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Review Copy

## **The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics**

The Personalities, Elections, and Events That Shaped Modern North Carolina

by Rob Christensen

368 pp., 24 illus., append., notes, index

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North Carolina is one of the most politically competitive and vibrant states in the South—a state where neither conservative nor liberals, Democrats nor Republicans, have been able to rest easy. Journalist Rob Christensen argues that it is this climate of competition and challenge that has enabled North Carolina to rise from poverty in the nineteenth century to become a leader in research, education, and banking in the twentieth century. In *The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics: The Personalities, Elections, and Events That Shaped Modern North Carolina*, Rob Christensen writes a comprehensive and accessible history of North Carolina politics since post-reconstruction, surveying the key players, parties, and issues that have made North Carolina politically what it is today.

Christensen contends that at the heart of North Carolina's political struggles is the strong competition between a business-oriented progressivism, strong conservatism, and the politics of race. The progressive thread can be found in the populists Frank Porter Graham, Terry Sanford, and John Edwards; the conservative impulse is found in Furnifold Simmons, Josiah Bailey, Sam Ervin, and Jesse Helms. Christensen tracks the state's racial divide from the white supremacy campaigns in the late 1800s to the U.S.

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2-2-2 The Paradox of Tar Heel Politics

Senate races a century later between African American candidate Harvey Gantt and the polarizing conservative Jesse Helms.

Christensen takes us to picket lines and debates and through numerous red-baiting and race-baiting political campaigns. He also introduces us to many remarkable and colorful characters, including a U.S. senator who was a Nazi sympathizer, a candidate for governor who was a Soviet agent, a senator who helped bring down Joe McCarthy and Richard Nixon, a TV commentator who helped usher in the Reagan Revolution, and concludes with the son of a mill worker with presidential aspirations.

Long before the talk of red state-blue state polarization, North Carolina was an intensely divided state politically, where the clash of old and new; rural and urban; industry and agriculture; and rich and poor, have dominated North Carolina politics during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. With Christensen as a guide, readers may find there is sense after all in the topsy-turvy nature of Tar Heel politics.

Rob Christensen has covered North Carolina politics for thirty-four years at the *News and Observer* in Raleigh.

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