in 1948. It was due to efforts of Cherry, state Democratic Party leader Capus Waynick, and others that made it possible for the *New York Times* to label North Carolina a "friendly Southern Democratic state" that "seems more certain than any other old-line Southern state to remain faithful to its Democratic Party suitor."²⁵ Although the state constitution preventing him from seeking a second consecutive term in office, Cherry remained a party regular and he recognized the importance of holding the state for Truman and the national Democratic ticket. Although he expressed concerns with elements of Truman's civil rights proposals, Cherry was a loyal party leader and this meant standing by the national party in the midst of a great crisis. He welcomed President Truman to Raleigh and hosted his family in advance of his campaign rally, hardly the actions of a wary southern Democrat seeking political cover.²⁶ This did not have to be the case, however, as anti-Truman Democrats tried to recruit Cherry into their ranks earlier in the year.

²⁴ *Raleigh News and Observer*, 20 October 1948, NCC Clipping File.

²⁵ *New York Times*, 19 October 1948 ["friendly"], 27 October 1948 ["seems more certain"].

²⁶ *New York Times*, 19 October 1948.

Mississippi Governor Fielding attempted to make any potential revolt more palatable to Democrats like Governor Cherry when, responding to news reports claiming he favored seceding from the Democratic Party, he responded that “the Southern States should take some action to protect our rights, but I did not advocate secession.”²⁷ South Carolina Governor Strom Thurmond maintained, “the South’s fight is not being waged on the theory of white supremacy but on state sovereignty.”²⁸ Texas Governor Beauford H. Jester appealed to Governor Cherry that Truman’s civil rights proposals amounted to “flagrant violations of the rights, the customs, and the social and economic well-being of the Southern States.”²⁹ Jester remained convinced that Truman was not a suitable candidate for reelection and encouraged others to draft Dwight Eisenhower for the party’s nomination.³⁰ Alabama Dixiecrat Horace C. Wilkinson urged that Cherry contribute to the establishment of a Southern Bureau in Washington to help “make South-baiting unprofitable, economically and politically” and help the region reassert its influence within the national Democratic Party.³¹

Governor Cherry received a large volume of mail from constituents urging his opposition to the Democratic Party’s civil rights platform. E. H. Gosney warned Cherry that Truman’s anti-segregation proposal makes him unelectable in the South.³² Ella Lucas argued that the civil

²⁷ Governor Fielding Wright to Governor R. Gregg Cherry, 22 January 1948, in Cherry Papers, General Correspondence, 1945-1949, Subject Files, 1945-1948, Box 52, Folder “Civil Rights” (2), NCSA.

²⁸ Governor J. Strom Thurmond to Governor R. Gregg Cherry, 13 April 1948, in Cherry Papers, General Correspondence, 1945-1949, Subject Files, 1945-1948, Box 52, Folder “Civil Rights” (2), NCSA.

²⁹ Governor Beauford H. Jester to Governor R. Gregg Cherry, 20 February 1948, in Cherry Papers, 1945-1949, General Correspondence, 1945-1949, Subject Files, 1945-1948, Box 80, Folder “Southern Governors’ Political Committee,” NCSA.

³⁰ Jester to Cherry, 26 April 1948, in Cherry Papers, 1945-1949, General Correspondence, 1945-1948, Subject Files, 1945-1948, Box 80, Folder “Southern Governors’ Political Committee,” NCSA.

³¹ Horace C. Wilkinson to Governor R. Gregg Cherry, 18 May 1948, in Cherry Papers, General Correspondence, 1945-1949, Subject Files, 1945-1948, Box 79, Folder “Southern Governors’ Conference” (2), NCSA.

rights laws would be “ruinous to the country” and urged that North Carolina oppose Truman.³³ Paul Palmer expressed his disappointment with the vote by the North Carolina delegation at the Democratic National Convention, stating that “the delegates who voted for Truman sold the South...down the river.”³⁴ Henry B. Benoit also regretted the vote in Truman’s favor. “I believe it would have been far better if the North Carolina delegation had stood by the other States of the South instead of splitting the vote,” said Benoit.³⁵ E. L. Henderson opposed Truman’s civil rights bill because, in his opinion, it will result in “a condition [that] will be forced upon us that will be so far removed from the living ideals of the South” and “lead to intermarriage of the races.”³⁶ R. C. Gary described Truman’s legislative proposals “as bad as any raw deal that the Republican Party forced upon us following the Civil War.” To illustrate his disappointment with the Democratic Party, he argued that it would be better for Republican Thomas Dewey to defeat President Truman rather “than support a party that is willing to bite the hand that has fed them through the years.”³⁷ Whether or not he meant to follow through with this and vote for the GOP ticket is less relevant than his use of such strong terms to express his disappointment and anger with the national Democratic Party.

³² E. H. Gosney to Governor R. Gregg Cherry, 9 March 1948, in Cherry Papers, General Correspondence, 1945-1949, Subject Files, 1945-1948, Box 52, Folder “Civil Rights” (2), NCSA.

³³ Ella Lucas to Governor R. Gregg Cherry, 11 March 1948, in Cherry Papers, General Correspondence, 1945-1949, Subject Files, 1945-1948, Box 52, Folder “Civil Rights” (2), NCSA.

³⁴ Paul Palmer to Governor R. Gregg Cherry, 16 July 1948, in Cherry Papers, General Correspondence, 1945-1949, Subject Files, 1945-1948, Box 54, Folder “Democratic State Convention, 1948,” NCSA.

³⁵ Henry B. Benoit to Governor R. Gregg Cherry, 19 July 1948, in Cherry Papers, General Correspondence, 1945-1949, Subject Files, 1945-1948, Box 54, Folder “Democratic State Convention, 1948,” NCSA.

³⁶ E. L. Henderson to Governor R. Gregg Cherry, 20 March 1948, in Cherry Papers, General Correspondence, 1945-1949, Subject Files, 1945-1948, Box 52, Folder “Civil Rights” (2), NCSA.

³⁷ R. C. Gary to Governor R. Gregg Cherry, 12 March 1948, in Cherry Papers, General Correspondence, 1945-1949, Subject Files, 1945-1948, Box 52, Folder “Civil Rights” (2), NCSA.

Despite the occasional missive declaring anti-Truman and pro-Dixiecrat sentiment, there was very little chance for the Dixiecrats to mount an effective campaign in North Carolina. The invitations from Dixiecrats and criticisms of his actions failed to persuade Cherry to join the anti-Truman forces threatening to upset President Truman's reelection campaign. His supporters praised his refusal to abandon the Democratic Party. One called his refusal to support the Dixiecrat walkout at the Democratic National Convention the embodiment of "courage and faith," while another urged Cherry to use his political influence "to reunite the South at a time of national crisis."³⁸ Governor Cherry expressed reservations with President Truman's civil rights platform, but he was not eager to join the Dixiecrats. "As I understand it, Governor Thurmond is opposed to the President's recommendations relative to civil rights. I am equally opposed. Our difference, if any exists, is on the method to be pursued to protect the interests of the citizens of our respective States," stated Governor Cherry.³⁹ Cherry did not intend to involve himself in the battle over civil rights, preferring instead to let the state's congressional delegation handle debate on this controversial issue.⁴⁰ These statements, however, did not mean that he planned to join forces with the anti-Truman faction or reflect widespread pro-Dixiecrat sentiment in North Carolina. He turned down an invitation from Mississippi Governor Fielding Wright to attend the States' Rights Democrats Conference in May 1948, preferring instead to attend the North

³⁸ J. Alfred Robinson, Jr. to Governor R. Gregg Cherry, 17 June 1948 ["courage and faith"], and Garland M. Bynum to Governor R. Gregg Cherry, 18 July 1948 ["reunite the South"], both in Cherry Papers, General Correspondence, 1945-1949, Subject Files, 1945-1948, Box 52, Folder "Civil Rights" (2), NCSA.

³⁹ Governor R. Gregg Cherry to Mr. William Lowndes Daniel, Jr. 11 June 1948, in John William Harden Papers, Folder 1822, "Correspondence, 1948-1951," Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

⁴⁰ Governor R. Gregg Cherry to E.L. Henderson, 22 March 1948, in Cherry Papers, General Correspondence, 1945-1949, Subject Files, 1945-1948, Box 52, Folder "Civil Rights" (2), NCSA.

Carolina Democratic Convention.⁴¹ He also chose not to attend the Dixiecrat convention in Birmingham, Alabama, several months later.⁴²

Despite his suspicions of Truman's civil rights agenda, Cherry, like many of the state's prominent Democrats, never became a vocal anti-Truman southern Democrat. One constituent reminded Cherry of the region's loyalty to the Democratic Party and urged him not to abandon the party, warning him of the fate that befell Furnifold Simmons and Tom Heflin, southern Democrats who broke ranks and endorsed Republican presidential nominee Herbert Hoover in 1928. "Politics makes strange bedfellows, but a Southern Democrat always sleeps in a Democratic bed, even if the covers are short, and no matter what you do to change it, that will always be the rule, and he that breaks it will pay for breaking."⁴³

Governor R. Gregg Cherry's refusal to endorse the Dixiecrat ticket reflected the prevailing mood among the state's Democrats in 1948. Cherry made the decision to remain in the Democratic Party rather than join the Dixiecrat crusade to defeat President Truman. This decision had profound implications for Truman's reelection campaign and the Democratic ticket in North Carolina.⁴⁴ Although President Truman did not enjoy unanimous support from North

⁴¹ Governor R. Gregg Cherry to Governor Fielding Wright, 4 May 1948, in Cherry Papers, General Correspondence, 1945-1949, Subject Files, 1945-1948, Box 52, Folder "Civil Rights" (2), NCSA.

⁴² Mrs. May T. Harris to Governor R. Gregg Cherry, 10 August 1948, in Cherry Papers, General Correspondence, 1945-1949, Subject Files, 1945-1948, Box 52, Folder "Civil Rights" (2), NCSA. Harris expressed disappointment with Cherry's refusal to attend the convention and urged that he join the Dixiecrat revolt. Harris informed Cherry that she was "tired of the treatment of the South has received and have more pride than to follow the national Democratic Party like a meek little lamb."

⁴³ E. Garland Brown to Governor R. Gregg Cherry, 11 May 1948, in Cherry Papers, General Correspondence, 1945-1949, Subject Files, 1945-1948, Box 52, Folder "Civil Rights" (2), NCSA. In 1930, both Heflin and Simmons failed to win reelection to the U.S. Senate as a result of their refusal to endorse Democratic presidential nominee Al Smith in 1928, preferring instead to support Republican Herbert Hoover.

⁴⁴ Governor Kerr Scott, "R. Gregg Cherry's Leadership," in Governor W. Kerr Scott Papers, 1949-1953, Speeches and Progress Reports, Box 197, Folder "Speeches, 1952," NCSA. In 1950, Scott praised former Governor Cherry and the state's delegates to the 1948 Democratic National Convention "for their wise and courageous leadership and effective action in holding North Carolina Democracy firm for party solidarity, thereby laying the foundation for the

Carolinians, his popularity was strong enough to temper the winds of revolt blowing from the Deep South. The primary reason for the Dixiecrats' failure in North Carolina was that they had very little influence in the state Democratic Party, and as a result, could not mount an effective campaign. The Dixiecrats controlled the election machinery in the pro-Dixiecrat strongholds of the Deep South, but not in North Carolina, where it remained under the control of party regulars. As a result, the Thurmond-Wright ticket found it difficult to gain acceptance among the state's election officials, which resulted in a legal battle for recognition on the North Carolina ballot.

States' Rights Democrats presented a petition with more than 18,000 signatures to the State Board of Elections in an effort to compete in the general election. Not surprisingly, the election board refused to accept it, claiming the petition did not follow the board's rules and regulations. Failing to convince the election board, the Dixiecrats then turned to the courts for assistance.⁴⁵ In August 1948, Wake Forest Superior Court Judge W. C. Harris ruled in favor of the Dixiecrats, arguing that the rule imposed by the election board requiring those who signed the petition to have abstained from voting in the primary was "unreasonable," and granted the Dixiecrats' request to appear on the state's ballot.⁴⁶ With his ticket on the ballot, Strom Thurmond expressed his optimism that the Dixiecrats "can carry North Carolina in the general election by a large majority." Demonstrating his loyalty to the Democratic Party, North Carolina Attorney General Harry McMullan took command of the case and immediately appealed the ruling, hoping to keep the Dixiecrats off the ballot and prevent an exodus of Democrats from the party's ranks.⁴⁷ McMullan's appeal failed to sway the North Carolina Supreme Court, which

1948 campaign in which our party, despite defections in other southern states, not only held its own, but actually increased its majority over the Republican opposition."

⁴⁵ Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt*, 146-147; *Washington Post*, 8 August 1948.

⁴⁶ *Raleigh News and Observer*, 21 August 1948, NCC Clipping File.

upheld the lower court's ruling in September 1948, thus affirming the Dixiecrats' place on the state's election ballot.⁴⁸

The States' Rights Democrats won their legal battle two months before the election, but this did not translate into support from the state's Democratic Party leadership, nor lead to an upsurge in popular support for the Dixiecrats. Thurmond's confidence notwithstanding, his third-party ticket never stood a chance to win North Carolina's popular vote due to the state's overwhelming loyalty to the Democratic Party and a political atmosphere hostile to their efforts. In addition, the Republican influence in state politics meant that the Dixiecrats faced not only a powerful and influential state Democratic Party, but also a sizable Republican minority. The large number of votes in favor of Dewey in 1944 meant that disenchanted voters were more likely to support the Republican Party than the Thurmond-Wright ticket.

Governor Cherry's tepid response to the Dixiecrat insurgency meant little unless the state Democratic Party waged a campaign to promote the party ticket. North Carolina Democrats responded to this challenge enthusiastically. Although Jonathan Daniels's pro-Truman editorials in the *Raleigh News and Observer* was a significant component, it was not the entirety of the party's effort to hold the state for the traditional Democratic Party. Capus Waynick, the chair of the state Democratic Party, campaigned fervently on behalf of his party's ticket, and it was largely due to his efforts that North Carolina voted overwhelmingly in favor of the Democratic ticket in 1948.

As state party chair, Capus Waynick was acutely aware that North Carolina had the potential to be an important battleground state because of the strength of the state Republican Party. To illustrate the state's significance for the party, Republican Senator Robert A. Taft

⁴⁷ *Raleigh News and Observer*, 21 August 1948, NCC Clipping File.

⁴⁸ Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt*, 147.

campaigning in North Carolina on behalf of Thomas Dewey, and Taft likely made few visits to the South in 1948.⁴⁹ Along with Tennessee and Virginia, North Carolina was one of the few hospitable environments for the Republican Party in the South. The state Republican Party opened an office in Raleigh, far away from its traditional stronghold in the foothills and mountains.⁵⁰ The fact that Thomas Dewey received one-third of the state's popular vote in 1944 emboldened the state Republican Party to expand its operations in the hopes that it could make an even stronger showing in 1948. For North Carolina's Democrats, the major threat in 1948 came not from the Dixiecrats, but rather the Republicans' influence. The job of preventing a breach in the Democratic Party ranks fell on Waynick, who worked tirelessly against the Dixiecrats and the Republicans to hold the state for Truman.

Capus Waynick launched a grassroots effort to increase Democratic turnout to counteract votes in favor of the Dixiecrats and Republicans, hoping to bring one million Democrats to the polls.⁵¹ Waynick rounded up reluctant Democrats to campaign for the Truman-headlined party ticket. He challenged Senator Hoey to campaign for the Democrat ticket, notwithstanding his vocal opposition to Truman's civil rights proposals. Waynick reassured Hoey that he had nothing to lose by campaigning because "you're not on the ticket this year." Waynick convinced Democratic gubernatorial nominee Kerr Scott, notoriously reluctant to mention Truman's name on the campaign trail, to record a radio advertisement on Truman's behalf. According to Waynick, Scott "didn't want to fool with an unpopular situation" and hoped to distance himself from the national Democratic ticket.⁵² North Carolina Democrats' efforts to carry the state for

⁴⁹ *New York Times*, 2 June 1948, 31 October 1948.

⁵⁰ *New York Times*, 27 October 1948. NC GOP leaders predicted that Dewey would receive 325,000 votes on Election Day, a significant improvement over its impressive showing in 1944.

⁵¹ *New York Times*, 27 October 1948, 31 October 1948.

President Truman paid off considerably in 1948 as Truman won North Carolina convincingly with fifty-eight percent of the popular vote. The Dixiecrats, on the other hand, received less than nine percent, with North Carolina giving the Thurmond-Wright ticket its smallest vote total in the South.⁵³ Kerr Scott's apprehensions about Truman's ability to compete in the state without hurting other Democrats on the ballot turned out to be needless, as Truman and Scott headlined a banner year for the Democratic Party in North Carolina.

Kerr Scott and the 1948 Gubernatorial Election in North Carolina

In 1936, W. Kerr Scott, a dairy farmer with deep roots in Alamance County, North Carolina, won election as state Secretary of Agriculture, an influential and powerful position in a state that remained predominantly rural and poor. Scott's election victory was significant because he did not represent the banking and textile interests closely linked to the Shelby Dynasty, the state's leading political machine. Nor was Scott a neophyte whose selection fulfilled a political debt so common in machine politics. As a New Deal Democrat during the early 1930s, Scott traveled the state during the Great Depression to help alleviate the terrible suffering in rural farm communities. His responsibilities included slowing the rate of farm foreclosures by promoting bank loans made possible through New Deal legislation. Scott witnessed firsthand the misery of rural life while also helping many save their farms through federal assistance. It was during this time that Scott recognized the need to modernize the state

⁵² Interview with Capus Waynick by Bill Finger, 2/4/1974, (A-332-1), in the Southern Oral History Program Collection, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill [Hereafter cited as SOHP]; *New York Times*, 20 October 1948. The *Times* reported that Scott "has not mentioned the President by name in his campaign speeches" but nonetheless appeared for Truman's visit to Raleigh, where he "came up for a handshake with Mr. Truman."

⁵³ Truman received 459,070 (58%), Dewey captured one-third of the state's total votes with 258,272 (33%), and the Dixiecrats 69,652 (8.8%). Dewey captured only Florida (34%), Tennessee (37%), and Virginia (41%) with a greater percentage of the vote than he received in North Carolina. By way of comparison, the Dixiecrats won outright majorities in Alabama (80%), Louisiana (49%), Mississippi (87%), and South Carolina (72%). Truman won a majority or a plurality of the votes in Arkansas (62%), Florida (49%), Georgia (61%), North Carolina (58%), Tennessee (49%), Texas (65%), and Virginia (48%); *North Carolina Manual* 1951, 195.

through governmental intervention. Like many New Deal Democrats, Scott believed in the potential for government to improve the lives of its citizens struggling through no fault of their own.⁵⁴ In contrast to the anti-New Deal conservatism that characterized the Shelby Dynasty, Scott worked to expand federal programs to benefit the state's rural population. While the Shelby Dynasty paid mere lip service to President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal policies, Scott put them into action. Most importantly, Scott used this experience to build a grassroots political base of rural voters, particularly those largely ignored by the pro-business Shelby machine. His agricultural experience and extensive knowledge of the problems facing rural North Carolinians became his greatest political asset, much to the detriment of the Shelby Dynasty.

In 1948, Kerr Scott launched an insurgent gubernatorial campaign against the Shelby Dynasty. Following in the tradition of progressive Democratic candidates Richard Fountain and Ralph McDonald, Scott began an uphill struggle to depose the state's dominant political machine. Scott benefited from these earlier efforts to challenge the Shelby Dynasty. While ultimately unsuccessful, these campaigns weakened the foundation of the Shelby Dynasty, thus making Scott's effort to challenge the entrenched conservative Democratic elite considerably easier.⁵⁵ Despite serving three terms as Secretary of Agriculture, Scott was essentially a political outsider lacking the support of the state's political leadership, much like the progressive Democrats who blazed the path for his candidacy. He may have been a prominent and influential member of state government, but Scott was not part of the political and business elite who dominated the machine. As such, few political observers took his campaign seriously.

⁵⁴ Rob Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics: The Personalities, Elections, and Events that Shaped Modern North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 112-113; William D. Snider, "The Scotts of Haw River," in Howard E. Covington, Jr. and Marion A. Ellis, eds., *The North Carolina Century: Tar Heels Who Made a Difference, 1900-2000* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 518-522.

⁵⁵ Rob Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics: The Personalities, Elections, and Events that Shaped Modern North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 112-113.

Shelby Dynasty loyalist and former Governor J. C. B. Ehringhaus told state Democratic Party chair and Scott campaign manager Capus Waynick that “he [Scott] hasn’t a chance in a thousand.”⁵⁶ His comments reflected the reality of campaigning against a powerful political machine in the Democratic South. Although the Shelby Dynasty weathered a series of challenges since its inception, the governor’s office was the one political office in North Carolina where the conservative faction consistently defeated its progressive opponents. Unlike Richard Fountain and Ralph McDonald, however, Scott succeeded where his predecessors failed.

The postwar South was ripe for change and Kerr Scott put the Shelby Dynasty on notice as he carried this banner all the way to the governor’s mansion. Like his predecessors, Scott campaigned as an economic populist, attacking the economic oligarchy that dominated state politics to the disadvantage of the state’s citizens. Scott was well ware of the importance of corporate influence in state politics, using it to his advantage as he took on the unenviable challenge of taking on the full resources of the Shelby Dynasty. During the primary campaign, Scott was unrelenting in his attacks on the machine candidate, state Treasurer Charles M. Johnson, and his close relationship with corporate interests, particularly the state’s banking and textile industries.⁵⁷ Not content to criticize the status quo, Scott promoted education reform, improving the state’s public health services, and abolishing the restaurant sales tax.⁵⁸ Scott presented his candidacy as a genuine alternative to machine politics. He understood that North Carolinians wanted something more than what the Shelby Dynasty provided them, and he attacked the machine’s record and its failure to include the state’s citizens in its policy-making

⁵⁶ Interview with Capus Waynick by Bill Finger, 2/4/1974, (A-322-1), SOHP.

⁵⁷ Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 114.

⁵⁸ *Asheville Citizen-Times*, 31 October 1948, NCC Clipping File.

decisions. Kerr Scott's devastating criticisms of corporate influence in state government were the most important element of his campaign against the entrenched political machine.

Demonstrating the strength of party politics and factionalism in North Carolina, none of the five gubernatorial candidates won a majority of the votes in the Democratic gubernatorial primary. State Treasurer Charles M. Johnson, the machine candidate, emerged with only a plurality of the voters, thus requiring a runoff election for the third time since 1932. This confirmed the declining influence of the Shelby Dynasty, for a truly dominant political machine selected its candidates and used their control of party machinery to eliminate potential opposition without the need for a runoff election. The state Democratic Party, however, was far too vibrant and contained too many factional rivalries for the Gardner machine to preserve party unity when faced with a strong primary challenger. In addition, the forces unleashed by the New Deal and Second World War threatened to undermine the profoundly anti-democratic political machines that dominated the South. Kerr Scott defeated Charles M. Johnson in the runoff election to effectively end the Shelby Dynasty's reign as the state's leading political machine.⁵⁹ Scott's huge upset of Johnson was not as much a victory over a candidate as it was the defeat of an influential and powerful political machine. In the general election, Kerr Scott received more votes than did President Truman, proving that while Truman was popular enough to carry the state, Scott's candidacy also brought Democrats to the polls.⁶⁰ As Ralph Scott later described his

⁵⁹ This primary demonstrated the competitive nature of North Carolina politics in the one-party system. Johnson won the first primary with 170,141 votes to Scott's 161,293. In a crowded field of five candidates, however, Johnson won only a plurality of the voters. Scott convincingly defeated Johnson in the second primary 217,620 to 182,684. Scott then crushed Republican gubernatorial nominee George M. Pritchard 570,995 (73.5%) to 206,166 (26.5%); *New York Times*, 28 June 1948; *Washington Post*, 28 June 1948, *North Carolina Manual* 1951, 214-215; *Raleigh News and Observer*, 28 June 1948, NCC Clipping File.

⁶⁰ Kerr Scott captured 570,995 votes compared to Truman's 459,070. In addition, Scott's Republican opponent in the general election, George M. Pritchard, received only 206,166 votes. Thomas Dewey, on the other hand, won 258,572, approximately 52,000 more votes than Pritchard.

brother's landmark campaign: "He [may] just as well have been a Republican or something, because see, he's the one that broke up the machine, as they call it."⁶¹

Kerr Scott dethroned the Shelby Dynasty for a number of reasons. First, voters weary of the unresponsive, conservative political machines responded enthusiastically to his fiery brand of economic populism. Scott built a grassroots base of support among rural farmers and campaigned on a platform of expanding the Fair Deal.⁶² Scott was the political embodiment of New Deal liberalism in a state where the reigning political machine stood diametrically opposed to this ideology. Scott's popularity helped President Truman win the state, as the rural voters who supported Scott's economic ideology were unlikely to also cast a vote for the Dixiecrats, whose political platform did not reflect their interests. Scott's grassroots supporters did not want to hear about racial anxieties and threats to their freedom due to the expansion of federal power. Rather, they wanted solutions to problems facing rural farmers, such as the lack of electricity, paved roads, and telephone service. The absence of a coherent platform appealing to rural farmers, combined with the strong party loyalty displayed by the state's Democratic leaders, doomed the Dixiecrats in North Carolina. Rather, it was progressive Democrat Kerr Scott whose grassroots political base triumphed over the Shelby Dynasty and the Dixiecrats.⁶³ Following several decades of conservative rule by the Simmons and Shelby political machines, Scott provided progressive Democrats with the opportunity to elect one of their own. Scott provided leadership to a progressive faction that lacked guidance and organization. Second, Scott promoted an increase in public school expenditures, reducing class size, and encouraging school

⁶¹ Interview with Ralph Scott by Jack Bass, 20 December 1973, (A-141), SOHP. The Shelby Dynasty withstood several challenges in the two decades of its existence, but Kerr Scott was the first to unseat this political machine.

⁶² On Scott's support for the Fair Deal, see Numan V. Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance: Race and Politics in the South during the 1950s* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), 57.

⁶³ Bartley, *The New South*, 214. According to Bartley, Kerr Scott's election "established a more liberal and rurally oriented faction to compete against the regular organization."

construction. This was merely a prelude to his proposal to modernize North Carolina. Third, Scott used his political platform to bring together rural farmers, along with conservative and progressive Democrats, including some corporate leaders whose traditional loyalty was to the Shelby Dynasty. What united these disparate interests was Scott's ambitious reform agenda, which had the potential to benefit rural farmers and corporations alike.⁶⁴ Finally, Scott emerged at a pivotal time in southern politics in which liberal Democrats enjoyed considerable influence before the politics of race triumphed over southern liberalism in the 1950s. Scott was one of many liberal Democrats elected governor or to the U.S. Senate between 1948 and 1950. Lyndon Baines Johnson of Texas, Estes Kefauver of Tennessee, Louisiana's Earl Long, and Sidney McMath of Arkansas all defeated conservative opponents in the party primary. According to historian Numan V. Bartley, these elections demonstrated the potential for a liberal alternative to the conservative Dixiecrats and "checked the drift of southern politics away from race and reaction."⁶⁵

As governor of North Carolina, Kerr Scott cemented his liberal populist credentials and with his emphasis on reforms and economic development, created the foundation of the modernizer wing of the contemporary Democratic Party. Scott did not cease his criticisms of the state's business interests after winning the election, but rather increased his populist rhetoric in an effort to distinguish his administration's governing philosophy from his predecessors. Scott reached out to labor, which backed his candidacy, when he announced his opposition to the Anti-Closed Shop Act, legislation that made union organizing an increasingly difficult endeavor in a

⁶⁴ Interview with Governor James B. Hunt by Daniel Menestres, 24 June 2008. In discussing Kerr Scott's influence on North Carolina politics and the Democratic Party, Hunt stated that Scott "broke through" and defeated the Shelby Dynasty through "his strong connection to rural North Carolina."

⁶⁵ Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance*, 40.

right-to-work state.⁶⁶ When his proposed gas tax ran into opposition from the oil industry, Scott went on the offensive, declaring that the “oil monopoly, headed out of New York, will not be allowed to push our people in the mud.”⁶⁷ Scott encouraged electrical and telephone providers to expand their services into the under-represented rural areas, arguing that these were “not luxuries...but necessities” for the state’s farmers.⁶⁸ Scott proved that his populist rhetoric was not the campaign tactic of a political opportunist hoping to prolong the misrule of the political machines, and that his greatest political triumph was not his surprise election victory, but rather his achievements as governor. While running for office, Scott promised his supporters not only change, but also pledged to get results, which he delivered in unprecedented accomplishments.

If his populist rhetoric was not enough to distinguish Kerr Scott’s ideology from that of his predecessors, his “Go Forward” program marked a decisive break with the conservative economic policies of the Simmons and Shelby machines that benefited corporate interests at the expense of the state’s citizens. A significant part of his plan for modernizing the state, the “Go Forward” program included paving rural roads across the state, as well as overseeing the expansion of rural electrical and telephone service. Scott did not sell the program as beneficial to business interests, but rather as a plan to benefit the entire state. “Good roads, good schools, and the modern conveniences of the machine age should be brought within reach of all of our people,” said Governor Scott, “regardless of where they live in town or country.” He argued for the benefits of these improvements, “[by] extending these services to people who have been without them, North Carolina is, at the same time, stimulating even greater development of her industrial and agricultural potential.” Scott promoted his agenda as a rural improvement plan,

⁶⁶ Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 116; *Wall Street Journal*, 24 February 1949.

⁶⁷ Scott quoted in Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 118.

⁶⁸ *Atlanta Daily World*, 17 December 1948.

both improving the quality of rural life and facilitating the transportation of agricultural products from farm to market, and as a plan to modernize the state. The rural vote not only made it possible for Scott to break the stranglehold of the political machines, but also provided him with a popular mandate. He rewarded rural voters handsomely with these improvements. However, the road paving projects and rural electrical and telephone service were not simply political rewards. Rather, this massive public improvements project prepared the state for the new era of the “Atomic Age which demands dispersal of industry and population.”⁶⁹

In true populist fashion, Governor Kerr Scott campaigned across the state to promote a public referendum to issue road bonds to pay for the paving project. He made numerous stops to preach his message of modernization to constituents, who overwhelmingly supported his plan. Kerr Scott had few friends in the General Assembly, which he believed to be under the influence of corporate interests tied to the Gardner machine. In promoting the road bonds, Scott took the campaign directly to the voters through radio campaigns and public rallies, thus bypassing the General Assembly entirely. “I regard a comprehensive educational program, properly implemented with road, health, and utilities programs, as the soundest insurance policy the State of North Carolina can underwrite for the protection of its future,” said Scott.⁷⁰ Scott’s election victory meant nothing unless he had the backing of the state’s citizens to help fund his proposals. In 1948, rural voters gave Scott a popular mandate to change the policies of state government and the following year, he hoped to begin the process of carrying out his mandate with or without legislative support. In June 1949, his rural supporters approved the issuance of \$200 million in road bonds to implement his policies, a vote which allowed the state to pave more

⁶⁹ Scott quoted in *Raleigh News and Observer*, 7 January 1950, NCC Clipping File; *Atlanta Daily World*, 31 August 1949. Scott emphasized the need to expand rural electrical service to provide a suitable foundation for industrial development in North Carolina.

⁷⁰ Scott quoted in *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 29 May 1949, NCC Clipping File.

roads under the Scott administration than all of his predecessors combined. The referendum approved the paving of 12,000 miles of rural roads, with an all-weather surface added to an additional 35,000 miles of the state's roadways. Also approved by voters was a \$25 million referendum for school construction, financed through the same one cent per gallon gasoline tax as the road bonds.⁷¹

The *Raleigh News and Observer* praised Scott's progress as leader: "seldom has any Governor of North Carolina been able to report as much progress in the first year of his administration."⁷² For nearly two decades, the conservative constraints of the Shelby Dynasty prevented the state from receiving its full share of federal largesse.⁷³ Scott inherited the postwar economy, and he made clear his intentions of creating an activist government responsive to the needs of its citizens. This issue, perhaps more than anything, separated Scott's leadership from the failures of his predecessors.

Kerr Scott also distinguished himself from his predecessors and contemporaries in his refusal to engage in race-baiting to prominent among southern Democrats, especially those of the populist variety. Scott paid little attention to the race issue, as he devoted his attention to the considerable effort necessary to modernize North Carolina. He could afford to ignore the race issue early in his term, largely because he did not use race-baiting tactics to win election, focusing instead on the economic populism that brought him to power. Additionally, the use of

⁷¹ *Wall Street Journal*, 6 June 1949; *Washington Post*, 12 June 1949; *New York Times*, 5 June 1949, 15 July 1949; Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 118-119; Jim Hunt called Kerr Scott's election "a clear mandate to pave roads and take electricity to communities and even though he faced a fairly hostile legislature, they recognized the mandate he had and they went along." Interview with James B. Hunt by Jack D. Fler, 8/15/2001, (C-0331), SOHP.

⁷² *Raleigh News and Observer*, 3 January 1950, NCC Clipping File.

⁷³ Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt*, 99.

racial politics by the Dixiecrats failed to resonate with the North Carolina's voters, and therefore made this issue considerably less prominent than Scott's economic platform.

In an endorsement that would have been almost unthinkable under any previous administration, Scott earned considerable praise from the state's leading African-American newspaper. In 1949, the *Carolina Times* praised Scott's intention to increase "Negro representation on state policymaking groups and his further indication that he wants to give the race a greater share of the benefits of democracy."⁷⁴ The Greensboro *Daily News* praised his courage and called his stand on racial discrimination "the antithesis of demagoguery."⁷⁵ Accordingly, Scott appointed the first African-American, Dr. Harold L. Trigg, to the State Board of Education. This decision earned Scott a commendation from the Southern Regional Council, a progressive organization devoted to combating racial inequality. Scott demonstrated a more proactive understanding of the race problem than some of his more reactionary contemporaries. "I'm firmly convinced that we've got to go ahead and meet the issue of the minority race," pledged Scott just days after taking office. "They came here against their will, brought in chains."⁷⁶ Later, Scott worked to defuse the threat posed by the Ku Klux Klan in North Carolina by using state law enforcement agencies to arrest offenders and prosecute acts of racial violence, declaring: "there is no such place in North Carolina for the Ku Klux Klan."⁷⁷ In 1951, Kerr Scott made it abundantly clear that he had no plans to support the increasingly hostile rhetoric from

⁷⁴ *Carolina Times*, 6 March 1949, NCC Clipping File.

⁷⁵ *Greensboro Daily News* 12 August 1950, NCC Clipping File.

⁷⁶ *Chicago Defender*, 18 June 1949 [Southern Regional Council]; *Christian Science Monitor*, 14 June 1949; *New York Times*, 3 July 1949; *Atlanta Daily World*, 30 June 1949 [Trigg]; *Washington Post*, 15 January 1949; *Raleigh News and Observer*, 15 January 1949; *Chicago Defender*, 26 May 1951 [list of appointments of African-Americans by Kerr Scott]; Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 119.

⁷⁷ *Atlanta Daily World*, 19 August 1951, 26 August 1951, 28 August 1951; *Washington Post*, 21 May 1952; Scott quoted in Governor W. Kerr Scott to Carl H. King, Jr., 7 May 1952, in Governor W. Kerr Scott Papers, 1949-1953, Subject File, 1952, Box 123, Folder "Ku Klux Klan," NCSA.

southern Governors James Byrnes, Eugene Talmadge, and Fielding Wright, who threatened to close the state's public schools in order to preserve segregation. "The Negro didn't come here by his own choice. It is our responsibility to education him," said Scott.⁷⁸ Despite his best intentions in confronting race relations in North Carolina, the divisive racial issue so prevalent in southern politics soon reared its ugly head and dominated the state's political headlines in 1950.

Kerr Scott, Frank Porter Graham, and the 1950 Senate Race

Kerr Scott's election victory contributed significantly to the growth of Democratic Party factionalism in North Carolina. Although the Shelby Dynasty's grasp on state politics often proved tenuous for a political machine, the conservative business interests remained powerful and enjoyed the resources, financial and political, to attempt to fend off any challenges to its dominance. Scott's leadership expanded progressive Democrats' influence in state politics and made it a viable political faction within the state party. Scott's political base, comprised primarily of farmers and rural agricultural interests, stood in stark contrast to the conservative faction's urban business leaders. Economics, rather than the politics of race, was the source of the major ideological divisions within the state Democratic Party in the mid-twentieth century.⁷⁹

Shortly after Kerr Scott took office in January 1949, the death of former governor and recently elected-Senator J. Melville Broughton presented term-limited Governor Scott with a unique opportunity to expand his political influence in both North Carolina and Washington. In March 1949, Governor Scott selected Frank Porter Graham, the President of the University of

⁷⁸ *Chicago Defender*, 26 May 1951.

⁷⁹ Dewey M. Grantham, *The Life and Death of the Solid South: A Political History* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1988), 131; Numan V. Bartley and Hugh Davis Graham, *Southern Politics and the Second Reconstruction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), 46.

North Carolina at Chapel Hill, to succeed the late J. Melville Broughton in the U.S. Senate.⁸⁰

This was only an interim appointment, however, with a special election scheduled in 1950 to determine if Graham would serve the remainder of Broughton's term. Graham's selection took the state by surprise, with many expecting Scott to appoint a seasoned political veteran like Capus Waynick. "It was generally assumed that Scott would appoint me to the Senate," said Waynick. "I'd have made a better senator, but I'm certainly not a better man. Because Frank Graham was a great-hearted man. Frank was a Scotch Covenanter looking for a place to be burned at the stake."⁸¹

Frank Porter Graham was the first genuine liberal to represent North Carolina in the U.S. Senate since the creation of the one-party system. Prior to Kerr Scott's election in 1948, progressive Democrats rarely achieved meaningful political influence. Conservative Democrats such as Senators Josiah Bailey and Clyde Hoey were most influential at the national level. While Scott was a liberal southern Democrat and quintessential populist, Graham was much more of a social activist than a politician. His service on President Truman's Commission on Civil Rights left Graham more closely aligned with Harry Truman and the national Democratic Party than Kerr Scott. Through his involvement with humanitarian causes and civil rights organizations, such as his term as president of the Southern Conference on Human Welfare, Graham earned a reputation as a radical, a dangerous label in a conservative state. In 1934, for example, Graham ruffled many feathers with his public support of Alton Lawrence, a former student arrested in connection with the textile workers' strike. What stirred the most outrage,

⁸⁰ *New York Times*, 23 March 1949, 25 March 1949, 27 March 1949; *Atlanta Daily World*, 27 March 1949; *Wall Street Journal*, 23 March 1949.

⁸¹ Interview with Capus Waynick by Bill Finger, 2/4/74, (A-332-1), SOHP.

however, was that Lawrence was the secretary of the state Socialist Party.⁸² Not surprisingly, Graham carried a significant amount of political baggage due to this incident and his past relationship with various left-leaning groups.

The state's newspapers both praised and criticized Graham's selection, with a majority approving the appointment. Like Kerr Scott, Frank Porter Graham earned considerable acclaim from African-American newspapers. The *Atlanta Daily World*, for example, praised Scott's selection of "a man so high a caliber as Dr. Graham," observing that "liberalism and progress, with which the Negro cause is inseparably tied in, has a great friend in Dr. Graham."⁸³ Conservative opposition to Graham, limited primarily to a few newspapers and letters sent to Governor Scott, was not particularly overwhelming. Although some expressed their displeasure with the selection, the acclaim overshadowed the disapproval. Senator Clyde Hoey, a conservative Democrat, defended Graham's selection as the state's junior senator while conceding that Graham "has sometimes been too lax" in allowing the use of his name by certain organizations.⁸⁴

While voters gave Scott a popular mandate in 1948 to promote his reform agenda, North Carolinians received Graham's selection with both surprise and dismay. However, there was no immediate anti-Graham groundswell, as voters largely supported Scott's choice. Because it was an interim appointment, Graham's rise to the U.S. Senate was not the result of a popular mandate, as voters did not elect him to this position, thus making his prospects for a long-term Senate career more precarious than a popularly elected conservative such as Clyde Hoey.

⁸² Julian M. Pleasants and Augustus M. Burns III, *Frank Porter Graham and the 1950 Senate Race in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 5-30, esp., 24. This important volume examines the Graham's appointment to the Senate and the 1950 campaign in greater detail than is possible to do here. See also Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 122-123.

⁸³ *Atlanta Daily World*. 27 March 1949.

⁸⁴ Pleasants and Burns, *Frank Porter Graham*, 31-45; Hoey quoted on p. 39.

Regardless, Kerr Scott believed that his popularity and political organization had the ability to forestall any potential opposition in the upcoming Senate primary.⁸⁵ Unfortunately, national politics shifted even further away from the liberalism to which both Graham and Scott subscribed. The rising anti-communist hysteria, the politics of civil rights, and President Truman's growing unpopularity less than two years after his triumphant election, combined to create a political climate throughout North Carolina and the South vastly different from that which carried Scott and Truman to victory two years earlier.⁸⁶ In 1948, President Truman's civil rights proposals provoked great furor among conservative southern Democrats. Although this did not translate into popular support for the Dixiecrats in North Carolina, the politics of civil rights remained a hot-button issue, both in the South and Congress. Most importantly, anti-civil rights crusaders reminded voters that Congress made the final decision over any proposed federal civil rights legislation, thus making Graham's appointment a source of concern for conservatives.

Despite Kerr Scott's hope that Graham's selection would not provoke opposition in the Democratic primary, this was not to be the case. In 1950, Willis Smith, a Raleigh lawyer and past president of the American Bar Association, announced his intention to challenge Graham to serve the full six-year Senate term. As a conservative Democrat, Smith closely reflected the prevailing sentiment of the state's traditional Democratic Party establishment. Smith stood to the right of Graham and Scott, the most visible symbols of North Carolina's liberal minority in the late 1940s. Like the fierce political campaigns of the previous decades, the Graham-Smith primary reflected the tremendous Democratic factionalism that produced many political battles between the party's conservative and progressive factions. Kerr Scott's upset victory in 1948

⁸⁵ Pleasants and Burns, *Frank Porter Graham*, 47.

⁸⁶ Bartley, *The New South*, 1-104, 147-222; Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance*, 3-46; Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt*, 187-238.

ended the rule of the Shelby Dynasty, but not the conservative faction, which regrouped to wage continued political warfare against its progressive rival.

Willis Smith benefited from several developments that greatly aided his Senate campaign. B. Everett Jordan, an unofficial Smith supporter, assumed the leadership of the state Democratic Party, replacing pro-Scott chair Capus Waynick. Unlike Kerr Scott and Frank Porter Graham, Smith enjoyed significant support from the state's lawyers and business leaders, in particular the textile industry and state public utilities chairman Louis V. Sutton, whom Governor Kerr Scott once publicly mocked as "Low Voltage Sutton."⁸⁷ Scott's troubled relationship with conservative business interests gave them little reason to support Graham's bid for the Senate in 1950. *Raleigh News and Observer* editor and pro-Scott Jonathan Daniels viewed the Graham-Smith primary as an ominous sign of the growing influence of anti-Truman southern conservatism.⁸⁸ Conservative Democrats rallied behind Willis Smith's candidacy, knowing that a Graham victory had tremendous implications for Truman's civil rights agenda. Not surprisingly, the politics of race and civil rights figured prominently in the Senate primary.

Despite the subsequent entries of former Senator Robert Rice Reynolds (1933-1945) and Olla Ray Boyd into the Democratic Senate primary, Frank Porter Graham and Willis Smith remained the most prominent candidates. The media attention focused almost entirely on Graham and Smith to the detriment of Boyd and Reynolds. The primary campaign featured a series of attacks against Frank Porter Graham by Willis Smith that brought attention to Graham's racial liberalism and left-leaning proclivities, which immediately put Graham on the defensive. For much of the primary, Graham spent more time defending his reputation than he did attacking

⁸⁷ Pleasants and Burns, *Frank Porter Graham*, 74; Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 119 ["low voltage"].

⁸⁸ Pleasants and Burns, *Frank Porter Graham*, 76.

his opponent. At a time of great upheaval throughout the South, the forces of conservatism and progressivism that clashed for decades in a bid to determine which faction would have the greatest influence in state, regional, and national politics. The campaign represented in microcosm many of the issues facing the United States immediately after the Second World War: race, civil rights, and the communist hysteria sweeping the nation.

Willis Smith attacked Graham's work with President Truman's Committee on Civil Rights, his support for the Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC), and his support for what Smith termed the "planned state," increased federal intervention in the form of socialist government. "The blueprint of socialism is already emerging from the drawing boards of the planners," Smith argued in his campaign platform, accusing Graham of being one of the key participants in President Truman's plan to encourage the expansion of the federal government in the form of civil rights legislation and employment equality laws. Smith used Graham's association with left-wing social activist groups, in particular those appearing on a federal government watch list of potential subversive organizations, to question his loyalty to the United States.⁸⁹

Willis Smith portrayed Graham as being out-of-touch with the typical North Carolinian, those who "do not favor ultra-liberals or left wingers...but rather they prefer a sound and safe policy in our government which varies neither to the extreme left nor to the extreme right." Smith emphasized national defense as "the fundamental basic issue of interest" and raised the specter of a potential threat to national security posed by the Soviet agents in the United States, using FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover's assessment detailing the presence of "54,000 spies and agents...more than 540,000 Communists and three to five million aliens" living in the United

⁸⁹ *Washington Post*, 28 April 1950; The House Un-American Activities Committee declared the SCHW to be a Communist front organization in 1944 and 1947; Pleasants and Burns, *Frank Porter Graham*, 169.

States. Smith argued that Graham's past involvement with groups deemed to be threats to national security made his fitness for office suspect. Graham responded, "I have been called a Communist by some sincere people. I have been called a spokesman for American capitalism by Communists and have been repeatedly called a tool of imperialism by...Moscow. I shall continue to fight against Ku Kluxism, imperialism, fascism and Communism, whether in America [or] Indonesia."⁹⁰

The Smith campaign and its surrogates did not shy away from using race as a campaign issue. During the course of the primary, a series of campaign advertisements warned voters of the threats to racial segregation and the South should Frank Porter Graham return to the U.S. Senate. These included a postcard of dubious authenticity allegedly sent by NAACP Director Walter White telling the state's voters that Graham "has done much to advance the Negro in North Carolina."⁹¹ One advertisement foretold a repeat of Reconstruction, complete with blacks regaining political power. Yet another argued that Frank Porter Graham's election supported miscegenation between black men and white women, complete with an image of African-American soldiers dancing with white women during the Second World War.⁹² Despite these tactics in the primary, the politics of race was not the overwhelming or defining issue of the campaign.

Willis Smith's attacks on Graham's involvement with civil rights groups and other suspicious organizations did considerably damage, but they did not determine the outcome of the primary. On May 27, 1950, Graham emerged as the frontrunner with a plurality of the votes.

⁹⁰ *Raleigh News and Observer*, 21 May 1950, NCC Clipping File; Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 136.

⁹¹ Pleasants and Burns, *Frank Porter Graham*, 176.

⁹² Pleasants and Burns, *Frank Porter Graham*, 174.

Graham captured 303,605 (48%) votes compared to Smith's 250,111 (40.5%), Reynolds's 58,752 (9.3%), and Boyd's 5,900 (1.3%).⁹³ More than six-hundred thousand voters turned out for his primary, a surprisingly large number that revealed the campaign's importance to the state's citizens. Graham was less than six-thousand votes from winning an outright majority in the primary. Although the race issue did not carry Smith to victory, it likely swayed enough votes away from Graham to ensure that he did not win a majority. On June 7, Willis Smith called for a runoff, with the final vote set for June 24. Smith and Graham had seventeen days to make their cases to the state's voters.

The issue of segregation and maintaining the South's racial hierarchy loomed large in the Graham-Smith campaign, particularly in the aftermath of Truman's civil rights proposals. Willis Smith made his case to voters by promising to uphold segregation against President Truman's civil rights initiatives and standing as a bulwark against the forces of civil rights activism that threatened to undermine the South. The segregation issue was important, but hardly the defining issue of the primary. Smith's attacks on Graham's involvement with liberal groups often contained the underlying insinuation about his liberal position on civil rights and segregation, but this was just one of several issues. Following the primary, a series of civil rights-related decisions issued by the United States Supreme Court pushed the politics of race back to the forefront of southern politics.

On June 5, 1950, the United States Supreme Court issued a unanimous decision in *Sweatt v. Painter*. The Court ruled that the University of Texas Law School could not deny admissions to the plaintiff, Heman Marion Sweatt, despite the availability of a separate black law school established at Prairie View Agricultural and Mechanical University. Chief Justice Fred Vinson declared that the black law school was not equal to the whites-only University of Texas Law

⁹³ *North Carolina Manual* 1950, 236.

School. In this case, the Court expanded the understanding of the “separate but equal” concept so that it now applied to racially segregated, state-supported law schools. In *McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents*, the Court declared illegal the segregationist-style restrictions placed on black graduate student G.W. McLaurin at the University of Oklahoma. In the third case, *Henderson v. United States*, the Court declared illegal the practice of segregating blacks and whites in railroad dining cars.⁹⁴ It is important to note that while none of these decisions declared illegal the practice of racial segregation, these rulings nonetheless alarmed conservative southern Democrats to the decline of legally sanctioned segregation. Most importantly, these rulings pushed Willis Smith’s conservative supporters into action, and they convinced a reluctant Smith to change course. On June 7, 1950, immediately prior to the deadline to declare his intentions, Smith announced his plans to challenge Frank Porter Graham in a runoff.⁹⁵

In the aftermath of the Supreme Court rulings, Willis Smith’s campaign took on a sense of urgency that the task of preserving segregation and protecting the southern way of life fell upon southern Democrats in Congress. These decisions confirmed their worst fears and emboldened southern conservatives to make a stand against the federal government’s encroachment in the South. Segregation remained legal, a point that conservative southern Democrats conveniently ignored, but many believed that it was nonetheless under withering attack from outside forces hostile to the South. While Graham and Smith battled during the first primary, Florida’s Claude Pepper, a New Deal liberal, lost his bid for a third term in the U.S. Senate to fellow Democrat George Smathers. In his successful campaign against Pepper,

⁹⁴ Charlotte *Observer*, 6 June 1950; *Raleigh News and Observer*, 6 June 1950; Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education and Black America’s Struggle for Equality* (New York: Knopf, 1976), 282-283 [*Sweatt v. Painter*], 283 [*McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents*], 284 [*Henderson v. United States*]; Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance*, 5-7, 37, 39-40 Pleasants and Burns, *Frank Porter Graham*, 195.

⁹⁵ Pleasants and Burns, *Frank Porter Graham*, 194-201; Pleasants and Burns argue that these rulings “gave Willis Smith the issue and the impetus he needed to call a runoff,” 268.

Smathers employed many of the same tactics that Smith subsequently used to target Graham. Smathers used Pepper's liberal voting record, including his support for President Truman's civil rights proposals and labor, to defeat a leading southern liberal and remove from office one of President Truman's staunchest supporters. Willis Smith did not defeat Frank Porter Graham in the primary, but the Smathers victory provided them with much-needed encouragement that theirs was a just and worthy cause.⁹⁶ Claude Pepper's defeat in May 1950 revealed the vulnerability of pro-Truman liberal southern Democrats and foreshadowed the still-unresolved Senate campaign in North Carolina.

Willis Smith benefited significantly from Claude Pepper's defeat and the Supreme Court decisions, both of which provided his campaign with considerable momentum even before he announced his intention to seek a runoff. With the campaign feeding off of this energy, Willis Smith set about to provide not only the state Democratic Party's conservative faction with a victory, but to eliminate the threats to the South posed by the Truman administration and the federal government. Above all, the Supreme Court's rulings in *Sweatt v. Painter*, *McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents*, and *Henderson v. United States*, placed the segregation issue at the forefront of southern politics. This made it possible for the politics of race to trump southern liberals' use of economic populism epitomized by Scott and Graham, which enjoyed moderate success in North Carolina, as symbolized with Scott's primary victory in 1948.

The Graham-Smith runoff election marked a complete reversal from just two years earlier when Kerr Scott ran a campaign on class-based liberalism to defeat the state's dominant political

⁹⁶ Interview with Claude Pepper by Jack Bass, 2/1/74 (A-0056), SOHP. In a 1974 interview, Pepper attributes his defeat to issues concerning civil rights, national health insurance, labor, and the influence of Richard Nixon and Joseph McCarthy anti-communist witch hunts. He calls the use of race and communist-inspired fear tactics, which felled several liberal Democrats in 1950 "one of the great tragedies of that year." See also Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance*, 39-40; Pleasants and Burns, *Frank Porter Graham*, 147-149; Grantham, *The Life and Death of the Solid South*, 126.

machine. In 1948, segregation was not an issue in state politics, as Kerr Scott never threatened to transform the racial status quo. Two years later, however, segregation was a national political issue, one that ultimately trumped Scott's economic populism, while returning the politics of race to the forefront of southern politics. As witnessed in both Florida and North Carolina, southern Democrats used the midterm elections to wage anti-civil rights campaigns in an effort to undermine President Truman's liberal civil rights agenda. Conservative southern Democrats viewed national politics, particularly their immense influence in Congress, as the primary means of countering the impending tide of anti-segregationist decisions made by the Supreme Court. It was through their immense political influence in Congress that southern Democrats sought to defend segregation and reaffirm their position within the national Democratic Party. Willis Smith not only made segregation *the* issue, but he portrayed his primary battle with Frank Porter Graham a referendum on the future existence of racial segregation. Simply put, Smith pledged to uphold segregation while Graham, by virtue of his liberalism, sought to undermine and destroy this tradition. Smith's attacks in the first primary were effective enough to prevent Graham from achieving a majority of the votes. In the runoff, however, the segregation issue proved to be the turning point, as Smith convinced voters that Graham the state required a conservative segregationist to defend the South in the U.S. Senate.⁹⁷ The contrast between Kerr Scott's triumph two years earlier and the Graham-Smith highlighted the significance of the politics of race in 1950. Despite President Truman's civil rights proposals, segregation was not an issue in 1948. However, due to legal challenges to segregation leading up to the Graham-Smith primary, it became the issue of the 1950 campaign, particularly as it related to national politics. It was through their majority in Congress that conservative southern Democrats were

⁹⁷ Pleasants and Burns, *Frank Porter Graham*, 203-246.

most influential in national politics. Furthermore, it was not a coincidence that these same Democrats portrayed the U.S. Supreme Court as a threat to the South.

Willis Smith and his supporters used a series of devastating campaign attacks and political advertisements to demonstrate that Graham undermined racial segregation. They provoked the worst kind of racial fears to attract voters. For example, Smith accused Graham of appointing an African-American to the United State Military Academy at West Point when Graham had done no such thing. Smith's supporters used various advertisements to effectively convey Graham's position on civil rights and segregation. The "Know the Truth Committee" preyed upon voters' racial fears when they issued the campaign's single-most effective advertisement. "WHITE PEOPLE WAKE UP!" and asked voters if they wanted to have "Negroes working beside you, your wife and daughters in the mills and factories? Negroes eating beside you in all public eating places? Negroes riding beside you, your wife and your daughters in buses, cabs and trains? Negroes sleeping in the same hotels and rooming houses? Negroes teaching and disciplining your children in school? Negroes sitting with you and your family at all public meetings? Negroes going to white schools and white children going to negro schools? Negroes to occupy the same hospital rooms with you and your wife and daughters? Negroes as your foremen and overseers in the mills? Negroes using the same toilet facilities?" This advertisement presented a stark contrast between the two candidates on the issue of race relations. Smith attacked Graham's alleged support for integration, complete with insinuations that blacks threatened the virtue of white southern women, while he promised to "uphold the traditions of the South." The "Working Men for Smith Committee" issued a campaign circular to voters warning that Graham's alleged support for the Fair Employment Practices Commission

(FEPC) had the potential to bring about an integrated workplace under federal control. The advertisement reminded workers, “A vote for Willis Smith is a vote for Your Freedom.”⁹⁸

Governor Kerr Scott campaigned vigorously for Frank Graham in the runoff, while President Truman sent prominent southern liberals Alben Barkley, Estes Kefauver, and Sam Rayburn to promote Graham’s campaign.⁹⁹ Truman recognized that this campaign had tremendous implications for his policy agenda and the future of national politics. Scott championed Graham to his rural supporters in eastern North Carolina, which Graham carried in the primary. In 1948, Kerr Scott carried the state’s plantation belt in his campaign against conservative Democrat Charles Johnson. This region, with its long tradition of political insurgency, overwhelmingly supported Scott and Truman over the Dixiecrats despite having a majority of the state’s African-American citizens.¹⁰⁰ In the runoff, eastern North Carolina voted decisively in favor of Willis Smith, and the state’s growing urban population, most of whom opposed Scott two years earlier, followed suit. Frank Graham’s insistence that he opposed “federal compulsion in race relations” and “socialized medicine” failed to stop Smith’s momentum.¹⁰¹ Willis Smith defeated Frank Porter Graham with 281,114 votes, compared to Graham’s 261,789.¹⁰²

While the Graham-Smith campaign demonstrated much that was least admirable about North Carolina politics, it hardly qualified as a new trend. In 1898 and 1900, Charles Aycock

⁹⁸ Pleasants and Burns, *Frank Porter Graham*, 223-224.

⁹⁹ *New York Times*, 25 June 1950; Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 137.

¹⁰⁰ *North Carolina Manual* 1951, 195-206.

¹⁰¹ *New York Times*, 25 June 1950. The *Times* labeled Graham’s loss a “rebuff to Truman.” *Washington Post*, 26 June 1950. The *Post* observed that Graham’s defeat had consequences for both Scott and Truman.

¹⁰² Pleasants and Burns, *Frank Porter Graham*, 281-286; Graham captured approximately forty-two thousand votes less than he received in the first primary. Smith’s vote total, on the other hand, increased by approximately thirty thousand over the first primary.

and Furnifold Simmons stirred racial fears to defeat the insurgent Populist-Republican “Fusion” alliance that promoted economic populism at the expense of corporate influence in state government. Furnifold Simmons used racial hatred to bolster their political machine for three decades. Fifty years after the white supremacy campaigns, the state’s conservative elite again united behind a banner of racial conservatism to defeat a candidate whose class-based liberalism also threatened their political influence.¹⁰³ The Graham-Smith Senate primary provided the blueprint for North Carolina’s political development in the late twentieth century, as the race issue remained prominent for several decades. In the debate over segregation, Willis Smith appealed to more voters because he defended this practice, while Graham appeared weaker because he had to defend his liberal voting record. Additionally, Graham’s use of economic populism failed to attract voters in a campaign where racial issues reigned supreme. These trends continued through the twentieth century.

If the 1948 election represented a triumph for southern liberals, then the 1950 midterm election was a stunning reversal of fortune. The absence of Frank Porter Graham and Claude Pepper from the U.S. Senate, along with the election of staunch segregationists James Byrnes and Herman Talmadge as the respective governors of South Carolina and Georgia, marked the declining influence of southern liberalism in favor of anti-Truman southern conservatism. These elections marked a decisive shift from liberalism to conservatism in the South and “set the mood for the gradual rise of massive resistance.”¹⁰⁴

Shortly after the campaign, Governor Kerr Scott publicly castigated the use of racism in this campaign, which left Graham and Scott politically weakened. Appearing at the North Carolina State Federation of Labor Conference, Scott declared, “As long as we base our

¹⁰³ Paul Luebke, *Tar Heel Politics 2000* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 17.

¹⁰⁴ Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance*, 40.

statewide action in politics on race prejudice, as long as we work against the right of the human, how in the world are we going to convince Russia that the American way of life is right?" Kerr Scott put his political reputation and popularity on the line in this campaign and, not surprisingly, took Graham's defeat quite personally, describing Graham's defeat in dire terms: "We're doing things the hard way. We turned down the man who stood to do more good for us, the common people, than any other man in our generation. You turned him down, my crowd turned him down." At the same event, Scott criticized African-American labor leaders for failing to do their part to rally their troops in the primary. "You many be another color, but in this election you were just as yellow as the other man." On the issue of race itself, Scott simply reminded voters who was ultimately responsible for the race problem in the United States. "I want you white people to remember this, those of you who spread the most bitter campaign man or woman of North Carolina ever heard—the Negro did not come into this country of his own accord. The white man brought him here."¹⁰⁵ Scott likely recognized that the politics of race undermined his brand of southern liberalism and his ambitious political agenda in a conservative state such as North Carolina, where national politics strongly influenced the state's political development.

Although the Graham-Smith primary was in many ways typical of the conservative-progressive competition for influence in the Democratic Party, the politics of race imbued in this campaign an increased level of animosity that was largely absent during the Shelby Dynasty. As the heir to the Simmons political machine, the Shelby Dynasty owed its existence to the white supremacy campaigns in the late 1890s that forged the one-party Democratic South. While the Simmons machine never shied away from race-baiting techniques in its quest for political dominance, the politics of race did not define the Shelby Dynasty as did its predecessor. Rather, the political rivalries between economic populists and conservative business dominated North

¹⁰⁵ *Carolina Times*, 19 August 1950, NCC Clipping File; *Atlanta Daily World*, 16 August 1950.

Carolina politics from the New Deal through the Second World War. The politics of race lay dormant, but never entirely disappeared. Kerr Scott's gubernatorial campaign served to highlight the fluidity of North Carolina politics, proving that while race was a key issue in southern politics during the 1948 presidential campaign, it did not take center stage in North Carolina. In 1950, however, the floodgates opened and unleashed upon the state a vicious political campaign based on racial hatred that revealed the worst of North Carolina politics. This campaign more closely resembled the Simmons machine's use of racial violence to seize power five decades earlier rather than the potential of southern liberalism in the postwar South demonstrated by Scott's campaign two years earlier. The Graham-Smith campaign epitomized historian Numan Bartley's contention that the chief failure of southern liberalism was its inability to present a suitable alternative to the politics of race.¹⁰⁶

Frank Graham's defeat was a devastating loss for the Kerr Scott faction of the Democratic Party. This election represented an opportunity to expand the progressives' influence not just in North Carolina, but also in national politics. In the end, however, this election simply revealed the progressive faction's limited influence in North Carolina politics. Despite his early successes, Kerr Scott found the conservative General Assembly more resistant to his populist style and political agenda.¹⁰⁷ In 1948, Kerr Scott's election posed a threat to the General Assembly, filled with Shelby Dynasty loyalists, as they no longer had an ally in the governor's office. Democratic voters provided Kerr Scott a popular mandate in 1948 but did not extend the same courtesy to the General Assembly. Scott's membership in the prominent yet less-influential progressive minority, combined with a scarcity of Scott's fellow progressives

¹⁰⁶ Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance*, 25. According to Bartley, "The absence of a genuine liberal alternative on the race issue was a signal void in southern politics. The South simply lacked an adequate institutional foundation for a viable liberalism."

¹⁰⁷ Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 147-148.

campaigning for the General Assembly, made it impossible for Scott to enjoy a legislative mandate. In 1949, Kerr Scott successfully promoted his “Go Forward Program” by taking his message to the voters, thus bypassing the General Assembly. A year later, however, the conservative-dominated legislature found solace in Willis Smith’s victory, an event that provided the conservative faction with considerable momentum following its setback in with Kerr Scott’s election victory.

The outcome of the Graham-Smith Senate primary shaped the remainder of Governor Scott’s term in office. Nowhere was this more evident than in the 1952 Democratic gubernatorial primary. Kerr Scott selected Judge Hubert Olive as his handpicked successor to represent the progressive faction. Conservative Democrats chose former Congressman and Senator William B. Umstead, a Shelby Dynasty stalwart, as their candidate. This election represented the second opportunity for Kerr Scott to expand progressives’ influence in North Carolina. The waning of Scott’s popularity following the 1950 Senate race, in which Scott invested considerable political capital to support Frank Porter Graham, resulted in a strong vote in favor of William B. Umstead rather than Hubert Olive in the 1952 Democratic gubernatorial primary. This marked the second time voters rejected the progressive Democratic candidate since 1948.¹⁰⁸ North Carolina Democrats decided that one insurgent candidate was enough and chose to return to power the still-popular conservative faction. Hubert Olive lacked the populist charisma that made Kerr Scott such a popular figure. Additionally, the political climate that made possible Kerr Scott’s victory changed drastically. Willis Smith’s victory over Frank Porter Graham, President Truman’s unpopularity and decision not to seek another term in office, and

¹⁰⁸ *North Carolina Manual* 1955, 210-212. William B. Umstead defeated Hubert Olive 294,170 votes to 265,675 in the Democratic gubernatorial primary. The Democratic Party remained in the hands of the conservative faction, which used its political resources to promote Umstead rather than Olive.

the increasing influence of anti-Truman conservatism in the South, created a political atmosphere hostile to Kerr Scott-style liberalism in North Carolina.

For the second time in four years, the outgoing governor failed to persuade the state's voters to follow his wishes and elect his preferred candidate. Despite the Shelby Dynasty's tremendous political resources, Charles Johnson failed to capture the Democratic gubernatorial nomination in 1948. In 1952, voters returned to power the faction that sat out the previous four years, thus marking the beginning of an important development in state politics. Lauch Faircloth, who later served as state Secretary of Commerce as a Democrat, and then in the U.S. Senate as a Republican (1993-1999), began his political career as a Scott loyalist in 1948 and campaigned for Hubert Olive in 1952. In 1999, he described this trend: "North Carolina has a tendency to despise outgoing governors. I've watched it and watched it and watched it. When a governor is on his way out, generally they become very unpopular...Scott going out could not elect Hubert Olive."¹⁰⁹ Kerr Scott left office in January 1953 after the state's voters rejected his choice for senator and governor, and turned over the reigns of state government to William B. Umstead, a conservative Democrat "who hated anything that touched [Kerr] Scott."¹¹⁰

At the end of Scott's gubernatorial term, the *Raleigh News and Observer* declared that Scott "brought a new brand of political courage" in his efforts to improve the lives of rural farmers and African-Americans. The state's corporate leaders and lawyers, on the other hand,

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Lauch Faircloth by Joseph Mosnier, 3/22/99 (I-0069), SOHP.

¹¹⁰ Interview with Capus Waynick by Bill Finger, 2/4/1974, (A-322-1), SOHP; Prior to his election, William Umstead enjoyed a good relationship with the General Assembly. *Durham Morning Herald*, 5 November 1952. Despite his status as a conservative Democrat, Umstead campaigned on a platform very similar to Scott's 1948 campaign, including efforts to promote education reform, improving roads and highways, agricultural reform, resource conservation and development, and public health. Scott also gained support from labor because of his largely pro-labor record as an interim U.S. senator in the late 1940s. See "A Better Day for North Carolina" and "Why Labor Unions Should Support William Umstead," NCC Clipping File. Umstead opposed the Taft-Hartley Act, but supported a wide variety of pro-labor legislation, including the Wagner Act, the Wage and Hour Law, the Social Security Act, and the Walsh-Healey Act.

were more pleased with his departure than were Scott's rural constituents.¹¹¹ Although he was unable to elect his successor, Scott's influence reached far beyond the governor's office, for he brought the progressive Democratic faction to prominence and influenced several generations of the state's political leaders. While it appeared that Kerr Scott's political career reached its rather unsatisfying conclusion, political developments provided Scott and progressive Democrats with the opportunity to stage an improbable comeback.

Kerr Scott, the Politics of Race, and the 1954 U.S. Senate Campaign

Senator Willis Smith died on June 24, 1953, having served less than three years in the U.S. Senate. Governor William B. Umstead appointed Wilmington attorney and conservative Democrat Alton Lennon to serve the remainder of Smith's term in office. Like Kerr Scott's selection of Frank Porter Graham in 1949, Umstead made certain to appoint a senator who represented his political faction. Similar to Frank Porter Graham in 1950, Lennon faced the prospect of a primary challenger when he decided to stay in the Senate beyond the expiration of his term in January 1955. The 1954 Senate primary provided the unredeemed progressive Democratic faction with the opportunity to avenge Graham's earlier defeat at the hands of Willis Smith and Hubert Olive's loss to William B. Umstead two years later. To accomplish this task, however, Kerr Scott had to wage a campaign in the midst of tremendous political and social upheaval in the South.

Governor William B. Umstead had been in office for little more than a year when the U.S. Supreme Court issued its landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling on May 17, 1954. In a unanimous decision, the Supreme Court declared unconstitutional the long-established practice of "separate but equal" public school facilities. This ruling overturned the court's 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision that allowed individual states to codify racial segregation in public

¹¹¹ *Raleigh News and Observer*, 4 January 1953, NCC Clipping File.

life. The *Plessy* ruling made it possible for the southern states, and many outside of the South, to create a racial caste system akin to South African apartheid and formed the basis of the one-party, race-based Democratic South. The racial segregation of public school and services, the exclusion of blacks and many poor whites from the democratic process were the signature hallmarks of the solid South. Several generations of southerners grew up in the segregated “Jim Crow” South, with this the only society they knew. The notion of a racially integrated South was a foreign idea to millions of white southerners, and many others nationwide. Not surprisingly, white southerners reacted harshly to this ruling. As historian Numan Bartley cogently observed, “The *Brown* decision focused race politics in the South.”¹¹² In its aftermath, the politics of race became the defining issue in North Carolina and southern politics, trumping virtually all other political and social issues, and contributing to the rise of the Republican Party in the South.

Like many southern Democrats, Governor William B. Umstead reacted strongly to the *Brown* decision. Umstead was “terribly disappointed” and believed the ruling to be a “terrible mistake,” calling it “a clear and serious invasion of the rights of the sovereign states” but also urged caution in response. “This is no time for rash statements or proposal of impossible schemes. This problem is too big for any one person to decide,” stated Umstead.¹¹³ Governor Umstead further explained his position to constituents. “I did not agree with it and think it was an awful mistake,” said Umstead. Unlike the millions of outraged southerners, one North

¹¹² Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance*, 67. Bartley’s volume is the best study of the varied responses to the *Brown* in the South during the 1950s. See also Michael J. Klarman, “How *Brown* Changed Race Relations: The Backlash Thesis,” *Journal of American History* 81 (1994), 81-118.

¹¹³ *New York Times*, 18 May 1954 [“terrible mistake”], *The Daily Independent* (Kannapolis, N.C.), 18 May 1954 [“terribly disappointed”], 19 May 1954; *The Robesonian* (Lumberton, N.C.), 17 May 1954, 18 May 1954, 24 May 1954; “A Statement by Governor William B. Umstead,” 5/27/54, in Governor William B. Umstead Papers, General Correspondence, 1954, Box 58, Folder “Segregation,” NCSA [“an awful mistake”]; See also *Gastonia Gazette*, 27 May 1954; *Statesville Record and Landmark*, 31 May 1954; *The Daily Independent* (Kannapolis, N.C.), 27 May 1954.

Carolinian welcomed the *Brown* ruling as “one of the best things that has happened to the South in a long time” because “it will unite the South as nothing has done in years.”¹¹⁴ The Dixiecrats failed to unite the South behind its third-party campaign in 1948, but the *Brown* ruling had the potential to forge southern unity in defense of segregation. While the *Brown* decision did much to unite the South, the responses to this ruling varied widely. Unlike many of his contemporaries throughout the South who exploited the ruling for political gain, Governor Umstead reiterated his intention to “proceed cautiously” while maintaining segregation. Likewise, Attorney General Harry McMullan announced that he would not file a legal challenge nor seek to resist the ruling.¹¹⁵ Umstead and McMullan set an important precedent with his cautious response to the *Brown* ruling, one that benefited the state of North Carolina in a time of great turmoil and had a profound influence on the course of state politics in its aftermath.

Several months prior to the *Brown* ruling, Kerr Scott announced his intention to challenge interim Senator Alton Lennon for the Democratic nomination to the U.S. Senate in February 1954.¹¹⁶ Scott’s entry into the race marked another attempt by progressive Democrats to expand their influence in state politics which, despite Scott’s election as governor six years earlier, remained under the control of conservative Democrats. Likewise, Alton Lennon’s desire to

¹¹⁴ Governor William B. Umstead to Basil M. Watkins, 5/24/54 [“awful mistake”] and Wilson Lorimer to Governor William B. Umstead, 5/20/54 [“unite the South”], both in Umstead Papers, General Correspondence, 1954, Box 58, Folder “Judicial Segregation,” NCSA.

¹¹⁵ Governor William B. Umstead to John Kerr, Jr., 5/28/54 [“proceed cautiously”], in Umstead Papers, General Correspondence, 1954, Box 58, Folder “Judicial Segregation,” NCSA. For Umstead’s support of segregation prior to the *Brown* decision, see Umstead to Mrs. Helen Bain, 2/12/54; Umstead to W. N. Jefferies, 1/14/54; Umstead to Reverend H. F. Beaty, 1/14/54; Umstead to Mrs. David Burns, 12/17/53; Umstead to E. E. Barringer, 12/15/53, all in Umstead Papers, General Correspondence, 1954, Box 58, Folder “Judicial Segregation,” NCSA; *Statesville Record and Landmark*, 26 May 1954; *The Daily Independent* (Kannapolis, N.C.), 27 May 1954, [McMullan]; See also Interview with Edward L. Rankin by Jay Jenkins, 8/20/1987, C-0044, and Interview with Robert Giles by Jay Jenkins, 9/10/1987, (C-0063), SOHP. Rankin details Umstead’s response to this ruling, and credits progressive Democrat Jonathan Daniels, who was not close to the conservative Umstead administration, with laying the groundwork for cooler heads to prevail through his editorial guidance of the *Raleigh News and Observer*.

¹¹⁶ *Raleigh News and Observer*, 2/7/54; *Durham Morning Herald*, 2/7/54, NCC Clipping File.

remain in the Senate demonstrated that the conservative faction did not intend to relinquish power. Three months later, on May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court issued the *Brown* ruling, which completely upended the Senate campaign. Prior to this decision, this campaign was a typical factional battle within the North Carolina Democratic Party, but the *Brown* ruling imbued in this campaign the issue of segregation, one Kerr Scott hoped to avoid lest he face the same fate as Frank Porter Graham. The Supreme Court provided Willis Smith with his major campaign issue in 1950, and it appeared that the timing of this ruling would again hurt the progressive faction's opportunity to win a campaign on its own terms, not those dictated by the conservatives. For the second time in four years, a Supreme Court ruling provided conservatives the opportunity to use the segregation issue to undermine southern liberalism. Similarly, the *Washington Post* predicted that the Lennon-Scott primary would serve as a barometer for judging southern reaction to the *Brown* decision.¹¹⁷

Alton Lennon wasted no time in exploiting the *Brown* ruling, issued a mere twelve days before the Senate primary, to pitch his candidacy to the state's voters. He argued that "this decision will further the objectives of agitators...in North Carolina...trying to influence the election of Kerr Scott to the United States Senate." Like Willis Smith before him, Alton Lennon used the Supreme Court's decision to urge voters to support his candidacy to "uphold Tar Heel traditions" in the U.S. Senate. Lennon also used the potential for federal intervention in the state's schools to sway voters. "This is why North Carolina must elect a senator who will fight by the side of his colleagues from the other southern states for constitutional state sovereignty—under which each of our states has the right to solve its local problems, without federal

¹¹⁷ *Christian Science Monitor*, 14 April 1954; *Washington Post*, 23 May 1954.

interference.”¹¹⁸ Lennon used his response to the *Brown* ruling not only to express his disagreement, but also to link Kerr Scott to efforts to integrate North Carolina’s public schools.

The *Brown* decision forced Kerr Scott to take a public stand on the segregation issue. Like Frank Porter Graham, Kerr Scott had to confront a volatile political issue he hoped to avoid entirely. Kerr Scott emphasized his segregationist credentials to voters. “I have always been opposed, and I am still opposed, to Negro and white children going to school together. It is my belief that most white and Negro citizens of North Carolina agree on this point...As a member of the United States Senate I would work in close cooperation with other like-minded citizens, regardless of race, color or creed, remain calm and work together in an orderly fashion while machinery is being set up to avoid the disruption of our pattern of school life. To this end, I shall fight.”¹¹⁹

Kerr Scott defended segregation, but like many southern liberals, he refused to exploit the situation for political gain. Kerr Scott illuminated the central dilemma facing southern liberals when he argued, “this decision on segregation should not become a controversy in the present senatorial campaign.” That even Kerr Scott, an outspoken southern liberal, came out in support of segregation testified to the absence of a viable foundation for southern liberalism in the aftermath of the *Brown* ruling. It was necessary that he take this stand to win election in North Carolina, for it was nearly impossible to succeed in this political environment with a platform opposing segregation. At the same time, however, Kerr Scott fought back against Alton

¹¹⁸ Alton Lennon Speech (May 1954), in John William Harden Papers, Box 156, Folder 1833, “Democratic Primary—Alton Lennon and Kerr Scott,” SHC.

¹¹⁹ *Raleigh News and Observer*, 18 May 1954; *Washington Post*, 23 May 1954; *Durham Morning Herald*, 18 May 1954, NCC Clipping File.

Lennon's use of the race issue, labeling the charges "McCarthyism" designed to "smear" his campaign.¹²⁰

There are numerous parallels between the 1950 Graham-Smith primary and the Lennon-Scott primary four years later: the prominence of the race issue following the Supreme Court decisions in *Sweatt v. Painter* (1950) and *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), factional warfare between the conservatives and progressives, and the use of the politics of race as a wedge issue to divide the Democratic Party. In 1950, the politics of segregation was largely an artificial issue, used by the Smith campaign despite segregation remaining legal. Four years later, segregation was very much a real issue, and Lennon partisans stoked the fires of racial animosity in their effort to discredit Kerr Scott. In the twelve days between the *Brown* ruling and the Senate primary, Alton Lennon and his conservative faction waged a fierce political campaign against Kerr Scott. The lessons learned in 1950, however, proved valuable in preparing the Scott faction for the campaign's final stretch.

Terry Sanford, a Fayetteville attorney and Scott partisan, campaigned for Frank Porter Graham in 1950. It was during the Graham-Smith runoff, when Willis Smith and his supporters waged a campaign based on racial fears, that Sanford learned "how to face a racist campaign, how to keep the prairie fire from getting loose."¹²¹ Sanford directed the Scott campaign's efforts to limit the influence of racist propaganda used by the Lennon campaign. Sanford executed a brilliant strategy to send a tobacco union member posing as a Lennon supporter to his campaign offices in order to pick up anti-Scott campaign advertisements, with the pledge to distribute this material to rural voters. The Scott campaign now held in its possession a large number of political flyers linking Kerr Scott to black political activists and efforts to end segregation. Most

¹²⁰ *Washington Post*, 23 May 1954; *New York Times*, 31 May 1954 ["McCarthyism"].

¹²¹ Interview with Terry Sanford by Jack D. Fleer, 3/18/98, (C-0335), SOHP.

importantly, this material did not find its way to voters as Sanford kept under lock and key potentially harmful material to the Scott campaign. With the material under wraps, Terry Sanford informed the *Raleigh News and Observer*, an influential pro-Scott newspaper, of its existence. One day prior to the election, the *Raleigh News and Observer* published a front-page story detailing Alton Lennon's use of these "phony race issue" advertisements against Kerr Scott. On May 29, 1954, Kerr Scott defeated Alton Lennon by ten thousand votes in an election not two weeks after the *Brown* ruling.¹²² Joel Fleishman referred to Kerr Scott's victory over Alton Lennon, in contrast to the Graham-Smith primary, as "an election in which race was an issue and which the liberals won."¹²³

Although Kerr Scott ultimately prevailed in the Senate primary, his victory over Alton Lennon was not preordained. Scott won because he did not fall victim to the same tactics employed in the Graham-Smith primary, despite the fact that Scott's campaign occurred in a more hostile political environment than the 1950 campaign. Scott had a proven record as governor, and despite leaving office so out of favor that he could not swing the election of his successor, his name remained popular with voters. Above all, Kerr Scott did not carry the political baggage of Frank Porter Graham's involvement with left-wing organizations. In a clear victory for southern liberalism, Scott weathered the storm against a conservative opponent seeking to manipulate the *Brown* ruling for political gain. The *Chicago Defender*, the nation's

¹²² Interview with Terry Sanford by Brent Glass, 5/14/76, (A-328-1), SOHP; *Raleigh News and Observer*, 28 May 1954; *Christian Science Monitor*, 29 May 1954; *New York Times*, 29 May 1954, 30 May 1954, 31 May 1954; *Washington Post*, 31 May 1954; Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 150-151; *North Carolina Manual* 1955, 249-250. Scott captured 274,674 votes compared to Lennon's 264,265. In the general election, Scott easily dispatched his Republican opponent, Paul C. West, with 408,312 votes to West's 211,322.

¹²³ Interview with Joel Fleishman by Jack Bass and Walter De Vries, 2/8/74, (A-121), SOHP; Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance*, 73. According to Numan Bartley, "In a vigorous campaign, he [Scott] denounced McCarthyism and racial intolerance and won the Democratic nomination...Scott's victory did not prove that North Carolina citizens were less devoted to segregation in 1954...it did demonstrate that far more than just a boundary line separated the state from its neighbor to the south."

leading African-American newspaper that earlier praised Scott's liberalism and efforts to improve race relations, argued that Scott's victory "may be proved by time as being as significant of fundamental change the Court's decrees."¹²⁴

Despite the apparently hostile political climate for southern liberals in the immediate post-*Brown* South, the ruling did not end southern liberalism immediately. Prior to the Supreme Court ruling, former Alabama Governor Jim Folsom (1947-1951) won the Democratic gubernatorial nomination for a second term in office. Alabama Senator John Sparkman prevailed over strong opposition from conservatives attacking his civil rights record and his vice presidential candidacy with pro-civil rights Democrat Adlai Stevenson on the 1952 ticket. Following the *Brown* ruling, Tennessee's Estes Kefauver won his party's nomination for a second term in the U.S. Senate. Former Arkansas Governor Sid McMath and Texas Democrat Ralph Yarborough challenged the entrenched conservative factions in their respective campaigns for the U.S. Senate and governor, respectively, but both ultimately fell short of their goals.¹²⁵ The *New York Times* recognized that the defeat or near-defeat of several conservative Democrats increased liberal influence in southern politics while the *Chicago Defender* argued that Scott and Sparkman's campaign victories indicated the decline of white supremacy as a political issue.¹²⁶

Despite these predictions, political developments that followed the *Brown* decision by the late 1950s created an inhospitable atmosphere in which many southern liberals found their popular support eroded by the politics of race and rising hostility toward liberalism. These developments ensured that Jim Folsom, Estes Kefauver, and Kerr Scott were more the exception

¹²⁴ *Chicago Defender*, 12 June 1954.

¹²⁵ *Washington Post*, 31 May 1954; The *Post* argued, "the victories of Senator Sparkman and Governor Scott show that the majority of the voters in North Carolina and Alabama are more concerned with issues than with prejudice." *Chicago Defender*, 26 June 1954; *New York Times*, 31 May 1954, 8 August 1954; Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance*, 56, 73; Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt*, 130-131.

¹²⁶ *New York Times*, 15 August 1954; Grantham, *The Life and Death of the Solid South*, 154.

in southern politics rather than the rule. Despite the victories for southern liberalism, the *Brown* ruling marked the dawn of a decidedly conservative era in southern politics. Kefauver and Scott demonstrated the potential of southern liberalism, but it was conservatives such as South Carolina's James Byrnes and Georgia's Herman Talmadge, among others, whose ardent defense of segregation overshadowed the liberal triumphs of 1954 and drowned out the liberal voices in southern politics. The anger resulting from the *Brown* decision failed to subside as the decade wore on, a development that had the potential to disrupt North Carolina from the moderate path charted by Governor William B. Umstead.¹²⁷

Governor Luther Hodges and the Quest for the Middle Ground

In his influential study of southern politics, political scientist V.O. Key observed in 1949 that North Carolina's reputation for moderate race relations rested entirely upon the preservation of the status quo. So long as there were no challenges to the system of segregation, either from internal or external forces, then North Carolina's status remained intact.¹²⁸ The state's response to the *Brown* ruling and the emergence of the civil rights movement, however, revealed that the transparency of the state's moderate reputation merely masked a more respectable presentation of white supremacy.

Governor William B. Umstead was in office at the time of the *Brown* decision, but this ruling forever altered the political career of his successor, lieutenant governor Luther H. Hodges. Hodges, a retired business executive recruited to serve in the Umstead administration as lieutenant governor, assumed the governor's office following Umstead's death in November

¹²⁷ Bartley, *The New South*, 260. As Bartley observes, "the politics of massive resistance oriented the regional spectrum far to the right."

¹²⁸ V. O. Key, Jr., *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (New York: Knopf, 1949), 205-228. See also William H. Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

1954, six months after the Supreme Court declared segregation unconstitutional. More than any other North Carolina political leader, the battle over public school integration shaped Hodges's legacy. Luther Hodges spent the next six years avoiding both compliance and defiance of the ruling, maintaining the moderation established by his predecessor, in order to promote the state's business-friendly environment to investors.

Luther H. Hodges hoped to use his job as lieutenant governor to promote industrial development in North Carolina. Hodges had grand visions to transform the state's concentrated, rural, low-skill, and low-wage industrial economy into a more dispersed, white-collar economy that used to its advantage the educational resources of the state's university system.

"Industrialization, then, with all of its advantages to the people and to the state, became the number one goal of my administration," said Hodges, who fit the mold of what historian Numan Bartley labeled the "business conservative." Bartley described the typical business conservative as one who "rarely defended segregation on the basis of Negro inferiority nor showed a willingness to battle for white supremacy much beyond pocketbook dictates," whose "primary loyalty was to business," and who remained loyal to the national Democratic Party despite their "followers who frequently voted Republican in presidential races." The business conservatives recruited from the industrial Northeast and Europe to invest in the South, with the promise of racial harmony, cheap land, the absence of labor unions, and low wages. Although few were strident defenders of segregation, these leaders had to appease the segregationist element in their political party. Governor Hodges's political leadership following the *Brown* ruling confirms Bartley's assessment and demonstrates that Hodges epitomized the prototypical business conservative of the postwar South.¹²⁹

¹²⁹ Luther H. Hodges, *Businessman in the State House: Six Years as Governor of North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962), 32 [Hodges quote]; Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance*, 22-25;

Shortly after the Supreme Court's *Brown* decision, Governor Umstead appointed Thomas J. Pearsall, a prominent Democrat and former speaker of the North Carolina House of Representatives, to chair the Governor's Special Advisory Committee on Education. The governor requested that the committee develop a plan of action to respond to the looming battle over public school integration, or as Luther Hodges described it, "to study the court's decision and its possible effects on the North Carolina school system." The committee issued its final report, popularly known as the Pearsall Plan, to Governor Hodges several months later. The Pearsall Plan, or Pupil Assignment Act, provided the blueprint for the state's formal response to the *Brown* ruling, calling for a system of voluntary segregation in the state's public schools. To accomplish this task, this plan shifted control of the responsibilities for student assignment and enrollment from the State Board of Education to the local city and county education boards. The committee based its final report on the belief that integration was not a feasible option and the state should not attempt to integrate its public schools. Those seeking to challenge segregation and attend a white-only school faced an insurmountable wall of state bureaucracy. The report also concluded that the state should make every attempt to meet the threshold set by the Supreme Court, but should do so without modifying or closing the state's public schools.¹³⁰

The Pearsall Plan set an important precedent as it called for neither acceptance nor defiance of the Supreme Court. Luther Hodges made it abundantly clear that, unlike the governors of South Carolina or Virginia, he did not intend to close the state's public schools in an effort to avoid integration. This was an option of last resort, but for Hodges this was simply

Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 156-161; Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt*, 162. For more on Hodges's business career, see also *Raleigh News and Observer*, 4 January 1953, 11 July 1954. For more info on Hodges becoming governor following Umstead's death, see *Raleigh News and Observer*, 9 November 1954, 11 November 1954, 5 December 1954, NCC Clipping File.

¹³⁰ Hodges, *Businessman in the State House*, 80; Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights*, 49-61; Pete Daniel, *Lost Revolutions: The South in the 1950s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 205-206.

not a choice. “I knew our schools must be kept open,” said Hodges. “They were more important than all else and they could easily be put in danger.”¹³¹ The potential demise of the public school system put at risk his plans to promote economic development and ran contrary to his efforts to promote a business-friendly environment in North Carolina. At the same time, however, the political realities of the post-*Brown* South meant that integration was not any more of an option than closing the schools. The furor that erupted throughout the South in response to the Supreme Court created a dilemma for Hodges.

Despite having few options available to him, Luther Hodges had to take action in response to the Supreme Court. The Pearsall Plan provided him with the opportunity to find the elusive compromise between the two extremes of allowing integration or encouraging massive resistance. According to Hodges, the Supreme Court ruling “did not forbid a dual system of schools in which the children of each race voluntarily attended separate schools and had never said that any state must set up a single school system.”¹³² This was essentially the gist of the Pearsall Plan: avoid integration and do not defy the ruling, but rather seek to work around it.

One year after the *Brown* ruling, the United States Supreme Court issued a second decision declaring that segregation in the nation’s public schools end “with all deliberate speed.” Governor Hodges charged the Pearsall Commission to develop a plan to find a solution to keep the schools open because “the white citizens of the state will resist integration strenuously, resourcefully, and with growing bitterness,” Hodges told the state’s citizens in a televised

¹³¹ Hodges, *Businessman in the State House*, 87. Interview with Elizabeth Pearsall by Walter E. Campbell, 5/25/88, (C-0056); Interview with Mack Pearsall by Walter E. Campbell, 5/25/88, (C-0057); Interview with Terry Sanford by Jack D. Fleer, 3/18/1998, (C-0335), SOHP. Both Elizabeth Pearsall and Mack Pearsall defend Thomas Pearsall from charges of racism and argue that he earned the trust from whites and blacks alike in his attempts to prevent a major crisis. Sanford describes Thomas Pearsall as being in agreement with the *Brown* decision, but Pearsall “was trying to find a way to head off the explosion.” Sanford calls the Pearsall Plan “a brilliant piece of legislation.”

¹³² Hodges, *Businessman in the State House*, 88 [“dual system of schools”].

address.¹³³ This plan included a constitutional amendment that provided the option to close local schools if a majority of votes agreed to do so. The state made available tuition grants and vouchers for parents to send their children to private schools in the event that the public schools closed.

Governor Hodges acknowledged the two extremes of integration and massive resistance, and presented his plan of voluntary segregation as the best option. “[There are] those who would go to far to the left, and those who would get equally as far to the right. It is neither fear nor lack of conviction that makes me stay nearer to the middle; it is a sincere desire to be the Governor of all the people of whatever belief, of whatever extremes, and to lead as best I can the State in a moderate fashion to help solve this problem pressing down upon us,” said Hodges.¹³⁴ The state’s voters overwhelming approved this course of action in a popular referendum. In his memoirs, Hodges commented: “North Carolinians could take pride in their solid endorsement of a moderate approach to the explosive problems resulting from the decisions of the United States Supreme Court.”¹³⁵

¹³³ Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 74-75. Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights*, remains the best study of Hodges’s response to the *Brown* decision and subsequent battle over the integration of the state’s public schools. However, Chafe’s assertion that “Hodges could have found as much support for compliance as for resistance” and “moved the mass of undecided people toward desegregation” is troublesome. Chafe also argues that the Pearsall Plan/Pupil Assignment Act was nothing more than “political expediency” on Hodges’s part (Chafe, 80-81). Chafe ignores the political realities in North Carolina during the 1950s. Such a move by Hodges would have likely increased segregationists’ influence within the Democratic Party and undermined whatever “moderate” path Hodges chose. While his response was not perfect and he may have at times undermined his attempts to promote moderation, Hodges assumed an unenviable task and made the best possible choices at the time.

¹³⁴ “Address by Governor Luther H. Hodges before Joint Session of the General Assembly of North Carolina, Meeting in Special Session,” 23 July 1956, in Governor Luther H. Hodges Papers, Box 132, Folder “Campaign Materials,” NCSA [“moderate fashion”]; “Statement by Governor Hodges to State Press,” 2 February 1956; “Speech by Governor Hodges at Leaksville,” 4 February 1956, both in Hodges Papers, General Correspondence, 1956, Box 123, Folder “Speeches Made-February,” NCSA.

¹³⁵ Hodges, *Businessman in the State House*, 104-105. The pro-Pearsall votes totaled 471,657 compared to 101,424 votes against this plan. In his memoirs, Hodges observes that a majority of voters in eastern North Carolina supported the Pearsall Plan. For more on Hodges’s self-proclaimed moderation, see Hodges to Lewis Kanoy, 9

Although the Supreme Court later declared the Pearsall Plan unconstitutional, it accomplished precisely what Governor Hodges wanted by averting integration while keeping open the state's public schools. Hodges was the quintessential moderate southern Democrat of the 1950s and portrayed his position as the moderate option compared to integration and massive resistance. Hodges "was besieged from both sides" of the political battle over integration of the state's public schools. "What we are trying to avoid is terrible extremes, and of course, I am catching it from both sides, both from the whites and the blacks. The position I have taken has been completely legal, not in defiance of the court, in appealing to the best that is in both races."¹³⁶ Although he believed that the "the segregation decisions constitute an unlawful usurpation of power," he was never particularly vociferous in his opposition to provoke public anger against integration. He justified his opposition to interposition and massive resistance favored by southern Democrats by explaining that "a course of defiance would forfeit whatever change we might have of convincing the rest of the nation that our position in this matter is sincere."¹³⁷ Although Hodges publicly opposed "mixing the races," he likewise rejected "any lawlessness or violence in connection with this problem." His plans to maintain segregated public schools appeased the segregationists long enough to forestall a primary challenge in the

February 1956; Hodges to Mrs. Charles Lane, 16 February 1956; Hodges to Mr. G. T. Leonard, 9 March 1956; all in Hodges Papers, General Correspondence, 1956, Box 119, Folder, "Segregation—K-L," NCSA.

¹³⁶ Hodges, *Businessman in the State House*, 87 ["besieged"]; Governor Luther H. Hodges to Dr. Lee F. Tuttle, 21 December 1955, in Hodges Papers, General Correspondence, 1956, Box 117, Folder, "Segregation-Patriots," NCSA. In his autobiography, Hodges observes: "We made it clear that the [Pearsall] Plan was designed to discourage attempts by the NAACP to force integration, and at the same time to discourage demands for more drastic steps such as a complete shutdown of the state's public schools." Hodges, *Businessman in the State House*, 93.

¹³⁷ "Address by Governor Luther H. Hodges Before Joint Session of the General Assembly of North Carolina, Meeting in Special Session," 23 July 1956, in Hodges Papers, General Correspondence, 1956, Box 132, Folder "Campaign Materials," NCSA; See also Paul A. Johnston to Mrs. Marvin H. Shore, 3 February 1956, in Hodges Papers, General Correspondence, 1956, Box 117, Folder "Segregation-Patriots," NCSA; Governor Luther H. Hodges to Mr. and Mrs. Don Butzin, 8 February 1956, in Hodges Papers, General Correspondence, 1956, Box 118, Folder "Segregation-B," NCSA; Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt*, 211.

1956 Democratic gubernatorial primary.¹³⁸ Similarly, his lack of enthusiasm for massive resistance prevented the state from following the disastrous example set by political leaders in Virginia and the Deep South in closing its schools or openly provoking confrontation with the federal government. Although Hodges publicly opposed “mixing the races,” he likewise rejected “any lawlessness or violence in connection with this problem.”¹³⁹

In the aftermath of the *Brown* decision, various groups emerged throughout the South with the purpose of fighting the effort to integrate public schools. The most prominent of these, the White Citizens’ Councils, was most active in the Deep South’s black belt, the region most loyal to the Dixiecrat cause in 1948.¹⁴⁰ North Carolina’s closest equivalent to the Citizens’ Councils came in the form of the Patriots of North Carolina, Inc. Located primarily in the Greensboro Triad area, its membership consisted of urban, white-collar, textile and professional business leaders. The Patriots, however, lacked any appeal outside of the Piedmont, particularly in the plantation belt of eastern North Carolina. Unlike the Citizens’ Councils of the Deep South, the Patriots never gained significant influence in state government or the Democratic Party.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt*, 130-131. The Scott faction did not field a viable candidate to challenge Hodges in 1956. Had they done so, the campaign would have likely turned into a battle over segregation, one that both the Hodges and Scott factions hoped to avoid. Elsewhere in the South, moderate Democrat Leroy Collins defeated a staunch segregationist in the gubernatorial primary, while Georgia voters rejected Talmadge machine candidate Marvin Griffin in favor of the more moderate (yet still segregationist) Carl Sanders. Schulman uses these elections to demonstrate that voters repudiated several segregationist candidates after the *Brown* decision. The fact that Hodges did not face a suitable challenge from any faction within the party demonstrates their lack of influence at a time when it had the potential to be considerably greater. As historian James C. Cobb observes, “segregation flourished in the moderate climate forged by Luther Hodges.” See Cobb, *The Selling of the South*, 147. Perhaps Hodges’s success in forestalling integration left other Democrats with little reason to oppose him in 1956.

¹³⁹ Hodges quoted in Earl Black, *Southern Governors and Civil Rights: Racial Segregation as a Campaign Issue in the Second Reconstruction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 106-114; Hodges quoted on p. 106; *Raleigh News and Observer*, 17 May 1956, 30 August 1957.

¹⁴⁰ Neil McMillen, *The Citizens’ Council: Organized Resistance to the Second Reconstruction, 1954-1964* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971). McMillen’s volume remains the best study of the Citizens’ Council and its influence in southern politics following the *Brown* decision.

The Patriots threw their unconditional support behind Governor Hodges's efforts to maintain segregation, including the Pearsall Plan. Hodges welcomed their backing but also encouraged the organization "to get good people if they are going to have anyone, and be moderate about their actions."¹⁴² Hodges's political acumen served him well during the political crisis of the 1950s, as he cultivated support from the Patriots, while keeping them at arms' length and precluded their gaining influence in his administration. He had no real use for the Patriots after they endorsed his plan to maintain a system of voluntary segregation. The Patriots hamstrung their efforts to gain influence in state politics with their endorsement of the Pearsall Plan, which a vast majority of the state's voters supported. The Patriots did not challenge its design or implementation, and thus lacked the grounds to object to Hodges's efforts.

Despite their organizational limitations, the Patriots did accomplish two considerable achievements in 1956 when they targeted the reelection campaigns of North Carolina Congressmen Thurmond Chatham, Harold Cooley, and Charles Deane, all of whom refused to sign the "Southern Manifesto" urging regional unity in response to federal intervention into southern race relations. The Patriots defeated Chatham and Deane, who represented districts in the Patriots' urban Piedmont stronghold. In his eastern North Carolina district, Cooley prevailed against his primary challenger by waging a campaign against the *Brown* decision. The Patriots' failure to defeat Cooley epitomized its inability to foster a political environment necessary to create a grassroots segregationist political organization in North Carolina, for the lack of broad support prevented the Patriots from achieving greater influence in state politics. At the same

¹⁴¹ Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance*, 96-97; McMillen, *The Citizens' Council*, 111-115. McMillen describes the Patriots as "a sedate version of the Citizens' Council." McMillen quoted on p. 111.

¹⁴² Octavious Lovin to Governor Luther H. Hodges, 21 December 1955; Governor Luther H. Hodges to Dr. Lee F. Tuttle, 21 December 1955; Governor Luther H. Hodges to R. Murphy Williams, 20 December 1955 ["moderate about their actions"], all in Hodges Papers, General Correspondence, 1956, Box 117, Folder, "Segregation-Patriots," NCSA; See also *Durham Morning Herald*, 5 February 1956, NCC Clipping File; *The Daily Times-News* (Burlington, N.C.); 9 July 1956; *The Robesonian* (Lumberton, N.C.), 9 July 1956.

time, the Patriots' successful efforts to oust two incumbent Democrats in the primary reflected the increasingly toxic political climate for moderate Democrats in North Carolina and the South. Chatham and Deane's defeat revealed the growing influence of anti-civil rights conservatism in state politics and the declining influence of liberalism in North Carolina two years after the *Brown* ruling.¹⁴³ The Patriots' influence faded following the 1956 congressional primary election, and by 1958, it disappeared entirely. Its successor organization, the North Carolina Defenders of States' Rights, included in its ranks many former Patriots' leaders, but its membership never "numbered more than a few hundred," before it disappeared in the early 1960s. Like the Patriots, the Defenders failed to incite grassroots protest outside of its urban Piedmont base or influence state policy.¹⁴⁴ Just as he refused to yield to the NAACP's efforts to promote integration, Hodges likewise never spoke the language that staunch segregationists demanded from the state's leader.

The Patriots' failure to influence state policy was symbolic of a larger trend in North Carolina following the Supreme Court's *Brown* decision: the absence of a grassroots populist demagogue or political group devoted to stirring up opposition to civil rights and desegregation. The White Citizens' Council, an organization that dominated state politics at the highest level of government throughout the Deep South, had little influence in North Carolina. Despite their prominence in southern politics, no rival political organization or leader emerged in North Carolina with the impact of Mississippi's Ross Barnett, South Carolina's James Byrnes, or Herman Talmadge of Georgia, elected leaders who cast aside the responsibilities of good

¹⁴³ Anthony J. Badger, *New Deal/New South: An Anthony J. Badger Reader* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2007), 84-85, 119-120; Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 164; Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance*, 97; Bartley describes the Patriots as "doomed to function on the fringe of decision making...noisy, sometimes dangerous, but powerless to direct the course of state policy." See also McMillen, *The Citizens' Council*, 111-115; *The Daily Independent* (Kannapolis, N.C.), 27 March 1956; *The Bee* (Danville, Va.), 26 March 1956,

¹⁴⁴ McMillen, *The Citizens' Councils*, 114-115. McMillen credits Governor William B. Umstead's decision to chart "a middle course between prompt acquiescence and protracted defiance."

governance while promoting massive resistance, and ultimately leading to a breakdown in law and order. Sam Ervin and I. Beverly Lake, Sr. bore the closest resemblance to segregationists in state politics, but they differed greatly from many of their counterparts in other states. During the 1950s, Senator Sam Ervin and Beverly Lake, both Harvard-educated lawyers specializing in constitutional law, spoke in opposition to civil rights legislation as a matter of constitutional law and states' rights rather than the overt and emotionally charged racism that typically motivated segregationist demagogues. However, segregationists likewise lacked a grassroots political base in North Carolina. Richardson Preyer, later a candidate for the 1964 Democratic gubernatorial nomination, observed that North Carolina had "all the conditions...ripe for a demagogue," but none successfully emerged to fill the political vacuum created by the *Brown* ruling in 1954. Similarly, Robert Giles, who served as Assistant Attorney General during the Hodges administration, argued that a majority of North Carolinians followed Umstead and Hodges's lead and refused to "go to war" with the federal government to defend segregation, thus preventing a groundswell of popular support for massive resistance.¹⁴⁵ The end of legal segregation, however, was merely one of several events that contributed to the development of two-party politics in North Carolina.

In the aftermath of the Dixiecrats' 1948 campaign, the Republican Party began making inroads in the South. The increasing anti-Truman and anti-civil rights conservatism, and the *Brown* decision, prompted an increasing number of disaffected southern Democrats to support the Republican Party. Southern support for Republican nominee Dwight Eisenhower during the 1950s obscures the fact that these were primarily protest votes against pro-civil rights Democratic nominee Adlai Stevenson, for the Republican Party during the 1950s retained its

¹⁴⁵ Interview with Richardson Preyer by Jack Bass and Walter De Vries, 1/28/74 (A-0137); Interview with Robert Giles by Jay Jenkins, 9/10/1987, (C-0063), SOHP.

civil rights plank. The national party had yet to adopt a party platform favorable to anti-civil rights southern conservatives, but with the absence of a sectional political party, many southerners reluctantly supported Eisenhower due to the lack of a suitable alternative.¹⁴⁶ Increasing competition between the two major political parties was most visible in the fast-growing urban and suburban South, including Atlanta, Birmingham, and Charlotte, while the rural South remained overwhelmingly loyal to the Democratic Party.¹⁴⁷

In 1952, Dwight Eisenhower carried several southern states, including Florida, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. Four years later, Eisenhower again carried these states while adding Kentucky, Louisiana, and West Virginia for his second electoral landslide over Adlai Stevenson. Eisenhower came within fifteen-thousand votes of being the first GOP nominee to carry North Carolina since Herbert Hoover in 1928. The Upper South proved quite hospitable to Eisenhower. With the exception of Louisiana, the Deep South demonstrated its traditional loyalty to the Democratic Party, as Stevenson won the remaining states by wide margins. In both elections, Stevenson's only victories came in the South.¹⁴⁸ Reflecting the influence of the South in the national Democratic Party, Stevenson selected southern Democrats to serve as his vice presidential nominee, Alabama Senator John Sparkman in 1952, followed four years later by Tennessee Senator Estes Kefauver. While this likely worked to keep several southern states in the Democratic ranks, it failed to curb the rising tide of Republican growth in the South. Although the South became increasingly receptive to the Republican Party during the Eisenhower administration, the party had yet to supplant its traditional northern party leadership

¹⁴⁶ Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt*, 222-223, 230-232, 235.

¹⁴⁷ Charles P. Roland, *The Improbable Era: The South since World War Two* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1976), 67.

¹⁴⁸ *North Carolina Manual* 1955, 205; *North Carolina Manual* 1959, 235.

to reflect the influence of southern Republicans and southern Democrats who supported Eisenhower. Regardless, this nevertheless demonstrated the potential for Republicans to compete in the Democratic South.¹⁴⁹

Despite some reservations with the national Democratic Party and Adlai Stevenson, Governor Luther Hodges remained a loyal Democrat during the 1950s. Hodges's acknowledgment that while "neither Party's platform is entirely acceptable to us, [but] I think that the one of the Democratic Party is the more acceptable one" summarized both southern Democrats' party loyalty and their growing disenchantment with its embrace of civil rights. For these party loyalists, the Republican Party failed to convince them to cast aside their traditional allegiances in favor of a party known for its pro-civil rights platform. These differences aside, the Democratic Party remained the most logical political party for even the most conservative of southern Democrats. Demonstrating his party loyalty, Hodges spoke in support of Adlai Stevenson's nomination at the 1956 Democratic National Convention in Chicago, Illinois, while running for election, hardly the actions of a southern Democrat seeking to distance himself from the national party.¹⁵⁰

Despite the inability of the Patriots and other segregationist groups to gain influence in state politics during the Hodges administration, their efforts to do so did not subside. Their failure left unredeemed the segregationist faction, which yearned for political power within the state Democratic Party, and continued their fight through the 1960s. That Governor Hodges prevented integration, massive resistance, and racial violence mattered little to Beverly Lake and

¹⁴⁹ Roland, *The Improbable Era*, 64-65.

¹⁵⁰ Governor Luther H. Hodges to E. G. Spencer, 24 August 1956 ["more acceptable option"]; Hodges to Mrs. Martha Ransom Johnston, 24 February 1956; Hodges to W. L. Totten, 11 August 1956; Hodges to L. L. Caudle, 24 August 1956; Paul M. Butler to Hodges, 29 November 1956 [Democratic National Convention] in Hodges Papers, General Correspondence, 1956, Box 74, Folder "National Democratic Convention" (unnumbered, 1), NCSA; Hodges to George S. Hodges, 13 August 1956, in Hodges Papers, General Correspondence, 1956, Box 74, Folder "National Democratic Convention" (unnumbered, 2), NCSA.

the unredeemed segregationists, who believed he had not done enough to prevent integration nor vocal enough in his opposition to the Supreme Court. The battle over public schools that occupied so much of Governor Hodges's administration increased considerably in the 1960s. The emergence of the civil rights movement, in which North Carolina figured prominently, and the transformation of national politics, shaped much of the state's political development and public discourse for the next several decades. The 1960 Democratic gubernatorial primary and presidential election provided the first real test to determine to determine whether the conservative or progressive faction would have the most influence after Hodges's departure from office.

CHAPTER 3

The Decline of Democratic Party Supremacy in North Carolina Politics, 1960-1968

The 1950s proved a troubling decade for the South following the Supreme Court's *Brown* ruling in May 1954. The rise of massive resistance, the declining influence of southern liberalism, and the beginnings of the civil rights movement fostered tremendous political and social upheaval in the region. Furthermore, the *Brown* decision was a defining event in shaping the development of two-party politics in the South. Beginning in the 1930s, the New Deal, Second World War, and Dixiecrat rebellion provoked political and social change in the one-party South, but failed to dislodge the Democratic Party from its position atop the hierarchy of southern politics. It was not until the Supreme Court outlawed the practice of racial segregation in public schools in 1954 that finally allowed the South to begin the process of severing its traditional bonds of loyalty to the national Democratic Party. The South's response to the *Brown* ruling, particularly in the form of massive resistance, provided the basis for the rightward shift of southern politics.¹ The transformation of southern politics, closely linked to national politics, wrought a tremendous change in state, regional, and national politics in the late twentieth century.

¹ Numan V. Bartley, *The New South, 1945-1980* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 260. According to Bartley, "the politics of massive resistance oriented the regional spectrum far to the right." The rise of massive resistance in the aftermath of the *Brown* ruling foreshadowed the development of two-party politics in the American South. For the unconvincing argument that emphasizes class while minimizing the politics of race, see Byron E. Shafer and Richard Johnson, *The End of Southern Exceptionalism: Class, Race, and Partisan Change in the Postwar South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

More than any previous decade since the creation of the one-party Democratic South, political developments during the 1960s revealed the potential for two-party politics in the South. This paradoxical decade witnessed the brief triumph of postwar American liberalism, the emergence of modern conservatism, and the transformation of national politics in response to the civil rights movement. Democratic President Lyndon Johnson embraced federal civil rights legislation while the Republican Party repudiated its longstanding endorsement of civil rights, a tradition dating back to Reconstruction. The subsequent collapse of the New Deal coalition had a profound impact on southern, and indeed national, politics. As the Democratic Party charted an increasingly leftward course and moved away from its southern base, conservative southern Democrats abandoned the “party of the Fathers” in droves, moving the national Republican Party from the center to the right. Not surprisingly, political developments in North Carolina closely mirrored national politics, which was pivotal in shaping the state’s politics during this decade. In 1960, the Democratic Party remained firmly in control of state politics despite intense party factionalism. By the end of the decade, however, it was readily apparent that the era of unrivaled Democratic hegemony was ending and the Republican Party benefited from an increased role in state and regional politics.

Bert Bennett, Terry Sanford, and the North Carolina Democratic Party

The 1960 Democratic gubernatorial primary provided the first significant challenge to determine the future direction of state politics as Governor Luther H. Hodges ended his term in office. The 1950s was a decidedly conservative era in North Carolina, but it was a qualified North Carolina-style conservatism. Unlike other southern states, North Carolina’s political leaders did not pursue a course of confrontation with the federal government, nor did the state’s leaders encourage massive resistance. Rather, they pledged to uphold the *Brown* ruling while

delaying meaningful desegregation of the state's public schools. This approach, directed by Governor Hodges, won the praise of conservative and progressive Democrats alike. However, it failed to pacify the increasingly vociferous segregationist element within the state Democratic Party, which remained excluded from state-level public policy. The segregationists' failure to gain influence in state politics during the 1950s contributed significantly to shaping the state's political development in the 1960s. This resulted in the intensification of Democratic factionalism and ultimately, the rise of the Republican Party in North Carolina.

The entry of two individuals, Bert Bennett and Terry Sanford, into the political arena in 1960 transformed state politics and the Democratic Party. Bennett, a progressive Democrat and businessman from Winston-Salem, was an anomaly in a party dominated by conservative business interests. Sanford, a Fayetteville attorney and Kerr Scott loyalist who came to prominence in Scott's 1954 Senate primary campaign, emerged as Scott's successor as the state's leading progressive Democrat after Scott's death in 1958. Bennett and Sanford sought to build upon and expand Scott's political legacy in North Carolina as the state's first progressive Democratic governor, and the first to defeat the Shelby Dynasty political machine. Although Scott failed to convince voters to nominate his successor in the 1952 gubernatorial primary, Scott's Senate victory in 1954 was an important achievement that allowed his faction to expand its influence. In 1960, six years of the Hodges administration convinced the Scott faction that it was the ideal time to return their faction to power.²

² For more on Bert Bennett's influence on state politics in the 1960s and beyond, see *Raleigh News and Observer*, 28 August 1960; *Durham Morning Herald*, 20 May 1962; *Greensboro Daily News*, 5 August 1963; *Winston-Salem Journal*, 26 September 1976; *Charlotte Observer*, 8 October 1978; *Raleigh News and Observer*, 10/21/1979; *Winston-Salem Journal*, 1 July 1979; *Greensboro Daily News*, 19 October 1980; *Winston-Salem Journal*, 8 March 1982, North Carolina Collection Clipping File, North Carolina Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill [Hereafter cited as NCC Clipping File].

Governor Hodges's departure from office created a leadership void in the state Democratic Party. Progressives and conservatives alike viewed this as an opportunity to gain influence within the party and direct the state's future. Hodges hoped to buy his moderately conservative, pro-business faction another term in office, while Bert Bennett viewed the gubernatorial campaign as an opportunity to fight the growing influence of the segregationist element within the party, while expanding progressive Democrats' influence. Sanford, a gubernatorial candidate representing the Scott faction, brought in Bennett as campaign manager to "add balance" to the state party. The *Raleigh News and Observer* described Bennett "as impatient with old and tired political mores" and the state's conservative political machine.³ Although progressive Democrats enjoyed only mixed success in the 1950s, they were not without a precedent in state politics.

The early influence of Richard Fountain, Ralph McDonald, Kerr Scott, and Frank Porter Graham created the foundation for progressive Democrats to challenge the entrenched political machine. Kerr Scott's gubernatorial primary victory in 1948 brought immediate legitimacy to the progressive Democrats when he defeated machine candidate Charles Johnson.⁴ The absence of race as a divisive political issue in 1948 contributed significantly to Scott's victory, as economic populism easily trumped the politics of race, particularly in a year in which race was not a major issue in state politics. In 1954, Scott defeated Alton Lennon in the U.S. Senate primary immediately after the Supreme Court's *Brown* ruling imbued the issue of race and segregation into the campaign. The *Brown* decision ensured that race remained a salient issue, if

³ Howard E. Covington, Jr. and Marion A. Ellis, *Terry Sanford: Politics, Progress, and Outrageous Ambitions* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 200; *Raleigh News and Observer*, 28 August 1960, NCC Clipping File.

⁴ Bartley, *The New South, 1945-1980*, 214. According to Bartley, Kerr Scott's election "established a more liberal and rurally oriented faction to compete against the regular organization." Interview with Terry Sanford by Brent Glass, 5/14/1976. (A-328-1), in Southern Oral History Program, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill [Hereafter cited as SOHP].

not the dominant issue in southern politics for the near future. Scott's Senate victory demonstrated that, despite the limitations of southern liberalism on the politics of race, it was not impossible for the progressive Democratic candidate to win in a decidedly unfriendly political climate. Six years later, it was in this political atmosphere that Terry Sanford launched his gubernatorial campaign

Although he did not seek the Democratic gubernatorial nomination until 1960, Terry Sanford's campaign began informally several years earlier with his involvement in the Frank Porter Graham and Kerr Scott Senate campaigns. The lessons learned in these campaigns, especially concerning the issue of race and politics, provided Sanford with valuable campaign experience in a political climate hostile to progressive Democrats.⁵ In 1958, Senator Kerr Scott died in office, joining J. Melville Broughton and Willis Smith as the third senator to do so in the last nine years. Governor Luther H. Hodges selected former Democratic Party chairman B. Everett Jordan, closely aligned with the conservative party elite, as Scott's replacement. Jordan's appointment infuriated the Scott faction, Sanford in particular, but was not a complete surprise. Just as Governor Kerr Scott appointed liberal Democrat Frank Porter Graham to replace Senator J. Melville Broughton in 1949, Hodges picked a Senator with impeccable conservative credentials, much to the progressive Democrats' dismay. The intense factionalism in the state Democratic Party made it highly unreasonable, if not impossible, to expect the governor to select a Senator from the rival faction. Such a move had the potential to undermine their faction's influence. Sanford, however, was also a beneficiary of Jordan's appointment as Hodges's decision elevated Sanford's leadership within the progressive Democratic faction. "I thought it was an outrageous appointment, but it was his [Governor Hodges] business," said Sanford. "And do you know what that did for me? It made me the immediate commander-in-

⁵ Interview with Terry Sanford by Brent Glass, 8/20-8/21/1976, (A-328-2), SOHP.

chief of the Scott people.” According to former Democratic Party chairman and Scott loyalist Capus Waynick, “I didn’t think that Everett [Jordan] was our type of Democrat...I wasn’t for him.”⁶ With Hodges in the governor’s office and Jordan in the Senate, the 1950s ended with the Scott faction desiring a return to political prominence. However, their plans to wage a political campaign found opposition from both the conservatives and segregationist Democrats who also hoped to expand their influence in the state party.

In February 1960, the emergence of the sit-in movement in Greensboro, North Carolina, made race and civil rights the central issue of the gubernatorial primary.⁷ Not only did this event mark the beginning of the civil rights movement in North Carolina, it also provided segregationist Democrats with the opportunity to field a candidate in the gubernatorial primary. The sit-ins made it appear that the Hodges administration failed to maintain law and order in the years following the *Brown* ruling, and seemingly contradicted Hodges’s claim that his path of moderation was the best way to preserve segregation. Attorney General Malcolm B. Seawell blamed “persons coming into North Carolina from other states” whose “actions can only result in irreparable harm being done to race relations here in North Carolina.” Seawell warned, “These incidents have posed and continue to pose a threat to the peace and good order in the communities in which they occur.” Similarly, Hodges viewed the sit-ins as a “breakdown in law and order” that carries with it the potential for extremism that “we have been fortunate” to so far avoid.⁸

⁶ Interview with Terry Sanford by Jack D. Fler, 3/18/1998, (C-0335); Interview with Capus Waynick by Bill Finger, 2/4/1974, (A-332-1); See also Interview with Horace Kornegay by Ben Bulla, 1/11/1989 (C-0165) SOHP.

⁷ William H. Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980). This volume is the best study of the sit-in movement and its implications for the civil rights movement and North Carolina politics in the 1960s. The sit-ins marked the beginning of the civil rights struggle in North Carolina, which found students from predominantly black North Carolina A&T College challenging segregation at a white-only lunch counter in a local Woolworth’s store.

The state's muted response to the *Brown* ruling, the absence of populist demagogues among the state's Democratic Party leadership, and the overwhelming popular approval of the Pearsall Plan combined to foster a political climate much unlike that of Virginia, South Carolina, and the Deep South. Governor Luther H. Hodges succeeded admirably in maintaining the course of moderation while other southern states openly defied the United States Supreme Court and provoked confrontations with the federal government. The failure of the Patriots of North Carolina and other segregationists to gain influence in the state Democratic Party and promote massive resistance undoubtedly helped Hodges steer this course, but as Hodges's time in office neared its conclusion, unredeemed segregationists saw an excellent opportunity to present their agenda to voters in 1960.⁹

Less than a month after the start of the anti-segregation sit-in movement, I. Beverly Lake entered the Democratic gubernatorial primary.¹⁰ Lake, a former Assistant State Attorney General who first emerged as a vocal segregationist in the 1950s, criticized Malcolm Seawell's pledge to uphold the *Brown* ruling and the limited desegregation efforts accomplished under the Hodges administration. Hodges's subsequent endorsement of Seawell in the primary campaign made Seawell an easy target and earned him Lake's enmity.¹¹ In response to the sit-ins, he warned that desegregation would lead to "chaos and confusion" and pledged to support "the right of the owner of any store, restaurant, or café to decide for himself what customers he will serve." As the students leading the protests came from a predominately African-American school, North

⁸ Statement of Attorney General Malcolm B. Seawell, 2/10/1960; Press Conference Statement by Governor Luther H. Hodges 3/10/1960, both in Governor Luther H. Hodges Papers, General Correspondence, 1960, Box 522, Folder "Segregation-Lunch Counter," in North Carolina State Archives, North Carolina Office of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina [Hereafter cited as NCSA]; Covington and Ellis, *Terry Sanford*, 205.

⁹ For more on Governor Hodges and his leadership following the *Brown* ruling, see Interview with Robert Giles by Jay Jenkins, 9/10/1987, (C-0063), SOHP.

¹⁰ *New York Times*, 3 March 1960.

¹¹ Covington and Ellis, *Terry Sanford*, 215.

Carolina A&T College, Lake argued that it was the school administration's responsibility to put a stop to the organizing efforts. Lake argued that if they failed to do so, "the state should supply the school with an administration which can and will do so."¹² Furthermore, Lake blamed Hodges's course of moderation for leaving North Carolina "the softest spot in the South" and most vulnerable to civil rights activists.¹³ The potential desegregation of public facilities represented in microcosm the threat of desegregation statewide and the potential for instability and violence. Lake's candidacy was the source of much concern for Governor Hodges.

Although he was a conservative Democrat, Hodges remained acutely aware of the threat posed by Lake to the state's political and economic stability. Hodges observed that Lake's campaign "brings in the race a segregation problem. I hate to see it done. So far as I know, we are the first southern state not to have a candidate of any consequence running on the extreme segregationist ticket. I hope we can beat him badly," said Hodges.¹⁴

The sit-in movement made civil rights and segregation a campaign issue in 1960, but Lake attempted to make it *the* issue of the gubernatorial primary. Terry Sanford's experience in 1950 and 1954 provided him with the political acumen necessary to deflect the issue and wage a successful primary campaign despite its prominence. Following six years of frustrations with Governor Hodges's moderation, the sit-in movement provided Beverly Lake with a reason to enter the gubernatorial primary. Rather than being a traditional conservative-progressive struggle, Lake's entry brought into the primary campaign the segregationist faction, heretofore excluded from state policy-making decisions during the Hodges administration. Governor

¹² *Washington Post*, 11 April 1960 ["the right of the owner"]; *Chicago Defender*, 29 February 1960 ["the state should supply an administration"].

¹³ *The Daily Times-News* (Burlington, N.C.), 6 May 1960.

¹⁴ Governor Hodges to Jim Daniel, 3/2/1960, in Hodges Papers, General Correspondence, 1960, Box 492, Folder "Hodges: Political, D," in NCSA; Covington and Ellis, *Terry Sanford*, 207.

Hodges's endorsement of Malcolm Seawell to represent the conservative faction was his attempt to minimize both progressive and segregationist influence in the state Democratic Party. Not surprisingly, the politics of race and segregation figured prominently in this campaign.

According to Lake campaign manager Robert Morgan: "All of the candidates in 1960 were segregationists except Malcolm Seawell...the attorney general. Malcolm was the only one who had the courage to stand up and say we're going to live by the Supreme Court decision. Terry [Sanford] didn't come out for segregation. In fact, he came out for preserving the status quo. Dr. Lake was firm in his views, and I think that came from the fact that [he] was the assistant attorney general who prepared and argued North Carolina's position in the *Brown* case in 1954."¹⁵

Beverly Lake's campaign relied less on issues of responsible governance and instead on the threats, real or imagined, posed by the NAACP and liberals seeking to undermine segregation. During the primary campaign, Lake pledged to "create a widespread awareness of the NAACP and its allies, and a climate of unyielding opposition to it."¹⁶ At the same time, however, Lake also campaigned on issues of economic populism, fiscal conservatism, and reforming state government. Lake earned a reputation as an economic populist when he fought for reduced utility rates and increased regulation in the state attorney general's office. "Dr. Lake was very much of a populist," said Robert Morgan, his former campaign manager. "His views, I think, were distorted quite a bit because of his views on segregation."¹⁷ In 1960, however, economic populism was not a significant political issue, nor was it popular among the

¹⁵ Interview with Robert Morgan by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, 12/1/1973, (A-136), SOHP; Interview with I. Beverly Lake, Sr. by Charles Dunn, 9/8/1987, (C-0043), SOHP.

¹⁶ Lake quoted in Greensboro *Daily News*, 6 May 1960, cited in Bartley, *The New South*, 258. See also Interview with I. Beverly Lake, Sr. by Charles Dunn, 9/8/1987, (C-0043), SOHP.

¹⁷ Interview with Robert Morgan by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, 12/1/1973, (A-136), SOHP.

conservative business interests or voters. The *Brown* ruling and the emergence of the civil rights movement allowed the politics of race to trump southern liberalism and economic populism. Additionally, economic populism was not an issue attached to conservative Democrats. Rather, voters most closely associated this platform with Kerr Scott and the state's progressive Democrats. Lake based his campaign on segregationist ideology rather than the need for reforming state government. Most importantly, his stump speeches warning of integration and the U.S. Supreme Court created the necessary buzz to launch a viable campaign.¹⁸

Malcolm Seawell's loss in the gubernatorial primary left Terry Sanford as Beverly Lake's primary target in the runoff. Seawell represented the Hodges administration and pledged to enforce the *Brown* ruling, both of which were more than enough to earn Lake's enmity. With the establishment candidate out, Lake set his sights on Sanford, who now enjoyed Hodges's backing. Despite their philosophical differences, Hodges threw his unconditional support behind Sanford in preparation for the runoff. Lake had the potential to inspire massive resistance, shut down the state's public schools, provoke a confrontation with the federal government, and undo Hodges's legacy as a moderate, business-friendly governor. Lake's strong primary showing united Hodges and Sanford, as both recognized the disastrous potential of a Lake victory. In doing so, Lake inadvertently accomplished what many believed impossible: the ability to unify the conservative and progressive Democrats against a common political adversary who was not a Republican.¹⁹

¹⁸ Covington and Ellis, *Terry Sanford*, 211-212, 224-225. According to Sanford's biographers, "It wasn't balancing the budget, keeping the power bills low, or overhauling the highway commission that gave Lake's campaign appearances their evangelical flavor. Folks took to their feet and let loose their rebel yells when Lake talked about the threats of the NAACP and the Supreme Court to their segregated lives." Quoted on pp. 224-225.

¹⁹ Bartley, *The New South*, 258; Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 184; Covington and Ellis, *Terry Sanford*, 223; *Washington Post*, 29 May 1960, 30 May 1960, 1 June 1960; *North Carolina Manual* 1963, 270. Terry Sanford (269,463) won a plurality of the votes in the primary. The remaining three candidates Beverly Lake (181,692), Malcolm Seawell (101,148), and John D. Larkins, Jr. (100,757), prevented Sanford from claiming an outright majority.

In the runoff, Terry Sanford presented himself as the law and order candidate. Like Malcolm Seawell in the primary, Sanford made clear his intent to uphold and enforce the *Brown* ruling. Sanford's message of law and order contrasted sharply with Lake's intentions to ignore the Supreme Court, which Sanford believed had the potential to bring down on North Carolina the full force of the federal government, a confrontation that the state was not likely to win. "I am for the people of North Carolina and I am for the rule of law," said Sanford. We are for the Supreme Court decision. We are going to implement it according to the law. North Carolina is a law-abiding state and proud of it." Hodges's leadership in the years following the *Brown* decision and public support of the Pearsall Plan made it possible for Sanford to present himself as the law and order candidate in 1960. Sanford later reflected on the importance of mentioning the importance of pride at the conclusion of his speeches. "When you inflected your voice and said 'proud of it' you never failed to get applause," recalled Sanford.²⁰

Although he did not favor provoking a confrontation with the federal government, Sanford was certain never to present himself as supporting integration and thus maintained control of the race issue, refusing to allow Lake to gain ground in the runoff. The political realities of post-*Brown* southern politics dictated that Sanford had to defend segregation, similar to Kerr Scott in his 1954 Senate campaign, but doing so in a manner befitting a progressive Democrat. Sanford did not defend the practice of segregation as a necessity, nor did he use this as a way to promote massive resistance. Rather, Sanford called Lake's use of segregation a "false issue" in the campaign. "I am and have been on the solid ground of being in favor of the North Carolina approach," Sanford argued. "No other workable solution has been suggested."²¹

²⁰ Interview with Terry Sanford by Jack D. Fleer, 3/18/1998 (C-0335), SOHP.

Responding to Lake's accusations that he favored integration, Sanford responded forcefully: "I am not an integrationist. Beverly Lake knows I am not an integrationist. He is desperate."²² Sanford repeatedly criticized Lake's vocal opposition to integration, predicting that a Lake victory would "lead to bloodshed, and integration or closed schools." On the issue of segregation, "I know how to handle it, and he [Lake] doesn't," he argued.²³ Sanford summed up the predicament he faced in 1960: "We had a racist campaign thrown against us, [at] the last minute...[and] with my experience in the Frank Graham campaign, I didn't have any question as to where I stood. I had the question of how to handle a delicate situation and keep it in balance, but I never did really consider how to make a decision on that. I always knew that we ought to do the decent thing and the question was how to translate the decent thing into action."²⁴

Terry Sanford's support for the Pearsall Plan legitimized his candidacy among the state's electorate, particularly conservative Democrats. After all, voters overwhelmingly supported the state's response to the *Brown* ruling during the Hodges administration. "I thought it was a brilliant piece of legislation...and I made myself very prominent in supporting it," said Sanford. His public backing of the Pearsall Plan "satisfied a whole lot of people [including] the true racists" and afforded him the ability to deflect Lake's campaign attacks accusing him of supporting racial integration. Sanford was not as vocal as Lake in his opposition to integration, yet Lake failed to impeach Sanford's credentials as a law and order candidate. As a result,

²¹ *Raleigh News and Observer*, 31 May 1960 ["false issue" and "North Carolina approach"]; Earl Black, *Southern Governors and Civil Rights: Racial Segregation as a Campaign Issue in the Second Reconstruction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 217.

²² Interview with Terry Sanford by Jack D. Fleer, 3/18/1998 (C-0335), SOHP; Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 181-185.

²³ *Raleigh News and Observer*, 31 May 1960, 1 June 1960.

²⁴ Interview with Terry Sanford by Brent Glass, 8/20-8/21/1976, (A-328-2), SOHP; *New York Times*, 29 May 1960, 30 May 1960, 31 May 1960, 5 June 1960.

Sanford “never did let him [Lake] get the upper hand on the race issue.” With Hodges’s support and the party establishment’s backing, he easily defeated Lake in the runoff, thus removing from Democratic Party politics the segregation issue.²⁵

Terry Sanford’s Democratic gubernatorial primary victory was significant for a number of reasons. First, it returned the Kerr Scott faction to the forefront of the state Democratic Party and demonstrated that Scott’s election was not a fluke. Unlike Scott’s 1948 campaign, however, Sanford enjoyed the full support of the state party establishment during the runoff.²⁶ Second, Sanford defeated both the Hodges and Lake faction on his way to the gubernatorial nomination. “We ran against the old guard, and we ran against Hodges’s wing, we ran against the racist campaign, and we won against all of them,” Sanford declared.²⁷ Third, Sanford successfully turned back the challenge posed not only by Hodges’s conservative faction, but also from the growing segregationist faction within the state Democratic Party. Although the Lake-Seawell rivalry dominated the initial primary, Sanford fought a two-front campaign within the state party, defeating the party establishment and the segregationist faction. Lake’s entry into the gubernatorial arena ensured that the primary campaign, and the future of state politics, would not be business as usual. The growing influence of conservative segregationists complicated the traditional conservative-progressive rivalry within the state party.

²⁵ Interview with Terry Sanford by Jack D. Fleer, 3/18/1998 (C-0335), SOHP; Covington and Ellis, *Terry Sanford*, 229, 235; *New York Times*, 24 June 1960, 26 June 1960, 30 June 1960; *Washington Post*, 26 June 1960; *Atlanta Daily World*, 28 June 1960; *North Carolina Manual*, 1963, 270. Sanford (352,136) defeated Lake (275,905) by a considerable margin.

²⁶ Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance*, 342n1. According to Bartley: “In 1960, the anti-organization candidate, Terry Sanford entered the gubernatorial runoff against I. Beverly Lake, an extreme neobourbon proponent of white southern rights. The uncompromising position symbolized by Lake threatened the state’s industrial stability, and the traditional organization, led by Governor Luther Hodges, supported Sanford’s candidacy as the lesser of two evils. The organization’s role in Sanford’s election represented the state’s conservative reaction to massive resistance extremism.”

²⁷ Interview with Terry Sanford by Brent Glass, 5/14/1976, (A-328-1), SOHP.

Additionally, the emergence of the sit-in movement, followed shortly thereafter by Lake's entrance into the gubernatorial primary, fostered a hostile political atmosphere in North Carolina, not unlike that created in the aftermath of the *Brown* ruling. The most significant difference between Scott's 1954 campaign and Sanford's 1960 gubernatorial campaign was that Beverly Lake had the potential benefit of six years of discontent upon which to build his campaign, but failed to win the primary. Governor Hodges's leadership in maintaining law and order, preventing massive resistance, and keeping open the state's public schools was a contributing factor in preventing Lake from waging a successful campaign in 1960. It was Hodges's decisive leadership, demonstrated most impressively with the Pearsall Plan, which kept the calm and prevented segregationists like Beverly Lake from gaining influence within the state party. As governor, Hodges likely did more to help Sanford win the primary than he ever realized. Sanford argued that his victory over Lake "has to be a significant event in the history of the state because it's the first time that a racist campaign had ever been defeated."²⁸

In 1948, Kerr Scott revealed the increasing potential for a viable alternative to conservative machine politics in the one-party South. Likewise, Terry Sanford's gubernatorial nomination in 1960 was not merely a stroke of luck. It was instead the logical outcome in the state's political development in the decade that followed Scott's election. "All of that built up to what we did in [1960], which brought it all together...So we were beginning to put North Carolina together. Then it got shattered by the racist thing that came on more or less expectedly." Sanford recognized the challenges of promoting the progressive faction in a hostile political environment, such as in the Graham and Scott campaigns, and reached its zenith in 1960.²⁹ According to Sanford political aide Joel Fleishman, "I don't think it [Sanford's primary

²⁸ Interview with Terry Sanford by Brent Glass, 5/14/1976, (A-328-1), SOHP.

victory] was an accident. The difference was that Terry decided that he was...it is much harder for liberals to get elected anywhere, at least in the South and basically a conservative political culture which has a lot of demons in its mind, it is very hard for a liberal to run in the South. Terry started running for governor six years before [1960]. He put together a [strong] network of political leadership throughout the state. That is the kind of organization that liberals have to have in order to win in the South.”³⁰ Likewise, Lake ran for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination six years after the *Brown* decision, but the political environment was no more favorable to Lake than it was to Alton Lennon in 1954. The absence of a grassroots segregationist organization and the failure of conservative segregationists to gain influence in state politics doomed Lake’s candidacy, while ultimately benefiting Sanford. Similar to the Patriots of North Carolina’s earlier endorsement of Hodges, the overwhelming popular support for the Pearsall Plan made it difficult for Lake to facilitate the creation of a statewide organization to promote his political agenda.

Terry Sanford’s victory over Seawell and Lake failed to resolve the persistent factionalism within the state party. If anything, the results left the conservatives with less influence while the segregationists remained excluded from party leadership. This, however, was the least of Sanford’s concerns after winning the gubernatorial nomination. In 1960, state and national political developments had the potential to disrupt Democratic Party dominance. First, President Eisenhower came within fifteen thousand votes of carrying North Carolina in 1956. It was possible for Republican gubernatorial nominee Robert Gavin to win the gubernatorial campaign, or Richard Nixon to carry the state in the presidential election. Virginia Republican Party Chairman I. Lee Potter, who also served the national party as director of

²⁹ Interview with Terry Sanford by Brent Glass, 5/14/1976, (A-328-1), SOHP.

³⁰ Interview with Joel Fleishman by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, 2/8/1974, (A-121), SOHP.

“Southern operations,” predicted a Nixon victory in North Carolina and argued that Robert Gavin has an “excellent” opportunity to defeat Sanford in the general election.³¹ The impressive growth of the Republican Party outside of its traditional stronghold in the foothills and mountains greatly improved the party’s ability to compete as a statewide organization. In August, the *New York Times* noted, “the Democrats plan to run as scared as they ever have in a state in which Republicans make up no more than one-third of the registered vote.”³² Second, Terry Sanford’s endorsement of John F. Kennedy prior to the Democratic National Convention unleashed a firestorm of controversy in North Carolina. Sanford’s endorsement put him at odds with the state party leadership’s support for Lyndon Baines Johnson. Finally, Sanford’s decision ignited a firestorm of anti-Catholic sentiment across North Carolina, in which non-Protestants constituted only a small minority of the state’s population. In total, the makings of a Republican upset were in place several months prior to the general election.³³

In the aftermath of the divisive gubernatorial primary and the Democratic National Convention, there existed a very real possibility for the Republican Party to wage a serious campaign in North Carolina for both governor and president.³⁴ Terry Sanford’s endorsement of

³¹ *Washington Post*, 21 July 1960.

³² *New York Times*, 7 August 1960. That one-third of the state’s voters were Republican mattered less than the fact that an increasing number of registered Democrats voted for Republican candidates in the 1950s, particularly in the presidential elections of 1952 and 1956. See also *The Daily Times-News* (Burlington, N.C.), 30 May 1960.

³³ Rob Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics: The Personalities, Elections, and Events that Shaped Modern North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 184-185; Covington and Ellis, *Terry Sanford*, 240-241; *Raleigh News and Observer*, 28 August 1960, NCC Clipping File. Bert Bennett convinced Terry Sanford to endorse John F. Kennedy at the Democratic National Convention as part of his effort to create a “better North Carolina.” The *Raleigh News and Observer* described the “Sanford-Bennett boldness...is indicated in their willingness to bear the religious tiger by allying themselves with a Catholic presidential candidate in an overwhelmingly Protestant state.” (*Raleigh News and Observer*, 28 August 1960).

³⁴ Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 181. According to Christensen, “The Republican Party had not yet emerged as a strong factor in North Carolina politics, so the [gubernatorial] race would be decided in the Democratic primary.” I disagree with this statement. Eisenhower’s strong showing in the 1950s, Democratic factionalism, and Sanford’s endorsement of an unpopular Kennedy created the opportunity for a Republican upset in 1960.

Kennedy immediately elevated Robert Gavin and Richard Nixon into serious contenders to carry the state in the general election. Sanford was one of the few southern Democrats running for office in 1960 to openly campaign for Kennedy. It was a tremendous political risk that jeopardized his gubernatorial campaign. “I thought we had the problem of Kennedy, who really wasn’t very popular,” Sanford recalled. “People now seem to overlook that fact. We were carrying a terrible burden by carrying Kennedy in this state.”³⁵ Sanford noted that following the Democratic National Convention, he returned to North Carolina “to face a poll that gave Nixon a two-to-one lead over [Kennedy] and me a two-to-one lead over [Robert] Gavin.”³⁶

Despite these ominous signs, Sanford and Kennedy ultimately defeated their Republican rivals and North Carolina Democrats enjoyed a banner year. Rather than resorting to self-defeating tactics such as infighting and allowing Republicans to encroach upon their territory, the North Carolina Democratic Party lined up behind the party ticket to present a unified front in preparation for the general election. Despite traditional party factionalism, North Carolina Democrats always united in time for the general election. Whatever philosophical differences existed between the conservatives and progressives mattered less when they faced the Republican Party. For much of the twentieth century, Republicans did not pose a significant threat to Democratic supremacy at the state level. President Eisenhower’s narrow loss four years earlier, however, revealed to the potential for increased party competition in North Carolina. Regardless of party ideology, a Republican victory for statewide office was not an acceptable option for the state’s Democrats in 1960.

³⁵ Interview with Terry Sanford by Brent Glass, 5/14/1976, (A-328-1), SOHP.

³⁶ Interview with Terry Sanford by Jack D. Fleer, 3/18/1998, (C-0335), SOHP. In 1948, Kerr Scott avoided President Truman like the plague, fearing that his declining popularity had the potential to doom his gubernatorial campaign. Truman and Scott easily carried North Carolina in the general election. In 1960, Sanford endorsed Kennedy prior to the Democratic National Convention, a move that provided considerable traction to Robert Gavin and Richard Nixon’s campaigns. Scott avoided a popular candidate in 1948, while Sanford embraced an unpopular candidate twelve years later.

Demonstrating the importance of party unity, I. Beverly Lake urged his supporters to abandon their write-in campaign and promised to honor his earlier pledge to support Terry Sanford for the party's sake. Although Governor Luther Hodges initially supported Texas Senator Lyndon Baines Johnson, whose candidacy Hodges believed "would help restore the South to a position of greater influence in national leadership, which would be good for the country and for the South," Hodges emerged as one of John F. Kennedy's most vocal supporters in North Carolina.³⁷ Hodges was, above all else, a loyal Democrat who refused to allow factionalism to hinder the party's election efforts. "Senator Kennedy knew how I felt," recalled Hodges. "I told him early that if he won the nomination I would work night and day anywhere in the United States for his election."³⁸ Following Kennedy's nomination, Hodges campaigned extensively on behalf of the party's ticket.

Governor Hodges confronted the one issue that caused the most resistance among southern Democrats to support the party's presidential nominee: Kennedy's Catholic faith. "I felt keenly all of us should combat the prejudice of the religious issue against Kennedy," said Hodges, who preached the virtue of the Democratic Party ticket and consistently downplayed the religious issue in the campaign. At a party unity rally in Raleigh, Hodges remarked, "the people of this country will vote for the best man regardless of church affiliation."³⁹ Hodges recognized that the religious issue threatened to do considerable damage to the Democratic Party ticket in 1960. "If it were not for the religious issue," said Hodges, "Nixon would be annihilated by

³⁷ *New York Times*, 7 August 1960, 10 August 1960; Luther H. Hodges, *Businessman in the Statehouse: Six Years as Governor of North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962), 292.

³⁸ Hodges, *Businessman in the Statehouse*, 292-294.

³⁹ Hodges, *Businessman in the Statehouse*, 292 ["combat the prejudice"]; *New York Times*, 10 August 1960 ["vote for the best man"].

Kennedy.”⁴⁰ Hodges, Sanford, and other Democrats labored to avoid a repeat of the 1928 presidential election in which Senator Furnifold Simmons endorsed Republican nominee Herbert Hoover rather than Democratic nominee Al Smith, an Irish-American Catholic who opposed prohibition. In 1960, the Democratic Party benefited from the absence of factionalism among the state party leadership over Kennedy’s religion. As Hodges observed, “a great difference is that there is no division among Party leaders in North Carolina so far as the Democrats are concerned.”⁴¹ In 1928, Hoover’s Protestant religion and prohibitionist stance provided southern Democrats with a reason to support him. In 1960, however, Richard Nixon failed to inspire similar confidence among loyal southern Democrats.

Despite harsh criticism from his fellow southern Democrats, Governor Hodges strived to make Kennedy’s religion a non-issue in the presidential campaign. Two years prior to the campaign, C. C. Herbert presaged the anti-Catholic sentiment that swept the state in 1960. He declared his opposition to Kennedy’s nomination, arguing his “allegiance to the Pope, who is regarded as both a political and a religious leader, would, I believe, keep a Catholic President from being impartial in religious affairs.”⁴² One constituent wondered how Hodges, a Methodist and Mason, could support a Catholic candidate. H. E. Reagan informed Governor Hodges that due to Kennedy’s Catholic faith, “the present Democratic Party bears no semblance to the Party

⁴⁰ Governor Luther H. Hodges to E. John Dorr, 8/31/1960, in Governor Luther H. Hodges Papers, General Correspondence, 1960, Box 492, Folder “Hodges: Political: D,” in NCSA. In his autobiography, Hodges reflected on the religious issue: “I said scores of times before and during the campaign, that Senator John Kennedy could beat Nixon by five million votes if it were not for the religious issue. I have never changed from that view.” Hodges. *Businessman in the Statehouse*, 291.

⁴¹ Hodges to Dorr, 8/31/1960, in Hodges Papers, NCSA. In 1928, Senator Furnifold Simmons, the founder of the political machine that bore his name, endorsed Republican Herbert Hoover. Democratic gubernatorial nominee O. Max Gardner endorsed and campaigned for Al Smith. Gardner won his gubernatorial campaign and his political machine supplanted Simmons, who lost his 1930 bid for reelection in the Democratic Senate primary.

⁴² C. C. Herbert, Jr. to Governor Hodges, 12/23/1958, in Hodges Papers, General Correspondence, 1960, Box 492, Folder “Hodges: Political, 1958-1959,” in NCSA. See also Vernon Morton to Governor Luther H. Hodges, 10/1/1959, General Correspondence, 1960, Folder “Political, 1959,” in NCSA.

of my ancestors, and I shall support the Republican Party this year because it is more nearly the Democratic Party of old.”⁴³ Hodges deflected criticisms of his support for Kennedy by presenting himself as a staunch believer “in the great principle of separation of church and state” who refused to support a candidate who advocated otherwise.⁴⁴ However, the rising tide of anti-Catholic sentiment was but one of many issues confronted during this campaign.

The issue of civil rights reared its head in the 1960 presidential campaign, but did not dominate the political headlines. Adlai Stevenson’s support for civil rights in 1952 and 1956 undoubtedly cost him some support from southern Democrats, but the South provided him with his only victories in 1956. Hodges informed supporters that the Democratic Party’s civil rights platform was not a suitable reason to abandon their loyalty because “there is no appreciable difference in the positions taken by the two parties.”⁴⁵ Hodges could make this claim without political retribution because both political parties endorsed civil rights. However, the Republican Party had yet to offer a suitable alternative to disaffected southern Democrats. The pro-civil rights position of the Eisenhower administration left southern Democrats with few reasons to support the Republican Party in 1960. “Let the North have Ike [Eisenhower] and the Negroes,” argued one unreconstructed “Dixiecrat and old time Confederate” who supported Texas Senator Lyndon Baines Johnson as the best way to maintain segregation. “I’m tired of living under a dictator,” he informed Hodges. His views reflect the region’s traditional dislike with

⁴³ H. E. Reagan to Governor Luther H. Hodges, 10/27/1960, in Hodges Papers, General Correspondence, 1960, Box 495, Folder “Hodges: Political, Religious,” in NCSA.

⁴⁴ Robert Giles to George Hollowell, 10/18/1960, in Hodges Papers, General Correspondence, 1960, Box 495, Folder “Hodges: Political, Religious,” in NCSA; For more on anti-Catholic sentiment in North Carolina, see *The Daily Times-News* (Burlington, N.C.), 16 July 1960, 10 August 1960, 21 September 1960, 31 October 1960.

⁴⁵ Governor Luther H. Hodges to Stephen Daly, 10/4/1960, in Hodges Papers, General Correspondence, 1960, Box 492, Folder “Hodges: Political, D,” in NCSA.

Eisenhower's civil rights record, particularly after the Little Rock Crisis in 1957.⁴⁶ Despite President Truman's support for federal civil rights legislation in 1948 and the party's pro-civil rights platform under two-time Democratic presidential nominee Adlai Stevenson in the 1950s, civil rights was not a salient political issue nor did it significantly damage the national Democratic Party in the South in 1960. The most significant developments in the civil rights struggle in the 1950s, such as the *Brown* ruling and the Little Rock Crisis, occurred under the Eisenhower administration. As such, it was the Republicans, rather than the Democrats, who bore the label of the party of civil rights in 1960. Eisenhower's support for the Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1960 left many southerners, Democrats and Republicans alike, wary of his administration and Republicans' alleged support for the South.⁴⁷ Eisenhower's pro-civil rights position had the potential to undermine Republican growth in the South during the 1950s, a development that undoubtedly aided southern Democrats.

Luther Hodges also defended John F. Kennedy against accusations that he threatened to dismantle free market capitalism. "Mr. Kennedy is not a socialist," said Hodges. "He would not destroy free enterprise." That Hodges, a dedicated free market capitalist, supported Kennedy unconditionally, spoke volumes about these allegations. Hodges staunchly defended his loyalty to the Democratic Party. "I am working for the Democratic ticket because I believe in the

⁴⁶ Charles Clinton Cole to Governor Luther H. Hodges, 10/15/1959, in Hodges Papers, General Correspondence, 1960, Box 492, Folder "Political, 1959," in NCSA.

⁴⁷ Alexander P. Lamis, *The Two-Party South*, 2d exp. ed., (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 17; Charles Roland, *The Improbable Era: The South since World War Two* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1968), 68. In the 1950s, southern Democrats in Congress led the fight against President Eisenhower's civil rights agenda. Chief among these opponents of civil rights in the U.S. Senate were North Carolina Senator Sam Ervin, South Carolina's Olin Johnston, and Georgia's Richard Russell. See, for example, *Raleigh News and Observer*, 26 March 1957, 4 June 1957, 6 June 1957, 22 June 1957, 16 July 1957; *Asheville Citizen*, 9 July 1957, 15 July 1957, 24 July 1957; *Durham Morning Herald*, 30 July 1957, 4 August 1957. Olin Johnston, for one, argued that it was Democrats who kept the South from being "beaten to death" in the battle over civil rights. According to Johnston, Eisenhower's proposed civil rights commission would "send hordes of inquisitors within our southern state borders to enforce the worst proposed legislation since Reconstruction." Johnston quoted in *Durham Morning Herald*, 4 August 1957, NCC Clipping File. For Sam Ervin's political career, see Karl E. Campbell, *Senator Sam Ervin: Last of the Founding Fathers* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

Democratic Party and its standard-bearers will do more for the country than will the other side [Republicans]. I am very sincere about this.”⁴⁸ Hodges also received criticism for his efforts to

maintain party unity and promote the region’s traditional loyalty to the Democratic Party.

Foreshadowing the decline of Democratic Party supremacy in southern politics, one constituent called unquestioned party loyalty “an unreasoning habit [and] an empty tradition that has been

carried to the extreme of stupidity.”⁴⁹ However, just as anti-Truman Democrats failed to sway

Governor R. Gregg Cherry to support the Dixiecrats in 1948, Hodges refused to allow the anti-

Kennedy sentiment to influence his support for the party ticket. If anything, it strengthened his

resolve to campaign on behalf of his party. For all those who criticized Hodges and the JFK-LBJ

ticket, however, others supported his efforts to maintain party unity. One North Carolinian

praised Hodges’s efforts for the national ticket, believing that “the South made a mistake in

voting for Eisenhower in 1956 and they’ll make a far greater mistake if they vote for Nixon [who is] no friend of the Southland.”⁵⁰

As part of his pro-Kennedy campaign, Hodges worked some humor into the controversy

over Kennedy’s religion and drew further parallels to the 1928 presidential campaign between

Catholic Democrat Al Smith and Quaker Republican Herbert Hoover. Hodges responded

forcefully to accusations he spoke ill of Richard Nixon’s Quaker religion during a campaign

rally, and reminded Democrats of the last time the nation went to the polls to choose between a

Catholic and a Quaker. “I have never made a statement against the Quakers as I think they are

one of the greatest people on earth. In my political speech...I pointed out that in 1928 we had a

⁴⁸ Governor Luther H. Hodges to J. C. Canipe, 9/22/1960, in Hodges Papers, General Correspondence, 1960, Box 492, Folder “Hodges: Political-A. B. C; General,” in NCSA.

⁴⁹ Charles L. Foster to Governor Hodges, 11/14/1960, in Hodges Papers, General Correspondence, 1960, Box 492, Folder “Hodges: Political, F,” in NCSA.

⁵⁰ Thomas F. Gibson to Governor Hodges, 9/16/1960, in Hodges Papers, General Correspondence, 1960, Box 492, Folder “Hodges: Political, G,” in NCSA.

Catholic and Quaker running and we didn't have very good times under the Quaker and I hope it didn't happen again. It has nothing to do with religion."⁵¹ Although party loyalty among southern Democrats was no longer the given that it was just two decades prior, Hodges was well aware of the party's importance to the South. Referencing the Great Depression that began under President Hoover, Hodges reminded voters of the Democratic Party's importance to the South. Furthermore, Hodges's political aide Robert E. Giles defended the governor's political loyalty because the Democratic Party was "the only [political] Party that has attempted to carry out programs of some benefit to the South."⁵² In 1960, Hodges firmly believed that "Senator Kennedy would be a better President than Mr. Nixon....and the Democratic Party would better serve the country than Mr. Nixon and the Republican Party."⁵³

John F. Kennedy's selection of Lyndon Baines Johnson as the party's vice presidential nominee likely aided his campaign's support among southern Democrats, and also demonstrated the decline of the Democratic Party in southern politics. Alabama Governor John Patterson argued that Johnson's presence "will insure full unity," while Virginia Governor J. Lindsay Almond believed the Kennedy-Johnson ticket "will lead us to victory in Virginia." According to Patterson, the Democratic Party presented "a tremendously stronger and more popular ticket with the average man than anything the Republicans could put up." Hodges, along with South Carolina Governor Ernest Hollings and Tennessee's Buford Ellington, believed that the Democratic Party would prevail in the South, and indeed, nationally, with Johnson's addition to the ticket. In contrast, Mississippi Governor Ross Barnett warned of its potential consequences.

⁵¹ Governor Luther H. Hodges to C. H. Mendler, 10/26/1960, in Hodges Papers, General Correspondence, 1960, Box 495, Folder "Hodges: Political, Religious," in NCSA.

⁵² Robert E. Giles to Mrs. Luther A. Gambill, 11/17/1960, in Hodges Papers, General Correspondence, 1960, Box 492, Folder "Hodges: Political, G," in NCSA.

⁵³ Robert E. Giles to Carol Hughes, 11/28/1960, in Hodges Papers, General Correspondence, 1960, Box 492, Folder "Hodges: Political, H," in NCSA.

“I don’t see how Mississippi can take the [pro-civil rights] platform on which [the nominees] must run,” said Barnett. “They endorsed that platform and Mississippi cannot accept it.”

Similarly, Georgia Governor Ernest Vandiver expressed reservations with the party’s support for civil rights, and remained uncertain that Georgians would welcome the Democratic Party ticket with open arms.⁵⁴

Nearing the end of his term as governor, Luther Hodges had nothing to lose by promoting the Democratic ticket despite its initial unpopularity in North Carolina. Hodges embraced the national party ticket when an increasing number of southern Democrats consciously tried to avoid it. His relentless efforts to sell the virtues of the Kennedy-Johnson ticket to reluctant voters helped preserve party unity. Hodges’s relentless campaigning on Kennedy’s behalf also helped Sanford, who spent several months locked in a surprisingly close battle against Republican nominee Robert Gavin. Democratic Party unity paid tremendous dividends in 1960. With Hodges leading this effort, both Kennedy and Sanford prevailed in surprisingly narrow campaigns. However, this also marked the end of an era, as it was the last election in which Democrats carried the “big three” spots on the party ticket: President, Senate, and Governor.⁵⁵

Ultimately, it was the Democratic East made possible Sanford’s victory. Ironically, the region’s conservative yet loyal Democrats helped elect the state’s most liberal governor at a time when southern liberals faced an increasingly hostile political environment. This did not mark a departure, however, as this region remained fervently loyal to President Truman in 1948 and supported Democratic presidential nominee Adlai Stevenson in the 1950s. Robert Gavin, part of

⁵⁴ *The Daily Times-News* (Burlington, N.C.), 16 July 1960.

⁵⁵ It was not until 2008 that the Democrats took the top three spots on the ticket in North Carolina. Democratic Party sweeps, of course, were routine in a one-party system. Following the emergence of two-party politics, the Republican Party accomplished this task in 1972 and 1984. That Republicans failed to accomplish the same results in 1968, 1980, 1992, 1996, 2004, and 2008 demonstrates the competitiveness of North Carolina’s two-party system.

the state Republican establishment whose primary strength was in the foothills and mountains, failed to effectively challenge Democratic loyalty in eastern North Carolina. While Gavin's candidacy revealed the potential for increased competition, the Republican Party had yet to develop into a statewide political organization with the ability to contend in this region. The impressive Republican growth in the urban piedmont had yet to make its way to eastern North Carolina, which remained the lone holdout in the development of two-party politics. In 1960, the East proved most reluctant to abandon its longstanding political loyalty to the Democratic Party.⁵⁶

The Sanford-Gavin gubernatorial campaign, in which Gavin received forty-five percent of the popular vote, was an integral part of the development of two-party politics in North Carolina. Regardless of Sanford's unpopular endorsement of Kennedy or the latter's Catholic religion, both ultimately prevailed, but it did not decimate the Republicans. Gavin's candidacy demonstrated both the limitations and the potential for the Republican Party to emerge as a statewide political organization. Although Gavin stated that he was "working very hard to establish the two-party system again," he faced an uphill struggle in a political climate that favored Democrats.⁵⁷ However, the failure of the state Republican establishment to make significant inroads in eastern North Carolina did little to deter its future efforts. Rather, its success in waging a surprisingly strong gubernatorial campaign emboldened Republicans to increase their efforts to create a statewide party. The Sanford-Gavin election was the closest

⁵⁶ *North Carolina Manual* 1963, 249, 260. Kennedy (713,318) defeated Nixon (655,648), while Sanford (735,248) defeated Gavin (613,975). Both Nixon and Gavin waged strong campaigns in North Carolina. While both won a significant number of votes in the urban Piedmont, Democrats dominated the East, which remained loyal because the Republican Party did not provide a suitable alternative to the Democrats. Based on recent political developments, this was not surprising. As historian Charles Roland observes, the urban South became the focus of increased political competition in the 1950s, while the rural South remained overwhelmingly loyal to the Democratic Party. See Roland, *The Improbable Era*, 67.

⁵⁷ *The Daily Times-News* (Burlington, N.C.), 27 September 1960. See also *The Daily Times-News*, 19 July 1960, 31 October 1960; *High Point Enterprise*, 9 November 1960.

margin of defeat for a Republican gubernatorial nominee since the establishment of the one-party system. In response to his party's strong campaign and growing strength in state politics, North Carolina Republican chair William E. Cobb declared, "We are the nucleus of a political bombshell that can go off at any time." Although Democratic Party loyalty remained strong, this election revealed the growing divisions between southern Democrats and the national party, from which Republicans benefited. The *Wall Street Journal*, for example, observed that Republican gains demonstrated that the "solid South is vanishing, more slowly than the Southern mule, but just as surely."⁵⁸

Terry Sanford's victory strengthened the conservatives' resolve to continue fighting for influence in the state Democratic Party. While Sanford defeated Seawell and Lake in the primary, he did not win a decisive victory over the conservatives or segregationists. That is, neither faction ceased being an integral part of the state party. Their defeat emboldened both factions to regain their foothold in the party. National political developments in the early 1960s greatly aided their efforts, as the politics of civil rights during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations contributed to Sanford's declining popularity in North Carolina. Sanford's close relationship with Kennedy and Johnson had tremendous consequences for the state's progressive Democrats. The end of Sanford's term provided the opportunity for conservatives to return their faction to the governor's office, and the segregationists the chance to expand their influence.⁵⁹

Like his political mentor Kerr Scott, Terry Sanford's term as governor ended in disappointment as he faced a hostile legislature and growing conservatism that contrasted sharply

⁵⁸ Bartley, *The New South*, 387. Bartley argues that Gavin's campaign "gave Republicans credibility in the state's politics." I believe that Republicans already enjoyed significant legitimacy in state politics due to their strong presence in North Carolina, and the 1960 gubernatorial campaign revealed the potential for a statewide Republican Party. This marked the first election in which the Democratic victor failed to receive at least sixty percent of the popular vote. See also *Washington Post*, 21 July 1960; *Christian Science Monitor*, 9 November 1960; Cobb quoted in *Time*, 13 July 1962; *Wall Street Journal*, 25 November 1960 ["solid South is vanishing"].

⁵⁹ Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 192-198.

with his reform-minded liberalism. The state's voters did not welcome Sanford's close relationship with President Kennedy and President Johnson, while the increased prominence of civil rights in state and national politics during their administrations left Sanford's progressive faction, and liberalism, deeply unpopular. Just as Scott's declining popularity opened the door for conservatives to regain their influence in 1952, so too did Sanford's. Both Scott and Sanford found that the national Democratic Party hindered their ability to promote their progressive agenda in North Carolina. For example, the 1950 Senate race revealed the precarious position of southern liberals in regional and national politics, while President Kennedy and Johnson's support for civil rights further eroded their party's dominance in southern politics. John H. Jenkins expressed his frustration with Terry Sanford's administration and summed up the general discontent in North Carolina that contributed to the conservative reemergence in 1964. "I worked for you in the election," said Jenkins, "and [I] am sorry to say that I and many [others] are disappointed in the manner you have sold your own white race out to the niggers and the Kennedy's during the months of conflict between the niggers and whites."⁶⁰ Jenkins reflected the views of many Democrats in this conservative state, one that contrasted sharply with Sanford's strong support for the national party, whose embrace of pro-civil rights liberalism alienated many southern Democrats.

The politics of civil rights and public dissatisfaction with the Sanford administration prompted a strong conservative resurgence in 1964. Four years earlier, the sit-in movement provided Beverly Lake the opportunity to enter the gubernatorial arena, but civil rights was more a state, rather than a national, political concern. In 1964, however, civil rights was the primary

⁶⁰ John H. Jenkins to Governor Terry Sanford, 7/3/1964, in Sanford Papers, General Correspondence, 1964, Box 450, Folder "Segregation G-M," in NCSA; Greensboro *Daily News*, 28 August 1963; Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 192-198.

issue in state and national politics. Not surprisingly, the gubernatorial primary reflected this development. In 1964, three candidates vied for the Democratic Party's gubernatorial nomination: Richardson Preyer, a federal judge and progressive Democrat who enjoyed the backing of progressive Democrat Bert Bennett's political organization; Dan K. Moore, a corporate attorney and conservative Democrat linked to Hodges and the conservative party establishment; and segregationist Beverly Lake, making his second attempt to capture the party's nomination. Lake's campaign further complicated the traditional conservative-progressive rivalry within the state Democratic Party and revealed that the segregationists remained unredeemed. If Lake's previous campaign demonstrated the segregationists' desire to gain influence in state politics, this campaign demonstrated the Democratic Party establishment was not yet receptive to his political agenda. In 1964, however, Lake found a more hospitable political environment for his segregationist ideology.

Amid intense Democratic factionalism, the North Carolina Republican Party launched its gubernatorial campaign. Based on their surprisingly strong 1960 campaign, party leaders believed they had a reasonable opportunity to wage a successful campaign in 1964. Robert Gavin's impressive vote total four years earlier made it even more important for Democrats to minimize party factionalism, lest the Republicans make further inroads in state politics. In addition to party factionalism, the *New York Times* observed in 1963 another potential problem facing North Carolina Democrats. "The Democrats do not want for candidates, but they do lack a strong, well-known figure to unify the party and bring in the votes," a problem that plagued the party throughout 1964.⁶¹ Luther Hodges's popularity aided his efforts to unite the party's factions in 1960, allowing Democrats to prevail in several close elections and maintained party unity. Four years later, the absence of a strong leader to unite the ticket revealed the growing

⁶¹ *New York Times*, 26 May 1963.

distance between the state and national parties. Consequently, there existed a significant opportunity for the Republican Party to wage a serious gubernatorial campaign in 1964. According to President John F. Kennedy's political aide, Henry Hall Wilson, "Kennedy had stirred a great resentment toward him [Sanford]. The Civil Rights Act had been sent up [to Congress]. The Republicans in Congress were raising hell, and the feeling was that...a Republican could win the general election [in North Carolina]."⁶²

Not surprisingly, the politics of civil rights was the defining issue in 1964. Moore and Lake criticized the Johnson-backed civil rights legislation, while Preyer announced his opposition to certain provisions but pledged his support if passed by Congress. Lake, who remained at the vanguard of the segregationist Democratic faction, labeled it a "very unwise and unconstitutional" law and pledged that he would not "enforce unconstitutional law of the federal government" if elected governor.⁶³ The emergence of the civil rights movement in North Carolina, along with Sanford's close relationship with the pro-civil rights Kennedy and Johnson administrations, provided the conservative faction with significant political momentum. On the surface, it appeared that Preyer's moderation on the civil rights issue had the potential to doom his campaign. Moore and Lake, both anti-civil rights Democrats, provided conservative Democrats with a significant opportunity to return their faction to power, and in Lake's case, to move from the fringe to the party's mainstream. Preyer, however, won a plurality of votes in the gubernatorial primary, demonstrating the strength of the progressive Democratic faction despite Sanford's lack of popular appeal.⁶⁴ Democratic Party factionalism, however, prevented Preyer

⁶² *Winston-Salem Journal*, 26 September 1976, [Wilson quote]; *Greensboro Daily News*, 28 August 1963, NCC Clipping File.

⁶³ *Raleigh News and Observer*, 6 April 1964, 8 April 1964, 22 May 1964, 27 May 1964; Black, *Southern Governors and Civil Rights*, 192; Covington and Ellis, *Terry Sanford*, 339.

⁶⁴ *North Carolina Manual* 1965, 262. Preyer (281,430), Moore (257,872), and Lake 217,172).

from receiving an outright majority. Similar to the 1960 gubernatorial primary, Moore and Preyer faced a runoff election to determine the party's nominee. Lake's absence from the runoff, however, appeared to return the Democratic Party to its traditional conservative versus progressive rivalry. However, this runoff campaign was anything but traditional, as Lake's influence remained significant.

Although Beverly Lake's second attempt to seek the gubernatorial nomination ultimately proved unsuccessful, he found an ally in fellow conservative Dan K. Moore. Moore, more akin to Hodges than Lake, nonetheless waved the anti-civil rights banner during the runoff. Moore and Lake made a not-so-secret arrangement for Lake's faction to support Moore in the runoff.⁶⁵ This agreement meant that Lake's supporters, a sizable and influential Democratic faction, would not abstain from voting in the runoff. Not surprisingly, Moore's campaign reflected Lake's influence, as he waged an anti-civil rights campaign against Preyer to demonstrate his conservative credentials to segregationist Democrats. "On the civil rights bill pending in Congress...I think it is a bad bill from beginning to end," said Moore.⁶⁶ Moore's campaign advertisements stated clearly his opposition to federal civil rights legislation, contrasting his position against that of progressive Democrat Richardson Preyer. "As a citizen and a lawyer, I am deeply concerned over the irresponsible and reckless actions which some groups are taking with the basic constitutional rights of all Americans. I do not believe you can legislate equality. It must be earned. To that end, the Negro deserves and should be given equality of opportunity. That will not come through violence or additional laws which take away private property rights

⁶⁵ Covington and Ellis, *Terry Sanford*, 344; *Charlotte Observer*, 25 October 1964. The *Observer* wavered in endorsing a gubernatorial nominee in the general election, expressing concern about Moore's arrangement with Lake. If Moore wins the election, "he [Lake] will be in a position to exercise power over Moore, power that is all the more sinister because it is without accountability."

⁶⁶ *Raleigh News and Observer*, 2 May 1964; "Vote for Dan Moore," NCC Clipping File.

in the name of civil rights. North Carolina should be allowed to work out its own problems,” said Moore.⁶⁷

Just as Terry Sanford used Beverly Lake’s segregationist views to portray him as a threat to law and order, so too did Richardson Preyer employ a similar strategy against Dan Moore. While he was hardly a strong advocate for federal civil rights legislation, Preyer also refused to pander to segregationists. Preyer did not reach out to Lake supporters in advance of the runoff, declining to attract the votes of those “whose attitudes would only stir up trouble and result in closed schools, federal troops, and violence and encouragement of the Ku Klux Klan.” Preyer, like Sanford, campaigned on the platform that his moderate approach encouraged, rather than undermined, law and order. Contrasting North Carolina with the Deep South, Preyer argued, “We don’t want to slip back and be another Alabama or Mississippi filled with fear and disorder.” Furthermore, he stated, “That kind of attitude hurts industry, hurts our tourism program, and hurts our people and our State.” Reflecting Sanford’s influence, Preyer campaigned on a platform of “respect for law and order and respect for each other.”⁶⁸

Despite Preyer’s efforts to portray Moore as a threat to stability and progress, Moore was a pro-business Democrat who never posed the same problems to the Democratic establishment as did Lake. Unlike Lake, Moore reflected the traditional view of conservative Democrats like Hodges and the party establishment, those who opposed federal civil rights legislation, but chose not to do so in a manner that threatened economic development and outside investment in North Carolina. Unlike 1960, Hodges chose not to endorse a candidate during the primary or runoff, leaving the potential for party factionalism to undermine the Democrats’ chances in the general

⁶⁷ “Dan K. Moore Speaks Up,” NCC Clipping File.

⁶⁸ Black, *Southern Governors and Civil Rights*, 192-193.

election, while Preyer chose not to rely on Sanford's experience to promote his campaign.⁶⁹ Additionally, the absence of Hodges and Sanford from the campaign failed to resolve the Democrats' most significant dilemma, the lack of a popular party leader to unite the seemingly irreconcilable factions torn asunder by yet another divisive runoff.⁷⁰ In contrast to his opponent, Moore enjoyed the full backing of the party in the runoff, when he handily defeated Preyer.

Following his runoff victory, Moore distanced himself from Terry Sanford's progressivism, for it did not reflect the political realities in 1964. Sanford "has given an image of North Carolina as a liberal state following right along in the national pattern, but I think that's wrong," said Moore. Furthermore, he argued, "North Carolinians are slow to make a drastic change. They're willing to go along on a fairly progressive platform, but they don't want to go

⁶⁹ *Charlotte News*, 18 May 1964, NCC Clipping File. The *News* endorsed Moore as "most closely attuned to the moderate conservative tradition that has made North Carolina a soundly progressive state," while criticizing Lake's "rigid, professorial view of government" and his "fascination with race as a problem rather than as a challenge to create leadership"; Covington and Ellis, *Terry Sanford*, 337, 343; Interview with Terry Sanford by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, n.d., (A-0140), SOHP; *North Carolina Manual* 1964, 263. With Lake's backing, Moore (480,431) handily defeated Preyer (293,863) in the runoff. Moore also enjoyed the backing of conservative Senator Sam Ervin and Congressman Alton Lennon (*New York Times*, 17 March 1964). See also Interview with Terry Sanford by Brent Glass, 8/20-8/21/1976, (A-328-2), SOHP; "Sen. Ervin Backs Moore," *Raleigh News and Observer*, (n.d., ca. May-June 1964), NCC Clipping File; Terry Sanford placed the blame for Preyer's defeat on a combination of racism and the "excesses" of the civil rights movement. See Interview with Terry Sanford by Brent Glass, 8/20-8/21/1976, (A-328-2), SOHP; Governor Terry Sanford to J. Boyd Burke, 8/19/1964, in Sanford Papers, General Correspondence, 1964, Box 450, Folder "Segregation, A-F," in NCSA; As governor, Sanford criticized the civil rights movement, which he believed had the potential to undermine his attempts to avoid extremism in North Carolina; Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 194.

⁷⁰ Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance*, 341-342, According to Bartley, "During the 1964 gubernatorial primary the traditional organization in North Carolina turned successfully to a politics of white supremacy as an expedient method to promote conservative rule in the state."

Additionally, "In 1960, the anti-organization candidate, Terry Sanford entered the gubernatorial runoff against I. Beverly Lake, an extreme neobourbon proponent of white southern rights. The uncompromising position symbolized by Lake threatened the state's industrial stability, and the traditional organization, led by Governor Luther Hodges, supported Sanford's candidacy as the lesser of two evils. The organization's role in Sanford's election represented the state's conservative reaction to massive resistance extremism. In 1964, however, Lake was eliminated in the first gubernatorial primary, and organization and anti-organization candidates went into the runoff. Organization spokesmen reached an accord with the Lake forces, received Lake's support in the campaign, and won the election in a blaze of social conservatism." Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance*, 342n1.

too far too fast...the people of North Carolina don't like to be pushed around.”⁷¹ Like Hodges, Moore consciously chose not to promote massive resistance or provoke a confrontation between North Carolina and the federal government over civil rights legislation. His arrangement with Lake notwithstanding, Moore appeared as a rational, yet conservative Democrat, more interested in responsible governance, in contrast to Lake's staunch anti-civil rights ideology that had the potential to bring the state into conflict with the Johnson administration. “Although I classify myself as a conservative, I feel that the state must progress. And there are many fields in which we need to progress,” said Moore, setting himself apart from both Sanford's liberalism and Lake's segregationist ideology. Like Hodges, Moore emphasized the need for economic development to “lessen unemployment and underemployment” in North Carolina.⁷²

Bert Bennett's quest to extend the progressive Democrats' ran into a conservative juggernaut in 1964. Governor Terry Sanford's declining popularity and the politics of civil rights made it increasingly difficult for the progressive Democrats to set the terms of the debate in the gubernatorial primary. Unlike 1960, they lacked the momentum and a strong candidate to make up for the difficult political environment. Furthermore, the anti-civil rights tone of the primary campaign made it difficult for progressive Democrats to offer a viable alternative to the growing popularity of anti-civil rights conservatism. Much like Kerr Scott, Sanford ended his term in office so unpopular that voters rejected his faction's gubernatorial candidate, as both faced strong conservative challengers. There were, of course, many reasons why voters selected Moore over Preyer, but the persistence of Democratic factionalism and the politics of race played a significant role. In 1952, voters rejected Scott's selection of Hubert Olive as gubernatorial candidate. Twelve years later, voters followed suit and returned to power the traditional

⁷¹ *Raleigh News and Observer*, 23 July 1964, NCC Clipping File.

⁷² *Durham Morning Herald*, 29 December 1963, NCC Clipping File.

conservative faction following a progressive interlude in state politics. In the post-*Brown* South, however, progressive southern Democrats found their positions compromised by the politics of race and the civil rights movement. Similar to Kerr Scott at the end of his gubernatorial term, Sanford “left office so unpopular he probably still can’t be elected,” observed Republican legislator Hamilton Horton in 1973.⁷³

Dan K. Moore’s runoff victory over Richardson Preyer was a significant event in North Carolina’s political development. First, Moore’s anti-civil rights conservatism likely forestalled a strong Republican challenge in 1964. Four years earlier, Republican nominee Robert Gavin waged a competitive campaign against Sanford, but his 1964 campaign was considerably less aggressive. Second, Moore’s arrangement with Lake brought from the fringe into the party mainstream a sizable number of staunch segregationists whose previous exclusion from the conservative and progressive factions contributed to increased party factionalism in the early 1960s. Ironically, Moore’s anti-civil rights campaign came during an election year that found President Johnson campaigning on a pro-civil rights platform. Finally, this election demonstrated the reshaping of the relationship between state and national politics.

Governor Dan K. Moore’s decision not to campaign on behalf of the national Democratic Party ticket in 1964 reflected the growing distance between southern Democrats and the national party. Richard Nixon and Robert Gavin’s strong showing in 1960 awakened Democrats to the potential for a strong decade of Republican growth in North Carolina. As a result, Moore was

⁷³ Interview with Hamilton Horton by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, 12/18/1973, (A-0127). Horton made these comments in 1973, a decade after Sanford left office. Covington and Ellis, *Terry Sanford*, 346. Unlike Scott, Sanford did not seek national office immediately following his departure from the governor’s office. Sanford and Scott left office and entered entirely different political worlds. Scott sought and won the Democratic Senate nomination in 1954, while Sanford waged two unsuccessful presidential campaigns (1972, 1976) before winning his party’s Senate nomination in 1986. More than twenty years after leaving office, Sanford defeated Republican Senate nominee Jim Broyhill and returned an NC Democrat to the U.S. Senate for the first time since Robert Morgan left office in 1981 following his reelection defeat. For more on the difficulties of the state’s governors, and Sanford in particular, in electing their successors, see Interview with Joel Fleishman by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, 2/8/1974, (A-0121), SOHP.

reluctant to link his gubernatorial campaign with President Johnson, a decision that earned the scorn of many Democrats. “I most certainly don’t like the attitude that Dan Moore is taking toward our national ticket,” said James McKinney. “But I am a Democrat and will support him. [I] guess anything is better than having a Republican in the governor’s mansion.”⁷⁴ Others expressed serious reservations concerning Moore’s lack of enthusiasm for the national party. “I realize Dan Moore does not support the national ticket, therefore I cannot support him. If he is not enough [of a] Democrat to [campaign] for LBJ and Humphrey, how can any good Democrat go for him?” asked another.⁷⁵ Not until Lady Bird Johnson, President Johnson’s wife, visited North Carolina in October 1964 did Dan Moore openly endorse the Johnson-Humphrey ticket.⁷⁶ Prior to Johnson’s visit, Moore did not campaign against the national party, nor did he express significant support for the Johnson administration. However, his distinct lack of enthusiasm epitomized the increasingly fractured relationship between southern Democrats and the national party.

Democrats nationwide viewed President Kennedy and President Johnson’s civil rights liberalism as a source of increasing frustration. One Democrat, for example, worried about the selection of the party’s vice presidential nominee and its influence on the general election. “Please consider the implications of selecting a candidate who identifies with the civil rights movement...e.g. Hubert Humphrey. We have seen ample indications...that the ‘white backlash’ is a very real threat to our victory...Please encourage President Johnson to select a non-

⁷⁴ James McKinney to Governor Terry Sanford, 7/30/1964, Sanford Papers, General Correspondence, 1964, Box 381, Folder “Democrats-National Democratic Convention,” in NCSA.

⁷⁵ Mrs. Norman M. Austin to Governor Terry Sanford, 10/13/1964, in Sanford Papers, General Correspondence, 1964, Box 381, Folder “Democrats-Democratic Executive Committee, A-F,” in NCSA.

⁷⁶ *New York Times*, 18 September 1964; *Chicago Defender*, 10 October 1964. Lady Bird Johnson’s visit to North Carolina was “credited with winning her husband the firm support of Democratic gubernatorial nominee Dan K. Moore, who had not openly endorsed Johnson prior to Lady Bird’s visit.

controversial Democrat,” wrote A. J. LaMere of Chicago to Governor Terry Sanford.⁷⁷

Johnson’s liberalism placed him at odds with southern Democrats who supported the Democratic Party due to its traditional [support] of segregation. “I have been a Democrat for fifty years...and I am very confused with our party,” reported one Democrat.⁷⁸ This sentiment was symbolic of the declining superiority of the Democratic Party in southern politics.

In 1964, North Carolina Democrats worried about a potential Republican upset in the general election. Reflecting the importance of Democratic unity amid party factionalism, Albert J. Ellis urged Beverly Lake’s supporters to convince Lake to campaign on behalf of the national party ticket. Ellis feared losing ground in the Democratic East to Barry Goldwater and Robert Gavin, believing that there existed the potential for Republicans to make significant inroads in eastern North Carolina. “Many of the [Democratic] Goldwater supporters were going to vote for Gavin,” said Ellis, who stressed that Lake’s support for the national party “will render a great service to the party and will make it easier for all Democrats in North Carolina to vigorously practice the unity which we have been preaching [this year].”⁷⁹ That Democrats sought Lake’s support for the national party ticket in 1964 revealed the importance of party unity due to the increasing strength of the Republican Party in southern politics. Democratic loyalty ultimately prevailed, as both President Johnson and Dan K. Moore won their respective campaigns, but the writing was on the wall.⁸⁰ Despite the potential for Republican growth in the Democratic

⁷⁷ A. J. LaMere to Governor Terry Sanford, 8/13/1964, in Sanford Papers, General Correspondence, 1964, Box 381, Folder “Democrats-National Democratic Convention,” in NCSA. As Mayor of Minneapolis, Humphrey gave a stirring speech in support of civil rights at the 1948 Democratic National Convention, leading to the exodus of conservative southern Democrats. See Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt*, 118-119.

⁷⁸ “A Friend” to Governor Terry Sanford (n.d., received 7/21/1964), in Sanford Papers, General Correspondence, Box 450, Folder “Segregation-General,” in NCSA.

⁷⁹ Albert J. Ellis to Billy Webb, 8/31/1964, in Sanford Papers, General Correspondence, 1964, Box 381, Folder “Democrats-Democratic Executive Committee, A-F,” in NCSA.

heartland, eastern North Carolina Democrats proved unwilling to support Goldwater, whose support for federal farm programs was lukewarm at best. In a campaign speech in Raleigh, Johnson warned voters of Goldwater's intention for a "prompt and final termination of the farm subsidy program."⁸¹ Johnson's support for federal agricultural policy lessened the influence of anti-civil rights conservatism and likely prevented a further exodus of southern Democrats from the party.⁸² Despite the Democratic landslide, Barry Goldwater's popularity revealed the most significant potential yet for two-party politics in the American South. In North Carolina, this was most evident in a congressional campaign that would have otherwise been an oversight amid a tremendous Democratic landslide.

Jim Gardner and the Rise of the "New" Republican Party in North Carolina

In 1964, Rocky Mount businessman James C. Gardner waged a fierce campaign to unseat fifteen-term Democratic Congressman Harold Cooley. First elected in 1934 as a New Deal Democrat, Cooley represented the state's Fourth Congressional District, which included Raleigh as well as parts of the Piedmont and eastern North Carolina. An agricultural expert, he served as the chairman of the House Committee on Agriculture, an influential and powerful position for a southern politician. As a prominent Democrat in eastern North Carolina, Cooley faced only token Republican opposition during his long political career. With the curious exception of Sampson County, the Democratic Party enjoyed unrivaled control of politics in this region. By the 1960s, however, southern Democrats could not take for granted their constituents' longtime support for the national Democratic Party. The New Deal no longer dictated political loyalties

⁸⁰ *North Carolina Manual* 1965, 255, 263. Johnson (800,139) defeated Goldwater (624,844) while Moore (790,343 to 606,165).

⁸¹ *Raleigh News and Observer*, 3 September 1964 [Goldwater]; 8 October 1964 [Johnson]; Lamis, *The Two-Party South*, 133.

⁸² *Raleigh News and Observer*, 8 October 1964.

despite eastern North Carolina's overwhelmingly rural, agriculture-based economy. Rather, the politics of civil rights and the region's large African-American population figured quite prominently into the state's changing politics.

James Gardner was one of many conservative southern Democrats who left the "party of the fathers" and found a new home in the Republican Party. In 1963, long before it was fashionable to do so, Gardner became a Republican because he "became dissatisfied with the strong liberal element in the Democratic Party" and "felt we needed a strong two-party system in North Carolina." A wealthy businessman and one of the founders of Hardee's hamburger chain, Gardner brought a business-like approach to politics. "I think competition is good for [politics]. You get better candidates if you're got a two-party system of government," said Gardner.⁸³ One year later, Gardner hoped to use the momentum from Barry Goldwater's presidential campaign to carry him to victory as the first GOP congressman from eastern North Carolina since the 1890s. However, President Lyndon Baines Johnson won a decisive victory in North Carolina, while Goldwater ultimately proved to be a liability for many southern Republicans running for office in 1964, including Gardner. Congressman Harold Cooley held onto his seat by a surprisingly razor thin margin for a Democratic incumbent in the midst of a national Democratic landslide.⁸⁴

⁸³ *Raleigh News and Observer*, 24 May 1964, News Clipping, NCC Clipping File.

⁸⁴ *North Carolina Manual* 1965, 299. In the 1962 midterm elections, Cooley (45,249) easily defeated Republican candidate George E. Ward (32,593). In 1964, Cooley (73,470) defeated Gardner (68,387) in a difficult reelection campaign despite the presence of a popular president headlining the national ticket. One year later, Gardner put much of the blame for his defeat on Goldwater. "There is no doubt Goldwater hurt us in 1964. There was a strong anti-Goldwater vote and there were many, many Republicans who wouldn't even vote [for Goldwater]. I spent more time defending Goldwater's stand on social security than I did in presenting my own issues." *Raleigh News and Observer*, 3 October 1965, News Clipping, NCC Clipping File. Similarly, Jim Holshouser realized the potential for Goldwater to hurt the party ticket in 1964, and encouraged wary supporters: "Don't vote for Goldwater if you can't. Come on and vote for the local ticket at least." See Interview with James Holshouser by Jack D. Flear, 1/31/1998, (C-328.1), SOHP.

Although it did not seem it at the time, 1964 was a blessing in disguise for James Gardner, as it was for many Republicans swept aside in the Democratic landslide. His narrow defeat occurred in an election year in which Johnson won a forty-five state national landslide election victory. Despite this competitive disadvantage, Gardner more than held his own against a veteran Democratic warhorse like Cooley. Gardner's campaign demonstrated the growing strength of the Republican Party in North Carolina and the South. Gardner epitomized the arrival of a new generation of southern Republicans in North Carolina—conservative Democrats-turned-Republicans whose political lineage owed more to Barry Goldwater than the traditional Republicans' loyalty to Thomas Dewey, Dwight Eisenhower, and Robert Taft. The close results of the Cooley-Gardner election in the Democratic heartland of eastern North Carolina revealed the potential for the Republican Party to compete outside of its traditional political base, thanks largely to the influence of national politics. In 1964, for example, South Carolina Senator Strom Thurmond joined the Republican Party and publicly endorsed Barry Goldwater. Thurmond, a longtime conservative Democrat who spearheaded a third-party challenge to President Truman in 1948, declared, "the party of our fathers is dead." Although it was not surprising given his conservative anti-civil rights credentials, Thurmond's departure from the Democratic Party reflected the growing popularity of the Republican Party in the South.⁸⁵

Although Barry Goldwater's campaign was an unmitigated disaster for the national Republican Party in 1964, it nevertheless revealed the growing political unrest in the Deep South, particularly as it related to his anti-civil rights platform. Goldwater's nomination over New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller marked a transformative event in American politics, as the national Republican Party abandoned its traditional support for civil rights in favor of a

⁸⁵ *New York Times*, 18 September 1964.

strong anti-civil rights nominee. For the first time, the national Republican Party provided conservative Democrats with a genuine political alternative to the national Democratic Party, whose embrace of civil rights liberalism alienated many southern Democrats who yearned for a political party that reflected their conservatism. This development shaped the rise of two-party politics in the former one-party South. Goldwater's campaign was a short-term failure for the national Republican Party, but ultimately it was a long-term success as the party became a key player in regional politics after decades of one-party Democratic rule. Goldwater helped set in motion forces that had the potential to remove from the South the persistent vestiges of one-party politics and transform the region into a vibrant two-party system.⁸⁶ Recognizing the region's influence in his party's future, Goldwater argued, "We're not going to get the Negro vote as a bloc in 1964 or 1966, so we ought to go hunting where the ducks are."⁸⁷

Barry Goldwater's presidential campaign was a pivotal event in the shaping of two-party politics in North Carolina and the South. According to North Carolina Republican James Holshouser, Goldwater's campaign "ignited a lot of interest in the Republican Party all over the South." Goldwater brought to the party a large number of conservative southern Democrats who saw in his candidacy a political alternative to the national Democratic Party and the opportunity to promote the development of two-party politics in the South. James G. Martin, a one-time

⁸⁶ For more on the significance of Goldwater's nomination and the reshaping of southern politics, see Earl Black and Merle Black, *The Vital South: How Presidents Are Elected* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 116-137. Goldwater's nomination over New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller "represented a shift of power from northeastern Republicans—progressives or moderates or liberals, as they chose to refer to themselves—to the Republicans of the South and West—conservatives as they thought of themselves." Black and Black, *The Vital South*, 127; See also Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 225-250. Lassiter argues convincingly, "The Goldwater debacle misread the long-term trends in southern politics and flipped the Republican base in the region inside-out. Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona updated the genuine Southern Strategy of the Dixiecrats by campaigning as a states' rights conservative who opposed the Civil Rights Act and openly appealed to the segregationist wing of the Democratic party." Lassiter, *The Silent Majority*, 230; Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 204-206.

⁸⁷ Goldwater quoted in Michael Perman, *Pursuit of Unity: A Political History of the American South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 300.

southern Democrat and future Republican governor of North Carolina, became a registered Republican in 1962 in anticipation of the 1964 presidential campaign. “I joined the minority party because the South needed two-party competition,” said Martin. These former Democrats provided a significant base for Republican growth in North Carolina during the 1960s, as Goldwater’s campaign motivated an entire generation of southern Democrats “who had become Republicans to support Goldwater,” and ultimately became “the heart that built the [Republican] party.”⁸⁸ North Carolina journalist Claude Sitton argued that Goldwater’s campaign “helped [southern Democrats] overcome that psychological block against voting Republican.”⁸⁹ In the aftermath of Goldwater’s crushing defeat and the failure of his congressional campaign, James Gardner nonetheless emerged as the leading Goldwater Republican in North Carolina.

Although he was unsuccessful in his attempt to unseat Congressman Cooley in 1964, James Gardner used his standing in Republican circles to influence the development of two-party politics in North Carolina. In 1965, Gardner won election as chairman of the state Republican Party with the support of state Representative James Holshouser and Congressman Charles Jonas, both prominent members of the party establishment. Jonas, known as “Mr. Republican” for his leadership in promoting the party ticket in North Carolina, was one of the great success stories for the state party, for his 1952 election to Congress ended the Republicans’ twenty-year exile in the political wilderness.⁹⁰ Holshouser and Gardner emerged as the state’s leading

⁸⁸ Interview with Governor James E. Holshouser by Jack D. Fler, 1/31/1998, (C-0328.1), SOHP [“ignited a lot of interest”]; Interview with James G. Martin by Jack D. Fler, 2/6/1998, (C-0333), SOHP [“joined the minority party”]; Interview with Jack Hawke by Jonathan Houghton, 6/7/1990, (C-0087), SOHP [“support Goldwater” and “the heart that built the party”].

⁸⁹ Interview with Claude Sitton by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, 12/11/1974, (A-142), SOHP.

⁹⁰ *Raleigh News and Observer*, 20 August 1965; 21 August 1965; 29 August 1965, NCC Clipping File. Congressman Charles R. Jonas of Lincolnton served in the U.S. House of Representatives from January 1953 to January 1973. In 1952, Jonas became the first Republican in the state’s congressional delegation since his father, Charles A. Jonas, lost his reelection campaign amid the Democratic resurgence in the 1930 midterm election.

Republicans in the 1960s, but they represented two different and diverse traditions within the state Republican Party. Gardner, a former Democrat from eastern North Carolina, was a recent Republican convert. Holshouser, on the other hand, was a mountain Republican from a region with a long tradition of support for the Republican Party going as far back as the nineteenth century. As party chair, Gardner moved quickly to put his stamp on the state's burgeoning Republican establishment, moving its headquarters to Raleigh from Charlotte, a decision that reflected the shifting balance of power away from the party's traditional stronghold in the West to the fertile lands of the Democratic East.⁹¹ This move demonstrated the rising influence of eastern Republicanism as a powerful and viable political faction within the state GOP.

In 1966, James Gardner again challenged Congressman Harold Cooley in a repeat of the 1964 campaign. The contrast between the two elections, however, could not have been greater. Unlike 1964, the political climate in North Carolina favored Gardner and the Republican Party. In 1964, President Johnson's landslide victory swept many Democrats into office as their party received its greatest mandate since the 1930s. Harold Cooley was one of many Democrats whose reelection Johnson made possible, as southern Democrats largely embraced President Johnson's campaign with open arms. By 1966, however, Johnson proved to be a serious liability to many southern Democrats seeking election, just as Goldwater was the bane of many southern Republicans in 1964. White backlash and rising hostility toward President Johnson's pro-civil rights and Great Society liberalism was most visible in the South, as a new generation of

Congressman George Pritchard, elected in 1928, did not seek reelection in 1930, thus leaving North Carolina Republicans shut out of even their traditional political strongholds in the foothills and mountains during the Great Depression and Second World War. It was during the 1950s that southern Republicans began to pick up seats in the urban South, such as Atlanta, Birmingham, Charlotte, and Chattanooga, outside of their traditional districts. Roland, *The Improbable Era*, 67. See also Interview with James Broyhill by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, 1/30/1974, (A-119), SOHP.

⁹¹ Interview with Jack Hawke by Jonathan Houghton, 6/7/1990, (C-0087), SOHP.

southern Republicans took a leading role in criticizing the failures of liberalism in the midst of the decline of the Democratic Party and the Civil Rights Movement.⁹²

James Gardner enjoyed the benefit of having the wind in his sails in his second campaign against Congressman Cooley. The national Republican Party provided considerable funding in support of Gardner's campaign, spending \$10,000 to win a race it narrowly lost two years earlier. The GOP spent a considerable sum of money on southern candidates in 1966, hoping to capitalize on the growing anti-Johnson conservatism in the South. Former Vice President Richard Nixon campaigned on Gardner's behalf, while Secretary of Agriculture Orville Freeman stumped for Cooley in eastern North Carolina. The growing unpopularity of the national Democratic Party, combined with the increasing popularity of the Republican Party, made Cooley's reelection campaign increasingly difficult in a political climate that favored southern Republicans. Cooley used his record as chairman of the Agriculture Committee and extensive work on behalf of the state's farmers, while Gardner campaigned as an anti-Johnson, law and order southern Republican. At thirty-three years of age, Gardner represented a new generation of youthful southern Republicans, an image that contrasted sharply with the superannuated Cooley's sixty-nine years, the last thirty-two of which he served in Congress. Not surprisingly, Gardner enjoyed a considerable advantage in the midterm elections at a time when anti-incumbent (and anti-Democratic) sentiment reached a fever pitch. The increasing anti-Johnson reaction transformed eastern North Carolina into a political battleground for both parties.

⁹² See especially, Earl Black and Merle Black, *The Rise of Southern Republicans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of National Politics* (New York: Knopf, 1995); Kari Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt and the End of the Solid South, 1932-1968* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); and Matthew Lassiter, *The Silent Majority*. For a superb study of the rise of the new Republican Party, focusing on Orange County, California, but with national implications, see Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

Congressman Walter Jones, whose district stretched across much of the region, distanced himself from President Johnson's unpopular Great Society policies as he faced a strong reelection challenge from Republican John East. Furthermore, the *Washington Post* labeled Congressman Cooley as one of many in Congress who "deserve to lose" in 1966, criticizing his relationship with lobbyists and his role in promoting bills friendly to lobbying interests.⁹³

Without an unpopular presidential nominee hindering his campaign, James Gardner handily defeated sixteen-term Democratic Congressman Harold Cooley in a victory with implications for state, regional, and national politics. Southern Republicans made tremendous gains in the 1966 midterm elections, a key event in the development of two-party politics. This election revealed several important trends in southern politics, the most notable of which included the increasing popularity of the Republican Party in the urban and suburban South. Two years earlier, Gardner failed to receive a majority of votes in Raleigh (Wake County), the state's urban, and increasingly suburban, capital. In 1966, Wake County voters supported Gardner over the rural-oriented Cooley. The *New York Times* reported that the Fourth Congressional District "has shown a strong dislike for the Johnson Administration," which likely doomed Cooley's reelection bid.⁹⁴ Governor Dan K. Moore blamed his party's defeat on national politics, particularly voter discontent with President Johnson and "trends having to do with issues beyond the borders of North Carolina." Moore nevertheless recognized the

⁹³ *Washington Post*, 25 September 1966 [GOP campaign funding]; *Washington Post*, 16 October 1966 [Nixon and Freeman]; *Winston-Salem Journal*, 18 September 1966 [Congressman Walter Jones and politics in eastern North Carolina]; *Washington Post*, 4 November 1966 ["deserve to lose"]; *New York Times*, 9 November 1966 [law and order].

⁹⁴ *New York Times*, 9 November 1966 ["strong dislike"]; *Raleigh News and Observer*, 20 November 1966, NCC Clipping File; *North Carolina Manual* 1967, 319. Gardner won a majority of votes in six of the seven counties in this congressional district, with the sole exception being Nash County, Cooley's political base. Gardner (60,686) defeated Cooley (46,673) by a sizable margin. See also (Burlington, N.C.) *The Daily Times News*, 9 November 1966.

significance of the election. “I think the two-party system took a giant step forward,” said Moore. “When the tide hits, there’s not much you can do about it.”⁹⁵

The 1966 midterm election was a pivotal event in the development of two-party politics in North Carolina and the South. First, this election heralded the arrival of a new generation of southern Republicans in North Carolina. The state Republican Party enjoyed a banner year, but it was the “new” Republicans who made the biggest splash. If Gardner’s election as state party chair symbolized the shifting balance of power within the state party, then his victory over Cooley demonstrated the potential for Republican growth outside of its traditional strongholds in the foothills and mountains. The decline of Democratic supremacy in eastern North Carolina, two years after President Johnson’s landslide election victory, allowed the Republican Party to focus its efforts on a region that for decades remained out of its reach. With the strong Republican presence in western North Carolina, the Democratic Party relied on its eastern base to maintain its stranglehold on state politics. With its rural, staple crop economy, and large African-American population, the region was largely receptive to President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal policies, and remained loyal to Truman, Sanford, and Moore. However, President Johnson’s endorsement of civil rights ultimately led many to question their loyalty to the national Democratic Party. Second, the midterm election revealed that despite Goldwater’s crushing defeat two years earlier was merely a blessing in disguise. Johnson won the election, but within two years, the Republican Party emerged with the momentum necessary to campaign as a national party. Johnson’s unyielding support for federal civil rights legislation provoked a strong backlash against the national Democratic Party that allowed southern Republicans to challenge one-party politics. This grassroots backlash, combined with a refashioned Republican

⁹⁵ *Durham Herald*, 10 November 1966 [“beyond the borders”]; *Winston-Salem Journal*, 10 November 1966 [“two-party system”]. See also (Burlington, N.C.) *The Daily Times News*, 10 November 1966. In 1966, North Carolina Republicans gained the largest number of seats in the General Assembly since 1928.

Party featuring Sunbelt Republicans at the vanguard, led to a profound transformation of southern politics. Third, this election made possible a major shift in national politics that set the stage for the national Republican Party to compete in the South. Cooley's defeat in the midst of a national revolt against Johnson's liberalism revealed the declining significance of the New Deal political coalition between southern Democrats and the national party.⁹⁶

James Holshouser, Gardner's successor as state party chair, reflected on the significance of the 1966 midterm elections for the development of two-party politics. "This time we struck at the grassroots. We think we have enough of a foothold to become a statewide party," said Holshouser shortly after the election.⁹⁷ "We elected practically everybody we had on the ballot and in places we could have elected some others if we had more," recalled Holshouser.

Reversing the Johnson-Goldwater debacle of 1964, Jim Martin observed that 1966 was a "huge year for Republicans locally and statewide."⁹⁸ Shortly after the midterm elections, the *Raleigh News and Observer* noted the increasing Republican growth in the urban Piedmont, epitomized by Gardner's victory.⁹⁹ In one of the many paradoxes of North Carolina politics, former gubernatorial candidate Richardson Preyer won election to Congress in one of the few bright

⁹⁶ *Christian Science Monitor*, 15 November 1966. This was a landmark election for southern Republicans and the national Republican Party. Winthrop Rockefeller became the first Republican governor in Arkansas since Reconstruction. Additionally, Republicans picked up longtime Democratic congressional and legislative seats throughout the region. South Carolina Senator Strom Thurmond, a longtime Democrat, switched to the Republican Party shortly after his 1960 election victory and won his reelection campaign as a Republican. Republican Howard Baker defeated Democratic Governor Frank G. Clement to represent Tennessee in the U.S. Senate. Tennessee Republicans also picked up two congressional seats. In Florida, Claude R. Kirk, Jr. became the state's first Republican governor since 1872; Roland, *The Improbable Era*, 75, 77-78; Black and Black, *The Rise of Southern Republicans*, 147-148.

⁹⁷ *Greensboro Daily News*, 12 November 1966.

⁹⁸ Interview with James E. Holshouser by Jack D. Fleer, 1/31/1998, (C-328.1), ["elected practically everybody"]; Interview with James G. Martin by Jack D. Fleer, 2/6/1998, (C-0333), SOHP ["huge year for Republicans"]. Holshouser described the geographical divisions within the state Republican Party as "the old guard versus the new guard kind of thing."

⁹⁹ *Raleigh News and Observer*, 1 January 1967.

spots for Democrats. Just as Gardner captured a heavily Democratic district in eastern North Carolina, Preyer carried a Republican-leaning district in Greensboro. Nineteen sixty-six was a decidedly Republican year in state and regional politics, but Preyer's victory in a Republican-leaning district meant the development of two-party politics would progress gradually rather than immediately.¹⁰⁰

In addition to persistent Democratic loyalty, the key reason for the gradual development of two-party politics in North Carolina was the potential for factionalism within the state Republican Party. Despite the impressive gains made in 1966, southern Republicans lacked ideological and political unity. The state's traditional Republicans, particularly those in the North Carolina foothills and mountains, spent decades focused on local politics, while the more ambitious Goldwater Republicans stressed the importance of national politics.¹⁰¹ The state's "new" Republicans, comprised mostly of conservative Democrats-turned-Republicans from eastern North Carolina, hitched their wagons to the national party in 1964, whose transformation under Goldwater provided the party with a southern political base. The state's Republican establishment enjoyed a longstanding relationship with the national party stretching back several decades. The political careers of James Holshouser and James Gardner demonstrated the potential for Republican factionalism. Holshouser, a mountain Republican, and Gardner, a recent Republican convert, both rose to prominence in the 1960s, but they took decidedly different paths to reach the point when both served as party chair. In the 1960s, however,

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Richardson Preyer by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, 1/28/1974, (A-137); Interview with Graham Jones by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, 12/12/1973, (A-130), SOHP.

¹⁰¹ Bartley, *The New South*, 384-395. According to Bartley, "The Goldwater campaign brought into the party a host of archconservatives who both strengthened and further divided southern Republicanism." Bartley, *The New South*, 386. Republican factionalism in North Carolina confirms Bartley's argument that southern Republicans lacked unity in the 1960s. While this factionalism was largely absent from North Carolina politics in the 1960s, however, it emerged in the 1970s with tremendous consequences for the state Republican Party. Southern Republicans discovered that they were not immune to the same problems that plagued their Democratic counterparts for decades within the one-party system.

factionalism did not impede Republican expansion, for the Democratic Party's decline in southern politics presented a unique and unprecedented potential for party growth in North Carolina.

James Gardner's campaign victory brought to Congress a conservative Republican from the Democratic heartland of eastern North Carolina. His ideological conservatism put him at the vanguard of the conservative Republican faction in state and national politics. In Congress, Gardner targeted President Johnson's Great Society liberalism, the civil rights movement, and the anti-war movement. "Lyndon Johnson has promised prosperity, and we have high inflation—he promised an honorable peace to the war in Vietnam, and we now see the United States drifting in a losing war—he promised certain minority groups that the Federal government would be everything and all things for them, instead we have rioting in every city in America," said Gardner.¹⁰² Congressman Gardner labeled anti-war protests led by civil rights leaders as "nothing more than an outright endorsement of North Vietnam's position...Dr. Martin Luther King...Stokely Carmichael and others are capitalizing on the publicity at the expense of those who are fighting for freedom in Southeast Asia."¹⁰³

Congressman Gardner argued it was necessary to abolish Johnson's Great Society program as an unnecessary expenditure at a time of war. "The Vietnam conflict is being blamed for the need to raise taxes. The real reason, however, is the desire to finance an expansion of...domestic programs in addition to supporting our military efforts in Southeast Asia."¹⁰⁴ Additionally, Gardner was a harsh critic of Johnson's war on poverty, arguing that political

¹⁰² Press Release, 3/13/1968, in James C. Gardner Papers, Box 21, Subject File "Press Release 3/13/1968," SHC.

¹⁰³ "14th Weekly Report," in Gardner Papers, Box 21, Subject File "14th Weekly Report," SHC.

¹⁰⁴ Press Release 8/18/1967, Congressman James Gardner to President Lyndon Baines Johnson, 8/18/1967, in Gardner Papers, Box 21, Subject File "Press Release 8/18/1967," SHC.

activists infiltrated the anti-poverty programs.¹⁰⁵ The anti-Great Society conservatism Gardner espoused won considerable support from conservative southern Democrats, and was an integral part of the development of two-party politics in the South. However, this was only one component of the transformation of southern politics.

In 1964, Barry Goldwater's campaign revealed the potential for a Republican base in the South. While Goldwater won only a few southern states, the significance of his campaign was clear. In order to compete at the national level, and especially in the South, the Republican Party had to abandon its longtime support for civil rights as well as its traditional party leadership. As a conservative southern Republican, Congressman Gardner took a leading role in removing the liberal influences of the national party's leadership. Gardner praised Richard Nixon's primary victory in New Hampshire. "I am convinced that all Americans, regardless of their Party affiliation, will turn to Richard Nixon for the leadership that is so desperately needed," said Gardner.¹⁰⁶ Additionally, he refused to endorse New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller. Gardner announced his intention to "vigorously oppose" Rockefeller's presidential campaign at the Republican National Convention. "I have always believed that it would be best not to speak out against a fellow Republican regardless of my personal feelings. However, I cannot, in good conscience remain silent and, through my failure to speak out, be associated in any way with Mr. Rockefeller." Further illustrating his point, Gardner unfavorably compared Rockefeller to President Johnson. "After one examines the statements and performance of Governor Rockefeller, it should be clear that if he is elected President we will have only a continuation of

¹⁰⁵ Congressman James C. Gardner to Sargent Shriver, 6/14/1967, in Gardner Papers, Box 21, Subject File "Press Release—OEO and Letter," SHC; *Washington Post*, 3 August 1968; *New York Times*, 13 August 1967, 8 November 1967, 14 November 1967.

¹⁰⁶ Press Release, 3/13/1968, in Gardner Papers, Box 21, Subject File "Press Release 3/13/1968," SHC. See also Press Releases dated 6/15/1967, 6/16/1967, 7/18/1967, 8/9/1967, 8/14/1967, 8/16/1967, 8/30/1967, 8/30/1967, 10/11/1967.

the type of policies that have brought this Nation to the brink of fiscal collapse, insurrection in the streets, and an Administration unwilling to win a war,” said Gardner.¹⁰⁷ Gardner’s rejection of Rockefeller’s candidacy represented in microcosm the struggle by conservative Republicans to purge the party of its moderate leadership and build a national party more reflective of southern conservatism. Southern Republicans like Gardner made possible the national Republican Party’s shift from its northern political base to its newfound focus on the Sunbelt. Similarly, Gardner’s popularity in eastern North Carolina brought his party into this Democratic stronghold, contributing to the party’s expansion as a statewide organization. The influence of national politics was the primary reason for the development of two-party politics throughout the South. Reflecting his party’s growing strength and influence in the South, Gardner’s primary goal was not to serve in Congress, but rather to win election as the state’s first Republican governor in the twentieth century.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ *Washington Post*, 3 July 1968 [“vigorously oppose”]; Press Release 7/2/1968, in Gardner Papers, Box 22, Subject File “Press Release 7/2,” SHC. See also Press Release 7/6/1968, Box 22.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Jack Hawke by Jonathan Houghton, 6/17/1990, (C-0087), SOHP. Hawke argues that Gardner cared little about his responsibilities in Congress because his main goal was to win his party’s gubernatorial nomination.

CHAPTER 4

“I didn’t leave the Democratic Party, it left me:” The 1968 Election and the Remaking of North Carolina Politics

In June 1967, Lieutenant Governor Robert W. Scott, son of former Governor Kerr Scott, keenly observed that the South of the 1960s was far different from that of his father’s generation. The “new breed of Southerners,” as Scott labeled them, benefited from improved education and prosperity, enjoyed greater sophistication, and most importantly, “feel no particular loyalty to the political party of their fathers and grandfathers.” In the midst of a great socioeconomic and political transformation, Scott recognized that the future of the Democratic Party was at stake. The party, he argued, “must reevaluate its traditional approaches to problems and electioneering and come forth with new ideas...It is apparent to me that the present political revolution presents a major challenge to the Democratic Party. How the party meets that challenge will determine its future.” Scott correctly recognized that the New Deal political coalition no longer served as the fulcrum of southern politics, especially among a generation that “doesn’t recall the Great Depression and barely remembers the Second World War.”¹

First elected to statewide office as lieutenant governor in 1964, Robert Scott inherited a political world far removed from that of his late father. In 1948, Kerr Scott’s rural-oriented liberalism resonated strongly with voters and made possible Scott’s primary victory over the state’s leading political machine. The elder Scott’s election made possible a liberal interlude in state politics that, while brief, set the stage for progressive Democrats such as Terry Sanford to

¹ *Raleigh News and Observer*, 15 June 1967, News Clipping, North Carolina Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill [Hereafter cited as NCC Clipping File].

challenge conservative Democrats' influence. By the 1960s, however, the declining influence of southern liberals made Kerr Scott's economic populism a relic of the past. The U.S. Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling, the civil rights movement, federal civil rights legislation, the rise and fall of Great Society liberalism, along with rising prosperity and suburbanization, rendered economic populism less salient than ever before.² In other words, there was little need nor opportunity for Robert Scott to campaign on the same platform as his father. Twenty years removed from his father's landmark election victory, Robert Scott faced a political environment that included a growing and influential Republican presence. Scott's reflections on the transformation of southern politics proved prophetic, for nowhere was this more evident than 1968, as the leaders of both political parties predicted a strong, competitive gubernatorial campaign.³

The 1968 Gubernatorial Primary Campaigns: An Overview

Reflecting the strong influence of national politics, the Democratic and Republican gubernatorial primaries revealed significant details about the future direction of both political parties. The crowded Democratic primary field was a hallmark of the state's spirited politics, as the conservative-progressive rivalry that defined one-party politics often provided voters with more options than the typical machine-selected candidate. In 1968, however, business was anything but usual for the Democratic Party as Dr. Reginald Hawkins, a dentist and civil rights activist, joined conservative J. Melville Broughton, Jr., and lieutenant governor Robert W. Scott, a moderate Democrat, in seeking the party's gubernatorial nomination. Broughton and Scott, the

² Numan V. Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance: Race and Politics in the South during the 1950s* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), remains the best study of the decline and fall of southern liberalism in the 1950s following the *Brown* decision. See also Kari Frederickson, *The Dixiecrat Revolt and the End of the Solid South, 1932-1968* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

³ *Winston-Salem Journal*, 22 October 1967; *Raleigh Times*, 7 November 1967.

sons of former governors, represented the party's traditional factions, while Hawkins's campaign marked the first time an African-American candidate sought statewide office. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, cornerstones of President Johnson's liberalism, made possible his entry into the political arena.⁴

Likewise, strong Republican growth and increasing party factionalism made necessary the state's first Republican gubernatorial primary. The emergence of conservative eastern Republicans, a great number of whom joined the party in the backlash against federal civil rights legislation, challenged the traditional party establishment for influence. In 1968, Congressman James Gardner, whose victory two years earlier was a significant event in the development of two-party politics in North Carolina, faced Charlotte businessman Jack Stickley, the establishment candidate, in the Republican gubernatorial primary. Both Hawkins and Gardner reflected the transformation of southern politics in the aftermath of the civil rights movement, with great implications for both political parties and the future of two-party politics in North Carolina.

The 1968 Democratic Gubernatorial Primary

Although the 1968 Democratic gubernatorial primary resembled many previous campaigns, Reginald Hawkins's campaign rattled the Democratic establishment and upset the party's traditional conservative-progressive rivalry. Similar to Beverly Lake in 1960, Hawkins was a political outsider seeking influence for a sizable faction long marginalized by party leadership. Furthermore, Hawkins's campaign had the potential to weaken the progressives,

⁴ For more on the significance of Reginald Hawkins' campaign and the reshaping of state politics and the Democratic Party, see Interview with Joel Fleishman by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, 2/8/1974, (A-121), in Southern Oral History Program, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill [Hereafter cited as SOHP]. "I think that because the black vote has always been the largest single [bloc] vote that could be counted on for the liberal wing of the Democratic Party in North Carolina and probably throughout the South. Once that separated out and became its own wing in a sense and had to be taken into account and became very difficult at that point to mobilize the kind of winning coalition," said Fleishman.

while ultimately emboldening the conservatives, as Lake demonstrated in 1964. Most importantly, however, Hawkins's candidacy revealed that African-Americans constituted an important constituency within the Democratic Party.⁵ As conservatives joined the Republican Party, African-Americans left the party to join the national Democratic Party, whose embrace of civil rights legislation ended its reign atop the hierarchy of southern politics, and contributed significantly to the rise of two-party politics in the South. As usual, the three candidates vying for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination engaged in a competitive primary campaign, from which none of the candidates emerged with a majority. Scott won the most votes (337,368), with Broughton (233,924) finishing second, and Hawkins (129,208), a distant third.⁶ Hawkins, who hoped to create a coalition of African-Americans, poor whites, and labor, failed to make a big impact in this campaign.⁷ As in 1960 and 1964, the moderate Democrat won the most votes in the primary, but the presence of a third candidate prevented him from winning a majority. Unlike these earlier campaigns, however, race and segregation were not significant political issues in the Democratic primary. Furthermore, the outsider candidate in 1968 was a liberal African-American civil rights activist, rather than a staunch segregationist white Democrat such as Beverly Lake.

Shortly after the primary, J. Melville Broughton, Jr., who finished second behind Robert Scott, chose not to call for a runoff election. Broughton's decision allowed the Democratic Party "to offer a united front against the strongest Republican challenge in many years." Governor Dan K. Moore and state party chair I.T. (Tim) Valentine, both of whom remained neutral in the

⁵ *Atlanta Daily World*, 17 January 1968; *Chicago Defender*, 15 January 1968, 27 January 1968, 3 February 1968.

⁶ *New York Times*, 6 May 1968; *North Carolina Manual* 1971, 318. Scott (337,368) won a plurality of the votes, while Broughton (233,924), and Hawkins (129,208) prevented Scott from receiving an outright majority.

⁷ *Gastonia Gazette*, 5 May 1968.

primary, believed this decision had the potential to unite, rather than divide, the party.⁸ Leading the party's unity efforts was Moore, who waged a vigorous campaign to ensure that his successor was a Democrat, proving that party loyalty trumped ideology when faced with a strong Republican challenger, such as was the case with Jim Gardner. The widespread factionalism that characterized the Democratic Party essentially disappeared after the primary due to Moore's desire for party unity. "Dan Moore had a lot to do with bringing those two [factions] together, to help heal the wounds," said Robert W. Scott. "I think Dan Moore was a loyal party man. I really think he believed in that."⁹

In the absence of a potentially divisive runoff with the potential to benefit his campaign, James Gardner alleged that Robert Scott "made a deal" with Hawkins and invited Broughton's jilted conservative supporters to join his campaign. Gardner, who did not shy away from using the politics of race in his campaign, appealed to conservative white voters with his goal of making the Republican Party in North Carolina "the white man's party."¹⁰ In contrast to Gardner's campaign, the politics of race was largely absent in the Democratic primary. Scott's primary victory was significant for a number of reasons. First, the moderate Democratic faction prevailed without resorting to race-baiting tactics, long a hallmark of Democratic politics, but made increasingly unnecessary by the exodus of anti-civil rights Democrats to the Republican Party. Second, his victory likely forestalled a further exodus, for his status as a middle-of-the-road Democrat proved palatable to both conservatives and liberals who remained in the party fold. Finally, his political coalition provided the model for the refashioned Democratic Party in the emerging two-party system.

⁸ *New York Times*, 9 May 1968; *Raleigh Times*, 8 May 1968.

⁹ Interview with Robert W. Scott by Jack D. Fleer, 2/4/1998, (C-0336-1), SOHP.

¹⁰ *Greensboro Daily News*, 9 May 1968 ["made a deal"]; *Raleigh News and Observer*, 12 May 1968 ["the white man's party"].

The 1968 Republican Gubernatorial Primary

In September 1967, Congressman James Gardner announced his intention to seek the Republican gubernatorial nomination. Gardner's campaign marked the first time that a Republican outside the traditional party leadership challenged the party establishment. Prior to Gardner's emergence, the state party was largely homogenous, with few divisions, ideological or otherwise. His campaign set up an unanticipated primary against Charlotte businessman Jack Stickley, who represented the party establishment. Stickley enjoyed the support of several prominent Republicans, including Congressman Charles Jonas, nicknamed "Mr. Republican" for his status as one of the state's leading Republicans, two-time gubernatorial nominee Robert Gavin, and former state party chair William E. Cobb, all closely aligned with the traditional Republican establishment. In contrast, Gardner was one of the most prominent Democrat-turned-Republicans in North Carolina, and enjoyed a "large following among dissident Democrats."¹¹ The *New York Times* observed that Gardner's entrance into the gubernatorial arena "reflected a view prominent in North Carolina Republican circles that President Johnson will be a drag on the ticket this year and that there is a pronounced trend toward conservatism in this state."¹²

As the Republican who epitomized his party's rise in state and national politics in the 1960s, Gardner was the ideal candidate to lead the campaign to restore his party to the governor's office for the first time since Daniel Russell left office in 1901. At sixty-four years of age, Jack Stickley faced the same problem that plagued Congressman Harold Cooley in his losing battle against James Gardner two years earlier. Much of James Gardner's appeal resulted from his youth and conservative political ideology, and his status as a former state party chair

¹¹ *New York Times*, 18 September 1967.

¹² *New York Times*, 4 January 1968.

and brash young conservative who slew a political Goliath when he defeated Cooley, afforded him celebrity status in the state party. Like Cooley, Stickley found it difficult to compete against the new breed of North Carolina Republicans. Although the party establishment spent several decades laying the groundwork for their emergence as a statewide political party and enjoyed an influential presence, the political environment in 1968 favored the young conservative candidate closely linked to national politics, rather than the older candidate representing the moderate party establishment. In a political environment heavily influenced by national politics, Gardner and the conservative Republican faction entered the campaign with significant momentum.

Reflecting the importance of the political base for the Republican Party, both Jack Stickley and James Gardner stressed eastern North Carolina's importance for his party's future success. "For a Republican candidate [the East] is where the potential lies," said Stickley. The party establishment realized its shortcomings in eastern North Carolina, which had only eleven percent of the state's registered Republicans. "I don't expect to take the East, but I expect to neutralize the East," argued Stickley.¹³ Gardner told voters that the key to the election was convincing eastern Democrats to break their political loyalties and vote for him. "The East has kept the Democrats in power for many years...What has it gotten them? The answer is sixty-seven years of promises and mediocrity," said Gardner. At a time when registered Democrats far outnumbered Republicans, it was necessary for Republicans to compete in the East if they hoped to expand into a statewide political party. Gardner's victory two years earlier brought the Republican Party into this crucial region. On the surface, the Gardner-Stickley campaign had the potential to be a competitive campaign. Seventy percent of the state's Republicans lived in the foothills and mountains, far away from Gardner's eastern base and the growing Republican presence in the Democratic East. Stickley, who hailed from the Republican-leaning Charlotte

¹³ *Burlington (N.C.) Times-News*, 19 March 1968.

metropolitan area, enjoyed the full resources of the party establishment, which remained largely excluded from eastern North Carolina. The party's first primary election for statewide office, however, turned out to be anything but competitive as Gardner easily defeated Stickley with more than seventy percent of the vote.¹⁴ In 1966, Gardner's congressional victory revealed the rising influence of the conservative Democrats-turned-Republicans in the state party, while his overwhelming primary victory over Stickley affirmed its popularity as a viable political faction in North Carolina. The Republican Party's rightward shift had tremendous implications for North Carolina's political development, as Gardner's victory over the party establishment had the potential to increase tensions between the factions. According to Gardner, his primary victory over Stickley represented a triumph over the "Republican Old Guard."¹⁵ Nineteen sixty-eight was unique, however, in that the Republicans held a distinct advantage in terms of political momentum and a surprising absence of party factionalism following the gubernatorial primary.

The 1968 Gardner-Scott Gubernatorial Campaign

Robert Scott and James Gardner's primary victories set in motion the state's most important gubernatorial election in seventy years. For the first time since the Populist-Republican political alliance challenged the Democratic Party in the 1890s, the state Republican Party had the potential to wage a serious campaign for statewide office. Aided in their efforts by their opponents' factionalism, the fracturing of the national Democratic Party and New Deal political coalition, and a convivial national party, North Carolina Republicans found a hospitable political climate in 1968. Unlike the Democrats, Republicans enjoyed considerable party unity

¹⁴ On Eastern North Carolina and the Republican Party, see *New York Times*, 9 September 1967, 28 April 1968, 5 May 1968; *Raleigh News and Observer*, 8 May 1968 ["The East has kept the Democrats in power"]; *The Robesonian* (Lumberton, NC); 20 February 1968; *The Daily Times-News* (Burlington, NC), 8 May 1968, 20 July 1968; Alexander P. Lamis, *The Two-Party South*, 2d exp. ed., (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 134; *North Carolina Manual* 1971, 318. Gardner tallied 113,584 votes (72%) to Stickley's 42,483 (28%)

¹⁵ *Salisbury Evening Post*, 21 November 1968.

in their quest to capture the governor's office. Although there were tensions between the party establishment and the "new" Republicans, this did not seriously hinder their campaign. Rather, both factions largely united in their efforts to win statewide office, made possible by the decline of the Democratic Party in the South, and the national Republican Party's ability to wage a national presidential campaign. Two-time Republican gubernatorial nominee Robert Gavin waged two competitive campaigns in 1960 and 1964, but the combination of post-primary Democratic unity and a weak national Republican Party consistently hamstrung his efforts, losing to his Democratic opponent in both elections. In 1968, however, Republicans believed they had the potential to win this campaign. Speaking to a friendly Republican audience at the party's annual Lincoln Day celebration, James Gardner declared, "the year 1968 is going to be a Republican year in North Carolina."¹⁶

This election took place amid the collapse of the national Democratic Party with tremendous implications for southern politics. The civil rights movement and Vietnam War split the national party into anti-war, anti-civil rights, pro-war, and pro-civil rights factions. Alabama Governor George Wallace's third-party campaign sought to harness the nation's discontent with the excesses of President Johnson's Great Society and pro-civil rights liberalism, not merely limited to disenchanted southern Democrats.¹⁷ Additionally, the Republican Party's increased capability to wage a national presidential campaign revealed the precarious standing of the Democratic Party in the South. Furthermore, the state Republican Party enjoyed an unprecedented statewide presence following decades of one-party politics.

¹⁶ *Gastonia Gazette*, 24 February 1968.

¹⁷ Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics*, 2d ed., (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000).

Shortly before the general election, state Republican Party chairman James Holshouser summed up the general sentiment uniting North Carolina Republicans regardless of ideological loyalty. Republicans, “whether they are liberal or conservative in nature, are dissatisfied with the status quo.” Holshouser observed that disappointment with the Democratic “establishment” presented the opportunity for Republicans to take an active role in promoting the development of two-party politics in North Carolina. Republicans, he remarked, “aren’t shackled by sixty-eight years of party tradition and viewpoint.” As the opposition party in state government, Holshouser believed Republicans brought fresh ideas to government and public policy. In a state in which registered Democrats overwhelmingly outnumbered their Republican counterparts, Holshouser emphasized the importance of building the Republican Party as a statewide organization. In order to accomplish this task, it was first necessary to promote primary elections to increase Republican voter registration. Holshouser recognized that “nothing would help the cause of getting people into the Republican Party like having a Republican governor. Thousands of registered Democrats are voting Republican in North Carolina, but we hope eventually that those thousands will become registered Republicans.”¹⁸ Holshouser, a longtime Republican dedicated to building a viable party organization in North Carolina, recognized that the party’s long-term future lay not with Democrats who voted for Republican candidates, but rather with Democrats who switched party registration.

Likewise, by the late 1960s, it became more acceptable for southern Democrats to cross party lines and vote for Republicans. The electoral success of Democrats-turned-Republicans like James Gardner popularized this trend, particularly as it related to increasingly competitive

¹⁸ *We the People of North Carolina* (Special Election Issue), October 1968, in John William Harden Papers, Box 157, Folder 1843 “Political Campaign Materials,” Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill [Hereafter cited as SHC].

political campaigns in heavily Democratic districts.¹⁹ The pro-civil rights agenda of the national Democratic Party, along with the anti-civil rights ideology of many southern Democrats-turned-Republicans, lessened the stigma attached to those who abandoned their traditional political loyalties in order to vote Republican, especially in national politics. If North Carolina Democrats proved reluctant to abandon the national party in 1948, they felt considerably less inclined to remain loyal twenty years later. Although North Carolina remained a heavily Democratic state, the “deep, ingrained resistance to party-switching” lessened significantly as a result of Republican growth in the 1960s.²⁰ In February 1968, the *Raleigh News and Observer* reported on this development. “The Switcher, born of creeping two-partyism, is emerging as a political phenomenon in North Carolina.” One former Democrat, Benjamin E. Winstead, switched party registration because “the national Democratic Party has left us completely,” while another said that the Democratic Party “has deserted the South.” Dr. Ernest Brown of Lumberton expressed his doubt that the Democratic Party “truly represents Southern people.” These southern Democrats, responding to the national party’s support for civil rights, made possible the rise of the Republican Party in southern politics during the 1960s, for without the support of southern Democrats, the Republican Party had little hope of competing in the South.²¹

If ever there was a year for the state Democratic Party to fall victim to its factionalism, it was 1968. Party infighting, a strong Republican gubernatorial nominee, and a divided national Democratic Party threatened to undermine the state party’s efforts to run a competitive campaign. Furthermore, national and international events such as the assassination of civil rights

¹⁹ *Greensboro Daily News*, 4 August 1968, Press Clipping, in John William Harden Papers, Box 1840, Folder “Press Clippings, 1968-1981,” SHC.

²⁰ *The Robesonian* (Lumberton, N.C.), 20 February 1968 [“deep, ingrained resistance”].

²¹ *Raleigh News and Observer*, 18 February 1968 [“The Switcher”]; *Winston-Salem Journal*, 8 November 1967; *The Robesonian* (Lumberton, N.C.), 20 February 1968.

leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the Vietnam War, and President Johnson's decision not to seek reelection, supplanted local and state issues in the headlines, observed journalist William D. Snider of the *Greensboro News and Record*. These developments had the potential to undermine Democratic efforts to run independently of the national party.²² Despite entering the campaign season seemingly crippled by internal rivalries and facing numerous problems, Robert Scott and the state Democratic Party prevailed in its bid to maintain control of the governor's office. However, Scott could not rely solely on party unity to defeat Republican nominee James Gardner. Nineteen sixty-eight was a highly competitive year in state politics, and Scott could not take party unity for granted. Governor Moore led the party's unity campaign, but divisions remained. The growing popularity of the national Republican Party and James Gardner's conservatism, both of which proved attractive to conservative southern Democrats, were two significant developments that ensured a competitive gubernatorial campaign between Gardner and Scott. Democratic losses in the previous midterm elections alerted many to the realization that their near-monopoly on electoral politics reached its end. Traditional voting patterns, party machinery, and weak Republican opponents no longer guaranteed Democratic Party dominance in southern politics. In spite of the perfect storm of events conspiring against Democrats in 1968, Scott won a campaign that by all accounts, Democrats should not have won. First, Scott benefited considerably from a unified state Democratic Party. Second, Scott distanced himself from the national party. Third, he ran as a moderate Democrat and also gained support from the state's influential business community, which typically supported conservative Democrats. Finally, Scott won the support of moderate Republicans who lacked faith in Gardner, who did not represent the traditional party establishment.

²² *Greensboro Daily News*, 27 April 1968.

Similar to Dan Moore's 1964 campaign in which he avoided linking his gubernatorial bid to President Johnson's election campaign, gubernatorial nominee Robert W. Scott did not go out of his way to support Democratic presidential nominee Hubert Humphrey. In an election year that found the national Democratic Party under duress from the Republican Party and George Wallace's third-party campaign, Scott focused his efforts on his gubernatorial campaign. The national party was a liability, rather than an asset, for Scott's campaign. Scott described his efforts to maintain his distance from the rivalry between Humphrey and Wallace that split the national party. "It was a very tight rope to walk...I stepped gingerly and tried to avoid getting trapped into extremes on either side...I was not going to get the George Wallace vote...and I didn't try to wave the flag for Hubert Humphrey," said Scott.²³ For several decades, North Carolina Democratic Party leadership was among the most vocal supporters of the national party. By the 1960s, however, the strained relationship and growing divide between the state and national party led many of the state's Democrats to campaign independently of the national party. As one keen Democrat recognized, "In light of the times and temper of Tar Heel voters, and the unfortunately rising tide of Jim Gardner-type Republicanism in this state, I quite understand our leadership's cautiousness in affiliation with our national Democratic Party."²⁴

Like his father, Robert Scott consciously avoided the national party ticket during his gubernatorial campaign. The sharp contrast between the two elections, just twenty years apart, revealed the vast transformation of southern politics following the Second World War. In 1948, Kerr Scott believed President Truman's pro-civil rights liberalism threatened to undermine his gubernatorial campaign, but Truman's strong victory in North Carolina proved Scott mistaken.

²³ Interview with Robert W. Scott by Jack D. Flear, 2/4/1998, (C-0336-1), SOHP.

²⁴ Roland Giduz to Governor Dan K. Moore, 8/26/1968, in Governor Dan K. Moore Papers, General Correspondence, 1968, Governor's File, Box 332, Folder "Political" (unnumbered, 1), in NCSA.

Twenty years later, President Johnson's failure to win the Vietnam War, along with the anti-civil rights backlash against the Democratic Party, made life difficult for southern Democrats seeking political office. President Truman's election campaign revealed the growing divide between the South and the national party, while the 1968 election represented the initial culmination of these divisions. Two decades after the Dixiecrats provoked an unenthusiastic response from the great majority of North Carolina Democrats, the Republican Party and George Wallace provided suitable alternatives for southern Democrats abandoning their traditional political loyalty. "I do not believe that any candidate in this day and time wants to become tangled up with other candidates...I am going to run my own campaign regardless of what happens," said Scott.²⁵

National political developments in the 1960s created many difficulties for southern Democrats. The political and racial tumult discredited liberalism and the national party in the minds of many voters. Robert Scott recognized its significance for his campaign. "I had to get off of the liberal bit, more into the middle of the road," said Scott. "I knew that I had to, at least in the minds of the public, pretty much shatter the conception that I was a liberal. The pendulum was beginning to swing back to conservatism." Scott campaigned as a law and order candidate to show that he was "not as liberal...and more in the middle of the road." Additionally, Robert Scott reached across factional lines in 1968 to gain support from conservative Democrats. "I realized I had to build support in the business community...Mel Broughton and his [faction] were much more business-oriented than I was." Unlike his father, Scott's political organization reached out to both business leaders and city voters. Scott realized that his father's rural political base was not enough to defeat Gardner, for the state's recent urban growth shifted the balance of power from the rural countryside to the urban Piedmont. This transformation rendered his father's rural populist, anti-corporate ideology null and void by the late 1960s. Scott's decision

²⁵ *Raleigh Times*, 31 July 1968.

to embrace the state's metropolitan citizens reflected the growing urbanization and suburbanization of North Carolina, a key target demographic for both political parties.²⁶

Likewise, Scott also believed that he had considerable support from the state's Republican establishment, many of whom remained suspicious of Gardner's support from the John Birch Society, a white supremacist organization, and his favorable comments toward George Wallace. Late in the campaign, Gardner moved away from Richard Nixon, backed by the state party establishment, and aligned himself with Wallace's third-party campaign, thus furthering the divide between Gardner and the state Republican Party. Gardner was much closer to Wallace than Nixon in political ideology and anti-civil rights conservatism. Wallace was a conservative southern Democrat who counted among his most fervent supporters disenchanted Democrats like Gardner. Revealing potential divisions between pro-Wallace conservatives and the party establishment, state Republican chairman Jim Holshouser warned that Wallace's campaign had the potential to hurt the Republicans' anti-Humphrey campaign. "If Wallace has any success at all, it will be to help Humphrey get elected...I hope that once the conventions are completed people will realize that they will be throwing their vote away with George Wallace," said Holshouser.²⁷

Robert Scott believed that Jim Gardner's nomination likely hurt the Republican Party's bid to win the gubernatorial election. "It [the election] might have been closer if the Republicans had nominated [Jack] Stickley...We had many people write to us and say, 'I'm voting for you,

²⁶ Interview with Robert W. Scott by Jack D. Fleer, 2/4/1998, (C-0336-1), SOHP; Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Matthew D. Lassiter and Kevin Kruse, "The Bulldozer Revolution: Suburbs and Southern History since World War II," *Journal of Southern History* 75 (August 2009): 691-706; Interview with James E. Holshouser by Jack D. Fleer, 5/9/1998, (C-0328.3), SOHP.

²⁷ *Durham Morning Herald*, 25 July 1968 [Holshouser on Wallace].

but I'm staying in the Republican Party,'" said Scott, shortly after his campaign victory. "I don't think [Gardner] had the confidence of moderate Republicans," recalled Scott. "I got a lot of that [rural Republican] vote that normally would have gone to a moderate."²⁸ In campaigning on a law and order platform, and by cultivating support from the state's business community and moderate Republicans, Robert Scott gained the support of those whose traditional loyalty was to conservative Democrats or even the traditional Republican establishment, as he waged a competitive and ultimately successful campaign for governor. Democratic Party unity contributed to Scott's victory, but just as important was Scott's ability to adapt to the changing political environment.²⁹ "It was obvious that many Republicans were dissatisfied with their candidate for governor and some Democrats were not too happy with their candidate for president," concluded Scott shortly after his election victory.³⁰

Despite winning on his own terms, his father's influence loomed large over Scott's gubernatorial victory. According to former North Carolina Secretary of State Thad Eure, Kerr Scott's legacy and political allies made it possible for his son to defy expectations and become the first lieutenant governor to win the gubernatorial election. "Bob Scott ran for governor just at the right time. If it had not been for his daddy's powerful organization, Bob Scott could never

²⁸ *Salisbury Evening Post*, 21 November 1968 ["It might have been closer..."]; Interview with Robert W. Scott by Jack D. Flear, 2/4/1998 (C-0336-1), SOHP. See also Interview with Joel Fleishman by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, 2/8/1974 (A-121), SOHP. According to Fleishman, "It [race] was not significant issue in the Scott election though I think to the extent that he made it an issue, he did what a lot of southern politicians do. He made vague illusions to how he would not tolerate crime in the streets and disorder and things like that." Covington and Ellis, *Terry Sanford*, 367.

²⁹ *Greensboro Daily News*, 7 November 1968, News Clipping, John William Harden Papers, Box 156, Folder 1840, "News Clippings, 1968-1981," SHC [Scott on party unity]; Interview with Robert W. Scott by Jack D. Flear, 2/4/1998 (C-0336-1), and Interview with Robert W. Scott by Karl Campbell, 9/18/1986, Interview with Jack Hawke by Jonathan Houghton, 6/7/1990, (C-0087), SOHP. Scott credits his political organization, not Bert Bennett's political network, for his 1968 gubernatorial victory. Scott and Bennett had a falling out in the 1960s, and consequently, Bennett did not play a significant role in Scott's administration. See also *Raleigh News and Observer*, 21 October 1979; *Winston-Salem Journal*, 8 March 1982, NCC Clipping File.

³⁰ *Greensboro Daily News*, 7 November 1968, News Clipping, John William Harden Papers, SHC.

have been elected governor of the state...I think Bob Scott would admit that if it hadn't been for his father's popularity and his black-top roads over the state, in the hinterlands of North Carolina...If it hadn't been for that, I think he would agree that he couldn't have made it," said Eure.³¹

Robert Scott's campaign reflected the changing realities of southern politics. By the late 1960s, the mass exodus of conservative white Democrats into the Republican Party required that the Democratic Party expand its political base to remain competitive in the emerging two-party system. This included reaching out to African-American voters, if not as a practical matter, then as a means of political survival. In 1968, Robert Scott won the Democratic gubernatorial primary without waging an anti-civil rights campaign along the lines of Dan K. Moore's runoff victory over Richardson Preyer four years earlier. Such a campaign would have been counterproductive for the Democratic Party, which found itself in the unenviable position of waging an underdog campaign against an ascendant Republican Party. Although African-Americans were an important part of the Democratic rank-and-file, Scott's campaign marked the first time that the party actively reached out to seek their support. It was not a coincidence that African-American voters viewed the Democratic Party as most hospitable, as political developments throughout the 1960s pushed this key voter bloc into the Democratic ranks.

Civil rights activist Floyd McKissick praised Governor Terry Sanford's efforts to improve race relations. At a time when many southern Democratic politicians consistently alienated African-Americans with their fiery opposition to integration and racial equality, Terry Sanford took a decidedly different path. McKissick credits Sanford for his liberal views on race relations, particularly for establishing the Good Neighbor Council, designed to facilitate dialogue within the community. "He brought people together by his public statements and his remarks,"

³¹ Interview with Thad Eure by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, (A-0120), 12/12/1973, SOHP.

said McKissick, who called Sanford “one of the very best governors that North Carolina has ever had.”³² Similarly, Chapel Hill Mayor Howard Lee observed that Terry Sanford “stands head and shoulders above any other administration in the state in recent history.” According to Lee, Sanford “was a very decent governor” whose influence on the state’s African-Americans was significant. “I know that the school integration situation here could have been worse if there had not been a Terry Sanford. If there had been another governor, I’m sure North Carolina would have gotten a great deal more tension with its desegregation problems. But Terry, I think, handled it in an astute fashion,” said Lee.³³ Furthermore, Lee recognized Governor Dan K. Moore’s contributions in explaining African-Americans’ support for the Democratic Party. Although Moore’s opposition to federal civil rights legislation was the cornerstone of his 1964 gubernatorial primary campaign, he helped African-Americans remain in the party’s ranks. Howard Lee credited Moore with making significant achievements for African-Americans. “I would consider Governor Moore’s administration as overtly kind of weak; you didn’t see much progress for the state being made there. But when one looked closer at Governor Moore, he probably brought more minorities into the government than any other previous governor to that time,” Lee argued.³⁴

Shortly after Barry Goldwater’s landslide defeat in 1964, a moderate Republican organization, the Ripon Society, published a report detailing the consequences of Goldwater’s anti-civil rights platform. The Ripon Society concluded that Goldwater’s “Southern strategy” not only contributed to Robert Gavin’s defeat in the gubernatorial campaign, it also erased “many of the painstakingly achieved gains of the last decade” by the North Carolina Republican

³² Interview with Floyd McKissick, Sr., by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, 12/6/1973, (A-0134), SOHP.

³³ Interview with Howard N. Lee by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, 12/13/1973, (A-0132), SOHP.

³⁴ Interview with Howard N. Lee by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, 12/13/1973, (A-0132), SOHP.

Party. Even moderate Republicans like Robert Gavin, who nevertheless supported Goldwater, found it difficult to gain African-American support because of the national party's anti-civil rights platform. Consequently, the state Republican establishment lost whatever African-American support it previously gained because of Goldwater's candidacy.³⁵ In 1968, Gardner's gubernatorial campaign did little to reverse this trend, as his racial conservatism further alienated any remaining African-American supporters. Moreover, Reginald Hawkins's bid for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination revealed the growing number of African-American voters in North Carolina following the passage of President Johnson's landmark civil rights legislation. The national Republican Party, having repudiated its longstanding support for civil rights, inadvertently made African-American voters an integral part of the new Democratic Party in North Carolina, a trend that developed over the following decades.

"The Negro vote was almost solidly against Senator Goldwater and went against Gavin rather than being enthusiastic for Moore," reported the *Lexington Dispatch*.³⁶ Similarly, the *Winston-Salem Sentinel* recognized the increasing importance of African-American voters to the Democratic Party. "Negro voters have a real and growing allegiance to the national Democratic Party. A big majority will vote Democratic—at least at the national level—for some time to come. But when race is not an issue, a significant minority of Negroes—especially business and professional men—are inclined toward Republicanism," observed the *Winston-Salem Sentinel*.³⁷ Based on the conclusion that Johnson and Moore received the majority of African-American votes in 1964, the *Sentinel* correctly identified African-Americans' support for Johnson, but

³⁵ *Burlington Times*, 2 February 1965; Matthew Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 229-232.

³⁶ *Lexington Dispatch*, 21 December 1964 ["rather than being enthusiastic"]; *Burlington Times*, 2 February 1965.

³⁷ *Winston-Salem Sentinel*, 3 January 1965.

misread their support for Moore, the Democratic establishment candidate whose vocal opposition to federal civil rights legislation helped him defeat progressive Democrat and Sanford ally Richardson Preyer in the primary. Moore received these votes largely by default, as he was the Democratic nominee in a strong Democratic year. By the late 1960s, however, the national Republican Party's anti-civil rights ideology left African-Americans without a genuine alternative. Attorney and politician H.M. "Mickey" Michaux argued that the Democratic Party was the logical home for African-Americans. Contrasting the two major political parties, he observed that Republicans "are not attuned to black politics as Democrats may be. Certainly most of your black voters are Democrats, registered Democrats. But the Republican Party just has not developed a black program in order to attract black politicians." Michaux placed the blame for this on "the national image of conservatism" that failed to include African-Americans as a significant part of the national Republican Party.³⁸

The driving force behind the transformation of state, regional, and national politics in the 1960s was the politics of race and civil rights. President Johnson's landmark civil rights legislation originated from a Democratic administration, a fact that was not lost on voters, regardless of race. Despite intense opposition from conservative southern Democrats, the national party under President Johnson became synonymous with civil rights, while the Republican Party, with southern and western Republicans at the vanguard, epitomized its opposition. These developments in national politics during the Johnson administration provoked the reshaping of both political parties in North Carolina. As moderate southern Democrats began the process of reaching out to African-American voters, conservatives left en masse to join the Republican Party. These former Democrats brought with them their anti-civil rights ideology and racial conservatism, which prompted a clash between the party establishment and the

³⁸ Interview with H.M. Michaux by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, 11/20/1974, (A-0135), SOHP.

Johnny-come-lately Republicans for leadership and influence within the party. Although conservative Democrats found their party's efforts to gain African-Americans' support nothing less than abhorrent, African-American voters did not ignore the party's civil rights record under President Johnson. With Goldwater at the helm of the national party, southern Republicans effectively turned their backs on any efforts to reach out to African-Americans. Furthermore, Reginald Hawkins' gubernatorial primary campaign in 1968 heralded the potential new wave of African-American political activism following the civil rights movement and the passage of Johnson's landmark civil rights agenda. Although he did not gain enough votes to move beyond the primary into a runoff election, Hawkins nevertheless demonstrated the extraordinary potential for African-American voters to play a pivotal role in the state Democratic Party.

With the emergence of two-party politics in the South, Democratic politicians found it necessary to reach out to African-American voters. In 1968, the *Wall Street Journal* reported on two southern Democrats' efforts to gain African-American support. The ability to attract African-American support without alienating conservative white Democrats required a delicate balancing act for southern Democrats. South Carolina Democratic Senator Ernest Hollings, for example, "is not making a strong pitch for the Negro vote...but neither is he ignoring his Negro constituents." Instead of openly seeking African-American support, Hollings chose instead to speak to college students at traditionally African-American schools. Florida Democrat LeRoy Collins, seeking his party's nomination for the U.S. Senate, "isn't outwardly seeking the black vote," but according to one Florida politician, "He just assumes he'll get it. The Negroes still remember the picture taken at Selma showing him walking next to Martin Luther King." Due to the increasing political influence of African-Americans in the South, and the Democratic Party in

particular, one Florida lawyer observed, “the days of running just as a white man’s candidate are over.”³⁹

James Gardner’s primary victory over Republican establishment candidate Jack Stickley further eroded any remaining African-American support for the state party. With James Gardner as the Republican nominee, African-American voters overwhelmingly supported Democratic nominee Robert W. Scott. This marked the second consecutive election in which African-American voters cast a majority of votes for the Democratic Party ticket largely because of an anti-civil rights Republican nominee on the state or national ticket. Simply put, Gardner’s racial conservatism and praise for George Wallace left African-American voters with little reason to support his campaign. Robert Scott’s victory over Gardner in the general election marked the first time that the Democratic nominee failed to capture a majority of white votes, but he won nevertheless because a majority of African-American voters made possible his victory in this new political environment.

In defeat, Congressman James Gardner’s gubernatorial campaign nonetheless qualified as a landmark event in the development of North Carolina’s two-party system. “He made people, for the first time, honestly believe a Republican could get elected,” said Jack Hawke. “Gardner brought...excitement and charisma” to the state Republican Party, something Hawke believed it lacked prior to his campaign. Not only did Gardner come dangerously close to ending seven decades of Democratic control of the governor’s office, Gardner contributed to the expansion of the Republican Party deep into the Democratic East.⁴⁰ Gardner’s political career in the 1960s

³⁹ *Wall Street Journal*, 7 May 1968 [Hollings and Collins]; See also *Christian Science Monitor*, 13 June 1968.

⁴⁰ Interview with Jack Hawke by Jonathan Houghton, 6/7/1990, (C-0087), SOHP. Raleigh conservative television personality Jesse Helms recognized the significance of Gardner’s campaign. “So conservatism which was the bedrock upon which the state Democratic Party in North Carolina was years ago built originally, is on the rise again in our state...the people are simply beginning to return to what they have subconsciously believed all along.” See Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 207.

reflected in microcosm the transformation of state and national politics, as he paved the way for the emergence of conservative Republicans and the development of two-party politics in the 1970s. James Gardner's nomination over Jack Stickley in the primary contributed significantly to the Republican Party's expansion into a legitimate statewide organization, but national political developments also played a significant part in this process. Richard Nixon's victory in North Carolina undoubtedly brought many votes for Gardner, votes that Robert Gavin did not receive in 1960 or 1964. Most importantly, however, James Gardner helped make possible a promising future for the Republican Party in North Carolina politics. At the same time, Gardner's influence in the state party had the potential to increase factionalism within the Republican ranks.

The 1968 election revealed the new Democratic coalition that would become a mainstay of state politics in the two-party system. Gardner won a majority of white votes, but Scott carried the great majority of African-American votes and a sizable number of white votes.⁴¹ As the Republican Party provided a genuine alternative to the Democratic Party, Governor Moore's efforts to promote party unity assumed even greater importance. In an increasingly competitive two-party system, Democratic unity made it possible for the party to withstand the political storm that saw the Republican presidential nominee carry the state for the first time since 1928, and the Republican Party wage its strongest gubernatorial campaign since the 1890s. The importance of unity applied to both political parties in the new party system, as harmony or disharmony meant the difference between victory and defeat. This election demonstrated that

⁴¹ Robert Scott reached out to African-American voters during the campaign. See Interview with Robert W. Scott by Jack D. Fleer, 2/4/1998, (C-0336-1), SOHP; Paul Luebke, *Tar Heel Politics 2000*, 211-212. Luebke is correct in pointing to the creation of a new Democratic political coalition, but he ignores the importance of Democratic Party unity in preserving victory in an increasingly competitive political system. Although both political parties recognized the significance of party unity in North Carolina, both parties were likewise prone to factionalism and disunity, hardly limited to one or the other.

southern Democrats could no longer rely on the national party to carry them to victory, therefore making even more important the necessity of a unified state party. If anything, the national party was a liability for Scott, but due in large part to Moore's efforts to promote harmony between the warring factions, the state party persevered and helped make possible Scott's victory.

James Gardner's campaign foreshadowed the rise of conservative Republicans in southern politics. Gardner's anti-Great Society ideology and anti-civil rights conservatism reflected the national party's growing appeal to "the silent majority" and provided the ideological foundation of the Republican Party in the South. In appealing to conservative voters, Gardner spoke of his "outrage that this country has to deal with a second front at home against rioters and beatniks when its fighting men are risking death overseas."⁴² Gardner urged voters to help foster the development of two-party politics was also a significant part of his campaign, criticizing the "old entrenched political machines, with selected hand-picked candidates subjected to the will of the few in power."⁴³ Whether or not Gardner and his supporters prioritized the development of a two-party system is less important than the fact that Gardner's success was a sign of the growing Republican ascendancy in state and regional politics. Gardner's endorsement of both Richard Nixon and George Wallace epitomized the decline of the Democratic Party in southern politics, while his claim that he defeated the "Republican Old Guard" to win the nomination contributed significantly to growing tensions within the state party.⁴⁴

James Gardner blamed his defeat partly on the Republican Party's failure to receive support from African-American voters. "It's hard to explain to me the Negro in North Carolina,"

⁴² Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 204-207; Gardner quoted on p. 206.

⁴³ "Winston-Salem Speech, 3/29," in Gardner Papers, Box 22, Subject File "Winston-Salem Speech 3/29," SHC.

⁴⁴ *Salisbury Evening Post*, 21 November 1968.

said Gardner. “He’s been terribly dissatisfied. The Democrats have been in charge, yet they [African-Americans] go out every year in a bloc vote for any Democrat...It’s not the easiest thing to run as a Republican in North Carolina. You start out with a certain number of Negro bloc votes against you and a certain number of people who vote straight Democratic no matter who the candidate is.”⁴⁵ In explaining his defeat, Gardner conveniently ignored the realities of political realignment since the New Deal. Despite his lackluster civil rights record, African-Americans nevertheless supported President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Presidents Truman, Kennedy, and Johnson’s support for federal civil rights legislation kept African-Americans within the Democratic fold, while Goldwater’s campaign and the Republican Party’s abandonment of its civil rights platform marked the end of the GOP as the “party of Lincoln.” The Johnson administration brought about a huge increase in African-American voter registration following the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act, the great majority of which benefited Democrats rather than Republicans.⁴⁶ African-Americans played a significant part in Scott’s victory, but their support for the Democratic Party was hardly a fluke. Rather, it was the logical outcome of a series of developments in state and national politics.

Governor Dan K. Moore’s urging of party unity paid tremendous dividends in 1968, as Scott defeated Gardner, thus keeping the governor’s office under Democratic Party control for at least four more years. However, there were serious limits to Democratic Party unity in North Carolina. For example, the efforts put forth by party leadership did not apply to the presidential

⁴⁵ Raleigh *News and Observer*, 8 November 1968; Lamis, *The Two-Party South*, 134; *North Carolina Manual* 1971, 308. Scott captured 821,233 votes to Gardner’s 737,675.

⁴⁶ See, especially, Nancy J. Weiss, *Farewell to the Party of Lincoln: Black Politics in the Age of FDR* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983). For the political realignment of white southern Democrats, see Earl Black and Merle Black, *Politics and Society in the South, The Vital South*, and *The Rise of Southern Republicans*. According to Jack Hawke, “I truly believe that Jim Gardner lost that race. Bob Scott didn’t beat him; Jim lost it because of mistakes he made” while Scott “just kept plodding along, making no mistakes.” See Interview with Jack Hawke by Jonathan Houghton, 6/7/1990, (C-0087), SOHP.

campaign in North Carolina. Although Democratic factionalism ceased following the gubernatorial primary, there was no equivalent political base for the presidential campaign due to the crowded field of candidates that ultimately divided supporters of the national party. In 1967, Moore pledged to support the national party ticket, but his endorsement had no bearing on the outcome of the presidential election. Former Governor Terry Sanford and Beverly Lake protégé Billy Webb took charge of promoting Hubert Humphrey in North Carolina, proving that the search for party unity often makes strange bedfellows.⁴⁷ Similarly, Senator Sam Ervin, a conservative but loyal Democrat, endorsed Democratic presidential nominee and Vice President Hubert Humphrey.⁴⁸ Moore and Ervin's support, as well as that of Sanford and Webb, however, had little influence, as there was no groundswell of popular support for Humphrey among white southern Democrats. If anything, the political climate in 1968 was decidedly anti-Humphrey.⁴⁹

Governor Moore strongly defended his support for the Democratic ticket to increasingly skeptical voters whose political loyalties did not often reflect his own. "As a lifelong Democrat, I have stated it is my intention to support all Democratic candidates on the ballot this year. However, I assure you that I have always reserved the right, and shall continue doing so, to disagree with any other Democrat when such as course is indicated," said Moore.⁵⁰ Similar to Luther Hodges in 1960, Moore defended the Democratic Party's record on integration, arguing, "the process of integration has been carried out by national administrations of both of our major

⁴⁷ *Greensboro Daily News*, 27 April 1968; 11 July 1968 [Sanford and Webb].

⁴⁸ *Raleigh News and Observer*, 11 September 1967 [Moore] Lamis, *The Two-Party South*, 134 [Ervin].

⁴⁹ *North Carolina Manual* 1971, 299. For the first time since 1928, Republican Richard Nixon (627,192) carried North Carolina. George Wallace (496,188) finished second, while Democrat Hubert Humphrey finished in third place in the field of three candidates, with 464,113; *Washington Post*, 6 November 1968.

⁵⁰ Governor Dan K. Moore to James Ellison, 10/18/1968, in Governor Dan K. Moore Papers, General Correspondence, 1968, Governor's File, Box 32, Folder "Political" (unnumbered, 1), in NCSA. See also Moore to Chesterfield Payton, 10/4/1968, in same folder.

political parties...In North Carolina, the attitude of the responsible officials has been that laws which are duly enacted must be obeyed, and that there is no other choice.”⁵¹ Despite this, Moore’s efforts failed to materialize in a victory for Humphrey, as the unprecedented anti-Humphrey sentiment in the South made possible his defeat in every southern state.

Vice President Hubert Humphrey’s candidacy failed to inspire southern Democrats in 1968, as his pro-civil rights liberalism won him few supporters in the South. The unprecedented anti-Democratic backlash marked the end of the “solid South” and party supremacy in southern politics, as southern Democrats abandoned the party in droves. This election marked the first time that the Democratic nominee was shut out of the South, as Humphrey failed to win a majority of votes in every southern state. Governor Dan K. Moore remained a party loyalist, but a majority of the state’s Democrats did not share this sentiment. “I begin by renouncing the Party of my choice...I must say that I have not left the Democratic Party, but that the Democratic Party has left me,” reported one disenchanted Democrat.⁵² Others reflected this sentiment. “I cannot under any circumstances support Mr. Humphrey and I believe this is the feeling of most Democrats,” said Margaret White.⁵³ “I shudder at the thought of Richard Nixon in the White House, I am appalled by the ideas of George Wallace, but I could not now vote for Hubert Humphrey,” said Lew Lewis.⁵⁴ Another reported, “Though I have always been a Democrat and supported the candidates of the Democratic Party, I will not be able to support [Humphrey] or

⁵¹ Governor Dan K. Moore to Clarence C. East, 1/14/1968, in Moore Papers, General Correspondence, 1968, Associations and Organizations, Box 351, Folder “Democratic Party,” in NCSA.

⁵² Mary G. McCollum to James V. Johnston, 9/4/1968, in Moore Papers, General Correspondence, 1968, Associations and Organizations, Box 351, Folder “Democratic Party,” in NCSA [“I have not left the Democratic Party”].

⁵³ Margaret A. White to Governor Dan K. Moore, (n.d., received 8/19/1968), in Moore Papers, General Correspondence, 1968, Governor’s File, Box 332, Folder “Political” (unnumbered, 4), NCSA [“feeling of most Democrats”].

⁵⁴ Lew Lewis to Governor Dan K. Moore, 8/20/1968, in Moore Papers, General Correspondence, 1968, Governor’s File, Box 332, Folder “Political” (unnumbered, 2), in NCSA [“I shudder at the thought”].

candidates who endorse him. I certainly will never vote for him.”⁵⁵ This view also reflected the increasing popularity of the Republican Party as a suitable replacement for the Democratic Party in state politics. “If I am forced to turn to the Republicans as the party that fulfills my needs in 1968, I will feel justified in going so far as to vote a straight ticket, even on the state level,” one Democrat informed Moore.⁵⁶ “If [Humphrey] is nominated by the Democratic Party, I will not vote for him, many others will not vote for him, and Richard Nixon will be our next President,” warned Thomas Dessent.⁵⁷

Dan K. Moore’s support for Humphrey incurred the wrath of conservative Lake supporters, who informed him that his endorsement was one of the reasons “why so many lifelong Democrats are becoming thoroughly disgusted with the Democratic Party.”⁵⁸ Joe McLaney labeled Humphrey as “anti-North Carolina” and “anti-South,” a candidate who “in no way represents the Democratic thinking of the people of North Carolina.”⁵⁹ McLaney represented in microcosm the southern Democratic grassroots view of Humphrey and the national Democratic Party in 1968. Unlike Democratic forbearers such as Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Delano Roosevelt, southern Democrats did not view Humphrey as a friend of the South.

⁵⁵ James C. Cooley to Governor Dan K. Moore, 8/8/1968, in Moore Papers, General Correspondence, 1968, Governor’s File, Box 332, Folder “Political” (unnumbered, 4), in NCSA [“I certainly will never vote for him”].

⁵⁶ Mrs. James R. Haviland to Governor Dan K. Moore, 8/13/1968, in Moore Papers, General Correspondence, 1968, Governor’s File, Box 332, Folder “Political,” (unnumbered, 2), in NCSA [“the party that fulfills my needs”].

⁵⁷ Thomas Dessent to Governor Dan K. Moore, 8/14/1968, in Moore Papers, General Correspondence, 1968, Governor’s File, Box 332, Folder “Political,” (unnumbered, 4), in NCSA [“Nixon will be our next President”].

⁵⁸ Paul A. Johnson to Governor Dan K. Moore, 6/19/1968, in Moore Papers, General Correspondence, 1968, Governor’s File, Box 332, Folder “Political Folder,” in NCSA [“many lifelong Democrats”].

⁵⁹ Joe W. McLaney to Governor Dan K. Moore, Moore Papers, Box 332, Folder “Political Folder,” NCSA [“anti-North Carolina” and “anti-South”]. See also Joseph L. Schneider to Governor Dan K. Moore, 7/10/1968, in Moore Papers, General Correspondence, 1968, Governor’s File, Box 332, Folder “Political” (unnumbered, 5), and Joe W. McLaney to Governor Dan K. Moore, 6/27/1968, in Moore Papers, General Correspondence, 1968, Governor’s File, Box 332, Folder “Political Folder,” in NCSA.

This left them with little reason to support the party, especially when Nixon and Wallace provided genuine alternatives for disenchanted southern Democrats.

The 1968 election marked the culmination of a several decades of political change in North Carolina. In the early 1960s, the Democratic Party remained in control of state politics, though the Republican Party made its presence known in waging increasingly competitive campaigns and strong party growth. Although the 1968 election brought mixed results for the state Republican Party, it was clear that this election was nonetheless a significant development in the growth of a two-party system. Richard Nixon's victory and James Gardner's narrow defeat provided the Republican Party with the opportunity to build upon this landmark election. In the 1970 midterm elections, the Republican Party proved that the previous election was not a fluke, as Congressman Earl Ruth, a former Democrat, won reelection as a Republican. Democrats outnumbered Republicans approximately three-to-one in Ruth's congressional district, but it was precisely these Democrats who made possible his reelection. Ruth's victory over Democrat H. Clifton Blue mirrored the Harold Cooley-James Gardner campaign in 1966, the results of which foreshadowed the tremendous Republican gains in the next national election. Congressman Ruth repeated what quickly became the standard line among conservative southern Democrats whose detachment from the national party brought about its demise as the only viable political party in the South. "I didn't leave the Democratic Party," Ruth said, "it left me." Congressman Ruth made these remarks during his campaign, undoubtedly reflecting the views of many of his constituents.⁶⁰ Ruth's victory in a heavily Democratic district was part of a larger trend shaping state, regional, and national politics following Richard Nixon's election, demonstrating that Republicans held significant momentum in advance of the 1972 election.

⁶⁰ *New York Times*, 6 September 1970.

CHAPTER 5

Jesse Helms, Jim Hunt and the Development of Two-Party Politics, 1972-1984

The 1972 election was a pivotal event in shaping North Carolina's political development. That year, the Republican Party made unprecedented gains not only in North Carolina, but also throughout the South and across the nation. It was a landmark Republican year that created the foundation for two-party politics in North Carolina. If everything came together for the Republicans, the Democrats fell apart due to factionalism and divisions between the state and national party. For the first time since the 1890s, Republicans captured a seat in the U.S. Senate and the governor's office, officially ending Democratic supremacy in state politics. This election brought to office the political leaders and political organizations most responsible for shaping the development of the state's nascent two-party system. Republicans Jesse Helms, Jim Holshouser, and Jim Martin headlined a banner year for their party, while Jim Hunt was one of the Democrats' few bright spots. These political leaders and their respective political organizations dominated state politics for the next three decades. Furthermore, this election revealed the emerging partisan structure of North Carolina's two-party system. Despite the emergence of two-party politics, it nevertheless reflected many of the legacies of one-party politics. For example, the factionalism that defined the Democratic Party remained an integral component of both political parties in the two-party system. The rival political careers of Republican Jesse Helms and Democrat Jim Hunt bore many similarities to the conservative-progressive rivalry that characterized one-party politics. Finally, the 1972 election prompted the reshaping of the

major political parties in North Carolina, as well as the relationship between state and national politics. In the decade that followed this crucial election, both political parties reorganized and adapted, with mixed results, to the new political environment of the modern South.

The 1972 Election and the Rise of Two-Party Politics

President Nixon's landslide victory over Democratic presidential nominee Senator George McGovern marked the second consecutive election in which the Republican candidate carried North Carolina. Nixon gave McGovern a sound thrashing, as McGovern never really had a chance to compete in North Carolina or the South, where he remained highly unpopular. "He just didn't have much appeal," said Republican Jim Holshouser, concurrently summing up Republican delight and Democratic discontent with the national party and its candidates.¹ Senator Sam J. Ervin, a conservative Democrat, best summed up the discontent among party loyalists. "As a Democrat, I expect to do what I have always done and that is to support all Democratic nominees. Candor compels me to confess, however, that it is extremely unfortunate that the American people have no choice except to choose between Nixon and McGovern," said Ervin. Edwin S. Lanier, the state Commissioner of Insurance, mirrored Ervin's sentiment. "I am a Democrat to the core, but I simply cannot vote this year for the Democratic nominee... And I will not vote for the Republican nominee," said Lanier.² McGovern's campaign weakened the entire party ticket and contributed to the defeat of many southern Democrats, including several in North Carolina. Republicans and Democrats viewed McGovern's pro-civil rights and anti-war liberalism with a mix of enthusiasm and horror, respectively. McGovern provided many

¹ Interview with Governor James E. Holshouser by Jack D. Fleer, 1/31/1998, (C-0328.1), in Southern Oral History Program, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill [Hereafter cited as SOHP].

² Senator Sam J. Ervin to Governor Robert W. Scott, 16 September 1972; Edwin S. Lanier to Governor Robert W. Scott, 15 September 1972, both in Governor Robert W. Scott Papers, General Correspondence, 1972, Governor's File, Box 530, Folder "Political-George McGovern" (II), in North Carolina State Archives, North Carolina Office of Archives and History, Raleigh, North Carolina [Hereafter cited as NCSA].

wavering southern Democrats with a reason to vote for Nixon, who was far more palatable to conservatives than McGovern and the national Democratic Party.

Nineteen seventy-two marked a decisive shift in national politics. Building upon the steady Republican growth of the 1960s, this election revealed the extent to which the South's traditional loyalty to the Democratic Party in presidential politics turned decisively in favor of the Republican Party. Four years earlier, Hubert Humphrey's campaign resulted in an exodus of southern Democrats from the party fold, a trend that continued as Nixon swept the South in 1972. North Carolina Democrats expressed a wide variety of sentiments relating to the Nixon-McGovern campaign. One "lifelong Democrat" argued that political loyalty was secondary to the "competency or integrity" of the nominee, declaring, "I can't stomach the likes of McGovern and [I] will vote for Nixon." Similarly, J.R. Smith called McGovern "an avowed socialist whose ultimate aim is the destruction of this country."³ Like his predecessor, Governor Robert W. Scott supported the Democratic Party ticket out of loyalty and his desire to maintain party unity, warning of the consequences of factional strife. "I think there's a limit to how much more 'civil war' the Democratic Party can stand and still have as reasonable chance of winning the main bout in November," said Scott. Many Democrats praised his efforts, while others strongly condemned his continued loyalty to a national party seemingly out of touch with the South. Despite the persistence of Democratic Party loyalty, the anti-McGovern sentiment most closely reflected the attitudes of the Democratic grassroots, which helped make possible a landmark Republican election.⁴

³ R. Rambo to Governor Robert W. Scott, 11 September 1972 ["lifelong Democrat"]; J.R. Smith to Governor Robert W. Scott, 15 September 1972 ["avowed socialist"]; both in Scott Papers, General Correspondence, 1972, Governor's File, Box 530, Folder "Political-George McGovern" (II), NCSA.

⁴ Scott quoted in Statement by Governor Robert W. Scott, 3/15/1972, Scott Papers, GC, 1972, Governor's File, Box 530, Folder "Edmund Muskie" (II), NCSA; For those supporting Scott, see Leo Jenkins to Scott, 8 September 1972; Daniel H. Pollitt to Scott, 7 September 1972; J.P. Crawford to Scott, 6 September 1972; J. Fred Corriher, Jr. to

Additionally, the 1972 presidential election revealed the divisions between the South and the national Democratic Party, as the gulf separating southern Democrats and the national party was more visible than ever before. Southern Democrats could no longer take for granted their traditional relationship with the national party. In his successful campaign for lieutenant governor in 1972, Jim Hunt observed that many Democrats “didn’t want to touch McGovern with a ten-foot pole [though] I thought he was a great fine man.” He continued, “Many times I was about the only major candidate to go to [his] rallies, [where] I was uncomfortable because I disagreed with McGovern on so many things. I felt like we went to Vietnam for the right reasons, and we should’ve tried to prevail there more strongly than we did. I’m a hawk on foreign affairs.” Although he supported the Democratic ticket, Hunt’s differences with McGovern epitomized the divide between moderate-to-conservative southern Democrats and the anti-war, pro-civil rights liberalism promoted by the national Democratic Party. “McGovern was way too liberal for me,” said Hunt. “I didn’t like his crowd. I thought they were hurting the party.”⁵ Reflecting the changing political realities of eastern North Carolina, Leo Jenkins, the President of East Carolina University, hosted a pro-McGovern event that attracted many college students, but failed to attract wider community support in this conservative Democratic heartland. Jenkins labeled McGovern “a very unpopular presidential candidate” in eastern North Carolina, the state’s political bellwether.⁶

Scott, 8 September 1972; Robert L. Blake to Scott, 5 September 1972; Mr. and Mrs. John K. Thomas, 6 September 1972; H. Marcus Coffey to Scott, 16 October 1972; Mrs. Anita R. Cottrell to Scott, 16 October 1972; Anne Queen to Scott, 18 October 1972; Mrs. T.R. Kanipe to Scott, 11 October 1972; Mrs. J.B. Spillman to Scott, 8 October 1972; Brigadier General Hugh B. Hester to Scott, 5 October 1972; all in Scott Papers, GC, 1972 Governor’s File, Box 530, Folder “Political-George McGovern” (I), NCSA.

⁵ Gary Pearce, *Jim Hunt: A Biography* (Winston-Salem, N.C.: John F. Blair, 2010), 59.

⁶ Interview with Governor James B. Hunt by Jack D. Fleer, 10/3/1001, (C-0332), SOHP; Interview with Leo Jenkins by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, 12/12/1973, (A-0129), SOHP.

Just as many southern Democrats avoided George McGovern at all costs, Republicans realized that McGovern was one of the best possible recruiting tools for their party. “I told a lot of people that George McGovern was really the best campaign issues I had without even knowing it,” said Republican gubernatorial nominee Jim Holshouser. Tom Lambeth, a Democratic political aide, placed much of the blame for his party’s electoral defeat on McGovern. “I think that McGovern was a tremendous influence in the election,” said Lambeth. Democratic Congressman Charles Rose observed that many eastern Democrats voted for President Nixon, “not so much because they felt total empathy for everything he wanted to accomplish, but because they were scared of George McGovern.”⁷ McGovern did not represent the traditions such as segregation, states’ rights, and anti-civil rights conservatism valued by conservative southern Democrats. Many of those who cast their vote for independent Democrat George Wallace in 1968 supported Nixon four years later, largely because the Democratic Party again nominated an unpalatable candidate, and thus contributed to the new era of Republican dominance in presidential politics.

President Nixon’s landslide over George McGovern masked the spirited nature of North Carolina politics.⁸ Despite Nixon’s big victory, the Senate and gubernatorial campaigns remained highly competitive. Neither the Senate nor the gubernatorial campaign was as lopsided as the presidential campaign. This reflected the top-down realignment of southern politics and demonstrated the enduring significance of party loyalty among southern Democrats, an increased

⁷ Interview with Governor James E. Holshouser by Jack D. Fleer, 1/31/1998, (C-0328.1); Interview with Tom Lambeth by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, 1/28/1974, (A-0131); Interview with Charles Rose by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, 1/30/1974, (A-0138), SOHP.

⁸ *North Carolina Manual* 1973 (Raleigh: North Carolina Secretary of State), 330-331. Nixon (1,054,889) captured approximately two-thirds of the total votes cast, with McGovern (438,705) finishing in a distant second place. See also *Washington Post*, 5 November 1972; 8 November 1972; *New York Times*, 5 November 1972; 9 November 1972.

number of whom split their ticket by supporting Nixon while also voting for Democratic candidates for local or statewide office.⁹ This election demonstrated that, despite its apparent lack of unity and Republican growth, the Democratic Party remained an integral part of state politics and that North Carolina would not turn into a one-party Republican state. This election revealed the competitive politics that became the hallmark of the state's two-party system in the late twentieth century.

The tide of national politics in 1972 meant that President Nixon was likely to carry North Carolina without significant competition from George McGovern. However, Republican gubernatorial nominee Jim Holshouser never enjoyed the same level of comfort as Nixon. Unlike the president, Holshouser faced a more difficult path in his quest to be the state's first Republican governor of the twentieth century. First, Holshouser waged a strong primary challenge from former gubernatorial nominee Jim Gardner. Gardner narrowly won a plurality of votes in the primary, but Holshouser prevailed in a closely contested runoff election. In contrast to 1968, this was a competitive primary campaign, one that former party chairman Jack Hawke called the party's "first real primary for governor."¹⁰ It was also bitter and divisive, pitting the eastern conservatives against the party establishment. Attorney General Robert Morgan

⁹ Veteran Democratic political aide Tom Lambeth observed that the Voting Rights Act of 1965 "marked the emergence of ticket splitting as a household habit in North Carolina." Southern Democrats largely abandoned their loyalty to the Democratic Party in national politics, while supporting Democrats at the state level, such as governor and lieutenant governor. Ticket splitting best explains the competitive nature of two-party politics in late twentieth century North Carolina. See Interview with Tom Lambeth by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, 1/28/1974, (A-0131), SOHP. For more on the top-down realignment of southern politics in the twentieth century, see Earl Black and Merle Black, *Politics and Society in the South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987); Black and Black, *The Vital South: How Presidents Are Elected* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); Black and Black, *The Rise of Southern Republicans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002). The reigning synthesis of the post-1945 South also includes significant material relating to the transformation of southern politics in the twentieth century. See Numan V. Bartley, *The New South, 1945-1980* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995).

¹⁰ Interview with Jack Hawke by Jonathan Houghton, 6/7/1990, (C-0087), SOHP; *North Carolina Manual 1979*, 799-800. Gardner (84,906) won a plurality of the votes in the primary, with Holshouser (83,637) taking second place in a field of four, with the remaining two candidates winning approximately 2,000 votes. Holshouser narrowly won the runoff with 69,916 votes to Gardner's 68,134.

recognized the potential for divisions between Holshouser and Gardner. “It looks like Holshouser and Gardner are going to bust up,” said Morgan. “As a Democrat, that suits me fine.”¹¹ Second, the potential for Republican factionalism to derail Holshouser’s campaign loomed large throughout the campaign. In 1968, eastern Republican Jim Gardner easily prevailed over the party establishment in his bid for the gubernatorial nomination. Four years later, however, two of the state’s leading Republicans engaged in a competitive primary. Holshouser’s hard-fought and narrow runoff victory failed to contribute significantly to party unity. If anything, it increased the animosity between party factions. Third, the competitive primary left unresolved the struggle between the party’s major factions, a development with substantial implications for the development of two-party politics in North Carolina. Despite the tensions, Republican factionalism did not hinder the party’s success in 1972. Finally, Democratic factionalism and the influence of national politics played a significant role in shaping the outcome of the gubernatorial campaign. If this was a Republican year, it was due to a combination of Republican strength and Democratic weakness. Notwithstanding the potential tribulations facing Republican gubernatorial nominee Jim Holshouser, he nevertheless prevailed in his bid to become his party’s first governor in the twentieth century. In a momentous Republican campaign, none of these problems precluded him from defeating Democratic gubernatorial nominee Hargrove “Skipper” Bowles. Holshouser won the election because of several political developments that benefited the Republican Party in 1972.

First, Republicans benefited from a strong anti-incumbent sentiment in North Carolina. Jim Holshouser appealed to a large number of voters in both parties with a campaign message that stressed the need for two-party politics in North Carolina. According to Holshouser, “the Democrats had been in [office] too long. No matter what any particular Democratic candidate

¹¹ *The Daily Times-News* (Burlington, N.C.), 15 June 1972.

might be like, he was still hamstrung by the fact that the whole structure of the state Democratic Party and the state government were so intertwined that it would be hard to untangle for a Democrat. And in a sense, it was really saying elect me because I am a Republican.” Second, despite partisan rivalries within the state organization, Republicans united behind the national party, with President Richard Nixon’s popularity serving to reinforce the strength of the party ticket, including Senate nominee Jesse Helms, and Holshouser. The influence of national politics in shaping the development of two-party politics was invaluable. According to Democrat Robert Morgan, Holshouser “benefited from the tremendous amount of influence and prestige that Nixon held” in North Carolina. Despite a rough-and-tumble gubernatorial primary, President Nixon’s popularity minimized party factionalism and united the party in advance of the election. It was primarily due to Nixon that North Carolina Republicans enjoyed a banner year. “The party pulled together for the fall campaign really well...so that the Helms and Holshouser people really sort of piggy backed on Nixon’s campaign’s surplus money...But we benefited from that significantly, I think,” said Holshouser.¹² Finally, Republicans profited considerably from the persistence of Democratic infighting and a party characterized by disunity and the absence of a strong party leader to offset the weakened national party.

In contrast to Republican unity, the Democrats’ gubernatorial campaign was an unmitigated disaster, but one that nearly prevailed nonetheless. Similar to the Holshouser-Gardner campaign, the Democrats engaged in a competitive party primary and runoff, but this is where the comparison ends. Unlike their Republican counterparts, the Democrats failed to unite before the election due to the absence of a strong party leader and a national Republican

¹² Paul Luebke, *Tar Heel Politics 2000* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 29; Interview with Robert Morgan by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, 12/13/1973, (A-0136); Interview with Governor James E. Holshouser by Jack D. Fleer, 1/31/1998, (C-0328.1), SOHP.

landslide that undercut their campaign efforts. If everything came together for the Republicans, the Democrats collapsed due to an inability to unite the warring party factions. In 1968, outgoing Governor Dan K. Moore and Democratic gubernatorial nominee Robert W. Scott brought conservatives and progressives together in advance of the general election. In a highly competitive political environment, Moore and Scott pushed for unity to prevent the state party from falling into disarray, and thus handed the reins of power to Republican Jim Gardner. Four years later, its absence doomed the party's efforts to maintain its dominance of state politics.

The conservative-progressive rivalry that defined the state Democratic Party during the era of one-party politics remained as significant in 1972 as it was two decades earlier.

Lieutenant Governor H. Patrick Taylor, Jr., the more conservative Democrat and presumed nominee, faced businessman and upstart liberal Hargrove "Skipper" Bowles in the party's gubernatorial primary. Taylor, whose political base was in courthouse machine politics, contrasted sharply with Bowles, a wealthy businessman attuned to the realities of waging a modern political campaign in the mass media. Like their Republican counterparts, the Democratic gubernatorial primary went into a runoff election, demonstrating the competitive nature of both political parties. Bowles won only a plurality of the votes in a crowded primary, but defeated Taylor in the runoff.¹³ Unlike many of the previous Democratic gubernatorial primaries, the politics of race was conspicuously lacking in the Bowles-Taylor campaign. This marked the first time in a gubernatorial primary in which race was not a significant issue. As

¹³ *North Carolina Manual* 1979, 799-800. In the primary, Bowles captured 367,433 votes to Taylor's 304,910, with four remaining candidates totaling approximately 130,000 votes. Bowles (336,034) then defeated Taylor (282,345) in the runoff. See also Interview with Ferrell Guillory by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, 12/11/1973, (A-0123). "I think there was a difference between the Taylor faction and the Bowles faction. I think the Taylor people sort of feared the Bowles people. You know, the Taylor people were sort of the older folks, the courthouse and everything, and here was this guy Bowles, you know, all of a sudden. You know, put on all this stuff. Television, how dare he put us in modern times and all that." Taylor's father, H. Patrick Taylor, Sr., served as lieutenant governor in Kerr Scott's administration. Elected twenty years later on separate tickets, the Scott/Taylor administrations mark the only time that a father/son combination has served in both positions concurrently.

conservative Democrats left the national party due to its pro-civil rights liberalism, the North Carolina Republican Party found itself increasingly burdened with the politics of race.¹⁴

In 1968, Robert Scott overcame a strong challenge from Jim Gardner thanks largely to African-American support. Four years later, Jim Holshouser attempted to reverse this trend, reaching out to African-Americans. As a moderate Republican unburdened by the politics of race, Holshouser publicly courted African-American voters, asking that they split the ticket by voting for him in the general election. Holshouser's efforts contrasted greatly with the racial conservatism of the "new" Republicans, including Jim Gardner and Jesse Helms, both former conservative Democrats who cut their political teeth in the racial politics of eastern North Carolina. Just as African-American voters played a key role in Scott's narrow victory, so too did Holshouser benefit from their support four years later.¹⁵ With a moderate Republican and a moderate Democrat in the general election, this gubernatorial campaign was noticeable for the lack of racial politics as a wedge issue dividing voters. Holshouser ran his 1972 gubernatorial campaign on the issue of governmental inefficiency in a one-party system, believing his election had the potential to help foster the development of two-party politics in North Carolina.¹⁶ Holshouser and the more inclusive Republican establishment did not employ the politics of race

¹⁴ Earl Black, *Southern Governors and Civil Rights: Racial Segregation as a Campaign Issue in the Second Reconstruction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 111. As I explain later in this chapter, it was the "new" Republicans, not the traditional party establishment, who brought this issue into the state GOP.

¹⁵ Earl Black, "North Carolina Governors and Racial Segregation," in Thad Beyle and Merle Black, eds., *Politics and Policy in North Carolina* (New York: MSS Information Corp., 1975), 76; Black, *Southern Governors and Civil Rights*, 111-112. According to Earl Black, Jim Holshouser "reversed Gardner's 1968 strategy and made a deliberate effort to win black support."

¹⁶ Luebke, *Tar Heel Politics 2000*, 57; Interview with Governor James E. Holshouser by Jack D. Flear, 1/31/1998, (C-0328.1); Interview with Governor James E. Holshouser, Jr. by Jack D. Flear, 5/9/1998, (C-0328.3), SOHP.

as a campaign tactic. Rather, moderate Republicans like Holshouser believed that the inclusion of African-Americans in the Republican Party was critical to the future of their party.¹⁷

Following Bowles's runoff victory, the Democratic Party fell apart due to factionalism and infighting. Governor Robert W. Scott did his best to be an effective party leader, but Bowles made the decision to distance himself from Scott, the outgoing, yet popular governor. Scott, who led the state at a time of great political and social turmoil, presided over the restructuring of the state's public university system, a massive yet ultimately successful undertaking completed in the early 1970s. Following its consolidation, the University of North Carolina system, a sixteen-member institution, stretched from the coast to the mountains.¹⁸ Furthermore, Kerr Scott's influence loomed large over his son's administration, as his efforts to modernize North Carolina ensured his legacy and left his family name quite popular among the state's Democrats. Bowles failed to attract Taylor supporters to his campaign. The failure of the Democratic factions to unite behind Bowles's gubernatorial campaign sealed the party's fate, particularly in a year in which Jim Holshouser proved more palatable to both Democrats and Republicans reluctant to support Jim Gardner four years earlier. President Nixon's popularity effectively diminished Republican factionalism in North Carolina. Democrats, on the other hand, lacked a comparable political leader at both the state and national level. Consequently, Democrats learned firsthand the harsh consequences of party disunity in an era of increased political competition.¹⁹

¹⁷ Black, *Southern Governors and Civil Rights*, 322. According to Earl Black, moderate nonsegregationist Republicans "perceived the inclusion of blacks in the Republican Party as essential to the long-term strength of southern Republicanism."

¹⁸ The consolidation of the university system is a significant part of William A. Link's biography of William Friday, the chancellor of the UNC system from 1956-1986. See Link, *William Friday: Power, Purpose, and American Higher Education* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995). There remains the need, however, for a modern biography of the Scott family and its legacy in North Carolina politics.

¹⁹ The divisions between the Bowles and Taylor camps are illuminated in detail by Ferrell Guillory, Leo Jenkins, and Robert W. Scott. See Interview with Ferrell Guillory by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, 12/11/1973, (A-0123);

Although 1972 was a decidedly Republican year, many of the Democrats' wounds were self-inflicted. "Skipper [Bowles] thought Scott's being for him would hurt him. Well, we can't have any of that in the Democratic Party if we're going to have any strength," said Leo Jenkins, stressing the importance of party unity. Governor Robert W. Scott blamed Bowles's criticism of his administration for "a definite coolness" between the members of Scott's political organization, most of whom supported Taylor, and Bowles, who "was running against me more than against the Republicans." According to Scott, "After the primary there was an effort to get the two factions together but it didn't work because the Skipper Bowles faction felt so strongly that they wanted to be totally in charge. They were not willing to bring Pat Taylor's faction into the fold...our folks frankly just did not get out there and work for Skipper Bowles. They didn't vote against him, and they didn't work against him. They just didn't get out there and hustle for him. That together with the tide of Richard Nixon's effort to bring Holshouser in" contributed to a landmark Republican victory. Jim Holshouser echoed Scott's assessment of the gubernatorial campaign. "I have been told that there was a big meeting between the Bowles' people and the Taylor people in the early summer after the second primary. They said that there was going to be room enough at the table for everybody. But everybody understands the Bowles' people will get the white meat. It just made the Taylor people mad as hell and a lot of people left and just never got on the bandwagon," said Holshouser. Similarly, Democrat H.M. "Mickey" Michaux argued that Bowles "failed" as a party leader, with tremendous consequences for Democrats who were "not unity minded." Their political loyalties notwithstanding, Holshouser, Michaux, and Scott underscored the most significant development following the primary: the lack of effective leadership and party unity hindered Democratic efforts to withstand the impending Nixon

Interview with Leo Jenkins by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, 12/12/1973, (A-0129), and Interview with Governor Robert W. Scott by Karl E. Campbell, 9/18/1986, (C-0036), SOHP.

landslide and offset the damage caused by the national Democratic Party's decline.²⁰ The result was that Jim Holshouser became the state's first Republican governor since the Populist-Republican Daniel Russell won office in 1897, while the competitive primary campaigns affirmed the significance of both parties in state politics. Furthermore, North Carolinians elected Jesse Helms to the U.S. Senate, the state's first Republican senator since Marion Butler left office in 1901.

Like Jim Holshouser, Republican Senate nominee Jesse Helms also benefited significantly from Democratic factionalism and Republican unity. In the 1972 Democratic Senate primary, Congressman Nick Galifianakis defeated incumbent Senator B. Everett Jordan, a fourteen-year Senate veteran and former state party chair. Galifianakis's surprise victory over the cancer-stricken Jordan, who did not anticipate a strong primary challenger, marked the first time a progressive defeated a conservative incumbent in a Senate primary. The *New York Times* linked Galifianakis's primary victory to the "new politics" in North Carolina, which included a growing number of young voters, African-American voters, and anti-Democratic establishment voters.²¹ These Democrats voted out of office an older conservative in favor of a young progressive. Republican Jesse Helms, an admirer of Senator Jordan, maintained that he campaigned for his party's Senate nomination primarily due to concerns that the more liberal Galifianakis had the potential to defeat Jordan. "If Galifianakis had not beat him," said Helms, "I would not have run a campaign against a good man. I'm honored to have succeeded Everett

²⁰ Interview with Leo Jenkins by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, 12/12/1973, (A-0129); Interview with Governor Robert W. Scott by Karl E. Campbell, 9/18/1986, (C-0036); Interview with Governor James E. Holshouser by Jack D. Fleer, 1/31/1998 (C-0328.1); Interview with H.M. Michaux by Jack Bass, 11/20/1974, (A-0135), SOHP.

²¹ *New York Times*, 5 June 1972 ["new politics"]. See also Ben E. Bulla, *Textiles and Politics: The Life of B. Everett Jordan* (Durham, N.C.: Carolina Academic Press, 1992), 309-311. Galifianakis (377,993) defeated Jordan (340,391) in a surprisingly competitive Democratic Senate primary. Demonstrating the state's changing demographics, Galifianakis won the state's urban and suburban Democratic vote, the areas where many of the young, African-American, and anti-Democratic establishment voters lived. Jesse Helms (92,496) easily dispatched his opponent, William H. Booe (16,032), in the Republican Senate primary. *North Carolina Manual* 1973, 379-380.

Jordan, but, if he had won the nomination in 1972, I would have sat on my hands.”²² Helms’s comments reflected the reality that it would have likely proven difficult to defeat a Democratic stalwart such as Senator Jordan despite the favorable political environment. Galifianakis’s victory over Jordan, however, did not inspire Democrats’ hopes of winning this campaign. “The weaker of the Democratic candidates [Galifianakis] ended up winning...and going into an election which was very heavily influenced by the presidential election,” made a Helms victory possible, said Joel Fleishman.²³

Just as the *New York Times* assessed Galifianakis’s primary victory as a product of the state’s “new politics,” so too was Helms’s victory over Galifianakis in the general election. The Democratic Party’s shift from the older, mossback conservative to younger, progressive leadership cost the party dearly in the midst of a national Republican landslide. Jesse Helms benefited from a pronounced trend in national politics that favored conservatives, who dominated elections to the U.S. Senate and Congress during the one-party system. For several decades, conservative Democrats like Josiah Bailey, Clyde Hoey, Sam Ervin, and B. Everett Jordan faced little opposition from progressives. Although Kerr Scott defeated conservative Alton Lennon in 1954, this was the most notable exception. Upon Kerr Scott’s death in 1958, Governor Luther Hodges appointed B. Everett Jordan to serve the remainder of his term, thus ending the short-lived experiment with a progressive Democrat in the U.S. Senate. Jordan subsequently served until Nick Galifianakis defeated him in 1972. As recently as 1968, Senator Sam Ervin won reelection with sixty percent of the vote, demonstrating conservative Democrats’ influence in shaping national politics. In a campaign featuring a conservative Republican and a liberal Democrat, it was not at all surprising that the conservative won, regardless of party

²² Interview with Jesse Helms by Ben E. Bulla, 5/25/1989, (C-0140), SOHP; Bulla, *Textiles and Politics*, 311.

²³ Interview with Joel Fleishman by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, 2/8/1974 (A-0121), SOHP.

affiliation. Helms campaigned as a conservative, appealing to both rural Democrats and suburban Republicans, on a platform opposing forced busing and federal intervention in race relations.²⁴ Helms linked Galifianakis to George McGovern, labeling them “McGovernGalifianakis” to demonstrate that there was little distinction between the candidates. Like many southern Democrats, Galifianakis found it difficult to avoid McGovern’s unpopularity. Helms characterized his opponent as “soft on drug abuse and a profligate spender,” in addition to supporting amnesty for those who evaded the Vietnam War draft.²⁵ Helms proudly displayed his no-nonsense conservative credentials, telling voters “no one has ever called Jesse Helms a namby-pamby on forced busing or extravagant federal spending,” in stark contrast to his liberal opponent.²⁶ Galifianakis, the son of Greek immigrants, a native North Carolinian, and four-term Congressman, found his Greek heritage under attack from Jesse Helms, who used campaign advertisements declaring that “He’s one of us.” Helms’s attacks on Galifianakis, emphasizing his “outsider” status as a Greek-American, a member of the Greek Orthodox Church, and Democrat, proved successful.²⁷

Democratic State Attorney General Robert Morgan observed that the strong Republican presence in North Carolina, combined with popular support for Jesse Helms in the “solid Democratic East,” demonstrated that Helms’s election was not “a political accident.” Claude Sitton, editor of the *Raleigh News and Observer*, concurred that his victory was more than a stroke of luck. “Helms has quite a bit of support, personal support that he’s built up. You know,

²⁴ William A. Link, *Righteous Warrior: Jesse Helms and the Rise of Modern Conservatism* (New York: St. Martin’s Press), 119-121.

²⁵ Numan V. Bartley and Hugh D. Graham, *Southern Politics and the Second Reconstruction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), 176; Paul Luebke, *Tar Heel Politics 2000*, 31.

²⁶ *Raleigh News and Observer*, 3 November 1972; Lamis, *The Two-Party South*, 135.

²⁷ Luebke, *Tar Heel Politics*, 31 [“He’s one of us”]; *New York Times*, 28 October 1972.

people vote for reasons of personality as well as reasons of party policy.” Similarly, journalist Ferrell Guillory aptly described Helms as “the right person in the right place at the right time.” For the first time, the Republican Party nominated a candidate popular in eastern North Carolina, which contributed to his landmark Senate victory. For decades, the Democratic Party relied upon the rural East as its stronghold. Republican Frank Rouse described eastern Democrats as “rural, extremely honest, plainspoken, and ultraconservative,” all of which contributed to these Democrats abandoning their longstanding party loyalties.²⁸ Unlike the urban Piedmont, where politics grew increasingly competitive in the 1950s, Democrats enjoyed a monopoly in predominately rural eastern North Carolina, which sustained the party despite increasing political competition. When eastern Democrats revealed their conservative, pro-Republican leanings in 1972, the entire state followed suit, carrying Helms, Holshouser, and Nixon to victory. “He [Helms] was just a person and I think he won because he did well in the East and I think it was a case of his ultra-conservatism, his seeming to speak the frustrations of the people out there. It just carried it and I don’t think it’s any grand strategy about it that you could point to,” said Guillory.²⁹

The landmark Republican campaign, however, failed to convince all Democrats and political observers that it was the result of an amazing coincidence. Secretary of State Thad Eure, for example, argued that there were serious limitations to the Republican triumph, coming as it did on the coattails of President Nixon’s landslide reelection. “I think that Helms and Holshouser’s election in this state was just pure accident. Each one of them had to have as many

²⁸ Interview with Frank Rouse by Jack Bass, 12/17/1973, (A-0139), SOHP.

²⁹ Interview with Robert Morgan by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, 12/13/1973, (A-0136); Interview with Claude Sitton by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, 12/11/1973, (A-0142); Interview with Ferrell Guillory by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, 12/11/1973, (A-0123), SOHP.

of the Democrats in this state voting for them as Republicans voting for them,” he said. Eure, a longtime veteran of state politics, argued that the national party contributed to the defeat of several North Carolina Democrats seeking office in 1972. Many Democrats who supported the Republican ticket, he contended, “would have voted [a straight] Democratic ticket, if it [the party’s presidential nominee] had [been] somebody other than George McGovern.” Eure also cautioned, however, that “we’ve got a growing tendency...of people who say that they vote for the man rather than the party,” which explained Helms’s popularity among Democrats.³⁰

Furthermore, Democratic politician H.M. Michaux argued that “there’s no doubt that Holshouser and Helms got elected accidentally. It’s got to be that way. You had Republicans running for the lieutenant governor [and] you had Republicans running for council of state positions. Every Republican got beat except the governor’s race and [the U.S. Senate] race. It’s got to be an accident. They rode in on that last ditch effort by Nixon, who at that time was at the height of his popularity.”³¹

On the South’s overwhelming support for President Nixon, North Carolina Congressman Charles Rose maintained that it was largely the result of an anti-McGovern reaction rather than pro-Nixon sentiment. “[It was] not so much because they felt total empathy for everything he wanted to accomplish, but because they were scared of George McGovern.” Leo Jenkins called it “a left-handed victory” that did not represent a permanent shift in political attitudes. “I don’t think the people were for the Republicans so much as they were against what we [Democrats] were offering,” said Jenkins. Regardless, few could argue with Claude Sitton’s assertion that the Republican victories represented “the culmination of the trend toward a two-party South.”

³⁰ Interview with Thad Eure by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, 12/12/1973, (A-0120), SOHP.

³¹ Interview with H.M. Michaux by Jack Bass, 11/20/1974, (A-0135), SOHP.

Similarly, veteran Democratic strategist Joel Fleishman argued that “North Carolina...is a two-party state” due to the strong Republican presence in state politics, not to mention the Republicans’ achievements in this election.³²

The 1972 election was a great triumph for the Republican Party and an unmitigated disaster for Democrats. In this landmark year, Republicans ended seven decades of near-total dominance by the Democratic Party. A significant part of the problem for Democrats was the widespread factionalism that contributed extensively to the party’s losses. According to Leo Jenkins, “the Democratic Party got itself horribly divided” in every major campaign, while journalist Ferrell Guillory summed up the Democrats’ predicament, “I don’t think...the Democrats have any clear idea what in the hell is going on,” said Guillory. Recognizing the multitude of factions within the party, combined with the absence of strong leadership, Guillory observed, “I don’t think the Democrats have a sense of what their party is right now.”³³ Nineteen seventy-two, however, revealed the future of both political parties, particularly as demonstrated in the election of Democrat Jim Hunt and Republican Jesse Helms.

Jim Hunt and the North Carolina Democratic Party, 1972-1984

Nineteen seventy-two was a milestone election year for Republicans and a nightmare for many Democrats. However, it did not mean that all was lost for the North Carolina Democratic Party, which enjoyed a significant numerical advantage and waged several competitive

³² Interview with Charles Rose by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, 12/11/1973; Interview with Leo Jenkins by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, 12/12/1973, (A-0129); Interview with Claude Sitton by Jack Bass, 12/11/1973, (A-0142), Interview with Joel Fleishman by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, 2/8/1974, (A-0121), SOHP.

³³ Interview with Leo Jenkins by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, 12/12/1973, (A-0129); Interview with Ferrell Guillory by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, 12/11/1973, (A-0123), SOHP. Guillory emphasized the large number of Democratic factions. “I tried to list...all of the wings in the Democratic Party, all it has got is wings and no body, and it’s just flapping. You know, it’s got a Sanford wing, Bowles wing, and a McGovern wing, a labor wing and a Black wing, and a rural wing, and a city wing, and a western wing, and an eastern wing, and it has got some women out here and it’s got some people in Greensboro that are little bit different from the people out here. And it’s got the oldtime guys, the courthouse wing, and nobody had brought that all together.” For more on Democratic factionalism, see also Interview with Claude Sitton by Jack Bass, 12/11/1973, (A-0142), SOHP.

campaigns. On the contrary, this election brought to office Jim Hunt as lieutenant governor in a Republican administration. Hunt, who bucked the political tide to win his first campaign for statewide office, demonstrated the persistence of Democratic Party loyalty in an unfriendly election year. In his campaign, Hunt revealed the template of party unity that became the hallmark of the state Democratic Party under his leadership. Over the course of the following decade, Hunt effectively rebuilt the Democratic Party, eradicating many of the vestiges of one-party politics, and turned it into an inclusive and competitive party in the two-party system.

Jim Hunt, a native of eastern North Carolina, came of age at a transformative era in state and national politics. Born in the midst of the Great Depression and New Deal in 1937, Hunt grew up in a family of farmers and loyal New Deal Democrats in rural Wilson County. As a farm family in the rural South, Hunt's family strongly supported President Roosevelt's New Deal agenda. "I knew my family knew what Franklin D. Roosevelt had done to save us as a country. We were particularly grateful for the farm programs," said Hunt.³⁴ The family's progressive Democratic leanings also extended to state politics, which by the late 1940s, was on the verge of a great transformation. This, more anything else, shaped his identity as a progressive southern Democrat.

Although Jim Hunt's family supported segregation, they remained Democratic loyalists and supported President Truman's 1948 campaign despite his pro-civil rights agenda. In 1950, the family supported interim Senator Frank Porter Graham, a liberal Democrat, against conservative segregationist Willis Smith.³⁵ Following the U.S. Supreme Court's *Brown* ruling in

³⁴ Interview with Governor James B. Hunt, Jr. by Jack D. Fleer, 5/18/2001, (C-0329), SOHP.

³⁵ Wayne Grimsley, *James B. Hunt: A North Carolina Progressive* (West Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2003), 25-27; Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics: The Personalities, Elections and Events That Shaped Modern North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 237.

1954, the family supported Governor Luther H. Hodges's attempts to resist compliance with the order to end segregation in the state's public schools.³⁶ Jim Hunt initially favored segregation, but changed his position after attending a speech by Allard Lowenstein, an anti-Communist and anti-segregationist liberal activist. "How powerful he was," recalled Hunt. "It just became clear to me [that] you cannot be a Christian and believe in what Jesus taught and be committed to making it happen on earth and support discrimination and segregation. You can't do it. It's wrong. We've got a responsibility to change it...If you believe in it strongly, if it's a really important issue, you'd got to get involved and fight for it or against whatever it is."³⁷ Hunt's racial awakening meant that race and segregation did not define his political identity as a southern Democrat. Lowenstein's influence, combined with Hunt's strong religious convictions, also shaped his view of the Democratic Party as an inclusive political organization.

Closer to home, progressive Democrats Kerr Scott and Terry Sanford profoundly shaped Jim Hunt's views on the role of government. In 1948, Kerr Scott became the first progressive Democrat to unseat the Shelby Dynasty, the state's ruling political machine. Prior to Kerr Scott, the state's "vested interests," an amalgamation of conservative business leaders and industrialists, dominated the state party. Because of "his strong connection to rural North Carolina" and his involvement with the State Grange, Scott "broke through" the traditional political boundaries established by one-party machine politics. A progressive Democrat, Scott championed education reform and modernization of the state's infrastructure through an ambitious rural electrification program and road-paving agenda designed to transform the state's

³⁶ Grimsley, *James B. Hunt*, 34.

³⁷ Interview with Governor James B. Hunt by Jack D. Fleer, 5/18/2001, (C-0329), SOHP; Grimsley, *James B. Hunt*, 48.

rural economy.³⁸ “Kerr Scott proposed those things [and] the Democratic Party stood for those things,” said Hunt, who described Kerr Scott’s transformative influence on the lives of rural North Carolinians. “Kerr Scott was for us, the people out there in the country where they didn’t have paved roads, they didn’t have electricity, they didn’t have telephones. They couldn’t get to town. We were held down. We were poor. We had very few opportunities to open that up and give us a chance to have a good life.” Most importantly, Scott’s election victory was a landmark event in the state’s political development and demonstrated the influence of progressive Democrats in the postwar South. “Kerr Scott had come along and led us in the right direction vigorously, strongly, powerfully...It was a crucial turning point both in terms of the issues and the new generation of leadership that came along associated with Kerr Scott,” said Hunt, one of many young Tar Heels attracted to the progressive Democratic faction because of Scott’s bold leadership.³⁹

In 1960, Jim Hunt actively campaigned on behalf of gubernatorial nominee Terry Sanford, a Kerr Scott protégé, and presidential nominee John F. Kennedy. Sanford and Kennedy, both young Democrats, appealed strongly to Jim Hunt. Sanford, who defeated segregationist Beverly Lake in a gubernatorial primary runoff, closely resembled Scott in terms of his desire for education reform, economic development, and a strong dislike for the politics of race as a divisive political issue. For Sanford, like Scott, the state faced far greater problems. Sanford “was a continuation of the Kerr Scott tradition of standing up for the average man and being for jobs and opportunities, a general progressive image and being willing to fight the old guard,” said Hunt. “Second, and most important, he was for education. The way he was going to change

³⁸ Interview with Governor James B. Hunt, Jr. by Daniel Menestres, 6/24/2008 [Notes in possession of author].

³⁹ Interview with Governor James B. Hunt by Jack D. Fleer, 5/18/2001, (C-0329), SOHP.

the state was to change the schools and give us a far better education. Third, he was a young, vigorous, [and] charismatic political figure that young people, modern kind of people I think, could identify with them and feel strongly about and want to be involved in helping be part of the team.” Above all, Sanford appealed to “those who wanted change and a new day” in North Carolina.⁴⁰ Jim Hunt’s involvement with the party’s progressive faction continued through the 1964 Democratic gubernatorial campaign. Hunt worked on behalf of Richardson Preyer, who lost a bitterly fought runoff to conservative Dan K. Moore. Unlike many southern Democrats in the 1960s, Hunt never wavered from his dedication to the Democratic Party, particularly the progressive faction. President Lyndon Johnson’s embrace of civil rights and the end of segregation did not result in a political crisis for Hunt, nor did it lead him to leave the party in protest.⁴¹

Through his work on behalf of progressive Democratic candidates, Jim Hunt met Bert Bennett, Terry Sanford’s former campaign manager and state party chairman during the Sanford administration. Bert Bennett, who played a significant role in Sanford’s victorious gubernatorial campaign, directed a statewide political organization promoting progressive Democrats as a viable alternative to the still-powerful and entrenched conservative faction. Bennett was also responsible for building the first generation of post-Kerr Scott progressive Democrats in North Carolina. Hunt described Bennett’s political network as an “organization of people that were both very good at politics and very loyal to Bert.” As the Democratic Party’s “Kingmaker” and “Political Godfather,” Bennett set his sights on Hunt as a future political candidate.⁴² Likewise,

⁴⁰ Interview with Governor James B. Hunt, Jr. by Jack D. Fleer, 5/18/2001, (C-0329), SOHP.

⁴¹ Grimsley, *James B. Hunt*, 48-53.

⁴² Interview with Governor James B. Hunt by Jack D. Fleer, 7/6/2001, (C-0330), SOHP [“very loyal to Bert”]; *Greensboro Daily News*, 19 October 1980, [“Kingmaker”], *Charlotte Observer*, 8 October 1980, [“Political

Hunt saw a void in Democratic Party leadership in the aftermath of Robert Scott's narrow victory over Jim Gardner in 1968.⁴³ In 1971, Hunt received Bennett's blessing to run for lieutenant governor. In preparation for his campaign, Hunt "appeared at any Democratic rally or spoke to every Democrat he could find." According to Bert Bennett, "we decided that we had our candidate. We decided he was the one, that we could sell him [to voters]."⁴⁴ Most importantly, Hunt's time on the road introduced him to a wide variety of Democrats.

In 1972, Bert Bennett threw the full weight of his political organization and its resources behind Jim Hunt's campaign for lieutenant governor. Democratic gubernatorial nominee Hargrove "Skipper" Bowles, a loyal Sanford-Bennett Democrat, played second fiddle to Hunt, whom Bennett designated as the party's future leader. Bennett defended his decision to focus on Hunt's bid for lieutenant governor because "you can have just one horse to ride at a time."⁴⁵ Bennett believed Hunt, not Bowles, demonstrated the most potential to lead the Democratic Party. Bennett had good reason to support Hunt's campaign, for he was the only major Democrat seeking election whose campaign did not split the party in 1972. In contrast to Skipper Bowles and Nick Galifianakis, Hunt unified the party's disparate factions behind his campaign. These efforts proved crucial in his quest to rebuild the party and launch his political career. According to Hunt, he "consciously sought out" Democrats regardless of ideological affiliation and "worked very, very hard" to support his campaign for lieutenant governor. Hunt worked closely with a wide variety of Democrats, including progressive Bert Bennett,

Godfather"]], News Clippings, North Carolina Collection Clipping File, North Carolina Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (Hereafter cited as NCC Clipping File).

⁴³ Interview with Governor James B. Hunt, Jr. by Jack D. Fleer, 5/18/2001, (C-0329), SOHP.

⁴⁴ *Charlotte Observer*, 8 October 1978, ["Democratic rally" and "we had our candidate"], NCC Clipping File.

⁴⁵ *Charlotte Observer*, 8 October 1978, ["one horse"], NCC Clipping File.

conservative Joe Hunt of the State Highway Commission, and Billy Webb, a segregationist and supporter of two-time gubernatorial candidate I. Beverly Lake, Sr.⁴⁶

Jim Hunt's election as lieutenant governor in a Republican year brought him instant credibility both as the highest-ranking Democrat in state government, and as a potential party leader with Bennett's backing. Despite the state's conservative leanings, particularly as revealed in the 1972 election, Hunt's status as a Bert Bennett-sanctioned progressive did not preclude his ability to unify the state Democratic Party. Like his political mentors Kerr Scott and Terry Sanford, Hunt appealed to Democrats, conservative and progressive, young and old alike, on a platform of economic modernization and education reform.⁴⁷ Hunt also reached out to African-Americans, women, and young voters, particularly those who had not been previously active in politics, and worked to include them in leadership positions. It was Hunt's intent to create a diverse political party as part of a long-term process of restoring the Democratic Party to prominence. "It's the right thing to do [and] it's the smart thing to do," said Hunt.⁴⁸

Despite the Democrats' post-election nadir, Congressman Charles Rose argued that the party had tremendous potential to rebuild its shattered ranks. "If the Democratic Party will continue to make room for young people, make room for minority views, make room for women, be the general melting pot of all ideas, the Wallace people as well as the black point of view, it can continue to represent a majority of the people in North Carolina." Similarly, Joel Fleishman stressed the importance of party over faction. "People are going to have to pay more attention to party organization and matters of building a Democratic Party organization rather...[than]

⁴⁶ Interview with Governor James B. Hunt by Daniel Menestres, 6/24/2008; Interview with Governor James B. Hunt, Jr. by Jack D. Flear, 7/6/2001, (C-0330), SOHP.

⁴⁷ Grimsley, *James B. Hunt*, 73-75.

⁴⁸ Interview with Governor James B. Hunt by Daniel Menestres, 6/24/2008.

worrying only about building factional organizations.” Rose and Fleishman confirmed the tactics Hunt used in his 1972 campaign that provided the blueprint for his efforts to rebuild the battered Democratic Party.⁴⁹

Jim Hunt recognized the importance of rebuilding the Democratic Party to remain competitive in a two-party system to offset the Democratic exodus to the Republican Party. Furthermore, several southern Republicans, including Jim Holshouser, Arkansas Governor Winthrop Rockefeller, and Virginia Governor Linwood Holton, won office with significant support from African-American voters.⁵⁰ In an age of increasing Republican strength in state politics, Hunt recognized the importance of keeping African-Americans in the Democratic Party. In his 1970 gubernatorial campaign, Georgia Democrat Jimmy Carter built a broad Democratic coalition of African-Americans, rural conservatives, and urban business conservatives to offset increasing Republican growth. Carter’s election victory provided a formidable model for southern Democrats seeking to remain relevant in a competitive, two-party South.⁵¹

Jim Hunt transformed the state Democratic Party to hold a competitive edge in the new two-party system. The North Carolina Democratic Party did not diminish in power with the disappearance of one-party politics. Rather, Jim Hunt turned the party from a relic of the “solid South” into a dynamic, progressive, and forward-looking political organization. Hunt’s championing of education reform and economic development appealed to a wide variety of Democrats regardless of factional loyalty, as Hunt combined Luther Hodges’s aggressive pro-

⁴⁹ Interview with Charles Rose by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, 1/30/1974, (A-0138); Interview with Joel Fleishman by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, 1/30/1974, (A-0121), SOHP.

⁵⁰ *Chicago Defender*, 23 November 1975.

⁵¹ Grimsley, *James B. Hunt*, 68-69; Dewey Grantham, *The Life and Death of the Solid South: A Political History* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1988), 182.

business salesmanship with Terry Sanford's and Kerr Scott's efforts to promote economic modernization and education reform. "I was careful to broaden my base throughout my political career," said Hunt. "I paid particular attention to creating a broad base that...didn't completely cover the philosophical spectrum [,] but that covered about three-fourths of it." Hunt credited the Democratic Party's success in maintaining "a wide variety of political philosophies...especially those that were very agitated about race back then. As governor, I was very successful in working with the business leadership of the state, creating better schools at all levels of education that sustained the industries, and thus created a very vibrant economy, a world-class economy."⁵²

Above all, however, Jim Hunt was a dedicated party man whose chief loyalty was to the Democratic Party rather than any of its various factions and ideologies. It was easier for Hunt to unify Democrats because of his loyalist credentials, especially at a time when party loyalty remained fervent, particularly at the state level. Despite the remarkable Republican growth, Democrats vastly outnumbered Republicans among the state's registered voters.⁵³ Hunt's efforts to restore the Democrats to prominence made possible his party's strong resurgence in the 1970s. On the eve of the 1976 election, the *Raleigh News and Observer* recognized the significance of Hunt's Democratic coalition for state politics. "After substantial defections to Republicans and third-party candidates in 1968 and 1972, Democrats see the 1976 results as an indication their party could reassemble a winning statewide coalition for philosophically moderate candidates."⁵⁴

⁵² Interview with Governor James B. Hunt by Jack D. Fleer, 7/6/2001, (C-330) ["broaden my base"], SOHP; Interview with Governor James B. Hunt, Jr. by Daniel Menestres, 6/24/2008.

⁵³ In 1976, for example, Democrats (1,840,827) outnumbered Republicans (601,897) among the state's registered voters approximately 3:1. *North Carolina Manual 1977* (Raleigh: North Carolina Secretary of State, 1978), 707-709.

⁵⁴ *Raleigh News and Observer*, 1 November 1976; Alexander P. Lamis, *The Two-Party South*, 2d exp. Edition, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 139.

In 1976, the Democratic Party presented a unified party ticket for the first time in more than a decade. Former Georgia Governor Jimmy Carter narrowly defeated President Gerald Ford in the state's most competitive campaign, while Jim Hunt won a tremendous gubernatorial victory over Republican David Flaherty, a Holshouser-style Republican.⁵⁵ Hunt's "big majority" reflected his efforts to unify the Democratic Party following its disastrous losses four years earlier. Hunt ran well ahead of Carter, demonstrating not only the influence of the Republican Party in national politics, but also Hunt's emphasis on the state Democratic Party. Unlike his first campaign for statewide office, Jim Hunt found the national Democratic Party and its presidential nominee decidedly more convivial to his own campaign. At the same time, however, Hunt proved that he did not need the national party to carry him to victory. Hunt won his gubernatorial election on his own terms and did not rely on Carter's coattails, which based on his narrow victory in many southern states, particularly those who overwhelmingly supported Nixon four years earlier, were not particularly long. According to Hunt, Carter's campaign "was helpful, but not a powerful factor in what happened here, but it was helpful to us at the time."⁵⁶ Hunt's success in uniting his party paid great dividends when he won the most lopsided gubernatorial campaign in twenty years, while also benefiting from a weak Republican opponent and a divided Republican Party, while Carter was the primary beneficiary in the aftermath of the Watergate scandal that led to Nixon's resignation in 1974. Hunt undoubtedly benefited from the

⁵⁵ *North Carolina Manual* 1977, 726, 766-767. Hunt (1,081,293) defeated David Flaherty (564,102); Carter (927,365) defeated Ford (741,960), and in the campaign for lieutenant governor, Democrat James C. Green (1,033,198) defeated Republican William S. Hiatt (521,923). Without a U.S. Senate seat in play, this election marked a clean sweep for the Democrats at the top of the ticket.

⁵⁶ Interview with Governor James B. Hunt by Daniel Menestres, 6/24/2008 ["not a powerful factor"] and ["big majority"]; In each of Jim Hunt's four gubernatorial campaigns, he shared the ticket with a southern Democrat presidential nominee [In 1976 and 1980, it was Jimmy Carter; in 1992 and 1996, it was Bill Clinton]. For more on the national Democratic Party throughout Hunt's political career, see Interview with Governor James B. Hunt, Jr. by Jack D. Fleer, 10/3/2001, (C-0032), SOHP; For more on Carter and Hunt, see *New York Times*, 13 October 1976, 1 November 1976, 4 November 1976.

anti-Republican backlash, but his election victory was due more to his success in uniting his party rather than the failure of the Republican opposition to set aside differences for the sake of party unity. Jim Hunt and Jimmy Carter represented a new generation of southern Democrats who emerged in the early 1970s. Far removed from the race-baiting tactics of the early twentieth century demagogues and many of their anti-civil rights contemporaries, these Democrats focused on economic development, education reform, and generally displayed a far greater sensitivity to racial matters than did their predecessors. In addition to Jim Hunt and Jimmy Carter, Florida's Reubin Askew, Alabama's Albert Brewer, and John West of South Carolina were charter members of these moderate southern Democrats in the emerging two-party South.⁵⁷

In 1980, Jim Hunt proved that his election in the 1976 Democratic resurgence was not a fluke when he won his reelection campaign to become the state's first two-term governor. Prior to a 1977 statewide referendum, the state constitution did not allow a governor to serve a second consecutive term in office. Hunt, an enthusiastic supporter of the gubernatorial succession amendment, also enjoyed the support of his predecessor, Republican Governor Jim Holshouser.⁵⁸ Furthermore, Hunt's emphasis on a strong and broad state Democratic coalition did not leave him vulnerable in an election year that was not as favorable to Democrats. Rather, it increased his political viability. So long as Hunt's leadership kept the state party unified and devoid of significant factionalism, his position was secure atop the party hierarchy. Most importantly, Hunt easily defeated his opponent, conservative Republican I. Beverly Lake, Jr., the son of the two-time Democratic gubernatorial candidate, with more than sixty percent of the popular vote.

⁵⁷ See especially Bartley, *The New South*, 381-416; Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, *The Transformation of Southern Politics: Social Change and Political Consequence since 1945* (New York: Basic Books, 1976); Gordon E. Harvey, *A Question of Justice: New South Governors and Education, 1968-1976* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002); Bruce J. Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy Economic Development, and the Transformation of the South, 1938-1980* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

⁵⁸ Interview with Governor Jim Holshouser by Jack D. Fleer, 5/9/1998, (C-0328.3), SOHP.

For the second time, Hunt demonstrated that he did not require the national Democratic Party to carry him to victory. In contrast to 1976, however, this was a decidedly Republican year in national politics, as Republican presidential nominee Ronald Reagan carried North Carolina over President Carter, and Republican Senate nominee John East defeated incumbent Democratic Senator Robert Morgan. Despite the Democratic losses in 1980, it mattered little to Jim Hunt, for he built his political career upon the strength of the state Democratic Party. The national party did not figure prominently into his political organization. In 1980, Hunt ran against a conservative Republican and soundly defeated his opponent with more than sixty percent of the popular vote.⁵⁹

By the early 1980s, Jim Hunt was the unrivaled leader of the state Democratic Party. His success in uniting a divided party in the aftermath of the 1972 electoral disaster was even more impressive considering the tremendous Republican growth in North Carolina. It was through a decade of hard work as a dedicated Democrat and party builder that Hunt brought unity to a fractured party in order to support his political ambitions and reshape state politics. According to Hunt political adviser Betty McCain, “[by 1984] the Democratic Party was Jim Hunt’s organization.”⁶⁰ Phil Kirk, Jim Holshouser’s political aide, argued that the state’s Democratic coalition was “not fragile as long as Hunt is governor.” One scholar described Hunt as “a moderate who does not threaten the more conservative Democratic business-industrial establishment of North Carolina. At the same time, he is far more appealing to blacks and white

⁵⁹ In 1980, Democratic Governor Jim Hunt (1,081,293) defeated I. Beverly Lake, Jr. (691,449). *North Carolina Manual* 1987-1988, 1318-1319.

⁶⁰ Betty McCain quoted in Pamela Varley, “The Helms-Hunt Senate Race,” Case Program (Cambridge: Kennedy School of Government, 1986), Part A, page 24; NCC.

liberals than any Republican alternative.”⁶¹ Under Jim Hunt’s guidance, the state Democratic Party emerged from defeat a stronger, more unified political party, and reversed many of the losses stemming from the 1972 election. North Carolina Republicans, on the other hand, faced a more tortured road to political stability in the state’s emerging two-party system.

Jesse Helms, Jim Holshouser, and the Republican Party, 1972-1984

The 1972 election brought two distinct factions of southern Republicanism into the mainstream of North Carolina politics: Jim Holshouser’s moderate, non-ideological Republican establishment and Jesse Helms’s ideologically conservative faction consisting primarily of Democrats-turned-Republicans. The steady growth of the Republican Party during the 1960s benefited both the party establishment, long active in state politics, and the new generation of conservative Republicans attracted to the party by Barry Goldwater and Richard Nixon. Jim Gardner and Jim Holshouser’s successive terms as state party chair affirmed the influence of both Republican factions in state politics. Despite the potential for party factionalism, there also existed a very real opportunity to create a “big tent” Republican Party in North Carolina. President Nixon’s landslide reelection campaign minimized party factionalism and swept both Jesse Helms and Jim Holshouser into statewide office in 1972. Regardless of their ideological differences, this election provided the nascent Republican Party with two big victories to begin the decade, thus making it possible for the party to emerge from its long exile in the political wilderness. Unlike Jim Hunt and the Democratic Party, however, the Republicans spent much of the decade mired in bitter political rivalries and an unfavorable political climate, one that prevented the party from building upon the momentum created by this landmark election.

⁶¹ Phil Kirk [“not fragile”] and Alexander Lamis [“far more appealing”] on Jim Hunt, Lamis, *The Two-Party South*, 138.

As Republicans demonstrated in 1972, party factionalism mattered less with a strong national party to reduce ideological differences within the state party. However, shortly after this great triumph, the North Carolina Republican Party discovered that it was not immune to the same problem of party factionalism that plagued the Democrats for decades. Unlike the Democrats during the era of one-party politics, Republicans had to contend with the pitfalls of factionalism in a two-party system, when unity or disunity often meant the difference between victory and defeat for both parties. Additionally, the Watergate Crisis that ended with President Nixon's resignation in August 1974 resulted in a reversal of fortune for the North Carolina Republican Party, as it lost many of the gains made in previous elections, and made possible a strong Democratic resurgence in the 1970s. The rivalry between the Republican establishment and the conservative insurgents defined the state Republican Party throughout the decade.

Jesse Helms faced a difficult task in his quest for conservative Republican dominance. The state Republican Party had not officially existed on a statewide level since the 1890s. The chief exception to this rule was western North Carolina, Jim Holshouser's home region, where Republicans remained key players in local and regional politics despite suffrage restrictions and disfranchisement laws that created the one-party Democratic South.⁶² Western North Carolina sent many Republicans to the state legislature and Congress while the Democratic Party dominated state politics. Like many of his fellow mountain Republicans, Governor Jim Holshouser was a dedicated party man whose first loyalty was to the Republican Party rather than narrow party ideology. Holshouser ran his 1972 gubernatorial campaign on the issue of governmental inefficiency in a one-party system, believing his election had the potential to help

⁶² Gordon McKinney, *Southern Mountain Republicans: Politics and the Appalachian Community, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978).

foster the development of two-party politics in North Carolina.⁶³ Additionally, Holshouser publicly courted African-American voters in 1972, asking that they split the ticket by voting for him in the gubernatorial election.⁶⁴ Holshouser's efforts to attract African-American voters contrasted greatly with the racial conservatism of James Gardner, his opponent in the 1972 GOP primary, and Jesse Helms, both former conservative Democrats who cut their political teeth in the racial politics of eastern North Carolina.

Although Helms and Holshouser both won election in 1972 as Republicans, they represented different factions of the North Carolina Republican Party, with divergent views on party building, politics, and race. The most significant difference between Holshouser and Helms is that the former was a Republican loyalist who placed party over ideology. Helms and other conservatives, on the other hand, promoted their own ideology and balked at the idea of moderate Republican leadership representing their political party. Jim Holshouser later summed up their differences between himself and Jesse Helms: "I have the impression that Senator Helms and I are a lot closer on 90% of the issues than most people would ever think. Our styles are just different. I am not nearly as confrontational as he is. I always viewed myself as somebody who tried to build a consensus, which means some compromising along the way."⁶⁵ Holshouser's dedication to the politics of moderation and party building failed to win over many conservatives allied with Jesse Helms. As Helms did not believe in compromising one's political integrity for the sake of party unity, it is easy to understand why the Republican Party remained fractured during the 1970s.

⁶³ Luebke, *Tar Heel Politics 2000*, 57; Interview with Governor James E. Holshouser by Jack D. Flear, 1/31/1998, (C-0328.1); Interview with Governor James E. Holshouser, Jr. by Jack D. Flear, 5/9/1998, (C-0328.3), SOHP.

⁶⁴ Earl Black, "North Carolina Governors and Racial Segregation," in Thad Beyle and Merle Black, eds., *Politics and Policy in North Carolina* (New York: MSS Information Corp., 1975), 76.

⁶⁵ Interview with Governor James E. Holshouser, Jr. by Jack D. Flear, 1/31/1998, (C-0328.1), SOHP.

Jesse Helms was born in the rural piedmont town of Monroe, North Carolina, in 1921. Growing up in the segregated South and this profoundly influenced his political and social views. His father, Jesse Helms, Sr., was a local policeman and a symbol of authority for the younger Helms as well as the town's African American population, who viewed him as a symbol of oppression for his role in upholding white supremacy. Unlike Jim Hunt, segregation defined Helm's youth and played a significant role in shaping his life. For Jesse Helms, racial segregation was a southern tradition and a way of life that benefited all involved. Years later, Helms argued that segregation was hardly the repressive, soul-crushing social order that its opponents believed it to be. "Nobody thought it terrible...not even the black folks," recalled Helms in 1989.⁶⁶

Like the great majority of southerners in the twentieth century, Jesse Helms was a registered Democrat. In contrast to Jim Hunt, however, Helms aligned himself with the party's conservative wing at a young age, not at all surprising given his background. The New Deal and progressive reform efforts mattered little to the Helms family. A racial conservative and staunch anti-Communist, Helms believed the liberal influence in the national Democratic Party undermined national security. In 1950, Helms supported conservative Willis Smith in his successful primary campaign over liberal Senator Frank Porter Graham. Helms spent several years in Washington, first as a political aide to Smith, an outspoken opponent of President Harry S. Truman's administration, and served on the staff of Georgia Senator Richard B. Russell's short-lived 1952 presidential campaign. Helms greatly admired Russell's anti-civil rights conservatism, particularly his ability to use his parliamentary skill to obstruct Senate votes on federal civil rights legislation. Russell, an influential and powerful member of the U.S. Senate, was one of the leading anti-civil rights conservative southern Democrats of his generation.

⁶⁶ Helms quoted in Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 22.

Helms's time in Washington convinced him that conservative southern Democrats were closer in spirit to Midwestern and Western Republicans, such as Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy and California Congressman Richard Nixon, respectively, than the national Democratic Party.⁶⁷

In the 1950s, however, Jesse Helms was a Democrat by default rather than sympathy. He remained a Democrat simply because the party remained most hospitable for conservatives, particularly in North Carolina, as there had yet to emerge any significant alternative. The conservative ascendancy that followed the U.S. Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling began the process of curtailing liberal influence in southern politics, which contributed significantly to the persistence of party loyalty through the 1950s. His conservative ideology often placed him at odds with the liberalism of the national Democratic Party, whose embrace of civil rights under President Truman and two-time presidential nominee Adlai Stevenson alienated many southern Democrats. At the same time, however, he found little to admire in the national Republican Party under President Eisenhower. For example, Eisenhower's decision to use federal troops to enforce the desegregation of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, upset him greatly. In keeping with his southern conservatism, Helms staunchly opposed federal intervention in race relations, particularly as it related to segregation.⁶⁸

Neither Democrats nor Republicans provided Helms with a suitable political home that reflected his conservative ideology. Instead, he remained a wavering southern Democrat whose loyalty remained up for grabs to the winning ideological bidder. In his campaign to create a

⁶⁷ Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 42-43; Gilbert C. Fite, *Richard B. Russell, Jr., Senator from Georgia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Bryan Hardin Thrift, "Jesse Helms's Politics of Pious Incitement: Race, Conservatism, and Southern Realignment in the 1950s," *Journal of Southern History* (November 2008): 887-926, esp, 887, 894.

⁶⁸ Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 58; On the post-*Brown* decline of liberalism in southern politics, see Numan V. Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance: Race and Politics in the South during the 1950s* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969).

national conservative party, Helms found a potential savior in Congressman Richard Nixon, whose anti-Communist crusade in the late 1940s endeared him to conservatives nationwide. In the 1950s, Helms championed Nixon, then serving as Eisenhower's vice president, as the ideal candidate to lead a national conservative resurgence against the liberal influence in both political parties. Although unsuccessful, Helms's support for a Republican candidate nevertheless revealed the declining significance of the national Democratic Party to conservative southern Democrats. At least a decade before it became fashionable to do so, Helms promoted a potential Republican presidential candidate he believed favorable to conservatives as an alternative to the liberal establishment candidates of both national parties.⁶⁹

Ultimately, Richard Nixon did not live up to Jesse Helms's expectations as a conservative redeemer. Richard Nixon's failure to promote a conservative platform or political agenda in his 1960 presidential campaign left Jesse Helms disillusioned. In the absence of a national conservative party, he continued to support conservatives within both political parties. That same year, Helms supported segregationist Democrat I. Beverly Lake in his losing bid for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination in North Carolina. Nixon lost the presidential election to John F. Kennedy while Lake lost the runoff to progressive Democrat Terry Sanford. In 1964, Helms actively supported Republican presidential nominee Barry Goldwater as a conservative savior. Goldwater's anti-civil rights platform trumped the liberal influence in the Republican Party as it began its transformation into a national party with a strong conservative base in the Sunbelt South and West. This marked the first time that the Republican Party nominated an anti-

⁶⁹ Thrift, "Jesse Helms's Politics of Pious Incitement," 895. "Unlike most white southerners in the 1950s," Thrift argues, "Helms valued conservative ideology more than fealty to the Democratic Party. His calls for party realignment and overtures to Richard Nixon in the fifties indicated his openness to the Republican Party and his willingness to make the GOP the vehicle for southern conservatism."

civil rights conservative with strong appeal to conservative southern Democrats.⁷⁰ As a popular radio and television figure based in Raleigh, North Carolina, Helms used his platform to criticize liberals, civil rights activists, and public school integration, among other issues. His target audience in eastern North Carolina, the state's Democratic heartland, proved most receptive to his conservatism. Several years before he ran for political office, Helms enjoyed a large following of disenchanted Democrats who, like Helms himself, were in the process of severing their longstanding ties with the national Democratic Party. Helms stood at the vanguard of conservative southern Democrats who formed the basis of the Republican Party in the former one-party South.⁷¹

Demonstrating support for conservatives in both political parties, Helms revealed the anti-party spirit that characterized much of his political career. His belief that ideology trumped party loyalty played a significant role in the reshaping of state and national politics in the late twentieth century. Similar to Bert Bennett's influence on Jim Hunt, so too did Jesse Helms have a political benefactor whose influence contributed significantly to the development of two-party politics in North Carolina. Thomas F. Ellis, an influential Raleigh attorney, shared Helms's dedication to conservative ideology over political party. Like Helms, Ellis opposed integration and federal intervention in the South's race relations. In the 1950s, Ellis played a key role in developing the "Pearsall Plan," North Carolina's response to forestall integration of the state's public schools. Ellis assisted the committee as legal counsel as it sought to avoid compliance with the U.S. Supreme Court's 1954 ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*.⁷²

⁷⁰ Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 69, 74.

⁷¹ Link, *Righteous Warrior*.

⁷² Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 121.

Thomas F. Ellis and Jesse Helms shared an ideological kinship based on racial conservatism and staunch anti-Communism. Like Helms, Ellis supported segregationist Beverly Lake's 1960 gubernatorial campaign and campaigned on behalf of Barry Goldwater's 1964 presidential campaign. Ellis supported conservatives regardless of political party. A longtime conservative Democrat, Ellis became a registered Republican in 1970 because the Democratic Party had been "taken over by the libs." Ellis believed conservatives represented the nation's best opportunity to prevent a Communist takeover, and he refused to concede the nation to "the liberals, commies or anybody else." According to Helms's recent biographer, "Ellis became Helms's conservative conscience, and when Helms encountered the realities of politics and governing, Ellis, as a true believer, reminded him of conservative priorities."⁷³ Ellis played a key role in promoting Helms's career, not entirely unlike that of Bert Bennett's relationship with Jim Hunt. Bennett and Hunt, however, were progressive Democrats whose chief loyalty was to the Democratic Party. Ellis and Helms, on the other hand, were conservatives whose foremost allegiance was to conservatism, not the Republican Party. It was Ellis who served as Helms's campaign manager in his 1972 U.S. Senate campaign, and it was Ellis who founded the Congressional Club shortly thereafter as a means of retiring his campaign debt.

Thomas Ellis and Jesse Helms viewed the Congressional Club as a political machine designed to support conservatives nationwide, but not necessarily designed to support all Republicans equally. For example, the Congressional Club (later renamed the National Congressional Club) demonstrated remarkably little enthusiasm in supporting Republican William Stevens in his 1974 U.S. Senate campaign.⁷⁴ Stevens, backed by Holshouser and the party establishment, ran an unsuccessful and uninspired campaign against state Attorney General

⁷³ Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 121.

⁷⁴ Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 144-165, esp. 151.

Robert Morgan, a conservative Democrat, to succeed retiring Senator Sam Ervin. While Helms and the National Congressional Club reached out to gain the support of conservative Democrats, or “Jessecrats,” as they were known in North Carolina, they were not as successful in enlisting right-wing Republicans to run for office. One political observer went as far as to say that the state Republican Party “simply has no stable of talent” from which to recruit candidates.⁷⁵ In the 1970s, Helms focused his priorities on bringing about the transformation of the national Republican Party from above, rather than focusing on party-building, which did not figure prominently into his political agenda. According to journalist Ferrell Guillory, “I don’t think Jesse is really interested in building a party and all of that very much.”⁷⁶

Similar to James Gardner in the 1960s, Jesse Helms was one of many former conservative Democrats who switched party loyalties after losing faith in the national Democratic Party. Helms observed that Democrats in the 1950s “veered so far to the left nationally, and was taken over by the people whom I’d describe as substantially left of center in North Carolina. And I think I felt, as many other Democrats felt and feel, that really I had no faith in the party.” Helms described himself as “a Democrat by registration until September 1970, even though I never voted for a Democrat nominee for president.” Despite his dissatisfaction with the national party, Helms “didn’t do anything about it” and remained in the Democratic ranks. Like many southern Democrats, Helms was reluctant to abandon his political loyalties. “Changing parties, changing party registration, is like moving from a church,” said

⁷⁵ Martin Donsky quoted in Alexander P. Lamis, *The Two-Party South*, 2d exp. ed., (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 137.

⁷⁶ Interview with Ferrell Guillory by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, 12/11/1973, (A-0123), SOHP; Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 144-165.

Helms. Eventually, a speech by President Nixon convinced him that “maybe the Republican Party in North Carolina and in the nation had a chance to restore the two-party system.”⁷⁷

As a former conservative Democrat-turned-Republican, Jesse Helms did not owe his allegiance to the North Carolina Republican Party. Instead, Jesse Helms and the National Congressional Club pledged devotion to conservatives such as 1964 Republican presidential nominee Barry Goldwater and California Governor Ronald Reagan rather than the state’s moderate Republicans, more closely aligned with Dwight Eisenhower, Nelson Rockefeller, and Robert Taft. The Republican establishment was not dependent on Goldwater, for it made great strides in party building and expanding its base prior to his campaign. Jesse Helms harbored a deep anti-party ideology and remained deeply distrustful of establishment Republicans and elements of the national Republican Party, as they tended to be moderates rather than conservatives. It was not until the national Republican Party began the process of eradicating its moderate leadership that Helms felt comfortable enough to finally abandon the Democratic Party. Helms and the Congressional Club displayed remarkably little interest in bringing these Republicans into their ranks or adopting their non-ideological platform. Jesse Helms’s 1972 election victory furthered the divisions between Republican moderates and Helms’s conservative faction.⁷⁸

Just as Jesse Helms sought to create a conservative party to counter the liberal influence in the national Republican Party, so too did Helms and conservative Republicans desire to increase their influence within the state Republican Party. Within a few months of the election,

⁷⁷ Interview with Jesse Helms by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, 8 March 1974, (A-0124), SOHP; Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 113-114; Thrift, “Jesse Helms’s Politics of Pious Incitement,” 896.

⁷⁸ Varley, “The Helms-Hunt Senate Race,” Part A, p. 10, NCC; Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 149. Link recognizes that Goldwater’s 1964 campaign split the NC Republican Party into moderate and conservative factions. “These bitter feelings,” Link observed, “were worsened by Helms’s arrival on the scene.” See also Thrift, “Jesse Helms’s Politics of Pious Incitement,” 896. *Raleigh News and Observer*, 23 February 1975, NCC Clipping File.

the Helms and Holshouser factions began a political war for control of the state party. Jim Gardner's impressive gubernatorial primary campaign, along with Jesse Helms's Senate victory, left their faction seeking increased influence within party leadership. Gardner and Helms's popularity in eastern North Carolina demonstrated the importance and influence of this traditional Democratic stronghold for the Republican Party, and the party owed much of its success to eastern Democrats who supported Republican candidates. The same tide that swept Helms into office, however, also made possible Jim Holshouser's election victory, albeit by a narrower margin than Helms's. In contrast to Jim Hunt's successful efforts to unite the various Democratic factions behind his campaign for lieutenant governor, moderate and conservative Republicans disliked each other considerably, thus making party unity exceedingly difficult to achieve. Conservatives like Gardner and Helms promoted an ideological form of conservatism, particularly on the issues of culture, race, and the role of government. Holshouser and moderate Republicans, on the other hand, were far less ideologically rigid, favoring a more pragmatic policy of reduced taxes and small government.⁷⁹ Furthermore, the split in Republican ranks precluded the emergence of a strong party leader to unite the factions despite the momentum provided by their great election victories. The absence of unity cost the party dearly as it proved unable to build upon its greatest electoral triumph of the twentieth century.

North Carolina Republican Party chair Frank Rouse, who enjoyed the full support of Helms and the Congressional Club, challenged the influence of the Holshouser-backed Republicans. In 1972, Rouse resigned as state party chair to endorse James Gardner in the primary. Holshouser defeated Gardner in a runoff and ultimately won the election to become the state's first Republican governor in the twentieth century. Understandably, Holshouser hoped to

⁷⁹ Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 118; Luebke, *Tar Heel Politics 2000*, 29.

use this opportunity to put his stamp on the state Republican Party by selecting a party chairman who represented his faction and reflected his efforts to expand the party's base. A former party chair himself, Holshouser recognized the importance of party-building to compete in a two-party system. Holshouser's term as party chair gave him "a sense of what my obligation to the party in terms of building the Republican Party."⁸⁰ Governor Holshouser nominated Tom Bennett, while Frank Rouse, who enjoyed the full support of Gardner, Helms, and the Congressional Club, hoped to resume his position. In contrast to Bennett, Rouse was much closer to Jim Gardner and Jesse Helms's political ideology and placed less of an emphasis on party building. Rather, Rouse preferred that the party recruit Democratic voters without necessarily switching their party loyalty and voter registration. Rouse, like many of his fellow eastern Republicans, was a former Democrat who left the party in response to its embrace of pro-civil rights liberalism. The exodus of conservative Democrats into the Republican ranks created a groundswell of grassroots support and contributed significantly to the growth of the state party. Regardless, many remained loyal first and foremost to Gardner and Helms, former Democrats, rather than Holshouser and the party establishment. Frank Rouse argued that Holshouser won the gubernatorial campaign because of other Republicans on the ticket, Helms and Nixon in particular, who won their campaigns by far greater margins than did Holshouser. According to Rouse, "Jesse's coattails elected Holshouser, not Nixon's coattails. Nixon helped, but Jesse made the difference." Furthermore, Rouse credited eastern North Carolina Democrats' support for Helms and Nixon, which "broke the bond" between southern Democrats and the national Democratic Party, and made possible the landmark Republican successes.⁸¹ Following a divisive state party convention

⁸⁰ Interview with Governor James E. Holshouser by Jack D. Fleer, 1/31/1998, (C-0328.1), SOHP.

⁸¹ Interview with Frank Rouse by Jack Bass, 12/17/1973, (A-0139), SOHP; Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 124. Link observes that Helms did not benefit from the Nixon campaign, which supported Holshouser's gubernatorial

and several months of infighting, Jim Holshouser won the battle with Tom Bennett's election as party chair. This, however, was a pyrrhic victory, one that Holshouser accomplished at a great cost to the state Republican Party. The party establishment's victory over the conservatives increased tensions, and failed to resolve the factional warfare that became a hallmark of the state Republican Party in the two-party system.⁸²

Virginia Governor Linwood Holton, a moderate Republican akin to Jim Holshouser, viewed with great anticipation the battle between Holshouser and Helms within the North Carolina Republican Party. Like Holshouser, Holton was a consensus builder whose party loyalty trumped ideology. Holton argued that a Holshouser victory had the potential to accelerate the development of two-party politics in the South. "North Carolina is the state to watch. If Holshouser wins his current contest with Helms, puts his whole political prestige on the line for his candidate for state chairman...I know that would be a move to the moderate side, so I suspect it's a race against Helms. If he gets to the moderate side, and gets some candidates, you'll see another strong two-party state developing," said Holton.⁸³ Unfortunately for Holshouser and like-minded party builders, this rivalry effectively curtailed the potential to

campaign. It was not until Nixon's visit to Greensboro, North Carolina, a few days before the election that Helms benefited from the Nixon landslide.

⁸² For more on Holshouser's view of this power struggle, see Interview with Governor James E. Holshouser, Jr. by Jack D. Fleer, 5/9/1998, (C-0328.3); Interview with Governor James E. Holshouser, Jr. by Jack D. Fleer, 6/4/1998, (C-0328.4), SOHP; See also *The Robesonian* (Lumberton, N.C.), 24 May 1972; *Gastonia Gazette*, 13 August 1973, 30 August 1973, 3 November 1973, 4 November 1973; *Burlington (N.C.) Times-News*, 8 August 1973, 6 September 1973, 12 September 1973, 21 September 1973, 11 October 1973, 24 October 1973, 2 November 1973; *High Point Enterprise*, 4 November 1973; Christensen, *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 205, contains a candid and revealing quote from Frank Rouse on the influence of race in shaping two-party politics in North Carolina. See also Paul Luebke, *Tar Heel Politics 2000* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 76, 183.

⁸³ Interview with Linwood Holton by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, 9.25/1973, (A-0207), SOHP; Dewey M. Grantham, *The Life and Death of the Solid South: A Political History* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1988), 165-166; Grimsley, *James B. Hunt*, 68. Holton won election in 1969, aided in part by a divided Democratic Party, with significant support from African-American voters. Four years prior to Holshouser's election, Holton's victory represented the potential for an inclusive Republican Party in Virginia. Like their North Carolina counterparts, Virginia Republicans also enjoyed a strong presence in state politics prior to the development of a formal two-party system.

create an inclusive Republican Party, as the failure to reach consensus on the party chair was symbolic of the problems that hindered its development as a viable statewide political party in the 1970s.

In contrast to Jesse Helms, Jim Holshouser and the traditional Republicans stressed the need for an inclusive party. Holshouser's narrow election victory revealed the party establishment's potential, not only as an integral component of the state party, but also its influence in shaping a viable two-party system. As such, he was reluctant to rest on his laurels and build a statewide political party solely based on one narrow victory. "Anybody who thinks about it for very long realizes that if you're going to have a viable party, you've got to have a big enough umbrella to have varying philosophies under that umbrella. If you don't, you're just not big enough to win," said Holshouser. He did not want the state party to limit its membership to former conservative Democrats-turned-Republicans. Rather, he believed that the party had the ability to contain several different factions, including both longtime Republicans and the recent converts. Whereas Helms dedicated himself to ideology above party, Holshouser desired to create "a state where people got to listen to ideas," for it was simply not in his plans to replace one-party Democratic politics with one-party Republican rule.⁸⁴ In contrast to Helms's conservatism, Holshouser labeled himself a "moderate conservative," the most apt description for Holshouser-style Republicans like Jim Broyhill and Jim Martin.⁸⁵

Congressman Jim Broyhill, a leading Republican politician closely aligned with the party establishment, echoed Governor Holshouser's desire to expand the Republican base. "You've got to remember that we, those of us who are Republicans, and particularly like Holshouser and

⁸⁴ Interview with Governor James E. Holshouser by Jack D. Flear, 5/9/1998, (C-0328.3), SOHP.

⁸⁵ Interview with Governor James E. Holshouser, Jr. by Jack D. Flear, 1/31/1998, C-0328.1), SOHP.

myself, feel that the state has an obligation to meet its responsibilities,” said Broyhill. In order to create a statewide political party, “we have to show, I think, all the people that we can...be effective in running programs and administering programs and advocating solutions to the problems...at the state level.” Like Jim Holshouser, Broyhill’s loyalty to the Republican Party left him with few illusions as to the most effective means of building a viable state party organization. The best way to expand the party’s base and attract registered Democrats to the Republican ranks was to promote the development of a “conservative to middle-of-the-road” party. In addition to demonstrating strong leadership and responsible governance, Broyhill explained the necessity of reaching out to African-American voters. “I think that we have to show that we’re appealing to all people, not just whites, but blacks and whites. I think we’re dealing with all segments of society, not just one part of the state or another. [We] can’t be a party just with one vote...I think that if we’re going to be a viable party, we’ve got to have some black support [and get] a share of that black support at the polls, from the black community. Unfortunately, over the years, we have had too many candidates in some places get one hundred percent of the vote against them,” said Broyhill.⁸⁶

In 1972, Jim Martin won his first term in Congress to succeed longtime Congressman Charles Jonas in a solid Republican district encompassing the Charlotte metropolitan area. Jonas, the first North Carolina Republican sent to Congress in twenty years following his 1952 election victory, was an influential leader of the Republican establishment. Martin, who earned a doctorate from Princeton University, was a professor of chemistry at Davidson College prior to embarking upon a political career. Like Congressmen Broyhill and Jonas, Martin was a member of the Republican establishment, closely aligned with the Holshouser faction, and dedicated to expanding his party’s base in North Carolina. Jim Martin actively sought African-American

⁸⁶ Interview with Congressman James Broyhill by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, 1/30/1974, (A-0119), SOHP.

support in his 1972 campaign for Congress, recognizing that African-American voters were once an integral part of the Republican Party. For Martin, reaching out to African-American voters was both personal and political. His father, a Christian minister in South Carolina, urged “his ecumenical, biracial...clergy association” to support integration and challenge massive resistance following the integration of Clemson University. Jim Martin hoped to remedy the absence of African-American supporters from Republican ranks. Martin ran into resistance from the Republican Party due to his attempts to court African-American voters, but ultimately worked separately of the party to accomplish this task.

Jim Martin campaigned for office in a safe Republican district and, therefore, it was not necessary to attract African-American voters. The campaign’s outcome did not hinge upon his success or failure to gain their support. Rather, it reflected his desire to expand the party’s base to be more inclusive and promote the development of two-party politics in North Carolina.

Nevertheless, Jim Martin persevered in his efforts and explained his motivations for doing so:

I felt the Republican Party on the one hand was getting racially polarized. Not “was getting,” was racially polarized and that the black population was partisan polarized. Thirty years before they were all Republicans. The party of Lincoln. The party that couldn’t win anything. Here in the early seventies they had changed over because of the Great Society programs and other things. The Voting Rights Act and those kinds of things which they should have acknowledged and dealt with accordingly. So they had moved that large group of voters into the Democrat column. I was thinking I’ve got to win some of that back. This is not right for the party to divorce itself entirely from the interests of black voters and then make black voters and their needs and aspirations campaign issues... I just felt the thing I could do about that was not to fall on my sword but to go out and try to recruit people to support me. Black people, voters, to support me. Didn’t do very well but in that race-It depends on how you measure it. If you’re expecting to get 2% or 5% at the best then the fact that we got 15% would be...an achievement.⁸⁷

In 1974, Congressman Jim Broyhill recognized that Republican factionalism was the party’s Achilles heel. “We’ve got as much factionalism as you’ll see in the Democratic ranks,”

⁸⁷ Interview with Governor James G. Martin by Jack D. Fleer, 2/6/1998, (C-0333), SOHP.

said Broyhill. Despite the influence of national politics in shaping the rise of the Republican Party in southern politics, party unity was an essential component of its ultimate success or failure. Broyhill, for one, recognized that its future success rested as much on party leadership as the influence of national politics. Furthermore, Broyhill believed that his party had the potential to become the majority party in North Carolina. “I think we have that opportunity. And we have that real possibility of being the [majority] party. We’re at that crossroads right now, being able to develop into that. It depends a great deal on the results of those who’ve been elected to leadership positions.”⁸⁸ The efforts of the party establishment, particularly those of Broyhill, Holshouser, and Martin, to expand the Republican base in North Carolina conflicted with the pronounced lack of party-building efforts on the part of the eastern Republicans, as Jesse Helms expressed little interest in expanding his grassroots political base consisting primarily of conservative Democrats. In contrast, Helms emphasized ideology over party, with little regard for the party establishment.

In 1975, Jesse Helms called for the establishment of “conservative” and “liberal” political parties to provoke a national political realignment. In response to the failures of both traditional political parties, Helms argued, “I say we need two parties, a liberal party and a conservative party by whatever name.” This reflected his continued distrust with the leadership of both major political parties, particularly the state Republican Party under the direction of Governor Holshouser and national Republican leaders such as Presidents Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford. Helms declared the Republican Party “out of touch with its own rank and file membership, and out of tune with the growing conservative majority. It is out of tune with the majority that is fed up with both parties, and is looking for politicians who will stand on issues and deliver what they promise.” Helms identified a number of issues around which a “conservative” political party

⁸⁸ Interview with Congressman James Broyhill by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, 1/30/1974, (A-0119), SOHP.

might coalesce. These included “not only our trusty band of ideological conservatives, but non-political people who are grappling in their own communities with issues such as pornography, the right to life, school textbooks, community control of schools, as well as those who are affected by [economic] issues such as inflation, soaring social security taxes, and loss of jobs.” Many of the cultural and social issues Helms outlined in this speech formed the core of the “New Right” ideology that would reshape national politics in the late twentieth century. Most notably, however, Helms paid little attention to issues such as party-building and economic development, two issues near and dear to the hearts of establishment Republicans. The 1976 presidential campaign provided Jesse Helms with a significant opportunity to promote the Republican Party as a national conservative party. Although he remained distrustful of the traditional political parties, Helms believed that Ronald Reagan’s campaign represented the best opportunity to promote a conservative political agenda within the two-party system. Jesse Helms declared 1976, the year the United States celebrated its bicentennial, “an appropriate year to issue a second Declaration of Independence.”⁸⁹

Jesse Helms emerged as an early supporter of former California Governor Ronald Reagan’s presidential aspirations. Like Helms, Reagan was a former Democrat who left the party and found a more comfortable home in the new Republican Party of Barry Goldwater and Richard Nixon. Helms urged Reagan to challenge incumbent Republican President Gerald Ford for the party’s presidential nomination. Jim Holshouser, on the other hand, publicly supported Ford’s reelection bid in 1976, thus increasing the tensions between the disparate Republican

⁸⁹ Jesse Helms, “Let’s Go Back to the Two-Party System,” Conservative Action Conference, 2/14/1975, NCC Clipping File.

factions and preventing the party unity that had so far eluded state Republicans since 1972.⁹⁰

Helms saw in Reagan the opportunity to move the Republican Party away from the moderate influences of President Ford and toward “philosophical purity” and a “rebirth.”⁹¹

Jim Holshouser steadfastly supported President Gerald Ford, actively working on his behalf and promoting his candidacy in the state’s presidential primary. A leading southern Republican and party loyalist, Holshouser also served as Southern Regional Chairman of the Ford campaign.⁹² Jesse Helms, also a prominent southern Republican, promoted Ronald Reagan’s insurgent challenge against the incumbent president, a move that increased tensions between the Republican factions in North Carolina. Holshouser supported Ford because he believed he represented the party’s best chance to extend its control of the White House. Although Ford was the incumbent, he was hardly the consensus choice within his own party. Rarely do incumbent presidents face a serious primary challenge, but 1976 proved an exception to the rule. Helms, on the other hand, promoted his vision of a “conservative party,” in this case, Reagan at the helm of a national Republican Party purged of its liberal influences. Like Helms, Reagan was a former Democrat who left the party and found a more comfortable home in the new Republican Party under Barry Goldwater’s leadership.

The split in the North Carolina Republican Party represented in microcosm the divisions within the national Republican Party. Ford remained the favorite of the Republican

⁹⁰ For a more detailed description of the ideological battles between moderates and conservatives in the North Carolina Republican Party, see Link, *Righteous Warrior: Jesse Helms and the Rise of Modern Conservatism*, 149-165.

⁹¹ For a more detailed description of the ideological battle between moderates and conservatives in the NC Republican Party, see Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 149-165; Helms quoted in Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 151 [“philosophical purity” and “rebirth”]; For the ideological rivalries within the national Republican Party and its influence on southern and national politics, see Black and Black, *Politics and Society in the South; The Vital South; The Rise of Southern Republicans*; and Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

⁹² Press Release, 2/10/1976, in Governor James E. Holshouser Papers, 1973-1977, General Correspondence, 1976, Federal Government, Box 476, Folder “President of the United States,” NCSA.

establishment, while the recent party converts flocked to Reagan's campaign. Likewise, Holshouser and Ford were longtime Republicans, while Helms and Reagan were more recent converts. For more than a decade, conservative and moderate Republicans vied for control of the national party. Similar to the state party, these factions often found it difficult to reconcile their differences for the sake of unity. In 1964, conservative Barry Goldwater defeated New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller, a political moderate, for the party's presidential nomination. Four years later, Richard Nixon defeated Rockefeller and won a national landslide reelection campaign. Following Nixon's resignation in August 1974, Vice President Gerald Ford assumed the presidency, and the Senate later confirmed Rockefeller as his vice president. Ford and Rockefeller, both moderate establishment stalwarts, failed to inspire the confidence of conservative southern Republicans. Jesse Helms, for example, harbored an intense dislike of the so-called "Rockefeller Republicans," as he believed they did not share an ideological kinship and did not promote nor represent true conservatism. In 1974, Helms was one of only seven members of the U.S. Senate to vote against Rockefeller's nomination as vice president, deeply suspicious of his liberal inclinations and the Ford administration generally.⁹³ The moderates did not fit into his view of the Republican Party, which Helms hoped to turn into the nation's conservative party. Just as conservative Republicans refused to defer to Holshouser's selection of Tom Bennett as party chair in 1973, ideology likewise led them to reject Ford in 1976.

As demonstrated in their many political battles, North Carolina Republicans had significant difficulties in building upon their 1972 triumph. Party factionalism, a largely self-inflicted hindrance, was but one of many challenges the party faced. Other problems, such as the party's rapid decline as a consequence of the Watergate Crisis and Nixon's declining popularity,

⁹³ Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 140-141, 161.

was beyond the control of the state party, but nevertheless impeded its potential. Two years following Nixon's landslide, the Republican Party reached its nadir and suffered terrible losses in the 1974 midterm elections.⁹⁴ The upcoming presidential campaign offered a significant opportunity for the warring factions to unite and regain their foothold in state and national politics. However, with Helms and Holshouser supporting Ronald Reagan and Gerald Ford, respectively, it proved increasingly difficult to bring unity to a party that had scarcely known this luxury.⁹⁵

In October 1975, the *Greensboro Daily News* reported on the growing Republican divide in North Carolina. Holshouser believed President Ford represented his party's best opportunity to win, while Helms "isn't really concerned with the Republican Party per se. His interest is getting a strong conservative voice to counter both Democrats and moderate to left-leaning Republicans." In contrast, Holshouser told President Ford that "the best thing I can do for the (party) in North Carolina is to do all I can to see that we have the strongest national ticket we possibly can in 1976." Where Holshouser placed loyalty to party above all else, Helms used the upcoming campaign to promote ideology over party. Helms argued that "Americans like the conservative name. But the problem is many Americans no longer equate that name, as they once did, with the Republican Party. We must make that equation clear again."⁹⁶ Thomas F. Ellis blamed Holshouser's "failure to articulate the conservative philosophy" for creating

⁹⁴ *Greensboro Daily News*, 7 November 1974, News Clipping, NCC Clipping File. Republicans lost fourteen seats in the State Senate (reducing their numbers from 15 to 1), 25 seats in the State house (while holding only 10 seats); Democrats added two congressional sets, Robert Morgan won election to the U.S. Senate.

⁹⁵ For more on the Helms-Holshouser split, particularly as it related to the 1976 presidential campaign, see *Greensboro Daily News*, 16 February 1975, 19 October 1975; *Raleigh News and Observer*, 16 February 1975, 23 February 1975, News Clippings, NCC Clipping File. See also *New York Times*, 9 November 1975, 23 November 1975.

⁹⁶ *Greensboro Daily News*, 19 October 1975, NCC Clipping File.

divisions within the state party. The Helms faction accused Holshouser of ignoring “conservative Democrats and the Republican mainstream” for the “politics of expediency.”⁹⁷

Jim Holshouser defended his support of President Ford in the wake of growing opposition, arguing that he “has the experience and the steady hand to guide our nation through the next four crucial years.” Holshouser affirmed his party loyalty and attempted to prevent a split in the ranks. “Since I am active in the Republican Party, I do not feel it appropriate for me to attempt to try and influence the race on the other side. I merely stated that it is very apparent that President Ford is going to be the nominee for the Republican Party and that further words between the candidates in our party would be divisive,” said Holshouser.⁹⁸ Ronald Reagan’s supporters targeted Holshouser for signing a letter sent to Reagan by nine Republican governors urging that he end his campaign for the sake of party unity. This earned him considerable enmity from Reagan supporters, who accused Holshouser of “dividing the Republican Party” with the “rash and premature” request that Reagan cease his primary challenge.⁹⁹ Reagan supporters argued that their party had a much better chance to win the election, and thus extend their control of the White House, with Reagan at the helm of the national party. “Reagan is a much better candidate than Ford and can receive much more of the electoral vote,” said one pro-Reagan partisan. “In keeping with past precedent,” argued another, “the President and not Governor

⁹⁷ *Raleigh News and Observer*, 23 February 1975, NCC Clipping File. That the Helms faction referred to itself as the “mainstream” spoke volumes about its growing influence, particularly in the aftermath of the 1974 midterm election.

⁹⁸ Governor James E. Holshouser to Fellow Republican, n.d., ca. early 1976 [“experience and steady hand”]; Governor James E. Holshouser to S.G. Williams, 22 March, 1976, both in Holshouser Papers, General Correspondence, 1976, Governor’s File, Box 483, Folder “Political,” NCSA [“active in the Republican Party”]. Like many Republicans, Holshouser assumed that Ford would be the party’s nominee and likely underestimated the strength of the Reagan insurgency.

⁹⁹ Betty Almond to Governor James E. Holshouser, 26 March 1976, [“dividing the Republican Party” and “rash and premature”]; R. W. Brownlee to Governor Holshouser, 19 March 1976, Ruth L. Cressler to Governor Holshouser, 19 March 1976; Jeanne G. Steelman to Governor Holshouser, 31 March 1976, all in Holshouser Papers, General Correspondence, 1976, Governor’s File, Box 483, Folder “President Ford-Political” (I), NCSA.

Reagan, if anyone, should drop out of the race.” He emphasized Reagan’s wide-ranging appeal, particularly to Democrats. “If [the Republican Party] is going to win in November, our party needs to attract support from Independents and Democrats and we know that Governor Reagan has proven to be very capable of doing such.”¹⁰⁰

The Ford-Reagan primary campaign was essentially a battle between Helms, Holshouser, and their respective political organizations. The “new” Republicans, former Democrats who enjoyed an uneasy and often troubled coexistence with the party establishment, supported Reagan overwhelmingly. Conservatives did not receive with enthusiasm Ford and Holshouser’s brand of moderate, non-ideological Republicanism. In many ways, this non-ideological strain of Republicanism never gained popular acceptance in the South. Although moderate Republicans abounded in North Carolina, it was not until the conservatives supplanted the national party’s moderate leadership that southern Republicans entered the mainstream of southern politics. As demonstrated in 1972, both moderates and conservatives enjoyed a banner year because of President Nixon’s landslide reelection. Immediately following the election, however, the factions waged a bruising battle for political influence. The absence of a strong party leader, combined with an unfavorable political climate for Republicans in the aftermath of Watergate, contributed to party factionalism and a pronounced lack of unity by 1976. Unlike Ford, Reagan brought excitement to an otherwise lackluster campaign. Most importantly, he inspired a grassroots base, with southern Republicans at the vanguard, to support his insurgent campaign against Ford.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ R.G.B. Artro to Governor James E. Holshouser, 21 March 1976 [“much better candidate than Ford”]; Daniel A. Young to Governor Holshouser, 19 March 1976 [“past precedent” and “needs to attract support”]; For a contrary view blaming Reagan for the split in the GOP, see Robert E. Shull to Senator Jesse Helms, 19 March 1976, all in Holshouser Papers, General Correspondence, 1976, Governor’s File, Box 483, Folder “President Ford-Political” (I), NCSA.

¹⁰¹ *Christian Science Monitor*, 7 November 1975; *New York Times*, 9 November 1975.

Despite Jim Holshouser's support for President Ford, Ronald Reagan won a surprise victory in the state's presidential primary.¹⁰² According to Holshouser, "I had put out and pulled out all the stops in trying to help...It hurt a good bit but I thought we were going to win kosher."¹⁰³ Reagan's victory in the primary foreshadowed the increasing influence of conservative Republicans in the South. The Republican grassroots' rejection of Ford's campaign revealed not only the limitations of moderate Republicanism, but also the perils of party factionalism in a competitive political environment. Reagan's victory emboldened the Helms faction while weakening Holshouser's party establishment, which never fully recovered from the disastrous 1974 midterm elections. Reagan defeated Ford several months prior to the state Republican convention, which provided Jesse Helms and his supporters the necessary momentum to strengthen their control over the party, with great implications for national politics in 1976. Reagan's primary victory emboldened the Helms faction and weakened the Holshouser's party establishment, and further undermined party unity in the middle of an election year.

At the 1976 state Republican Convention, tensions between the Helms and Holshouser factions reached boiling point. Jim Holshouser's focus on state politics and party-building efforts meant that the Republican Party's losses in the 1974 midterm elections hurt Holshouser and the party establishment far more than it did Jesse Helms, whose focus remained national politics. Above all, the unfriendly political climate forestalled Holshouser's attempts to promote the development of two-party politics at the state level. Holshouser argued that the Watergate

¹⁰² Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 157.

¹⁰³ Interview with Governor James E. Holshouser by Jack D. Fler, 5/9/1998, (C-0328.3), SOHP.

Crisis “tainted the Republican Party...for a couple of elections.”¹⁰⁴ The Democratic resurgence in the 1974 midterms, headlined by Robert Morgan’s Senate victory and significant gains in the General Assembly, left the state Republican Party divided, weakened, and in a general state of disarray. In the midst of this political crisis, Jesse Helms and the National Congressional Club played a significant part in preventing the state party’s total collapse. According to former state Republican Party chairman Jack Hawke, “We had a period in there which was real hard and no growth really, I’d say. The only thing that held it together was Helms and the [National] Congressional Club. In fact, the party headquarters and the state chairman of the party itself became almost nonexistent in terms—the real power was over in the [National] Congressional Club.”¹⁰⁵

This increased influence provided Helms and the National Congressional Club the unique opportunity to flex their political muscle within the state party, with significant implications for both state and national politics, the latter being their priority. Helms and Tom Ellis, head of the National Congressional Club and Helms’ political mentor, refused to allow moderate Republicans to represent the state’s delegation to the national Republican National Convention in Kansas City, Missouri. Included in the moderate ranks were Governor Jim Holshouser and Congressmen Jim Broyhill and Jim Martin, all elected Republicans typically entitled to, but denied, the opportunity to serve as delegates. Not surprisingly, Holshouser, Broyhill, and Martin

¹⁰⁴ For a Democratic perspective on the NC GOP’s inability to build upon its landmark victories, see Interview with Governor Robert W. Scott by Karl Campbell, 9/18/1986, (C-0036); For comments on the impact of the Watergate crisis on the 1974 midterm elections and the state Republican Party, see Interview with H.M. Michaux by Jack Bass, 11/20/1974, (A-0135); Interview with Governor James E. Holshouser by Jack D. Fleer, 5/9/1998, (C-0328.3); Interview with Governor James E. Holshouser, 6/4/1998, (C-0328.4) [“tainted the Republican Party”], SOHP.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Jack Hawke by Jonathan Houghton, 6/7/1990, (C-0087), SOHP.

supported President Ford, which clashed with the conservatives' support for Ronald Reagan.¹⁰⁶ "That hurt the party bad," recalled Republican political consultant Jack Hawke.¹⁰⁷ "For those of us who have worked hard to build an effective two-party system in North Carolina," Holshouser lamented, "it simply represents another one of those temporary lapses where we seem to forget what it takes to win elections."¹⁰⁸ Ultimately, neither the conservatives nor the moderates could claim victory, as Democrat Jimmy Carter defeated President Gerald Ford. Republican infighting contributed to Carter's narrow victory in North Carolina and a continued Democratic resurgence in 1976.

Demonstrating the significance of national politics in shaping North Carolina's two-party system, it was not until Ronald Reagan's 1980 presidential campaign that brought legitimacy back to the Republican Party. Like Nixon eight years earlier, Reagan's popularity benefited southern Republicans regardless of ideological loyalty. Furthermore, it took a strong leader and the full weight of the national Republican resurgence to minimize the feuding that plagued the Republican Party for much of the decade. With a strong national party, North Carolina Republicans emerged from their exile in the political wilderness. According to Jim Holshouser, "The 1974 election, 1976 election, and 1978 election were all tainted," said Jim Holshouser. "It was only Ronald Reagan's election in 1980 that sort of turned that cycle back around. North Carolina's elections are impacted by national elections more than most people realize. If North

¹⁰⁶ Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 157-159; *Washington Post*, 20 June 1976; *New York Times*, 6 July 1976, 19 July 1976. Republican factionalism led to the exclusion of three pro-Ford governors from the Republican National Convention: Christopher Bond (Missouri), Daniel J. Evans (Washington), and Jim Holshouser. The Ford-Reagan primary splintered Republicans nationwide, which resulted in neither candidate receiving a majority of pledged delegates to the RNC. *New York Times*, 6 July 1976.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Jack Hawke by Jonathan Houghton, 6/7/1990, (C-0087), SOHP.

¹⁰⁸ Holshouser to Bill Bradley and Howard Wimpey, 8 July 1976, in Holshouser Papers, General Correspondence, 1976, Alphabetical File, Box 501, Folder "Republican Party," NCSA.

Carolina doesn't carry the state for president on the Republican ticket, we don't do nearly as well in local and congressional elections.”¹⁰⁹

Ronald Reagan's coattails swept many Republicans to victory in 1980, demonstrated most notably by John East's upset of incumbent Democratic Senator Robert Morgan. East's victory was not simply a Republican victory; it was a triumph for Helms and the National Congressional Club, who bankrolled and directed East's campaign. Morgan, whose sixty-seven percent rating from the American Conservative Union designated him as the most conservative Democrat in the U.S. Senate in 1979, witnessed his once-promising Senate career come to a premature end.¹¹⁰ East, a Helms-style conservative Republican, ran an ideologically based campaign against Senator Morgan, whose “moderate conservatism” paled in comparison to East and his political benefactors Jesse Helms and the NCC.¹¹¹ East campaigned on a platform of a strong national defense, opposition to abortion, reducing federal spending on social programs, the hallmarks of Helms and the NCC. Morgan, who considered himself “a moderate,” faced a withering attack from East and the NCC, linking him to liberal Massachusetts Senator Ted Kennedy and 1972 Democratic presidential nominee George McGovern. The NCC launched an all-out advertising blitz against Morgan, distorting his pro-military and anti-organized labor voting record into an anti-defense and pro-labor position.¹¹² Like Helms, East stressed the importance of national politics, with little regard for state politics. “The point is, if you want to see important change in Washington, you have to change the Congress as well as the White

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Governor James E. Holshouser by Jack D. Fleer, 6/4/1998, (C-0328.4), SOHP.

¹¹⁰ *Raleigh News and Observer*, 19 January 1980; *Charlotte Observer*, 12 October 1980 [Info on Morgan's political career], NCC Clipping File.

¹¹¹ *Raleigh News and Observer*, 6 February 1980, NCC Clipping File.

¹¹² Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 213-215.

House,” said East. That’s the real crux of the point we’re making.”¹¹³ The National Congressional Club’s influence reached far beyond North Carolina as the organization raised millions for Ronald Reagan and bankrolled the conservative candidates who defeated Democratic Senators Birch Bayh of Indiana, Frank Church of Idaho, and South Dakota’s George McGovern.¹¹⁴ Thomas F. Ellis described its mission as a conservative crusade: “the reason the Congressional Club exists is to do everything it can to further the conservative cause. That’s what it’s all about—we have to save this country.”¹¹⁵

Conclusion

In the decade that followed the 1972 elections, North Carolina’s two-party system reached its initial peak. The emergence of Jesse Helms and Jim Hunt prompted a reshaping of the state’s political parties. Between 1972 and 1984, Helms and Hunt were the most influential and popular leaders of their respective political parties. Despite being on opposite sides of the political spectrum, Helms and Hunt rarely came into conflict with one another. Jim Hunt’s focus on state politics did not bring about a direct confrontation with Jesse Helms. Likewise, Helms’s emphasis on national politics did not infringe on Hunt’s political turf. Hunt’s efforts to rebuild his fractured party returned the Democrats to prominence in state politics, and he became the state’s first two-term governor of the twentieth century. In contrast to Hunt’s coalition-building efforts, Helms and the National Congressional Club put forth little effort to elect candidates to positions in state government, with two notable exceptions. In 1980, the NCC supported I. Beverly Lake, Jr. and Bill Cobey, who won the Republican nomination for governor and

¹¹³ *Raleigh News and Observer*, 19 January 1980 [“a moderate”]; *Durham Morning-Herald*, 28 September 1980 [“change the Congress”], NCC Clipping File; East (898,064) defeated Morgan (887,653) by less than 11,000 votes *North Carolina Manual* 1981, 924-925.

¹¹⁴ Varley, “The Helms-Hunt Senate Race,” Part A, p. 18, NCC.

¹¹⁵ Ellis quoted in Luebke, *Tar Heel Politics* 2000, 163.

lieutenant governor, respectively. Hunt handily won reelection, while incumbent Lieutenant Governor James C. Green defeated Cobey. The strength of Hunt's Democratic coalition assured Hunt and Green's victory in 1980. In contrast to Hunt, Helms did not participate in party-building efforts. As a result, Hunt won two gubernatorial elections by decisive margins, while Helms won two Senate elections by less significant margins.¹¹⁶

The Democratic and Republican political parties enjoyed mixed success between 1972 and 1984. Republicans were most successful when working in tandem with the national party, as epitomized by the triumphs of 1972. Jesse Helms, Jim Holshouser, and Jim Martin testified to the many varieties of North Carolina Republicanism, which ultimately fared less successful when factionalism precluded party unity. Like their Democratic counterparts, Republicans learned that party factionalism often meant the difference between victory and defeat in a competitive political environment. Republicans were most successful in national politics, epitomized by the success of both Jesse Helms and John East. In contrast, Democrats dominated state politics under Jim Hunt's leadership. Hunt built his political career upon the strength of the state Democratic Party, while the national party did not figure prominently into his political organization. While Senator Robert Morgan's defeat in 1980 was a loss for Democrats, it did not adversely affect Hunt's political coalition. On the other hand, Jesse Helms's distrust of the state Republican Party made necessary his dependence on the national party, which carried him to victory in 1972 and brought considerable success to Republicans in 1980.

The first decade of two-party politics in North Carolina ended with Jim Hunt and the Democrats in firm control of state politics, while Jesse Helms and the Republicans enjoyed the upper hand in national politics. Although Jesse Helms and Jim Hunt did not compete directly against one another in the decade that followed the 1972 elections, it just so happened that each

¹¹⁶ Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 212; *North Carolina Manual* 1981.

began 1984 with an uncertain political future. Unburdened by term limits, Helms faced a potential reelection campaign, while the state constitution precluded Hunt from seeking a third consecutive term as governor. Helms and Hunt's emergence as political titans left few doubts among observers that it was only a matter of time until these heavyweights faced each other.

CHAPTER 6

“Where do you stand, Jim?”: The 1984 U.S. Senate Race and Two-Party Politics in North Carolina

The rise of Jim Hunt and Jesse Helms transformed North Carolina politics in the 1970s. Jim Hunt and Jesse Helms both won election to statewide office for the first time in 1972, as lieutenant governor and freshman United States Senator, respectively. Jim Hunt epitomized the new breed of Sunbelt Democrats, characterized by moderate positions on race relations, education reform, and pro-business development. Democrats of Hunt’s generation were far more concerned with economic growth than the politics of race. Jesse Helms represented the new generation of post-Barry Goldwater southern Republicans, part of the far right wing of the Republican Party that was emerging as a powerful force in southern and national politics. Both men remained quite popular among the electorate despite their ideological differences. Each candidate reflected North Carolina’s unique political legacy, where conservatives and progressives battled for control of the Democratic Party during the era of one-party politics. “Each man exemplifies a strain in Tar Heel politics,” declared the *Raleigh News and Observer*. “Helms speaks to the state’s conservative streak—opposition to large government spending for social programs, strong support for national defense, opposition to civil rights laws.” Hunt, on the other hand, “articulates the state’s ‘New South’ tendencies—more government spending for education, attempts to attract high-technology industries and a desire to lay to rest the racial

turmoil of the past.” Together, they built the modern political culture of modernizers and traditionalists that dominates state politics more than thirty years later.¹

Although Jesse Helms and Jim Hunt rarely infringed on the other’s political turf in the decade that followed the 1972 election, their political parties became intense rivals. Between 1972 and 1984, the two-party system supplanted the competitive one-party system, with Helms and Hunt at the head of the Republican and Democratic parties, respectively. Helms’s focus on national politics and Hunt’s emphasis on state politics resulted in the creation of two distinct political organizations, both of which enjoyed considerable success under their leadership. The political trends that emerged in the 1970s following the emergence of Helms and Hunt profoundly influenced the outcome of the 1984 Senate race. The relationship between state and national politics, for example, was critical. Jim Hunt did not require a strong national party ticket, but he needed a unified state party to wage a successful campaign. The benefit of a strong national party was far more important to Jesse Helms, as he built his political career on the foundation of a national conservative Republican Party, not the moderate state party establishment. Similar to 1972, the state Democratic Party fractured under the weight of factionalism while the Republican Party rallied behind President Reagan’s landslide reelection victory over Democratic challenger Walter Mondale.

The Ronald Reagan-Walter Mondale presidential campaign dominated national politics in 1984, but the Helms-Hunt Senate race overshadowed the presidential campaign in North Carolina. North Carolina became what political scientist Alexander Lamis described as “the

¹ Ferrell Guillory, “A Political Paradox: North Carolina’s Twenty-Five Years under Jim Hunt and Jesse Helms” *Southern Cultures* 4 (Spring 1998): 52-61; *Raleigh News and Observer*, 6 November 1983, News Clipping, North Carolina Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill [Hereafter cited as NCC Clipping File].

South's premier partisan battleground of 1984."² While President Reagan enjoyed a wide margin of victory in North Carolina and swept the South in a national landslide, Senator Helms prevailed with only fifty-two percent of the vote. Jesse Helms clearly benefited from Reagan's victory, just as he had done with President Richard Nixon in 1972, but unlike Reagan, Helms enjoyed no guarantee of a victory until the final tally of the votes on November 6, 1984.³ Jesse Helms defeated Jim Hunt for several reasons. First, Helms ran on the same ticket as Ronald Reagan, an advantage that Hunt did not enjoy. Helms openly allied himself with Reagan's reelection campaign while Hunt all but disassociated himself from Democratic presidential candidate Walter Mondale.⁴ In an era of increasingly competitive two-party politics, party unity versus disunity played a significant part in the Helms-Hunt campaign. Second, the media-driven campaign revolutionized political advertising in North Carolina, as Helms's National Congressional Club spent \$16 million to Hunt's \$10 million. The Helms campaign's advertisements succeeded in transforming Jim Hunt's image as a moderate-to-conservative Democrat into a tax-and-spend liberal. In the age of personality-driven politics, political advertising was crucial to Helms's reelection victory. The Helms fundraising and advertising machine effectively neutralized Hunt's decade of work to unify Democrats in the aftermath of

² Alexander P. Lamis, *The Two-Party South*, 2d expanded ed., (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 249.

³ Compare Helms's narrow election victory in 1984 to the contests of several other southern Republicans. Virginia's John Warner won his second term in office, 70% to 30%; South Carolina incumbent Senator J. Strom Thurmond won with 67% of the vote; Mississippi's Thad Cochran defeated Democrat William Winter 61% to 39%; In Texas, Congressman Phil Gramm defeated Democratic state senator Lloyd Doggett 59% to 41%. Democratic incumbent Senator Sam Nunn of Georgia and Louisiana's J. Bennett Johnson easily won reelection, while Congressman Al Gore, Jr. of Tennessee handily defeated his Republican opponent for the Senate seat vacated by Republican Howard Baker. Democrats also prevailed in Alabama and Arkansas. For a solid overview of the 1984 elections in the South, see Lamis, *The Two-Party South*, 233-264.

⁴ Earl Black and Merle Black demonstrate that southern Democrats regularly distanced themselves from the national Democratic Party in 1984 with Walter Mondale at the helm. "The aggressive and unapologetic liberalism of [former vice president and 1968 Democratic presidential candidate Hubert] Humphrey and [Walter] Mondale placed them in the forefront of the Minnesota Democratic Party, but many of their sincere convictions and goals appeared to be—or could be made to appear to be—radical departures from common sense to most southern white voters." Black and Black, *The Vital South: How Presidents are Elected* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 338.

the divisive 1972 elections. Finally, the Helms campaign defined Jim Hunt as a candidate before he had the chance to define himself, and by placing “wedge” issues such as race and culture at the forefront of the campaign, Helms put Hunt on the defensive before he had the opportunity to take the offensive. On these and other issues, voters simply responded better to Jesse Helms than Jim Hunt.

In his influential study of North Carolina politics, *Tar Heel Politics 2000*, Paul Luebke argues that Jesse Helms consistently won reelection in North Carolina because he has won at least sixty percent of the white vote in each of his campaigns.⁵ Luebke is correct in pointing to this important statistic, but the 1984 election provided a much different set of circumstances that requires an analysis of other significant issues and their influence on the Helms-Hunt campaign. These include southern politics in the “age of Reagan,” specifically the tremendous inroads made by the Republican Party in the South during the 1970s and 1980s; the influence of national politics on the nation’s political realignment; and the fractured relationship between southern Democrats and the national Democratic Party, for nowhere were these divisions more evident than between Jim Hunt and Walter Mondale.

The 1984 U.S. Senate Race

The 1984 U.S. Senate campaign unofficially began following the surprise Democratic resurgence in the off-year elections in 1982. The National Congressional Club supported seven congressional candidates, only to have all of them lose, leaving the Republicans outnumbered nine to two among the state’s congressional delegation. The election was a stunning defeat for Jesse Helms and the National Congressional Club following their upset 1980 victory of East Carolina University political science professor John East over incumbent Democratic Senator Robert Morgan. Most surprisingly, the Club proved incapable to unseating Democratic

⁵ Paul Luebke, *Tar Heel Politics 2000* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 167.

Congressman Ike Andrews, the Fourth District incumbent arrested on drunken driving charges just weeks before the election. According to political reporter Rob Christensen of the *Raleigh News and Observer*, “the lesson that was drawn from ’82 was that the [National Congressional] Club was on the decline and that Jesse Helms was in big political trouble.”⁶ Additionally, Jesse Helms found few supporters for his “New Right” social agenda in Congress and suffered from declining popularity in North Carolina, with his approval ratings hovering in the thirty percent range. By contrast, nearly seventy percent of North Carolina voters approved of Jim Hunt’s leadership as governor.⁷ The contrast between Helms and Hunt could not have been greater. Jesse Helms acknowledged that his party “took a beating” in 1982, but declared that it “would be no cakewalk” for his opponent to unseat him in his upcoming reelection campaign in 1984, later promising to hold his opponent’s “feet to the fire.”⁸

While Jesse Helms faced growing unpopularity in North Carolina and Washington, Governor Jim Hunt, now serving his second term as governor, was unquestionably the most powerful Democrat in North Carolina. Limited by the state constitution to serving two consecutive terms in office, Hunt set his sights on 1984. He emerged as a prominent figure in the national Democratic Party as chair of the so-called “Hunt Commission,” established by the national party to reform the presidential nomination process. Hunt earned high praise for his work from other commission members. Democratic pollster and committee staff member Pat Caddell stated, “The governor has done extremely well. Jim [Hunt] has shown unflagging leadership. He’s been reasonable [and] I think he’s impressed everybody in the process.”

⁶ Rob Christensen quoted in Pamela Varley, “The Helms-Hunt Senate Race,” Part A, p. 11, NCC.

⁷ William A. Link, *Righteous Warrior: Jesse Helms and the Rise of Modern Conservatism* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2008), 272.

⁸ Snider, *Helms and Hunt*, 94-95. Helms quoted on page 95. Helms’s “feet to the fire” quote in the *Raleigh News and Observer*, 26 June 1983; NCC Clipping File.

Further praise came from others involved in the commission's work. "I think [Hunt] has gained incredible stature out of this. There isn't a person who would say he hasn't been extremely agile and fair."⁹

In late 1982, Jim Hunt held a twenty-five-point lead over Senator Helms in a hypothetical matchup for the latter's Senate seat.¹⁰ Two years before the election, the *Fayetteville Observer* declared the anticipated Helms-Hunt matchup "the Second Most Important Race in the Nation" for 1984. "This is one of those political donnybrooks where the grudges are too old, the passions too deep, the stakes too high, the history too rich, the campaign technologies too honed and the money too bountiful to wait on the calendar."¹¹ In a statewide poll released in the summer of 1983, several months before both Helms and Hunt officially announced their candidacy for the Senate, Hunt remained more than twenty points ahead of Helms. Jim Hunt's political fortunes increased dramatically in 1982-1983, while Jesse Helms appeared to be on the verge of a disastrous defeat. The White House privately conceded that Helms would probably not win reelection in 1984. In October 1983, the *Washington Post* detailed the problems facing Jesse Helms and issued their prediction on the upcoming campaign: "Barring an act of God, Jesse Helms can't win."¹²

⁹ News Clipping, n.d. (ca. 1982), Folder 219, Ike Andrews Papers, Wilson Library, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill [Hereafter cited as SHC]; Snider, *Helms and Hunt*, 92.

¹⁰ Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 272.

¹¹ *Fayetteville Observer*, 8 October 1982, NCC Clipping File.

¹² *Washington Post*, 23 October 1983; Luebke, *Tar Heel Politics 2000*, 171. Although Helms debated whether or not to seek reelection in 1984, it was not surprising when he announced his intentions to seek a third term in office and continue his conservative crusade. Jim Hunt, nearing the end of this second term in office, was the subject of widespread speculation that he would seek Helms's Senate seat. Although he did not officially announce his candidacy until early 1984, it was well known that Hunt would likely challenge Helms, making it one of the worst kept secrets of the year. This marked an anti-climactic beginning to a campaign that turned out to be anything but lackluster and predictable.

Democrats and Republicans alike expected a serious campaign between these two political heavyweights. The anticipated Helms-Hunt campaign had the potential to “transcend the political history of the state. It won’t be big just by North Carolina standards, I think it’ll be big by national standards,” said Charlotte Democrat Jim Babb. Phil VanHoy, a Charlotte Republican, shared this sentiment: “It would be the biggest Senate race this state has ever seen and one of the biggest this country has ever seen.”¹³ Democrats outside of North Carolina also weighed in on the expected Helms-Hunt campaign. “That’s going to be the most important race in the country outside of the presidential race,” said Hamilton Jordan, President Jimmy Carter’s former chief of staff. “All you need in a great political season is someone to vote for and someone to vote against,” said Atlanta Mayor Andrew Young, “I believe you all have that in North Carolina.”¹⁴ According to the *Raleigh News and Observer*, “the election is expected to match two men who are arguably the most dominant political figures of the post-World War II era of North Carolina voters.”¹⁵

Rather than focusing their efforts on party building, Jesse Helms and the National Congressional Club worked to promote conservative candidates in North Carolina and across the nation. Founded in 1972, the National Congressional Club quickly became a powerful force in state and national politics, pioneering the use of direct mail fundraising tactics and strategic media campaigns employing slash-and-burn tactics against their Democratic, and sometimes Republican, opponents. For his 1978 reelection campaign, the National Congressional Club raised nearly \$7 million compared to the paltry \$217,000 raised by Democratic candidate John

¹³ *Charlotte Observer*, 20 August 1982, NCC Clipping File.

¹⁴ *Charlotte Observer*, 14 March 1983, NCC Clipping File.

¹⁵ *Raleigh News and Observer*, 11 March 1983, NCC Clipping File.

Ingram.¹⁶ In 1980, the National Congressional Club engineered John East's shocking upset over incumbent Democratic Senator Robert Morgan. Its influence reached far beyond North Carolina as the NCC raised millions for Ronald Reagan and bankrolled the conservative candidates who defeated Senators Birch Bayh of Indiana, Frank Church of Idaho, and South Dakota's George McGovern.¹⁷ Tom Ellis described its mission as a conservative crusade when he stated, "the reason the Congressional Club exists is to do everything it can to further the conservative cause. That's what it's all about—we have to save this country."¹⁸ Although Helms had very little in common with North Carolina's Republican establishment, the National Congressional Club nonetheless gained the support of conservatives statewide. According to journalist William Snider of the *Greensboro News and Record*, "Even those conservatives who did not swallow all his right-wing ideology nevertheless liked enough of [Helms's] free enterprise spirit to set aside their doubts and go along."¹⁹ Regardless of ideological tensions within the party's ranks, the powerful advertising and fundraising capabilities of his organization no doubt enticed many Republicans to support Jesse Helms and the National Congressional Club.

The National Congressional Club, however, was not without controversy. In 1982, Democratic Congressman Charles Rose filed a formal complaint against the NCC with the Federal Election Commission. Rose accused Jefferson Marketing, Inc. an NCC-affiliated media production company, of making illegal campaign donations by providing "cut-rate services" to his political adversaries. Rose's opponents in the Democratic primary and the general election

¹⁶ Pamela Varley, "The Helms-Hunt Senate Race," Case Program (Cambridge: Kennedy School of Government, 1986), Part A, pp. 17-18, NCC. In 1978, Jesse Helms won 54.5% of the vote to John Ingram's 45.5%, nearly identical to Helms's 1972 election victory over Democrat Nick Galifianakis (54.4% to 45.6%).

¹⁷ Varley, "The Helms-Hunt Senate Race," Part A, p. 18, NCC.

¹⁸ Tom Ellis quoted in Luebke, *Tar Heel Politics 2000*, 163.

¹⁹ William Snider quoted in Varley, "The Helms-Hunt Senate Race," Part A, p. 18, NCC.

used a contentious advertisement produced by Jefferson Marketing, Inc. The advertisement in question, titled “Free-O to Rio,” alleged that Rose had taken a trip to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, with his congressional aide at taxpayer’s expense. North Carolina Democratic Party chairman David Price challenged the legitimacy of what he called Helms’s “incestuous political network,” claiming that they existed in violation of federal election laws.²⁰ Congressman Rose and others questioned the true nature of the relationship between Jefferson Marketing and the National Congressional Club. More specifically, they sought an investigation to discover if the former was truly a separate organization as federal law required. The National Congressional Club used Jefferson Marketing to produce its media advertising, but “the line dividing the two entities was unclear.”²¹ Much to the disappointment of Democrats, the Federal Election Commission did not rule on this complaint until after the Helms-Hunt campaign. The subsequent investigation revealed that Jefferson Marketing was essentially a shadow organization of the National Congressional Club, staffed by former Club employees and controlled by several of its leaders.²² This controversy, however, did not impede the Club’s ability to raise millions of dollars for Jesse Helms and other candidates in preparation for the upcoming elections. If anything, it probably helped the Club increase its fundraising capabilities.

The National Congressional Club provided Jesse Helms with a national fundraising and media machine that set a high standard for his rivals. More importantly, it made it possible for Helms to compete against Democrats at the statewide level. Although this organization did not exist during Helms’s 1972 Senate campaign, it is hard to imagine Helms winning reelection

²⁰ Varley, “The Helms-Hunt Senate Race,” Part C, p. 15, NCC; *Washington Post*, 17 March 1985. Despite prodding from Jim Hunt and other Democrats, the FEC did not issue a ruling on the complaint during the 1984 campaign season, much to the disappointment of the Hunt campaign. David Price quoted in *Raleigh News and Observer*, 21 September 1984.

²¹ Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 280.

²² Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 280-281.

without its advertising and fundraising apparatus. Despite recent gains by the Republican Party, Democrats outnumbered Republicans approximately three to one among the state's registered voters.²³ For a Republican to win statewide office, it required the support of a large number of swing voters among registered Democrats. Jesse Helms proudly counted among his supporters the "Jessecrats," conservative Democrats who made possible his 1972 election victory.

Democratic Party loyalty was deep-seated in North Carolina, but by the 1980s, an increasing number of registered Democrats found it palatable to vote for Republican candidates for national office, especially Ronald Reagan. However, Jesse Helms won his first two elections against rather weak opponents, and in 1972, relied heavily on President Nixon's national landslide to win. Helms's 1978 reelection victory over Democrat John Ingram took place during off-year elections, thus proving that he could defeat a Democrat without the benefit of a presidential election. Helms had never faced an opponent as popular and powerful as Jim Hunt. Unlike Senator Helms, Jim Hunt handily defeated his Republican opponents in 1976 and 1980, capturing more than sixty percent of the vote in each campaign.²⁴

Jim Hunt, on the other hand, built the most successful grassroots political organization in twentieth-century North Carolina. Helms and Hunt held two very different ideas about parties and politics. The competition between these candidates and their political organizations

²³ *North Carolina Manual* 1985 (Raleigh: North Carolina Secretary of State, 1986), 1231-1232. At the time of the 1984 primary elections, there were 2,961,103 voters registered with the State Board of Elections. 2,317,005 (72%) were Democrats, Republicans numbered 704,301 (23%) with the remaining 119,797 registered Independents. At the time of the general election in November 1984, there were 3,270,128 total registered voters, an increase of 309,025 voters since the primary. Democrats added 152,056 for a total of 2,289,061, Republicans increased to 838,631 (134,330), and Independents added 22,639 for a total of 142,436.

²⁴ *North Carolina Manual* 1973 (Raleigh: North Carolina Secretary of State, 1973), 383. In his 1972 campaign, Jesse Helms defeated former Congressman Nick Galifianakis 795,248 (54%) to 677,293 (46%); *North Carolina Manual* 1979, 752. Helms defeated state Insurance Commissioner John Ingram in 1978, this time again with 54% of voters supporting him; *North Carolina Manual* 1977, 726. *North Carolina Manual* 1983, 979. Jim Hunt captured nearly sixty-six percent of the popular vote (1,081,293) over David Flaherty (564,102) in 1976. Hunt received sixty-two percent (1,143,145) in his 1980 reelection victory over I. Beverly Lake, Jr. (691,449). Lake received more voters than Flaherty, but Hunt still collected more than 1,000,000 votes in his second decisive election victory.

provided the momentum for the 1984 Senate campaign and the continued rivalry between traditionalists and modernizers. The National Congressional Club's sustained fundraising efforts provided Jesse Helms with access to campaign funds while Jim Hunt was still in the process of organizing his campaign for the U.S. Senate. Despite facing serious political troubles in North Carolina, Helms nonetheless enjoyed a huge advantage over Hunt because of the National Congressional Club. The *Raleigh News and Observer* declared that the upcoming Senate race will likely "pit the Democrats' organizational strength against the Republicans' ability to raise more money." Democrats outnumbered Republicans nearly three-to-one among registered voters, but Helms proved his ability to consistently raise campaign funds to counter the Democrats' strength in numbers.²⁵

In late 1982, Jim Hunt's supporters established the North Carolina Campaign Fund, an organization headed by former federal judge and seven-term Democratic Congressman Richardson Preyer, who lost his bid for an eighth term to a Helms-backed candidate in 1980. The organization borrowed at least one idea from the National Congressional Club: the use of direct mail fundraising. Despite Jim Hunt's reluctance to utilize this tactic, it was imperative that Hunt's campaign focus some of its considerable efforts on out-of-state fundraising to remain competitive with Jesse Helms's campaign empire. Hunt said something to the effect of "no way, [it's] not my style" in response to his supporters' use of this campaign tactic. In the summer of 1983, the Campaign Fund compiled a list of approximately thirty-five thousand supporters at the cost of \$1 million. Shortly thereafter, this organization ceased operations and the Hunt campaign assumed fundraising responsibilities for the upcoming campaign.²⁶ Despite their early success in

²⁵ *Raleigh News and Observer*, 6 November 1983, NCC Clipping File.

raising campaign funds and a big lead in the polls, the Hunt campaign was already far behind Jesse Helms and the National Congressional Club in both advertising and fundraising.

In late 1982 and early 1983, with Jesse Helms at the lowest point in his political career, the National Congressional Club provided Helms with the opportunity to stage an improbable comeback. Beginning in April 1983, nineteen months ahead of the upcoming Senate election, Helms and the NCC launched an “aggressive media campaign” with newspaper and radio advertisements in eastern North Carolina. These advertisements focused on Helms’s chairmanship of the Senate Agriculture Committee, his friendship with President Reagan, his commitment to lowering taxes. Helms attacked Hunt’s out-of-state fundraising campaign, his use of state-owned airplanes for campaign events, and linked Hunt to liberal Democrats such as Massachusetts Senator Edward Kennedy and Minnesota’s Walter Mondale. Most importantly, Helms stressed his opposition to the renewal of the Voting Rights Act and the proposed federal holiday honoring the slain civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr.²⁷ Helms was the most vocal opponent of the King Holiday in the Senate and he made this position clear to voters in eastern North Carolina. Helms did not employ the traditional race-baiting techniques featured so prominently in the early twentieth-century South or the pro-segregation stump speeches of Alabama Governor George Wallace in the 1960s, but instead skillfully exploited the issue in a more respectable manner that nonetheless succeeded in making race a wedge issue among North Carolina voters.

²⁶ Varley, “The Helms-Hunt Senate Race,” Part B, pp. 1-2, NCC; Hunt quoted on page 1. The North Carolina Campaign Fund’s use of direct mail fundraising list was the source of an FEC complaint filed by Jesse Helms against Jim Hunt in 1984.

²⁷ Varley, “The Helms-Hunt Senate Race,” Part B, pp. 6-7, NCC; Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 273. According to Link, the Helms campaign ran ads in 150 small-town newspapers and put their ads on seventy-two radio stations, airing three times a day for several months. The radio ads cost from \$20,000 per week in summer to \$50,000/week in the fall. Eastern North Carolina was the heart of the ‘solid South’ and it remained heavily Democratic, though very conservative, and a critical region for Helms.

As the National Congressional Club unleashed its barrage of political advertising, the Hunt campaign stood idly by as it was unable to compete with the Club due to a lack of financial resources. In 1984, the Hunt campaign could not afford to run the same amount of newspaper, radio, and television advertisements, leaving Jim Hunt to play catch up as his campaign “nervously sat back and bided its time” as they “could not afford to get into a full-scale media war with the financially well-heeled Helms committee so early.”²⁸ The Hunt campaign lacked the financial resources to challenge the National Congressional Club’s advertising and fundraising expertise and watched its candidate’s lead decline quickly with the onslaught of the pro-Helms advertisements. The Helms campaign hoped that these political advertisements would erase Jim Hunt’s big lead in the polls, and they succeeded brilliantly. Jesse Helms narrowed Hunt’s twenty-point lead to just six points by October 1983, all the while using the politics of race to divide the electorate.²⁹

Jesse Helms won in 1972 in part due to his use of racial appeals to win support from conservative Democrats. The debates on the Voting Rights Act in 1982 and the King Holiday proposal in late 1983 provided Jesse Helms with his first major campaign themes. Racial issues were critical in turning the campaign around in Jesse Helms’s favor. In 1982, the Voting Rights Act came before Congress for renewal. Helms, whose opposition to the original legislation was on the record, took the lead in delaying its renewal in the Senate. Like many southern conservatives, Helms believed this legislation brought unwarranted federal oversight into issues better handled at the state level, a continuing source of resentment from the civil rights legislation of the 1960s. Without support from President Reagan or his fellow Senate

²⁸ *Raleigh News and Observer*, 2 February 1984; See Link, *Righteous Warrior*, p. 275 for a brief discussion of each campaign’s financial strategies.

²⁹ Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 275.

Republicans other than John East, Helms led a six-day filibuster against the Voting Rights Act. Despite his best intentions of “making senators aware of the implications of this bill,” Helms abandoned his filibuster and the bill passed the Senate 85-8.³⁰ Regardless of the outcome of the debate, Helms nonetheless demonstrated his ability to stand firm on issues he believed important, no matter how unpopular. While his resistance to federal civil rights legislation may have left liberals appalled, it cemented his credentials with conservatives, particularly those card-carrying members of the “New Right.”

Jesse Helms, who made his early career as a television journalist by attacking civil rights activists and black militants, lined up in opposition to the proposed Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday without hesitation. Helms led a month-long filibuster to prevent Senate passage of the bill establishing a national holiday in honor of King. In one of his many speeches, Helms pulled no punches in making clear his views on the legacy of the late civil rights leader. At the height of the Cold War, Helms framed his opposition in bluntly anti-communist terms. “King’s view of American society was not fundamentally different from the [American Communist Party] or of other Marxists,” Helms argued. “While he is generally remembered as the pioneer of civil rights for blacks and as the architect of non-violent techniques of dissent and political agitation, his hostility to and hatred for America should be made clear.” Additionally, Helms accused King of being “an irresponsible individual, careless of his own reputation and that of the civil rights movement for integrity and loyalty, [who] knowingly cooperated and sympathized with subversive and totalitarian elements under the control of a hostile foreign power.”³¹

³⁰ Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 259-261; Helms quoted on p. 261.

³¹ *Congressional Record*, 3 October 1983; Helms quoted in Luebke, *Tar Heel Politics 2000*, 175; *Charlotte Observer*, 5 October 1983; 14 October 1983; *Greensboro Daily News*, 14 September 1983; NCC Clipping Files, NCC; David J. Garrow, “The Helms Attack on King,” *Southern Exposure* Volume 12, No. 2, (March-April 1984): 12-15.

Despite Jesse Helms's best efforts, the bill gained Senate approval and President Reagan signed the legislation into law. Though he lost the battle, Helms continued to fight to turn his declining fortunes into political capital. The King debate proved to be the turning point in the Helms-Hunt campaign. For much of the previous two years, it appeared that Helms would face an uphill struggle should he choose to seek a third term in office. With his political future in jeopardy, Helms found an issue he knew would resonate with his constituency. Always an astute politician, Helms and the National Congressional Club then ran a series of political advertisements telling voters his position on the King Holiday and other issues. Although he failed to prevent the renewal of the Voting Rights Act and federal approval of the King Holiday, he stood by his controversial positions and refused to back down. Jesse Helms placed Jim Hunt on the defensive with a series of advertisements targeting Hunt's positions on various issues such as the King Holiday, President Reagan's military operations in Grenada, forced busing, and school prayer. Helms made it clear where he stood on the issues and then asked, "Where do you stand, Jim?"³²

Journalist Thomas Edsall later recalled the importance of this advertising tactic by the Helms campaign. "[Jesse] Helms broke the lead of former governor James B. Hunt, Jr. with ads describing Helms's battles on the Senate floor against making Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday a holiday, and then asking: 'Where do you stand, Jim?'"³³ For Helms, these early advertisements reinforced his support against racial traditionalists, especially those "Jessecrats" in rural eastern North Carolina. According to political scientist Merle Black, these ads marked a critical turning

³² Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 275-276.

³³ *Washington Post*, 5 October 1990. It was no coincidence that Thomas Edsall wrote this in the midst of another Helms reelection campaign, this time against former Charlotte Mayor Harvey Gantt, the first African-American candidate to run for the Senate in North Carolina. Like the Helms-Hunt campaign in 1984, the Helms-Gantt election in 1990 witnessed Helms's use of not-so-subtle racial appeals.

point in the campaign. “That was where he [Helms] recaptured his white majority. He did the equivalent of George Wallace standing in the schoolhouse door.”³⁴

The Voting Rights Act and King Holiday debates, however, were not the only political issues with racial undertones Helms used in his campaign against Jim Hunt. Helms sought to tie Hunt to civil rights leader and 1984 Democratic presidential candidate Jesse Jackson. Part of Jackson’s campaign was to increase the number of black voters in North Carolina, which the Helms campaign exploited in a series of political advertisements. Helms accused Hunt of complicity with Jackson’s plan to register new black voters and using taxpayer funds so that the State Board of Elections would increase minority voter registration.³⁵ Jesse Helms continued to use the politics of race to promote his reelection bid. The Helms campaign newspaper, for example, published a series of articles and advertisements connecting Jim Hunt to civil rights leader Jesse Jackson with headlines such as “Black Voter Registration Rises Sharply,” “Hunt Urges More Minority Registration,” and the “Hunt-Jackson Plan,” the latter of which Helms claimed would lead to an increased number of minority voters threatening his reelection. The Helms campaign’s use of Jesse Jackson was just as damaging as the “Mondale liberal” label and likely had an adverse effect on Hunt’s diverse political coalition that helped elect him to terms as governor. Jesse Jackson was probably as disliked by conservative white voters as Walter Mondale and Edward Kennedy. Jesse Helms’s use of divisive racial issues in his campaign materials worked wonders for his campaign, much like Willis Smith’s use of race-baiting politics

³⁴ Merle Black quoted in *Christian Science Monitor*, 9 November 1984. Although Helms never really “lost” his “white majority,” Black’s comments that this was a watershed event in the campaign are correct.

³⁵ Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 273-274.

to seize upon voters' emotions in 1950.³⁶ The idea of promoting black voter registration no doubt left many conservative Democrats, especially those in eastern North Carolina, unsettled.

Jim Hunt, hoping to gain support from black voters but also cautious to avoid a white backlash if he positioned himself too far to the left, took the middle ground in this potentially divisive debate, publicly expressing halfhearted support for the proposed King holiday.³⁷ Jim Hunt remained vulnerable to one of Helms's major criticisms of him as a politician: that he was too pragmatic and too often compromised his positions, while Helms stood his ground regardless of the unpopularity of his choices. Most importantly for Helms, these advertisements appeared months before Hunt's official announcement as a Senate candidate. Jim Hunt never had the opportunity to select the campaign issues, as Jesse Helms and the National Congressional Club controlled the agenda and set the tone for the campaign more than a year before the election.

On January 18, 1984, Jesse Helms broadcast a thirty-minute television advertisement in which he announced his intentions to seek a third Senate term, as well as reaffirming his opposition to the King Holiday, his anti-communist ideology, and his support for prayer in public schools. Jesse Helms challenged Jim Hunt to a debate, claiming that Hunt had so far failed to take a stand on these issues. "I frankly don't know where he stands on government spending. I don't know where he stands on prayer in the schools. I don't think he stands on anything. I think he stands pretty much wherever the political popularity may be."³⁸ In his announcement for reelection, Helms emphasized several key themes: race, culture, and Hunt's alleged weakness

³⁶ *Washington Post*, 15 June 1984, News Clipping, Box 18, McNeill Smith Papers, SHC. In a campaign letter, Jesse Helms targeted Jesse Jackson, mentioning him by name twenty-four times without a reference to Jim Hunt, although several photographs showed Jackson and Hunt together. Referring to Jackson's voter registration drive, Helms said "It's hit me like a ton of bricks—a monumental blow to my campaign." Helms claimed that Jackson's goal was to register "200,000 more 'straight ticket' anti-Helms voters in North Carolina." *Raleigh News and Observer*, 22 February 1984.

³⁷ Luebke, *Tar Heel Politics 2000*, 176.

³⁸ *Charlotte Observer*, 19 January 1984; Varley, "The Helms-Hunt Senate Race," Part B, p. 14.

of failing to take a stand on these issues. Helms used these themes repeatedly throughout the 1984 campaign. “I think it would be a tragedy for anybody to be elected to the Senate, or defeated for the Senate, with the people not understanding where the candidates stood.” Helms referred to the national economy, foreign policy, and the reestablishment of national values as “a wide array of issues that must be confronted in this campaign.”³⁹

Nearly one year after the Helms campaign began its advertising blitz and three weeks after Jesse Helms declared his intention to seek a third term, Jim Hunt officially announced his candidacy for the U.S. Senate on February 5, 1984. Focusing on his achievements as governor, Hunt spoke of a new vision for North Carolina and the nation. “I believe 1984 will be an important year for North Carolina—and for this nation. The decisions we make will set the course of our country, not just of the term of a Senator but for the rest of the century.” Jim Hunt’s message reflected his innovative strategies as governor of North Carolina. Blending the themes of fiscal conservatism with an activist government that characterized his time in public office, Hunt appealed to North Carolinians regardless of political affiliation. “I intend to be a United States Senator who works for a healthy and competitive economy that creates jobs and opportunities and I intend to be a Senator who works for a fair economy, where tax cuts go to working families and the middle class, and not just to loopholes and tax shelters for the rich.” Jim Hunt held North Carolina’s economy as a model for the nation and promised to take “the North Carolina approach—that makes things work—to our nation’s capital.” In addition to economic issues, Hunt revealed his hawkish leanings when he discussed his support for a strong

³⁹ *Raleigh News and Observer*, 19 January 1984.

national defense and the “military strength to defend freedom in the world, and the courage to save our world from nuclear war.”⁴⁰

Despite his brief comments on defense policy, Hunt made it clear that his campaign would focus on domestic issues, such as jobs, the economy, and education, as opposed to foreign policy and potentially divisive social issues such as abortion and school prayer. With his emphasis on economics, education, and jobs, Hunt’s campaign strongly reflected the state Democratic Party ideology. Hunt built his campaign on these economic issues, hoping that they would resonate with voters in his bid for the Senate. Jim Hunt’s record as governor would not be a liability if he were able to keep the campaign focused on these issues, making it unlikely for Helms to defeat Hunt. Jesse Helms, on the other hand, likely recognized that his opponent would face an even tougher battle if he kept the focus on national politics such as defense and foreign policy, as well as race and culture. After all, Helms and the National Congressional Club set the tone of the campaign in 1983 with their pro-Helms/anti-Hunt advertisements, and essentially spent the rest of the campaign in the driver’s seat.

Notably absent from Jim Hunt’s campaign announcement were the personal attacks that filled the airwaves during the National Congressional Club’s advertising war that began more than a year before the election. The Hunt campaign instead focused on the “The Four E’s”: economy, education, the environment, and the elderly, believing that this agenda “is what it takes to carry us to victory in 1984.”⁴¹ According to Hunt campaign manager Joe Grimsley, “the ads

⁴⁰ Jim Hunt Announcement Speech, 4 February 1984, Folder 311, Josephine Clement Papers, SHC. Jim Hunt echoed his hawkish defense policy in a 2008 interview. “There’s evil in this world and you have to fight it. A lot of people don’t understand about evil and therefore they are neutral about it or play games with it. You can’t do that. You have to be willing to fight for freedom and liberty and protect people.” Interview with Governor Jim Hunt by Daniel Menestres, 24 June 2008; See also Interview with Governor James B. Hunt by Jack D. Fleer, 10/3/2001 (C-0332), SOHP.

⁴¹ Varley, “The Helms-Hunt Senate Race,” Part B, p. 13, NCC. Hunt adviser Gary Pearce later expressed his displeasure with this campaign slogan. “You know, even the term itself sounded ludicrous—really Mickey Mouse”

were designed to take Jim's tie off, get him out of the governor's image and put him into a soft shirt, [walking] around, talking to human beings. It was really sort of humanizing Jim Hunt and getting him back to the people." The Hunt campaign summed up his twelve years of public service with the campaign slogan: "Jim Hunt: He can do more for North Carolina."⁴²

Both Jesse Helms and Jim Hunt enjoyed popular appeal among rural North Carolina voters, but Hunt had a lot of work to do in order to catch up to Helms's advertising advantage in 1984. The pro-Helms advertising blitz that saturated the airwaves and newspapers for months prior to Hunt's campaign announcement allowed Helms to chip away at Hunt's lead in the polls. The Hunt campaign could not compete with the National Congressional Club's fundraising expertise and as a result, did not make an earlier campaign announcement. Because of the damage done by the Helms campaign and a lack of comparable fundraising, Jim Hunt did not enjoy improved poll numbers after announcing his candidacy. In May 1984, Joe Grimsley explained the campaign's fiscal strategy. "We just sit here and take the lumps. We're not spending it [money]. We're going to wait until we see the whites of their eyes." While the Hunt campaign remained cautious regarding its expenditures, fearing the potential to overspend and lacking the financial resources to complete the campaign, the Helms campaign spent every dollar that came its way. The Hunt campaign ended with \$800,000 that it did not spend during the campaign. Hunt adviser Gary Pearce later said that Helms's financial strategy "was right, and ours was wrong."⁴³

and "it sort of trivializes what it's all about. I thought it was a very unfortunate phrase." Varley, "The Helms-Hunt Senate Race," Part B, p. 23, NCC.

⁴² Varley, "The Helms-Hunt Senate Race," Part B, p. 16, NCC.

⁴³ Grimsley quoted in *Christian Science Monitor*, 2 May 1984; Pearce quoted in Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 275.

As a result of its superior fundraising and political advertising, Jesse Helms and the National Congressional Club controlled the campaign agenda, shifting the focus from Jim Hunt's gubernatorial record to Helms's positions on the issues. Not surprisingly, Helms and his surrogates prodded Hunt to take a stand on what Helms considered his "issues." Senator John East, North Carolina's junior Republican said, "I think it is worth asking the governor about his stands on...other issues. No longer can the governor hide in the bland world of being governor, where you cut ribbons and talk about puffy things like education."⁴⁴ Whether or not East's comments on Hunt's education policy were representative of the North Carolina Republican Party, he nonetheless drove home an important point: Helms should force Hunt to debate conservative social issues such as abortion and school prayer. Helms informed voters where he stood on these issues in the well-financed media blitz conducted by the National Congressional Club, a strategic and tactical campaign decision that provided Helms's reelection campaign with the momentum it so sorely lacked in 1982 and 1983. Jim Hunt acknowledged in the middle of the campaign that Jesse Helms held the upper hand from the beginning. "His [Helms] pounding for fourteen months when we couldn't answer on television obviously took its toll."⁴⁵

The Hunt campaign entered its second phase in March 1984. According to Joe Grimsley, the campaign's initial advertisements set out to show voters that "Jim Hunt has a reason for being in public life—that he is personally motivated." Hunt finally went on the offensive, no longer content to sit on the sidelines. For the first time, the Hunt campaign publicly criticized Jesse Helms for his votes in favor of raising the tax on tobacco products and his failure to

⁴⁴ John East quoted in *Raleigh News and Observer*, 16 February 1984. Senator East narrowly defeated incumbent Democratic Senator Robert Morgan in 1980, swept into office on Ronald Reagan's coattails. East was formerly a political science professor at East Carolina University recruited by the National Congressional Club. He committed suicide in 1986.

⁴⁵ Hunt quoted in *Washington Post*, 15 June 1984, News Clipping, Box 18, McNeill Smith Papers, SHC.

support education by voting against federal student loans, reading programs, Project Headstart, and vocational education programs.⁴⁶

Jim Hunt emphasized his achievements as governor and how the “North Carolina model” could work at the national level. Pointing to the large number of manufacturing jobs created and sizable industrial development in North Carolina since taking office in 1977, Hunt promised to take the “North Carolina approach to Washington... [Where] I believe that together we can develop national economic policies that bring increased prosperity to our state and new strength, vigor, competitiveness, and confidence to the nation.” Hunt also voiced strong support for a constitutional amendment requiring a balanced budget, as well as investments in education and increased exports for long-term economic development. He reiterated his support for national defense, but also proposed a reduction in federal spending with “better management practices” and by “cutting out waste” in the defense budget.⁴⁷

Jim Hunt continued to criticize Jesse Helms’s failure to help North Carolinians. In a March 1984 speech, Hunt touched on a number of pressing issues such as Social Security and Medicare, jobs, federal farm policies, the working-class, the environment, and federal deficit reduction, essentially the cornerstone of his Senate campaign. Hunt believed these issues were of great importance to North Carolina voters and he attempted to bring them to the forefront of his campaign platform. He challenged Jesse Helms to take a stand on these issues while avoiding the hot-button social issues championed by Jesse Helms. In 1984, each candidate concentrated on the issues most pertinent to their experiences in government.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ *Raleigh News and Observer*, 18 March 1984.

⁴⁷ Press Conference on Economic Policy, 2 March 1984, Folder 311, Josephine Clement Papers, SHC.

⁴⁸ Governor Jim Hunt Press Conference Statement, 19 March 1984, Folder 312, Josephine Clement Papers, SHC.

With the national economy sufficiently recovered from its earlier recession, talk of deficit reduction failed to spark voter interest as it did in previous years. The emergence of conservative political interest groups such as Jerry Falwell's "Moral Majority" helped shift the issues to social issues such as abortion, school prayer, and the reinstatement of traditional family values. In 1984, these issues stirred voter sentiment in 1984 much more so than education policy and Social Security. This was especially true in an election year in which President Reagan epitomized the return of conservative social values allegedly threatened by liberals and the Democratic Party. These conservative social issues stirred emotions and provoked fierce debates in 1984, resulting in many new voters and former Democrats joining the Republican ranks. Just as Jesse Jackson sought to increase black voter registration to promote his presidential candidacy and the Democratic Party, Jesse Helms's reelection campaign provoked similar reactions from his supporters. More than 113,000 blacks in North Carolina registered to vote between October 1982 and May 1984, with 77,000 of that total number registering in the early months of 1984. While the number of black voters increased considerably in the months leading up to the Helms-Hunt campaign, so too did white voter registration. In 1984, more than 142,348 additional white North Carolinians became registered voters, with at least half of this number being evangelical Christians.⁴⁹ By the early 1980s, Jesse Helms emerged as the one of the leading spokesman for the growing number of disaffected conservative evangelical Christians seeking a voice in national politics. In 1984, his status brought in millions in campaign contributions from supporters across the United States and no doubt encouraged many to become actively involved with politics.

⁴⁹ Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 290.

Jesse Helms, Ronald Reagan, and the Republican Party

In 1984, Republicans found the party unity that eluded them for much of the 1970s. In stark contrast to the persistent factionalism that plagued the party for much of the previous decade, the state and national party united in solidarity in a manner that closely mirrored the events of 1972. Republican unity created a formidable challenge for Democrats, both at the state and national level, in an election year with tremendous implications for the development of two-party politics in the South.

Ronald Reagan had long been a popular figure in North Carolina. With his surprise victory over President Gerald Ford in the state's 1976 Republican primary election, Reagan emerged as a viable Republican candidate for national office. In 1980, Reagan defeated Democratic incumbent President Jimmy Carter, a native southerner, with a near-sweep of the South, and established himself as the central figure in the rise of the Republican Party in the former one-party region. Just as Reagan's election victory in 1980 boosted the fortunes of several Republican candidates in 1980, including John East, Helms needed the full force of the Reagan machine in 1984 to defeat Jim Hunt, his most powerful adversary yet.

Throughout 1984, Jesse Helms openly tied his campaign to Reagan's reelection. Helms proudly displayed party solidarity with the popular president. He downplayed his disagreements with Reagan, one of many inconsistencies noted by the Hunt campaign.⁵⁰ According to Senate records, Helms voted against Reagan approximately forty-one percent of the time. Helms's voting record gave him the second highest opposition record to President Reagan's policies in the Senate. As one of the most outspoken conservative members of the Senate, Helms earned many headlines for his opposition to Reagan's proposals. For example, in 1983 Helms supported

⁵⁰ For more on Helms and Reagan, see Snider, *Helms and Hunt*, 70-77.

Reagan's decision to end the century-old ban on diplomatic ties between the United States and the Vatican. One year later, however, as the Senate debated the bill, Helms opposed President Reagan's plan to restore formal diplomatic relations with the Holy See and used his power to postpone the vote on Senate approval of Ambassador William A. Wilson.⁵¹

Jesse Helms made a name for himself among conservative circles as a vociferous opponent of uncontrolled federal spending and, at least on paper, favored a balanced budget. However, Helms remained tight-lipped when the federal deficit ballooned during Reagan's first term in office. According to Helms, the increase was due to numerous "entitlement" programs placed in the budget by tax-and-spend liberals. He remained vague about these alleged "entitlements" but denied that he referred to Social Security, one of the lasting influences of the liberal New Deal and Great Society and the sort of wasteful, big government programs he loved to attack. Helms called the federal food stamp program "full of fraud" and proposed slashing its budget by fifty percent while also reducing other social welfare spending.⁵² His statements against taxpayer-supported handouts, such as "I don't think any program is entitled to anything from your pockets which you worked for," won many supporters in 1984. At the same time, Helms conveniently ignored his Senate record, such as his vote in favor of raising the tobacco tax as part of a multi-billion dollar spending bill. In addition, he also spearheaded Senate opposition to the ratification of the international genocide treaty supported by President Reagan.

⁵¹ Hunt's voting record is the subject of official Hunt campaign correspondence. Joe Grimsley to Hunt Campaign, 26 January 1984, Folder 311, Josephine Clement Papers, SHC. For Helms's opposition to diplomatic relations with the Vatican, see *Raleigh News and Observer*, 3 February 1984, 5 February 1984, 23 February 1984. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee voted 9-1 to confirm Wilson as ambassador to the Vatican, with the Helms casting the sole "no" vote.

⁵² Snider, *Helms and Hunt*, 72.

Helms and Reagan put aside their differences in 1984 in order to present a unified front against Walter Mondale and, in Helms's case, Jim Hunt.⁵³

Despite their differences, President Reagan and Jesse Helms shared much in common, especially an anti-communist foreign policy, and Helms received President Reagan's full support in his bid for a third Senate term. The White House recognized that Helms was in trouble, and needing an ally in the Senate, the president threw his considerable weight behind the North Carolina senator. On a campaign visit to North Carolina in October 1984, President Reagan told the crowd, "Do you know how hard he [Helms] works for your state? He's one of my greatest supporters, too." Secretary of the Treasury Donald T. Regan voiced the administration's support for Helms when he stated, "On balance, he [Helms] is very supportive of the president's policies. When push comes to shove...Jesse Helms is there."⁵⁴

Jesse Helms's comeback coincided with the emergence of the 1984 presidential campaign. Running on the same ticket as Ronald Reagan during a landmark election year provided Helms with an advantage that Jim Hunt did not enjoy. Jesse Helms successfully framed his candidacy as a referendum on the political viability of the president, and by extension, the perceived weakness of Jim Hunt and Walter Mondale. Helms benefited from Reagan's strong showing in North Carolina, where Reagan enjoyed a two-to-one lead over Mondale following the wide lead for the duration of the campaign. However, despite Mondale's lack of popular support among voters in North Carolina, Jesse Helms never enjoyed the same level of comfort in his reelection bid as did Reagan.

⁵³ Helms quoted in Luebke, *Tar Heel Politics 2000*, 174; *Raleigh News and Observer*, 16 September 1984, 11 October 1984.

⁵⁴ President Reagan quoted in *Raleigh News and Observer*, 9 October 1984; Treasury Secretary Donald Regan quoted in *Raleigh News and Observer*, 8 September 1984.

Jim Hunt, Walter Mondale, and the Democratic Party

Unlike Jesse Helms's close relationship with Ronald Reagan, Jim Hunt was not eager to tie his campaign to that of Democratic presidential nominee Walter Mondale or the national Democratic Party. Jim Hunt built his political career on the strength of the state Democratic Party, and overcame an unpopular national party to win election as lieutenant governor in 1972 and as governor in 1980. Hunt proved that he did not need the national Democratic Party behind his campaign despite the emergence of two-party politics that ended his party's electoral dominance in southern politics. Unlike Helms, Hunt's political fortunes had the potential to rise and fall with the state, rather than national, party. The differences between Hunt, a moderate-to-conservative southern Democrat, and Mondale, an outspoken liberal, were too great for Hunt to ally himself with the national Democratic Party in 1984. Hunt and Mondale differed on tax reduction, federal spending, and defense expenditures, three critical issues in national politics during the presidential election. Ronald Reagan made it palatable for southerners to identify as Republicans and the national Democratic Party did little to counter the growing strength of the Republican Party in the South, consistently failing to find moderate southern Democrats to run for national office. More importantly, Reagan made it possible not only for southern Democrats to vote Republican, but also to register as Republicans, the true test of political loyalty. Republicans closed ranks behind President Reagan in 1984, while Walter Mondale did little to inspire the fortunes of southern Democrats.

The most significant difference between Hunt and Mondale surfaced when Mondale suggested that a tax increase, in addition to the closing of loopholes and spending cuts, was necessary to curb the growing federal deficit. To support a tax increase during an election year was political suicide. Jim Hunt countered by proposing the closure of tax loopholes and

reducing expenditures without raising taxes. “We’ve balanced our state budget every year for the past eight years,” Hunt said. “We’ve proved that we can have both a fiscally responsible government and a fair and caring government.” Jim Hunt also took aim at Jesse Helms’s economic policies, criticizing his lack of support for “rooting out waste and inefficiency out of those huge military contracts.”⁵⁵

Further distancing Mondale from Hunt was the issue of defense spending. Walter Mondale’s proposed defense cuts were not only unpopular in a state such as North Carolina with a large military population, but with the looming threat of the “Evil Empire,” Vice President George Bush countered that such proposals posed a threat to national security. In 1984, the mere mention of reducing defense expenditures was as unpopular as talk of raising taxes. President Reagan used these two key components of Mondale’s platform to demonstrate that the national Democratic Party was out of touch with American values. Jesse Helms used Walter Mondale’s proposals to attack Jim Hunt and tied his opponent to Mondale, the epitome of everything that Helms believed was wrong with the liberal establishment in America.⁵⁶

The Republican Party tagged Walter Mondale a “tax-and-spend” liberal in 1984 and this label most certainly did not help Democrats running for office, Jim Hunt in particular. Helms’s supporters were more than willing to link Hunt to Mondale, especially when Hunt was himself reluctant to do so. In its effort to transform Hunt’s image among North Carolinians, characterized Hunt as a “Mondale liberal,” an extremely damaging and perhaps fatal label for many southern Democrats in 1984. One Helms campaign advertisement went as far as to label

⁵⁵ *Raleigh News and Observer*, 4 September 1984.

⁵⁶ *Raleigh News and Observer*, 11 September 1984. In his speech, Bush appealed to Democrats who “feel the national party in Washington, controlled by special interests and the most liberal elements of the party, have simply shut them out.” Jim Hunt made clear his support for national defense with his endorsement of the B-1 bomber, the MX missile, a 600-ship Navy, air-launched cruise missiles, Pershing II missiles in Europe, and new light infantry units. *Raleigh News and Observer*, 28 October 1984.

Walter Mondale a “Jim Hunt liberal.” According to political scientists Earl Black and Merle Black, “Nowhere was the liability of the ‘Mondale liberal’ label used more effectively than in the North Carolina Senate Race between incumbent Republican Senator and Democratic Governor James B. Hunt.”⁵⁷

The Helms campaign made up for lost ground with a never-ending supply of advertisements that tied Jim Hunt to Walter Mondale. No matter how hard Hunt tried to distance himself from the national party and define himself as a southern Democrat, he simply could not shake the association with Walter Mondale. Hunt’s fiscal conservatism, support for the death penalty, and anti-crime legislation won over many conservatives while serving as governor. Yet, when he faced Jesse Helms, his conservative positions paled in comparison to those of North Carolina’s senior senator. Not only did Jim Hunt have to campaign against Jesse Helms, he also had to run against Walter Mondale.

In response to the accusations that he was a “Mondale liberal,” Jim Hunt defended his record by staking out conservative positions on several issues, including the death penalty, supporting foreign aid to the anti-communist Contras in Nicaragua, prayer in public schools, and President Reagan’s defense policy. Jesse Helms responded that he would be “glad to share my prayer book with the governor. It might have been helpful if he had taken this position earlier, but better late than never.” Hunt received considerable criticism for his “Johnny-come-lately” conservatism.⁵⁸ In 1983, Jim Hunt publicly announced his opposition to any potential nuclear freeze, one of the few issues on which he and Jesse Helms shared common ideological ground.

⁵⁷ “Jim Hunt liberal” advertisement in *Raleigh News and Observer*, 18 October 1984; Earl Black and Merle Black, *The Vital South: How Presidents Are Elected* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 260.

⁵⁸ Helms quoted in *Raleigh News and Observer*, 7 March 1984; Luebke, *Tar Heel Politics 2000*, 178. For editorial criticisms of Hunt, see *Raleigh News and Observer*, 29 January 1984. The newspaper’s editorial, “‘Me too-ism’ by Hunt” criticized Hunt for failing to stake out his own position on foreign policy, instead supporting Reagan’s hard line, military-oriented Central American policy, a strategy that even Helms believed was too soft on the communist menace in America’s backyard.

As an attempt to reach out to conservative voters, Hunt's public stand on foreign policy issues did not achieve the desired results, likely because Jesse Helms was far more conservative and more vocal in his support of these positions. Hunt's late shift on these issues, as Paul Luebke noted, "perhaps even backfired." It was unlikely for conservative voters to switch their loyalties during the course of the campaign, as Hunt could not compete with Helms on these issues. As one astute political observer noted in 1984, "it is simply impossible to out-Helms [Jesse] Helms" on conservative social issues.⁵⁹

Jesse Helms did not limit his use of the "Mondale liberal" character attacks to campaign advertisements. In the new age of media and character-driven politics, the televised campaign debates in 1984 assumed a critical importance. During the second campaign debate in September 1984, Helms stated, "Mr. Hunt doesn't want you to know it, but he's a Mondale liberal and ashamed of it. I'm a Reagan conservative and proud of it...What is it about these two figures [Walter Mondale and Edward Kennedy] that you admire so much?" Helms did not simply mention Mondale, he also invoked the name of Massachusetts Senator Edward Kennedy, a favorite scourge of conservatives in the "age of Reagan." When he tied Hunt to Mondale and Kennedy, Helms no doubt reminded many voters of the reasons why they left the Democratic Party in droves in the 1970s and 1980s.⁶⁰ The Democratic Party was at a crossroads in 1984, as

⁵⁹ For Hunt's position on the nuclear freeze, see *Raleigh News and Observer*, 1 March 1983, NCC Clipping File. Luebke quoted in *Tar Heel Politics 2000*, 178. Luebke asks: "Why would Helms-leaning whites switch allegiance when Helms held the same positions and had supported them with greater fervor? Committed white and black Democrats, particularly in the metro Piedmont counties, wondered on the other hand why they should work their precinct for Hunt if he was determined to blur his differences from Helms. The effect was to engender disenchantment among Hunt's most ideological backers without winning back support from large numbers of uneducated whites." Luebke, *Tar Heel Politics 2000*, 178-179; Quote about Helms in *Washington Post*, 15 June 1984, News Clipping, Box 18, McNeill Smith Papers, SHC.

⁶⁰ *Raleigh News and Observer*, 10 September 1984. Snider, *Helms and Hunt*, 165; Black and Black, *The Vital South*, 260. In 1982, the state GOP issued a press release that tied Hunt to 1972 Democratic presidential nominee George McGovern. "Governor Jim Hunt is demonstrating again this weekend that he is too liberal for North Carolina as he entertains George McGovern's old campaign manager—[Colorado] Senator Gary Hart—at a \$100 a head reception and fundraiser for Jim Hunt's political machine. While Jim Hunt's elite liberal cronies are clinking

Walter Mondale made it unpopular and difficult to be a Democrat in the South, and across much of the nation. According to one prominent Democrat and cofounder of the Democratic Leadership Council, the national Democratic Party “was an albatross on a lot of people as we saw with Jim Hunt in 1984.” As far as Jesse Helms was concerned, even a moderate-to-conservative Democrat such as Jim Hunt was a “liberal,” despite his tremendous differences with his party’s presidential candidate.⁶¹

Jim Hunt recognized the damage done by Helms’s media blitz and his use of the term “Mondale liberal.” To these allegations, Hunt emphatically replied, “he’s [Helms] running against me for [the] Senate—not against Walter Mondale.” In an effort to distance himself from the Democratic presidential nominee, Jim Hunt declared himself “part of a new generation of Democrats...like [Virginia Governor] Chuck Robb and [South Carolina Governor] Dick Riley and [Georgia Senator] Sam Nunn and Governor [Robert] Graham in Florida. People who believe in three things...balanced budgets, economic growth, and providing jobs [as well as] racial justice and people working together.”⁶² Unfortunately, by tying himself to other Sunbelt Democrats, Jim Hunt may have further reinforced the view that his campaign would not go beyond issues such as economic development and jobs.

Jim Hunt acknowledged late in the 1984 campaign that he supported Walter Mondale despite their many ideological differences, but also hoped that Mondale “won’t tow anybody’s party line.” Hunt’s campaign manager recognized the problems that Mondale’s candidacy posed

champagne glasses this weekend, Jim Hunt might take a moment to explain to the voters of North Carolina if he differs any from his McGovernite crony.” NC Republican Party Press Release, NCC Clipping File.

⁶¹ Jon F. Hale, “The Making of the New Democrats,” *Political Science Quarterly* 110, No. 2 (Summer 1995): 207-232; “albatross” quote on p. 214.

⁶² *Raleigh News and Observer*, 28 September 1984. Jesse Helms stated that Hunt and Mondale were “inseparable” and asked “How do you separate them? They are Siamese twins.” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 24 September 1984. Hunt later tied Helms to the “radical right wing” of the GOP, including Jerry Falwell’s Moral Majority that plans to “take over North Carolina.” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 7 October 1984.

to Jim Hunt in his bid to unseat Jesse Helms. “We are definitely hurt by the low level of support of Mondale in North Carolina,” Joe Grimsley noted. “It is not liberal vs. conservative; it is Reagan vs. Mondale in political popularity at this point in time. In 1972 we survived a similar landslide as Lieutenant Governor. As a federal candidate our race is more closely tied to national politics.” Much to the chagrin of southern Democrats in 1984, the face of the national party was neither Jim Hunt nor Sam Nunn; but it was instead Walter Mondale. Toward the end of his campaign, Hunt and his advisers avoided all mention of Mondale and did everything but openly disassociate themselves from the party’s presidential nominee. The new campaign strategy that was perhaps too little too late, requested that Hunt supporters “help tie our state races to the local Democratic race” to prevent a further exodus of Democrats from the party.⁶³ While this campaign illuminated the growing gulf between southern Democrats and the national party, and pushed many southern Democrats to join the Republican Party, Hunt remained a Democrat. Despite some disagreements with the national Democratic Party, Hunt later stated, “I’ve never had any qualms about which party was best.”⁶⁴

In the spring of 1983, the Helms campaign began a long-term advertising campaign more than a year before the Senate election. Targeting the conservative region of eastern North Carolina, Jesse Helms presented himself as the guardian of North Carolina’s tobacco crop,

⁶³ Jim Hunt quoted in *Raleigh News and Observer*, 24 September 1984; Joe Grimsley to Hunt Campaign, 19 September 1984, Folder 310, Josephine Clement Papers, SHC [emphasis in the original]; Jim Hunt to McNeill Smith, 22 October 1984, Box 18, McNeill Smith Papers, SHC. Jim Hunt did not attend Walter Mondale’s campaign rally in Asheville in August 1984 as he had already “committed to going ahead” with a planned family vacation at the beach. While there is no evidence to suggest that Hunt purposely skipped the Mondale fundraiser, it is nonetheless symbolic of the distance between the two candidates, and provides a microcosm of the divide between southern Democrats and the national Democratic Party. *Raleigh News and Observer*, 8 September 1984. Several news articles highlight the concern of Democrats across the nation, particularly those in the South, who hoped to avoid Mondale’s coattails. See *Raleigh News and Observer*, 8 September 1984, 18 September 1984, 4 October 1984. In September 1984, a Gallup Poll reported that Helms enjoyed a slight lead over Hunt (48.5% to 44.5%) while Reagan polled 62% compared to Mondale’s 34% among North Carolina voters. See Joe Grimsley’s aforementioned campaign memorandum.

⁶⁴ Interview with Governor James B. Hunt, by Daniel Menestres, 6/24/2008.

opponent of big government, and staunch supporter of President Reagan. His Senate voting record, however, easily contradicted all of these so-called Helms “virtues.”⁶⁵ The Hunt campaign failed to respond to these advertisements and slowly watched its sizable lead disappear over the course of several months as Jesse Helms began an improbable comeback. Helms used the debates over the Voting Rights Act and the King Holiday to gain support from racial conservatives and using his position on these issues, the later in particular, to make Hunt out to be nothing more than a pragmatic politician lacking firm beliefs, while holding himself up as the ideologically committed politician.

Late in the campaign, the *Washington Post* reported that “race has been a strong undercurrent in the Helms campaign,” and through his use of thinly veiled racial appeals, “Helms is believed to have stirred a backlash among conservative white voters,” the latter of whom were critical in deciding the outcome of the election, and courted by both Helms and Hunt. These comments suggested that the politics of race resonated strongly in 1984. While some scholars argued that the politics of race declined in importance by the 1980s, racial conservatism nonetheless played an important role and remained part of North Carolina politics during this decade. Although it lacked the vitriol employed by southern demagogues in the early twentieth century, it nonetheless remained prevalent in southern politics and proved critical in the Helms-Hunt race.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Luebke, *Tar Heel Politics 2000*, 175.

⁶⁶ “\$21 Million Dead Heat: N.C. Senate Race Expensive and Mean,” *Washington Post*, 28 October 1984. In *Politics and Society in the South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), Earl Black and Merle Black focus on the socioeconomic transformation of the post-1945 South, not race, as the key component in the development of two-party politics. In his biography of George Wallace, historian Dan T. Carter makes it abundantly clear that the politics of race was the primary factor in the transformation of both regional and national politics in the late twentieth century. See Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics*, 2d ed., (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000). See also Carter’s *From George Wallace to Newt Gingrich: Race in the Conservative Counterrevolution, 1963-1994* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996).

The bitterness and divisiveness of the Helms-Hunt campaign, however, extended well beyond the politics of race. Throughout the campaign, each candidate claimed they focused on the issues while, at the same time, attacking each other in the media. The nasty tone of the campaign helped shift the focus from the issues at hand to the candidates' personalities. Jesse Helms and Jim Hunt, who had so far served in elected office for a combined total of twenty-four years, did not sit idly by as their political experience took a back seat to personal attacks and character assassinations, the likes of which had not been seen since the Frank Graham-Willis Smith Senate primary in 1950.

The Helms for Senate Committee published a half-page advertisement in the *Raleigh News and Observer* accusing Jim Hunt's fundraisers of coercing campaign contributions from state employees. One "employee" profiled by the Helms campaign in the advertisement feared that the request, "Wouldn't you like to contribute to Governor Hunt's campaign?" was the equivalent of "Wouldn't you pay to keep your job?" The advertisement and subsequent news articles originated in the *Washington Times*, but the writer later admitted that he did not attempt to confirm the allegations.⁶⁷ Jim Hunt earned the trust of North Carolina voters as much through his clean-cut image and strong credibility as much as his achievements as governor. The personal attacks that dominated the Helms-Hunt campaign likely caused many voters to change their opinions of Jim Hunt, who enjoyed high approval ratings prior to the Senate campaign. The allegations of coerced campaign fundraising, however, marked only the beginning of a malicious campaign.

⁶⁷ *Raleigh News and Observer*, 24 April 1984, 6 July 1984. *The Landmark*, a Chapel Hill weekly that would later make headlines of its own in the Helms-Hunt campaign, also published this story. In the wake of the fundraising allegations directed at the Hunt campaign, the North Carolina Republican Party called on Hunt to return contributions from state employees. *Raleigh News and Observer*, 17 May 1984.

Jesse Helms publicly condemned Jim Hunt for his criticisms of President Reagan, notwithstanding the fact that Helms was far more vocal than Hunt in his disapproval of Reagan. Jim Hunt pointed to several occasions where Helms disagreed with the president's policies, including foreign aid to Central America, relations with China and the Soviet Union, and Social Security. Jesse Helms responded to Hunt's accusations by blaming the liberal "reluctance in the Congress of the United States." In the midst of a deep freeze in Soviet-American relations, Helms not surprisingly framed his response in decidedly patriotic terms. "I plead guilty to being opposed to communism and I plead guilty to doing everything I can do to stop it—in Central America or otherwise." On the issue of Social Security, Jim Hunt accused Jesse Helms of voting against minimum benefits three times, in addition to having "voted against your president and the bipartisan plan to save the program." Jesse Helms responded, "You can't play politics with this program as you are doing...Ted Kennedy does it, and [New York Senator Daniel] Moynihan, it's across the board." Jim Hunt promised to safeguard Social Security, with statements such as "I support cost-of-living adjustments. I will fight to keep Social Security universal and strong," and reminded voters that his opponent once called the program "disguised welfare."⁶⁸

Jim Hunt's critical assessment of Jesse Helms's position on Social Security had little influence at best, simply because it was not a campaign issue in 1984. Helms effectively made the problems plaguing the federal government and the nation the result of liberals' meddling in governmental affairs, a point not missed by voters. Helms used his service in the Senate, especially his experience on the Foreign Relations Committee, and his chairmanship of the Subcommittee on Western Hemispheric Affairs, to prove to voters that he was better suited for

⁶⁸ *Raleigh News and Observer*, 30 July 1984; Hunt's position on Social Security is outlined in Jim Hunt to McNeill Smith, 27 October 1984, Box 18, McNeill Smith Papers, SHC.

the job because of his familiarity with foreign policy. Although Jim Hunt broadened his campaign's focus to include issues such as national defense, nuclear policy, and foreign affairs, he had little chance to defeat Helms on these issues.

During the 1984 campaign, Jesse Helms positioned himself as the candidate supportive of President Reagan's programs and therefore the best and most practical choice to represent North Carolina in the U.S. Senate. Helms did his best in the campaign debates and political advertisements to demonstrate that a vote for Jim Hunt was tantamount to voting for Walter Mondale. "The choice is clear," Helms stated, "If you subscribe to Mondale's liberalism and oppose Ronald Reagan, you should vote [for Hunt]." A vote for Jesse Helms, on the other hand, was a sign of support for President Reagan's conservative agenda. Helms argued that Jim Hunt was no different from Mondale in his criticisms of the president, further adding to the "liberal" stigma that plagued Jim Hunt in 1984. With no evidence to support his assertion, Helms claimed that Mondale "viciously attacked" President Reagan and that Jim Hunt applauded these attacks.⁶⁹

Jim Hunt placed his gubernatorial record at the center of his campaign in 1984, headlined with economic development, education reform, fiscal responsibility, and jobs. Strongly influenced by Governor Terry Sanford's emphasis on education in the early 1960s, Hunt's tenure as governor included pay raises for teachers and improved standardized test scores, among other achievements. In 1980, National Congressional Club-backed Republican gubernatorial candidate I. Beverly Lake, Jr. could not exploit Hunt's first term as governor for political gain. Four years later, however, Jesse Helms used Jim Hunt's record to indict the governor for being out of touch with traditional values.

For example, Jesse Helms pointed to Hunt's support of the failed 1983 legislation to allow teachers to deduct their dues to the North Carolina Association of Educators from their

⁶⁹ *Raleigh News and Observer*, 10 September 1984.

paychecks, a plan opposed by the North Carolina School Board Association. According to Helms, approval of this law by the General Assembly “would have brought teachers’ unions to North Carolina,” Jim Hunt’s opposition to this plan notwithstanding. In addition, Helms accused Hunt of having “jerked” educators around by supporting pay raises only during election years. In response to the accusation that he failed to support public education, Helms claimed he had voted against several education bills in the Senate because they “would have allowed the federal government to expand their control over our schools.” Jesse Helms successfully used the issue of an overbearing and out-of-control federal government to argue against the extension of federal control over matters he believed better handled by individual states, not the U.S. Department of Education.⁷⁰

When Jesse Helms invoked fears of teachers’ unions in North Carolina, he was well aware of the longtime animosity toward organized labor in the South. The National Congressional Club used television advertisements to connect Jim Hunt to labor unions by displaying the names and amount contributed by labor interests to the Hunt campaign. This illustrated the problems that unions faced in the South, especially in a state that had long harbored anti-organized labor sentiment as a cornerstone of its conservative traditionalism. Jim Hunt, on the other hand, embraced the support of labor unions and earned the endorsement of the state AFL-CIO. Hunt presented himself as a friend of the working-class and attacked Helms’s relationship with special interest groups, which led to further accusations by both Helms and Hunt over the influence and involvement of organized labor in the 1984 campaign. During his tenure as governor, Hunt enjoyed a strong relationship with modernizing business interests. Jesse Helms, however, remained vehemently opposed to labor unions, which helped him gain

⁷⁰ *Raleigh News and Observer*, 16 September 1984. Jim Hunt began the 1984 legislative session calling for a 15% pay raise for teachers, college scholarships for prospective teachers, increased curricula, and upgrade vocational programs.

support from traditional business interests, and consistently voted in favor of tax breaks for new industrial development, thus gaining favor from business leaders who may have otherwise supported Jim Hunt. In 1984, modernizer business interests did not necessarily view Hunt as the most pro-business candidate to preserve the status quo in the relationship between business and government. Organized labor's strong support for Jim Hunt undoubtedly left many unsure of the extent of his support for management. In addition, Walter Mondale's proposed tax increases likely did little to add to business leaders' confidence about Democratic politicians.⁷¹

Jesse Helms challenged Jim Hunt on several issues, including civil rights, religion, and labor, but also cultural issues that entered the Helms-Hunt campaign and divided the electorate. Foreshadowing the gay marriage issue that entered national political discourse in 2004, homosexuality as a politically charged issue first emerged prominently in the Helms-Hunt campaign twenty years earlier. The growing influence of the Christian Right brought about increased attention to issues such as morality, family values, and alleged social deviancy. Homosexuality became one of their favorite targets in their bid to "purify" America through political involvement and the restoration of supposed "traditional values." Consequently, due to his vocal opposition to abortion and homosexuality, Jesse Helms emerged as an icon of the Christian Right in the 1980s. Helms broadened his influence among conservatives far beyond Congress through his involvement with the Moral Majority and other fundamentalist Christian groups.⁷² This issue hit especially close to home in the South, home to a growing number of conservative evangelical Christians and an increasing number of Republicans who identified

⁷¹ On the Helms campaign advertisements, see Luebke, *Tar Heel Politics 2000*, 111-126, especially 112. For the relationship between Jim Hunt and organized labor, see *Raleigh News and Observer*, 27 September 1984. Hunt acknowledged that Helms would criticize him for speaking to the AFL-CIO. "I'm sure he [Helms] is going to make something out of my visit today. He can say whatever he wants to. We'll answer that gentleman on November 6." *Raleigh News and Observer*, 21 September 1984. For more on organized labor and the Helms-Hunt campaign, see *Christian Science Monitor*, 2 May 1984.

⁷² Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 290-294.

themselves as part of the Christian Right. Not surprisingly, southern Republicans used homosexuality as a campaign issue against Democrats in the early 1980s.⁷³ While the politics of race remained vital in 1984, the issue of homosexuality became just as important in the Helms-Hunt campaign and defined the last months of the campaign.

In addition to targeting Hunt on issues such as the King Holiday, his views on abortion and school prayer, among others, the North Carolina Republican Party ran several advertisements questioning Hunt's connection with gay rights groups and his support for anti-discrimination legislation. Reflecting the growing influence of the Christian Right in southern politics, North Carolina GOP chairman David Flaherty repeatedly hit Jim Hunt with allegations of homosexuals' involvement in Hunt's fundraising efforts.⁷⁴ Jesse Helms railed openly against homosexuality as a threat to "traditional values" and publicly linked homosexual groups to Jim Hunt. "He's locked into the gay rights movement, the far-out feminist crowd, the labor union bosses and so forth. I think the public deserves to know who is supporting me and anyone else running for political office...I'm proud of everyone who is supporting me," said Helms.⁷⁵ However, much of the Helms campaign's "attack on sexuality" came from Helms supporters, campaign representatives, or third party activists supporting Helms.⁷⁶ Regardless of who was in charge of the campaign's dirty work, this issue dominated the headlines in the summer of 1984,

⁷³ Joe Herzenberg, "Gay-baiting in Southern Politics," *Southern Exposure*, Volume 13, No. 5 (September-October 1985): 17-18, NCC Clipping File. Herzenberg looks at this issue in the context of Mississippi's 1983 gubernatorial campaign, in which Democratic Attorney General Bill Allain defeated Republican Leon Bramlett despite a campaign advertisement featuring black drag queens alleging a sexual relationship with Allain. Herzenberg also examines the influence of homosexuality in the 1984 Texas Senate race between Republican Phil Gramm and Democrat Lloyd Doggett, in which Gramm accused Doggett of "undermining family values" and "pandering to homosexuals." Doggett could not shake these accusations and lost to Gramm 59% to 41%.

⁷⁴ *Raleigh News and Observer*, 7 June 1984, 17 June 1984.

⁷⁵ *The Daily Tar Heel*, 16 April 1984, NCC Clipping File.

⁷⁶ Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 291.

and marked a major turning point in the Helms-Hunt campaign, as it allowed Helms to surpass Jim Hunt in the polls.

Jesse Helms and the National Congressional Club were not the only parties involved in transforming Jim Hunt's image. In what was perhaps the most dramatic development of the campaign, a small newspaper published a story accusing Jim Hunt of engaging in extramarital relationships while serving as governor. This accusation took political mudslinging to a new level. In July 1984, *The Landmark*, a conservative weekly from Chapel Hill, accused Hunt of having "a lover who was a pretty young boy from North Carolina but who was presently employed in the U.S. State Department." In addition, Jim Hunt also had a "girlfriend in his office" who was said to be "a former high-priced call girl used by the banks and big companies in Winston-Salem to entertain their guests." Written by *The Landmark*'s editor Bob Windsor, and headlined "Jim Hunt is Sissy, Prissy, Gay, and Effeminate," this article quickly became the talk of North Carolina.⁷⁷

The Hunt campaign responded to this rumor with a statement that emphatically denied the allegations and threatened legal retribution against the editor. "The article in *The Landmark* goes beyond the bounds of decency, and it shows how far Governor Hunt's opponents will go in this campaign...The governor has instructed his special counsel, former state Supreme Court Justice J. Phil Carlton, to determine appropriate legal action in this matter." The Helms campaign categorically denied any knowledge of the story and issued a response saying, "We think it's preposterous."⁷⁸ Although Bob Windsor endorsed Jesse Helms, the Helms for Senate Committee worked to remove its campaign advertisements from *The Landmark*. In response, Windsor told one of Helms's lieutenants that he used the homosexual issue in this story at the

⁷⁷ *Raleigh News and Observer*, 6 July 1984.

⁷⁸ *Raleigh News and Observer*, 7 July 1984.

request of Helms supporters, although there was no direct link discovered between Windsor and the National Congressional Club.⁷⁹

Bob Windsor published this story without any evidence to substantiate the allegations against Jim Hunt. Included with the article was the then-unnamed writer's admission that "the facts in the story are accurate with the exception of things I reveal that were just rumor." The story continued, "A man called me aside and told me that Hunt had a lover who was a pretty young boy from North Carolina who was presently employed by the U.S. State Department. He called the boy by name and gave the location of his hometown. The fact that he gave his employer gave credibility to the story." As for the rumored female lover, the writer claimed, "I was told that suddenly this young lady left the employer and married a fellow from the mountains who was a friend of Hunt's. I was told that Carolyn Hunt [the governor's wife] told Jim Hunt, 'That whore goes or I go.'"⁸⁰

Jim Hunt issued a personal response to accusations contained in *The Landmark*, which he called "scurrilous lies," standing firm in his denial, stating, "I'm not going to have it." Hunt continued, "You know, when I got into this campaign I knew it was going to be tough, but I never really had an idea it would get this mean and vicious...No person in public or private[,] like their families[,] ought to have to put up with this kind of stuff." He then received support from an unlikely source, Jesse Helms, who issued a personal statement on Hunt's behalf:

Let me say, as emphatically and unequivocally, as I know how, that I believe Governor Hunt to be, personally, a moral family man. Any suggestion to the contrary is repugnant and unfair, and has no place in a political campaign. He and I disagree on issues but I reject any question about his personal morality...While I realize this type of rhetoric is not uncommon in American politics, I nevertheless regard it as destructive and demeaning to the political process.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 292.

⁸⁰ *Raleigh News and Observer*, 7 July 1984.

Despite his statement, Helms did not reject Windsor's support. "I would welcome the support of anybody," said Helms shortly after the story hit the headlines.⁸² In a statement quite revealing of North Carolina's polarized political climate in 1984, complete with conspiratorial overtones, Jim Hunt remained unconvinced of the Helms campaign's denial concerning their lack of involvement in this situation. "I think they're tied in without any question whatsoever," Hunt stated. "They've been the main sponsor of that newspaper. Every article in there is either against Jim Hunt or for Jesse Helms."⁸³

Shortly after its initial publication, Bob Windsor admitted that he had been "dead wrong to publish the article" and "if I have to do it over, I would not have published it. If I could undo it, I would...I humbly and sincerely apologize to the governor." At the same time, however, Windsor refused to admit that the story was nothing more than fiction. "I haven't said that at all," he responded. In his apology to Jim Hunt, Windsor admitted that he was in fact the sole author of the story, which he wrote "without any aid or suggestions from anyone else on my staff or otherwise...As a matter of fact, no one ever say or read the article until I handed it to the typesetter personally." Windsor wrote the story after viewing a controversial campaign advertisement approved by the Hunt campaign that he believed included an unjust portrayal of Jesse Helms. "The thrust of my story was intended to show that the rumors that I identified [in that article] had the same basis in fact as the rumors in the [Hunt] political machine." Windsor

⁸¹ Helms quoted in *Raleigh News and Observer*, 7 July 1984.

⁸² Helms quoted in Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 293.

⁸³ Hunt quoted in *Raleigh News and Observer*, 7 July 1984; *New York Times*, 7 July 1984.

continued, “At no time did I say Jim Hunt was homosexual. Both the story and the ads shock and draw attention to statements that have no basis in fact.”⁸⁴

The Hunt campaign commercial to which Windsor referred in his *mea culpa* was one where Jim Hunt linked Jesse Helms to murderous right-wing dictatorships in Central America. At a time when the United States and the Soviet Union engaged in proxy wars for foreign influence in Central America, the Hunt campaign sought to publicize Helms’s relationships with leaders who while fervently anti-communist, were decidedly less than democratic. The Hunt campaign hoped that these commercials would provide the kind of hard-hitting advertisements used by the Helms campaign, this time using Helms’s foreign policy credentials against him. The commercial showed pictures of Jesse Helms and Central American dictators. “When you look at the friends Jesse Helms has made around the world,” said the narrator, “it is no wonder he has made enemies for North Carolina in the Senate.” A second campaign advertisement followed less than two weeks later, complete with the sounds of gunshots and pictures of dead bodies, linking Helms to El Salvador death squads under the leadership of El Salvador President Roberto D’Aubuisson, and claimed that Helms is “his [D’Aubuisson’s] best friend in Washington—maybe his only friend.”⁸⁵ The Hunt campaign’s attempts to hit Helms on his foreign policy experience failed to bring about a decisive shift in the campaign in Hunt’s favor, and with *The Landmark* dominating the headlines in summer 1984, Helms used this momentum to his advantage.

Regardless of the veracity of the allegations published in *The Landmark*, it nonetheless succeeded in keeping a hot-button cultural issue at the forefront of the campaign. As Jesse

⁸⁴ *Raleigh News and Observer*, 8 July 1984; *New York Times*, 8 July 1984.

⁸⁵ For the first ad, see *Raleigh News and Observer*, 18 June 1984; For the second ad, 28 June 1984; See also Link, *Righteous Warrior*, 282-283, for the divisions in the Hunt campaign over this advertisement and the response by the Helms campaign.

Helms and the NCC tried to do with their own campaign advertisements, this advertisement placed the focus squarely on Hunt and his positions on controversial issues so dear to the “New Right.” Homosexuality became a major campaign issue in the Helms-Hunt campaign in 1984, and this presaged its use by conservative Republicans in the 1990s. Just as race and communism defined much of American politics during the Cold War, homosexuality and religion emerged as significant wedge issues used to divide the electorate in the “age of Reagan,” reflecting the influence of the “New Right” on state, regional, and national politics.

Throughout his reelection campaign, Jesse Helms appealed to church-going conservatives using religious language to frame the Helms-Hunt campaign and the Democratic-Republican political rivalry in apocalyptic and messianic terms. The “New Right” ideology, which permeated American politics in the early 1980s, strongly influenced by the growing involvement in politics by religious organizations such as Jerry Falwell’s Moral Majority, became an integral part of the Helms-Hunt campaign. In front of a friendly Baptist audience, Helms declared, “This is the year, 1984, that God-fearing Americans can assure the restoration of their freedom.” If he did not always link Democrats to the efforts to undermine the nation’s religious values, the implication was nonetheless present. Helms warned of the dangers posed by secular humanism, which he believed was “demanding that our nation divest itself of religion.” Secular humanism, he argued, represented an attempt to “confuse and deceive...everywhere we are urged to compromise, to retreat, even to doubt the validity of the Scriptures.” Freedom of religion, Helms told the audience, was merely a front for the ultimate goal of “freedom from religion.”⁸⁶

⁸⁶ *Greensboro News and Record*, 10 September 1984, NCC Clipping File. On the influence of religious leaders and their organizations in the Helms-Hunt campaign, see *Greensboro News and Record*, 3 September 1984, NCC Clipping File.

Jesse Helms spoke openly of his religious convictions during the campaign, telling voters “the older I get and the longer I live, the more I realize man can’t do it by himself. We began to make a god of government, forgetting this land is a government of God.”⁸⁷ Christianity, Helms argued, is “higher than religion” and the “meaning of America.” He warned of the influence of “secular humanism” in Congress and pledged to continue to fight to restore the nation’s religious heritage, because “Christianity may be popular today, but some other religion may come along tomorrow.” Helms refused to apologize for his crusade on behalf of Christianity, telling the North Carolina Christian Educators Association, “I’m repeatedly called a ‘Prince of Darkness’ because of my efforts to restore school prayer and a right-wing extremist because I stand up for the most innocent and helpless humanity, the unborn child.”⁸⁸

The attempt to link religious values with political identity was an integral part of the New Right’s political involvement in the “age of Reagan.” In other words, God called upon the Republican Party to lead the crusade to rescue the nation from the secular Democrats. “The reason the Congressional Club exists,” said Thomas F. Ellis, the founder of the National Congressional Club and a mentor to Helms, “is to do everything it can to further the conservative cause. That’s what it’s all about—we have to save this country.”⁸⁹ Using stark religious language to define his candidacy, Helms and the Republican Party employed religion as a wedge issue to distance himself from the secular humanism allegedly promoted by the Democratic Party. Governor Jim Hunt, himself a conservative Southern Baptist, was one of many Democrats who fell victim to this campaign. On one occasion, a young voter declined to shake his hand, declaring, “I’m sorry, but I’m a Christian and I’m voting for your opposition.” Hunt responded,

⁸⁷ *Fayetteville Observer*, 28 October 1984, NCC Clipping File.

⁸⁸ *Washington Post*, 3 November 1984.

⁸⁹ Luebke, *Tar Heel Politics 2000*, 163.

“You don’t think anyone *else* is a Christian?” This incident speaks to the narrow view of religion promoted by the Helms campaign, and its influence in defining religious values and politics in 1984. Jesse Helms described his ideology as “the cause of a Christian nation” while Hunt warned of the “radical right wing” led by Helms threatening to “take over this country.”⁹⁰ With the looming national Republican landslide, Helms enjoyed the political momentum in this debate, while Hunt, beset by problems from both the state and national party, never had the opportunity to trump Helms on this issue. Jesse Helms’s appeal to religious conservatives was a critical development in his reelection campaign and likely influenced its outcome.⁹¹

In one of the campaign’s many low points, Jesse Helms and Jim Hunt engaged in a verbal sparring match during the third and final televised debate that neatly summed up the tone of the campaign. Responding to Jim Hunt’s accusation that he previously voted against veterans’ benefits, Helms responded with one of the most famous quotes of the campaign that has since taken on nearly legendary status in North Carolina: “Governor, which war did you serve in?” To which Hunt replied, “I didn’t serve in a war.” Helms then acknowledged his opponent’s response before Jim Hunt interrupted him, “Wait a minute, let me answer that question.” Ignoring Helms’s objection, Hunt explained that he was in high school during the Korean War and considered too old for eligibility to serve in Vietnam. He concluded his responses by taking a sharp jab at Helms, “I don’t like you questioning my patriotism.” Jesse Helms served in the United States Navy during the Second World as a dry-land sailor stationed in Wilmington, North Carolina, writing press releases for the military. The infamous question, “Which war did you

⁹⁰ *Time*, 19 November 1984, NCC Clipping File.

⁹¹ *Raleigh News and Observer*, 9 November 1984, NCC Clipping File. It is difficult to quantify, but it is likely that evangelical turnout offset the overwhelming support for Jim Hunt among black voters.

serve in?” easily applies to the 1984 Senate campaign, for it was nothing short of a battle between the candidates, their political organizations, and their contrasting ideologies.⁹²

The 1984 Election and its Significance in Shaping Two-Party Politics

In November 1984, North Carolina voters went to the polls to choose between incumbent Republican Jesse Helms and Democrat Jim Hunt to serve in the United States Senate. For the first time in his political career, Helms faced a Democratic challenger who, unlike Nick Galifianakis and John Ingram, could more than hold his own with the popular two-term senator. The Helms-Hunt campaign set a national record as the most expensive Senate campaign to date, with a total of \$26 million spent between the candidates, foreshadowing the increased importance of money in politics. Following more than a year of mudslinging, venomous insults, and partisan politics in a bitterly polarized political environment, Jesse Helms prevailed in his reelection campaign with nearly fifty-two percent of the vote compared to Hunt’s forty-eight percent. Eighty-six thousand votes separated the winner and loser.⁹³ Nineteen eighty-four marked a pivotal event in the development of two-party politics in North Carolina.

With his third successful campaign for the U.S. Senate, Jesse Helms proved that he was not a fluke in North Carolina politics. Although it took the full weight of President Reagan’s reelection campaign to carry him to victory, Helms nonetheless survived his closest campaign to ensure a place in North Carolina history not only for himself, but also for the Republican Party. Like 1972, this was a banner year for Republicans, both statewide and nationwide. “It shows that a conservative can win against the odds,” said Helms political adviser Thomas F. Ellis. “I think

⁹² *Raleigh News and Observer*, 24 September 1984. Hunt described the question as “a low blow” while Helms said he asked the question because Hunt “knew so much about veterans. I didn’t know whether he fought in a war or not.” Shortly after this debate, the *Raleigh News and Observer* published an editorial appropriately titled, “Debate in the Gutter.” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 25 September 1984.

⁹³ Jesse Helms received 1,156,768 votes to Jim Hunt’s 1,070, 488 (a difference of 86,280). The candidates split a total of 2,227,256 votes, with approximately 68% of the state’s registered voters turning out in this election. *North Carolina Manual* 1985, 1270-1271.

that white people in North Carolina are clearly sensing that the national Democratic Party is leaving them. This is a nationwide trend. It isn't just true for North Carolina."⁹⁴ For only the second time in the twentieth century, Republicans carried North Carolina in the presidential, Senate, and gubernatorial campaigns.

In 1984, the state Republican Party was largely free of factionalism and disunity. Unlike 1972, there was not a bruising and divisive gubernatorial primary, leaving moderate Republican and six-term Congressman Jim Martin to face only token opposition in his successful bid for the party's nomination. Furthermore, the National Congressional Club did not promote its own candidate to challenge Martin, who quickly emerged as the frontrunner. Martin, however, was much closer to former Governor Jim Holshouser in ideology and political philosophy than Jesse Helms. Like Holshouser, Jim Martin had close ties to the party establishment and engaged in extensive party building efforts across North Carolina to expand the Republican base in a state where registered Democrats outnumbered Republicans.⁹⁵ Helms and Martin demonstrated the diversity within the state Republican Party, which, buoyed by a strong national leader like President Reagan, enjoyed a landmark election year. Martin won the primary and never looked back, enjoying the full benefit of a unified Republican ticket and a divided Democratic Party. Like President Nixon twelve years earlier, President Reagan's popularity in North Carolina served to unify the Republican factions during an election year.

In contrast to the pronounced absence of Republican factionalism, several leading Democrats, including Democratic lieutenant governor Jimmy Green, commerce secretary Lauch Faircloth, and Democrat Eddie Knox, Mayor of Charlotte, all conservative Democrats, and

⁹⁴ *Fayetteville Observer*, 12 November 1984, NCC Clipping File.

⁹⁵ For more on Jim Martin's party building efforts in the context of two-party politics in North Carolina, see Interview with Governor James G. Martin by Jack D. Fleer, 2/6/1998, (C-0333), SOHP. See also Interview with Governor James G. Martin by Jack D. Fleer, 2/27/1998 (C-0334), SOHP.

Insurance Commissioner John Ingram, and state Attorney General Rufus Edmisten, both aligned with the party's progressive faction, vied for the gubernatorial nomination. Jim Martin correctly assessed the primary as "five statewide established politicians who are going to fight each other to the death."⁹⁶ Jim Hunt, focused on his Senate campaign, avoided taking sides in Democratic gubernatorial primary and chose not to publicly endorse any potential successor.⁹⁷ Rufus Edmisten emerged as the party's nominee following a bitter runoff election against Knox, but this did not end the ideological battle within the Democratic Party that, with Jim Hunt's leadership, had remained below the surface for the last decade. Following the primary, Eddie Knox, a longtime friend and ally of Jim Hunt, displayed remarkably little interest in Edmisten's urging of party unity, arguing that such demands were too little, too late.⁹⁸ Knox later endorsed Ronald Reagan while his family endorsed Helms, as Knox blamed his defeat on Hunt's Senate campaign and the governor's lack of effective party leadership in the midst of a bruising primary battle.⁹⁹

Rufus Edmisten blamed his defeat on "the tide of history" and Jim Hunt's absence from the primary. According to Edmisten, Democratic infighting and an absence of party leadership did more to damage his campaign than his Republican opponent. "There was no real leadership anywhere because everybody at headquarters was so busy helping the Jim Hunt campaign that they let the governor's race deteriorate into a bloody pit terrier fight. The result was that I was

⁹⁶ Interview with Governor Jim Martin by Jack D. Fleer, 2/6/1998 (C-0333), SOHP.

⁹⁷ Jim Hunt decided not to endorse any potential successor in 1984 and he did the same in 2000, choosing not to exert his influence in the Democratic Party primary. For his relationship with Eddie Knox, see Interview with Governor Jim Hunt by Jack D. Fleer, 10/3/2001, (C-0332), SOHP. For Rufus Edmisten's comments on Hunt's absence in the 1984 gubernatorial campaign, see Interview with Rufus Edmisten by Karl Campbell, 7-15-1986, (C-0033), SOHP.

⁹⁸ *Greensboro News and Record*, 29 June 1984, NCC Clipping File.

⁹⁹ *Durham Morning Herald*, 4 July 1984; *Charlotte Observer*, 3 July 1984; 9 October 1984, 19 October 1984; 21 July 1985; *Raleigh News and Observer*, 9 October 1984, 11 November 1984, 31 May 1985; NCC Clipping File.

the one who was bloodied. Mr. Martin never had to say a word about me. It had already been done by the other boys. When you got Jimmy Green and Eddie Knox together, after I had whipped both of them, then it was easy pickings for Mr. Martin to combine what they had done along with the tide of history and do it.”¹⁰⁰ Likewise, former Governor Robert W. Scott believed that Hunt’s lack of inclusion, President Reagan’s popularity, and the gulf between the state and national Democratic Party doomed the Democrats in 1984. According to Scott, “The major factor in Governor Jim Hunt’s failure...was his unwillingness to bring other leaders of the Democratic Party into his circle of leadership. He refused to share power.”¹⁰¹ Most importantly, the gubernatorial primary took place in the middle of Hunt’s campaign to unseat Senator Jesse Helms. The failure to unite the warring factions prior to the general election doomed both Edmisten and Hunt. In order to win their respective campaigns, Hunt and Edmisten did not need assistance from the national Democratic Party, but they did require the full support of the state organization, whose unity fractured due to both internal and external tensions. At a time when they needed unity most, the state party failed to respond accordingly.

For more than a decade, Jim Hunt worked to rebuild the Democratic Party and hold the party together despite increased opposition from the Republican Party. The party unity that carried him to three major election victories collapsed in 1984 under the weight of the Reagan-Mondale and Helms-Hunt campaigns, as well as a bitter and divisive Democratic gubernatorial primary. Furthermore, the Helms-Hunt campaign left Jim Hunt bruised and politically damaged. According to political scientist Abraham Holtzman of North Carolina State University, the National Congressional Club’s advertising campaign proved so successful that “it left a visible

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Rufus Edmisten by Karl Campbell, 7/15/1986, (C-0033), SOHP.

¹⁰¹ Interview with Governor Robert W. Scott by Karl Campbell, 9/18/1986, (C-0036), SOHP.

trace of suspicion of Hunt” in a state where he enjoyed tremendous popularity.¹⁰² Simply put, this was a disastrous year for the North Carolina Democratic Party, with many similarities to the party’s collapse twelve years earlier. In many ways, this election was a repeat of 1972: a divided state party, a national party lacking the candidate and ability to wage a competitive campaign in the South, a strong and influential Republican presence in southern politics, and a looming national Republican landslide, characterized both elections. Furthermore, this election illuminated the shortcomings of the state Democratic Party in the two-party system, as party disunity brought about an electoral disaster that mirrored the 1972 election.

The 1984 election epitomized the competitive nature of two-party politics in the modern South. Jesse Helms and Jim Hunt were both popular leaders with great electoral success. The clash between the modernizer and traditionalist philosophies furthered the development of the new political culture that emerged in the 1970s. Politics in the “age of Reagan” brought this political culture to a new level, with tremendous polarization as characterized by the Helms-Hunt campaign. The close results of the Helms-Hunt campaign, as well as the Edmisten-Martin campaign, illuminated the challenges both parties faced in the two-party system. Neither Helms nor Martin won a decisive victory in 1984, and their successes did not bring about an end to Republican factionalism in the 1980s. What they accomplished, however, contributed significantly to the development of two-party politics in a state long dominated by one-party politics.

¹⁰² *Raleigh News and Observer*, n.d. circa 11/1984, NCC Clipping File.

CONCLUSION

Following the 1984 Helms-Hunt Senate race, North Carolina Democrats, much like the national party, found themselves cast adrift, lacking both strong party leaders and a political base in the “age of Reagan.” The election was a disaster for the party that, only two decades prior, enjoyed a virtual monopoly on state politics. Jim Hunt’s absence from elected office left a sizable void for the Democrats, while Jesse Helms and the Republicans fared better. Just as progressive Democrats found it difficult to present a viable alternative to the politics of race, particularly in the decades following the U.S. Supreme Court’s *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, so too did southern Democrats find it increasingly difficult to compete against conservative Republicans within the two-party system. The development of two-party politics in the aftermath of the Helms-Hunt Senate campaign ensured that neither emerged as a true majority party.

Unlike 1972, North Carolina Democrats in 1984 did not elect a party savior in the mold of Jim Hunt. Hunt’s successful party-building efforts in the 1970s made possible his political career and a Democratic resurgence in the midst of tremendous Republican gains. Hunt’s big election victory in 1976 and strong reelection victory four years later demonstrated that he built his career upon the state party, not the national Democratic Party. In 1984, however, the bitter and divisive gubernatorial primary destroyed the party unity Hunt worked so hard to create, as Republicans swept the ticket. Lieutenant Governor Robert Jordan, a veteran legislator, was one of the few bright spots for Democrats in an otherwise disastrous election year. Similar to Jim

Hunt, Jordan served in a Republican administration and hoped to use his election victory as a springboard for the governor's office in 1988. Unfortunately for Democrats, Republican Governor Jim Martin won reelection in 1988, becoming the state's first two-term Republican governor and thus denying Jordan the opportunity to return his party to the governor's office. With Jesse Helms firmly ensconced in the U.S. Senate and Jim Hunt taking a break from elected politics, both continued to influence the state's political development in the 1980s. In his position as a leading Republican, Helms continued to promote his conservative agenda. Hunt's absence, on the other hand, left Democrats scrambling for leadership. "The Democratic Party is in serious trouble today in North Carolina," argued former state attorney general Rufus Edmisten in 1986. "The Democratic Party is in bad shape."¹

President Reagan's landslide reelection victory in 1984 was the final nail in the coffin of the Democratic South. Conservatives such as Barry Goldwater and Richard Nixon brought a new generation of conservative southern Democrats into the Republican Party, while Reagan's popularity furthered this trend. As the Republican Party increased its significance in the region, the strong Democratic tradition largely disappeared. Two stories about southern voters illuminate the extent of political change in the South. In 1984, Alabama native Robert Gwin, a registered Democrat, stated that he planned to vote for President Reagan instead of Democratic nominee Walter Mondale. At the same time, he intended to split his ticket and support two Democrats, Senator Howell Heflin and Congressman Ben Erdreich. Gwin's example is symbolic of the top-down realignment of southern politics, where voters initially supported Republican presidential candidates such as Goldwater, Nixon, and Reagan, while continuing to vote for

¹ Interview with Rufus Edmisten by Karl Campbell, 7/15/1986, (C-0033). in Southern Oral History Program, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill [Hereafter cited as SOHP].

Democrats in lower-level elected office.² In Eastern North Carolina, brothers Roy and Wallace Taylor, both retired tobacco farmers and “lifelong Democrats,” explained their political loyalties in 1984. “I have never voted for a Republican,” said Roy Taylor, endorsing Jim Hunt in the upcoming election. “I like Jesse Helms; I think he’s a right fine man. But I ain’t got no complaints with Jim Hunt.” Wallace Taylor, on the other hand, pledged to vote for Jesse Helms, the first time he would support a Republican. “I ain’t got a thing against Jesse Helms—not a thing against Jim Hunt,” he said. “But he [Hunt] believes in raising taxes too much.”³

In 1986, despite a favorable political climate, and only two years removed from a national electoral landslide, North Carolina Republicans engaged in the kind of vicious factionalism that for decades divided their Democratic counterparts. As Democrats learned in 1972 and 1984, party factionalism came at a high cost, and had the potential to benefit the Republican Party. Likewise, Republican factionalism had the potential to benefit the Democratic Party. In 1985, Senator John East announced that he would not seek reelection in 1986. East, a paraplegic due to an earlier bout with polio, committed suicide in June 1986, several months before the expiration of his term in the U.S. Senate. Governor Jim Martin appointed Congressman Jim Broyhill to serve the remainder of East’s term. Broyhill’s decision to seek the party’s nomination in 1986 provoked a battle between the moderate party establishment and conservative Republicans. The National Congressional Club supported conservative Republican David Funderburk, a college professor and former ambassador to Romania under President Reagan. Broyhill won a divisive primary in May 1986, but lost the general election to former Democratic governor Terry Sanford, who retired as president of Duke University and returned to

² *Raleigh News and Observer*, 29 October 1984.

³ *Raleigh News and Observer*, 5 August 1984.

politics at the age of sixty-nine. The Broyhill-Funderburk primary left the party divided and weakened in an off-year campaign in which the Republican Party did not benefit from a national election.⁴ These divisions within the Republican Party demonstrated the importance of party unity. The rivalry between moderates and conservatives had severe repercussions for the party in 1986. According to political scientist Merle Black, “Republicans have been able to win in the past only when they are united and have gone out and gotten votes from independents and Democrats.”⁵

Less than a year after the Broyhill-Funderburk Senate primary, Republican moderates and conservatives waged yet another battle for influence within the state party. In 1987, Governor Jim Martin’s put forth Jack Hawke as state party chairman. Conservatives, still licking their self-inflicted wounds, refused to concede to Governor Martin and instead promoted Barry McCarty, who enjoyed the backing of Jesse Helms and the National Congressional Club. The 1987 contest between Hawke and McCarty was largely a repeat of the 1973 skirmish between Tom Bennett and Frank Rouse. In both cases, the moderate Republican governor found his faction waged in a proxy battle with the conservative Republicans who proved unwilling to compromise. Like Holshouser, Jim Martin emerged victorious from a bruising and largely unnecessary conflict with conservative Republicans. Governor Jim Holshouser reflected on the difficulties both he and Jim Martin faced: “I think the Republicans have not accepted the Democratic tradition of having the governor simply name the state chairman. Legally it’s done

⁴ William A. Link, *Righteous Warrior: Jesse Helms and the Rise of Modern Conservatism* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2008), 337-338.

⁵ *Raleigh News and Observer*, 2 March 1987.

by the state executive committee. But when Jim Hunt says who he wants to be chairman, that's who becomes chairman. Jim Martin and I both had to fight for our selections as chairman."⁶

By the late 1980s, several developments confirmed the existence of the state's two-party system. According to the North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research, Republican victories in presidential politics, a growing number of registered Republican voters, and increasing competition between the political parties indicated the end of one-party politics. The report concluded that North Carolina has a two-party system "in theory and in fact" and the state "has been transformed from near-total domination by the Democratic Party to a state with a new political balance."⁷ Between 1984 and 1988, Ronald Reagan and Jesse Helms carried the state to win reelection, Democrat Terry Sanford won election to the U.S. Senate, and Jim Martin won his reelection campaign, demonstrating the strength of a competitive, two-party system in North Carolina. Following Governor Jim Martin's two terms in office (1985-1993), the Republican Party has yet to regain the governorship. The Democratic Party's stranglehold on this office is largely the result of two separate developments: Jim Hunt's Democratic coalition that continues to dominate party politics and the failure of the Republican Party to promote candidates appealing to the state's urban Democratic population.

Jim Hunt's return to the governor's office in 1992 coincided with the reemergence of southern Democrats in national politics. In 1992, former Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton won the Democratic presidential nomination. He selected Tennessee Senator Al Gore, Jr. as the party's nominee for vice president. With Bill Clinton at the helm, Jim Hunt found the national

⁶ Interview with Governor Jim Holshouser by Jack D. Fler, 5/9/1998, (C-0328.3); See also Interview with Jack Hawke by Jonathan Houghton, 6/7/1990, (C-0087), SOHP; *Greensboro News and Record*, 22 February 1987; *Raleigh News and Observer*, 5 March 1987; *The Daily Tar Heel*, 24 February 1987.

⁷ *Winston-Salem Journal*, 2 December 1987 ["in theory and in fact"]; ["has been transformed"]; *Charlotte Observer*, 2 December 1987; *Greensboro News and Record*, 2 December 1987, 6 December 1987; *Fayetteville Observer*, 2 December 1987; *Fayetteville Observer*, 3 December 1987, 11 December 1987.

Democratic Party more hospitable to his political career. Each time Hunt ran for governor, a southern Democrat won the party's presidential nomination: Jimmy Carter in 1976 and 1980, and Bill Clinton in 1992 and 1996. In contrast to his 1984 U.S. Senate campaign, there was considerably less distance between southern Democrats like Jim Hunt and the national Democratic Party. "Running with southerners [southern Democrats]...made it easier," argued Hunt.⁸ When Hunt left office in 2001, two-term Attorney General Michael F. Easley succeeded him and like his predecessors Hunt and Martin, served two terms in office.

In 2008, the Democratic Party swept the top three spots on the state's ballot for the first time in forty-eight years. Democratic presidential nominee Barack Obama was the first to carry the state since Jimmy Carter in 1976. Senate nominee and little-known state senator Kay Hagan defeated one-term incumbent Republican Senator Elizabeth Dole, thus ending thirty-six years of Republican control of this seat, previously held for thirty years by Jesse Helms. Democratic lieutenant governor Beverly Perdue, her party's gubernatorial nominee, defeated former Charlotte Mayor Pat McCrory in a closely fought election. Perdue was the state's first lieutenant governor to win the gubernatorial election since Jim Hunt thirty-two years earlier. Her victory extended her party's grip on the governor's office for an unprecedented fifth consecutive term, an unmatched achievement in the two-party South. Rather than state Democrats running independently of the national Democratic Party, as had been the norm since the emergence of the two-party system, many North Carolina Democrats linked their campaigns to the national party, which did not hinder their success. The presidential and gubernatorial campaigns were the most competitive statewide campaigns, demonstrating the spirited nature of the state's two-party system. Similar to Republicans in the 1970s and 1980s, the Democrats benefited considerably from a favorable political climate and a strong national party. Democrats in North Carolina

⁸ Interview with Governor James B. Hunt by Jack D. Fleer, 10/3/2001, (C-0332), SOHP.

enjoyed a banner election year in 2008, the likes of which they had not experienced in several decades. These results, however, were hardly spontaneous. Instead, they represented the logical outcome of state and national political developments.

The relationship between state and national politics continues to shape political development in North Carolina in the twenty-first century. Jim Hunt and Jesse Helms did more than any other politician to shape the development of two-party politics in North Carolina. Despite their tremendous influence, few political leaders have emerged with the sustained popularity of Hunt or Helms. North Carolina politics in the twenty-first century displays little resemblance to its one-party predecessor that dominated state politics for much of the twentieth century. Despite the absence of Hunt and Helms, North Carolina's two-party system continues to distinguish itself as one of the most interesting political cultures in the South.

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Interview with James M. Baley, Jr., by Jonathan Houghton, 11/22/1988, (C-0070).
Interview with Anne Barnes by Kathryn Nasstrom, 1/30/1989, (C-0049).
Interview with James T. Broyhill by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, 1/30/1974, (A-0119).
Interview with Jonathan Worth Daniels by Charles Eagles, 3/9-3/11/77, (A-0313).
Interview with Rufus Edmisten by Karl Campbell, 7/15/86, (C-0033).
Interview with Thad Eure by Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, 12/12/73, (A-0120).
Interview with Lauch Faircloth by Joseph Mosnier, 3/22/99, (I-0069).
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Interview with Harvey Gantt by Lynn Haessly, 1/6/86, (C-0008).
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Interview with Lloyd E. Griffin by Ben Bulla, 8/20/82, (C-0135).
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