

From Resurgence to Realignment: The Shelby Dynasty, Luther Hodges, and the Election of 1952

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Luther Hodges faced an uncertain future in 1950. He had just left his job as Vice President of Marshall and Field Company where he had worked for the past 32 years. Only 52 years old and in good health, Hodges announced that he wanted "to dedicate the rest of my life to public service."¹ But, in truth, he hadn't the slightest idea what that meant or what he was going to do next.

Thus far his life story resembled the plot of a Horatio Alger story. Born in 1898 to a poor tenant farmer who moved to the mill town of Spray, North Carolina, as a child, Hodges worked hard in the textile mills and his father's tiny grocery store. He put himself through the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, served briefly in World War I, and returned home to start a personnel office in a local textile company. Step by step he rose up the corporate ladder to become one of the most respected businessmen in the national textile industry. But in 1950 he was looking for a new direction in his life.²

Not long after retiring Hodges accepted an invitation from Robert M. Hanes, the President of Wachovia Bank, who was serving as the top administrator of the Marshall Plan in Germany. Hodges agreed to serve as the temporary Chief of the Industry Division of the Economic Cooperation Administration (ECA) in West Germany, which was part of the Marshall Plan's project to rebuild Europe while keeping the growing communist menace at bay. It was a tough job, an important job, and he enjoyed the challenge.³

He was concerned, however, with letters from home describing the raucous U.S. Senate primary between Frank Porter Graham and Willis Smith. Hodges's wife, Martha, spoke out publically in favor of Graham. Of course, he liked Graham, too, and he supported what Martha had said, even if he was uncomfortable that she had said it. Luther Hodges was not a politician and he did not like the thought of his family getting pulled into political entanglements.⁴ Yet, within two years he would be elected Lieutenant Governor of North Carolina. In four years he would become Governor. In six, he would win reelection in a

landslide. And, by the end of the decade, he would be heading to Washington to serve as President John F. Kennedy's Secretary of Commerce.

The state of North Carolina also faced an uncertain future in 1950. Since the turn of the century, the state had been governed by a relatively steady coalition of wealthy agriculturalists, New South businessmen, and their lawyers. Since the late 1920s the dominant political machine was known as the Shelby Dynasty, named after the hometown of its leader, Governor O. Max Gardner. Political scientist V.O. Key had Gardner and the Shelby Dynasty in mind when he famously praised North Carolina's political leadership as a "Progressive Plutocracy." But in 1948 major cracks began to appear in the state's political structure. In the gubernatorial campaign an agrarian populist from Haw Creek, Kerr Scott, upset the Shelby Dynasty's favored candidate. Scott and his supporters, nicknamed the Branchhead Boys, said they were out to protect the little man, and the state's traditional political leadership did not have the wherewithal to rein them in. Scott's most controversial move was appointing Frank Graham to the Senate in 1949, which led to the ugly red-baiting, race-baiting, mud-throwing campaign of 1950 upon which Martha Hodges had commented. Smith eventually won the second primary and took the Senate seat, but not until the two sides had further destabilized the old political order.⁵

In 1950 it was unclear if the Progressive Plutocracy had survived the dual shocks of Kerr Scott's insurgency and the Graham-Smith political blood-letting. Over the following decade a series of political crises and untimely deaths shook the state's long stable political structure even more. In 1952 the Shelby Dynasty made a comeback by putting their candidate, William Umstead, in the Governor's Mansion. But in 1954 Governor Umstead died in office, as did Senator Clyde Hoey, another member of the Shelby Dynasty. They were replaced by the much more independent Governor Luther Hodges and Senator Sam Ervin. That same year the U.S. Supreme Court issued its landmark *Brown* ruling, further altering the political landscape in North Carolina. Also in 1954 Kerr Scott returned to politics by winning the Senate seat made available when Willis Smith passed away in Washington. Two years later, in 1956, Hodges and Ervin won landslide reelections. Four years later, in 1958, Kerr Scott died suddenly from a heart attack and Hodges appointed B. Everett Jordan to the Senate. Six years later, in 1960, when modernist Democrat Terry Sanford defeated traditionalist Democrat I. Beverly Lake for governor, Tar Heel politics looked very different than it had a decade earlier.⁶

Students of North Carolina politics might find some troubling implications in this brief overview of the 1950s. There are some assumptions here that do not follow the orthodox interpretation, and the traditional milestones and guideposts are not quite in the right places. The political terminology may also raise some questions. Is the Progressive Plutocracy synonymous with the Shelby Dynasty? And can that label be applied to North Carolina's political leadership after the 1950s? Likewise, the terms *modernizer* and *traditionalists* did not enter the narrative until 1960. Political sociologist Paul Luebke provided these labels for the two competing brands of conservatism that he believes

dominated Tar Heel politics in the latter half of the twentieth century. But when did this competition begin? Can modernizers and traditionalists be found in the 1950s or the 1940s or even earlier as some writers have suggested?⁷ If so, how does Luebke's model of traditionalists and modernizers fit with Key's idea of a Progressive Plutocracy?⁸

Political scientists have an analytical tool that can assist historians trying to make sense of the political changes between 1948 and 1960. Realignment theory suggests that individual elections should not be seen as discrete events in which the outcome is primarily determined by the exigencies of the moment—such as campaign strategies, dynamic personalities, debate performances and other specific events—but as part of a larger political system. These political systems, also called *political regimes*, represent distinct eras of related elections in which the issues, the parties, the policies, and the behavior of both leaders and voters is relatively consistent. Such a political regime may last for twenty or thirty years, or even longer, until a major transformation occurs—a *realignment*—in which the apple cart is upset and a new political system is established.⁹

Realignment theory is not limited to just partisan political change but is a valid concept for analyzing the transformation of all political systems, including ones in which the competition is between factions within a single party. Such was the case in North Carolina from 1900 until 1948. But what happened then? The term *realignment* is usually not applied to the 1950s but is reserved for the later and more obvious change in the state's political system—the rise of the Republican Party beginning in the 1970s. Was there an earlier realignment and, if so, when did it happen and how can it be described? Did it come suddenly and definitively in the critical elections featuring Kerr Scott in 1948 and the Graham-Smith contest in 1950, or did it develop more slowly throughout the 1950s in which Luther Hodges dominated Tar Heel politics?¹⁰

Sometimes the best way to approach larger questions is to examine smaller events. For instance, no one would argue that the election of 1952 was the most significant political contest of this turbulent era. On the surface it appears that the traditional alliances remained intact. The battle for the governor's mansion between the Shelby Dynasty's candidate, William Umstead, and the Branchhead Boy's nominee, Hubert Olive, was close and colorful, but neither of the candidates matched Governor Kerr Scott's charisma from 1948 or practiced the racial demagoguery thrown at Frank Graham in 1950. The Lieutenant Governor's race in 1952 pitted political newcomer Luther Hodges against several of the state's more experienced legislative leaders, but such down-ticket campaigns are seldom seen as significant indicators of major trends in Tar Heel politics. There really is nothing particularly dramatic or pivotal about the events of 1952. Nonetheless, this election, and especially Luther Hodges's campaign for Lieutenant Governor—which was fought below the headlines in the tangled bushes and weeds of local politics—does provide an opportunity to examine the changing political structure of state politics. If a realignment had occurred then the old issues and factions would have faded and new alliances would be apparent. If not, then Hodges's campaign should demonstrate politics as usual.

In late 1951 Luther Hodges finished his job at the ECA in Germany and returned to Leaksville, North Carolina. He had only been home for a few months when B. Everett Jordan called on the telephone. Hodges and Jordan had known each other for many years. Like Hodges, Jordan had been a textile executive and was active in Rotary and the Methodist Church. The two men had recently joined in a business venture to open several Howard Johnson restaurants. Unlike Hodges, however, Jordan had been very active in politics. His cousin was married to Governor Kerr Scott, who had appointed Jordan as chair of the North Carolina Democratic Executive Committee. However, Jordan and Scott had a falling out in 1950. Jordan was also a friend of Robert Hanes. Hanes, who had invited Hodges to join him in Germany, was considered the unofficial leader of the Shelby Dynasty after O. Max Gardener's death. In making his call to Hodges, Jordan was doing the bidding of Hanes not Scott.¹¹

As Hodges remembered it, Jordan surprised him when he said: "Several of us have been talking about the lieutenant governor's race, and although there are two or three in it we are not too happy and we would like to have you run for lieutenant governor." Hodges's reply was immediate and firm: "No, not me." Jordan did not back down. "I want you to consider this seriously," he continued. "Do you remember in your Rotary speeches when you told us that businessmen ought to be involved in government? It's your theory. You ought to practice what you preach."¹² Hodges reluctantly agreed to meet Jordan the following day to talk it over.

When Hodges and Jordan met there were already three announced candidates for lieutenant governor. The presumed frontrunner, Roy Rowe from Burgaw, was an experienced legislator with the support of most seasoned politicians in the General Assembly. But some considered him too cozy with lobbyists. Jordan and Hanes thought the office of lieutenant governor was too important to be left to Rowe. It took some persuading but Hodges agreed to consider the offer and to check with some friends across the state.¹³

The following week Jordan set up a luncheon between Hodges and Governor Scott. After an hour or so, in which the Governor lobbied hard for the continuation of his Go Forward Program, Hodges found an opening to ask him directly about the lieutenant governor race. Scott was clear that neither Rowe nor the other declared candidates would be acceptable to him and he implied his support for Hodges. Later in the meal when Scott offered "If I can do anything . . ." Hodges quickly interrupted him. "Governor, I appreciate it, but I'd rather you wouldn't make any commitment."¹⁴

Even a political newcomer like Hodges knew better than to have Governor Scott endorse him publically. Especially since Hodges was much more closely associated with Scott's rival faction. As early as the 1930s Hodges had served as a member of the North Carolina

State Board of Education under Governor O. Max Gardner and on the State Highway and Public Works Commission under Governor J. C. B. Ehringhaus, another prominent member of the Shelby Dynasty. He had also worked to elect candidates associated with Gardner's political machine in the past. And, of course, he was a friend of Robert Hanes. Hodges did not want to alienate either the Shelby Dynasty or the Branchhead Boys, at least if he did not have to.

Governor Scott, however, had different plans. As Terry Sanford observed, Kerr Scott "liked to stir things up."¹⁵ The Governor had earlier joked with reporters that he might run for lieutenant governor himself after his term was over. Soon after his meeting with Hodges, Scott leaked to the press that Luther Hodges might run for lieutenant governor and that, in his opinion, Hodges would be a good candidate. Then, a few weeks after Hodges's official announcement, Scott told the Farm Bureau Convention that he still might consider bringing out a farmer-candidate for lieutenant governor. The Governor knew it was wise to lay bets on more than one promising horse in a race.¹⁶

What Kerr Scott did not know was that Hanes and Jordan had tricked him. They knew that if Scott brought out his own candidate for lieutenant governor then Hodges would probably be pushed down to third place, behind the frontrunner Rowe and the Governor's man. So they devised a plan by which Jordan and Hodges would court Scott and imply that Hodges would be his stealth candidate, Hodges would run an independent campaign, and support continuing the Go Forward program. It worked. By the time Scott reconsidered naming his own candidate for lieutenant governor, it was too late.¹⁷

A few days after Hodges announced his candidacy he and Martha traveled to Raleigh for the Democratic Party's annual Jefferson-Jackson dinner. Luther enjoyed the attention showered on him by politicians working the crowd before and after the dinner in the lobby of the Sir Walter Hotel. Around midnight he confided to Martha how well he thought the evening had gone. Martha knew better. "Those people are not for you" she said. "They don't mean what they say." Jonathan Daniels, editor of the *Raleigh News and Observer*, had the same opinion. "Hodges made a good impression," he wrote, "but the crowd was for Rowe." Traditionally the members of the legislature had great influence over who the next lieutenant governor should be. Rowe was one of their own; Hodges was an outsider. It was not surprising that the regular politicians who gathered at the Jefferson-Jackson dinner would throw their support, and their political machines back home, behind Rowe. As one legislator said, "Let the people choose the governor, . . . "we will chose the lieutenant governor."¹⁸

Luther Hodges found himself in an awkward position in his first political campaign. Without the open support of either the Shelby Dynasty or the Branchhead Boys Hodges had to run as his own campaign against Rowe and the legislators' traditional networks across

the state.¹⁹ I'm not working thru politicians nor am I organizing on a formal basis." Hodges explained. "I am depending on my friends."²⁰ Luckily, he had a lot of friends.

Hodges did try to reach out to Umstead several times only to be harshly rebuffed. Early in the campaign Hodges spoke to an Umstead supporter in the town of Albemarle and suggested that he was "working right along with Umstead toward the November election." A few days later Umstead telephoned Hodges personally to make it clear that he did not want his name used in connection with Hodges's campaign. "We are not running together," Umstead snapped.²¹ Not long afterward when Umstead's campaign manager met an enthusiastic voter who expressed support for "Umstead and Hodges carrying each other along," the Umstead man shot back that Hodges had never even attended a legislative session and knew nothing about how they worked.²²

Hodges and others speculated about Umstead's reasons for keeping his distance. It had not been the tradition in North Carolina for the governor and lieutenant governor to run as a team, yet they had often cooperated when they represented the same faction within the Democratic Party. Perhaps Umstead feared that his association with Hodges might cost him votes since most pundits perceived Rowe as the frontrunner for lieutenant governor. Or maybe Umstead had held a grudge since back in 1946 when Hodges did not support his unsuccessful bid for reelection to the U.S. Senate against J. Melville Broughton, Jr.²³

There was another reason, however, one seldom spoken out loud. William Umstead was not a well man. Frail, gaunt in appearance, full of nerves, a chain smoker, and a workaholic, Umstead was known to have battled health issues for some time. Indeed, another one of the reasons Hanes, Jordan, and their friends wanted Hodges to run for lieutenant governor was as an insurance policy in case Umstead did not survive his term. Of course Hodges knew this, and so did Umstead. Rob Christensen has suggested that Umstead kept his distance because "Hodges reminded him of his own mortality."²⁴

Hodges played the cards he was dealt and turned the confusion into an asset. The former businessman constructed a version of himself that he could sell. He ran as an independent, a businessman, a non-politician, who would make no specific commitments to any group. "You understand," he wrote a potential supporter, "that I am not running with Mr. Umstead as a team nor am I going to have a tie-up with anyone else or with any group. I am trying to go in as a conscientious citizen without any obligations to a single person. As you probably know, most of the promises made by politicians are made to get votes. I simply won't do that."²⁵

An experience on a campaign swing through the western part of the state revealed another aspect of the weakening party structure in North Carolina. ²⁶ Early in the campaign Hodges and a friend drove into the mountain town of Andrews and stopped by to see the most politically connected man in town, a banker named Percy Ferebee. Hodges introduced himself and asked about the lieutenant governor' race. Ferebee looked somewhat puzzled

at the political newcomer standing before him and politely said, "We're all for Rowe up here and we will elect him." "Well," Hodges asked "is there any use of my spending my time in the town of Andrews?" "None whatsoever," Ferebee answered, and Hodges and his friend got back in their car and headed out of town.²⁷

But Hodges paused, turned to his friend, and wondered out loud if the local party machine could really be so solid. "I just don't believe there's anybody that good," he said. "I couldn't be and I don't think you could be and I don't think Mr. Ferebee can be." So he pulled into the next gas station and asked the attendant if it was true that everyone in Andrews was a Rowe supporter. "That's not true," the attendant said. "Mr. Ferebee is not speaking for all of us." So Hodges asked who he should go talk to in order to get some help. "Chuck Love," the man answered. "Where do you find Chuck Love?" Hodges asked. The attendant pointed to a house where a man was standing on a roof fixing shingles and said "that's Chuck." So Hodges and his friend walked next door and found that Chuck Love was happy to introduce them to a lot of other people in Andrews that no longer took their voting directions from the local court house gang.²⁸

Luther Hodges drew a lesson from his experience in Andrews that helped to shape the rest of his campaign. He later wrote: "I felt then and I have felt increasingly since that time that no man or any small group of men can control an election or elect a man. Organization helps but you have to reach the people and they make up their own minds in a more independent fashion than they formerly did. I would not have had a chance if that had not been true." ²⁹

So Hodges set out to build his own campaign with, of course, plenty of unofficial advice and support from Jordan and Hanes.³⁰ He put together a team of family and friends, with his daughter Nancy acting as office manager, to churn out letters, organize supporters, and send out posters and brochures³¹ They depended heavily on Hodges's Rotary connections, and they made overtures to other groups to which they had some connections, including textile men, business associates, women's organizations, and even barbers.³²

Hodges set out every Monday morning to canvass a different section of the state. He returned home every Friday night and spent the weekends dictating letters to all the people he had met during the week. Hodges promised to visit every county in North Carolina, and he covered over 11,000 miles in his large Buick, stopping every few miles to put one gallon of gasoline in the tank and talk to whomever he could. If there was a theme for the campaign it came from something Congressman Charles Deane wrote to Hodges about his own first race for a local public office. A local banker told the young candidate, "If you run, run to win." Luther Hodges wanted to win.³³

At first it was difficult for the former Vice President of Marshall Field and Company to reach out to individual voters and ask for their support. He had a batch of cards printed up to carry with him, but, for several days, he could not bring himself to actually give one to anyone. Finally, one morning in a hotel restaurant in Goldsboro, Hodges pulled out a card to give to the waiter, but he hesitated and nervously returned it to his pocket. He got up to pay the cashier and this time slid her a card while stammering: "I am Luther Hodges. I am running for lieutenant governor. I have never been in office before and I would like for you to vote for me." Then he headed for the door. The cashier called out after him, "I'm for you!" He talked with her a few minutes and learned an important lesson. "A lot of people" she said, "want to see some new faces in government, not just the usual politicians." A few weeks later he learned another lesson when he handed his card to some tobacco-chewing men at a country store saying "I hope you will vote for me." One of the men turned to the other and said "I don't know why we shouldn't be for him. Ain't nobody else been around." If the courthouse gangs and local legislators would not support Hodges, then he would have to get out and see the people face to face.³⁴

As the primary campaign came to a close, another feature of the changing political world came into clearer focus—the power of television. Politicking on radio was old hat by 1952. Hodges, like most candidates, ran a series of radio spots that introduced him to the public.³⁵ He had a confident manner and commanding voice that came across well on the radio. But it was television that really captured his strengths. Hodges appeared on two television programs that aired right before the primary. He was a big hit. Many who watched thought Hodges stole the show, outperforming all the other candidates, including Umstead and Olive.³⁶ Poised, professional, and entirely comfortable in his own skin, Hodges was a natural for the new medium that was just beginning to have an impact on politics. The potential to reach a large audience was enticing. WFMY-TV of Greensboro claimed to have 115,000 television sets in its coverage area, which, based on an estimate of three persons per set, presented a potential audience of over 300,000. Hodges was so impressed with the opportunity television provided, especially for an underdog like himself, that he even ran a few political spots on TV. Later that year Dwight D. Eisenhower would be the first presidential candidate to run political commercials on television. Politics would never be the same.³⁷

On the evening of the Democratic Primary, as polling results began to come in, Hodges surprised the political pundits by taking an early lead over Rowe. As the night wore on, his lead grew larger. Radio commentator Carl Goerch kept asking Lynn Nesbit, the dean of the Raleigh press corps, how Luther Hodges, without any political experience in an elective office, could come in and run ahead of a man who had had many terms in the legislature and who had the support of a lot of groups."³⁸ Hodges led the first primary with 226,167 votes. Rowe came in second with 151,067 votes. The other two candidates earned about 50,000 each. The next morning newspaper headlines asked "Is a Political Miracle in the Making?"³⁹

The answer was unclear. In the governor's race Umstead defeated Olive, as expected, but Hodges had fallen several thousand votes short of a clear majority. Rowe could call for a run-off. A few days later Hodges was resting with his family at the beach when he received a disturbing call from a political powerbroker in Raleigh who claimed that he spoke for several important groups. The caller explained that if he and Hodges could sit down together and come to an understanding about a few things then he and his friends would try to persuade Rowe not to run. Hodges was angry. He told the caller that he had no intention of sitting down with anyone to reach an understanding as to how he would operate as lieutenant governor and that he felt his majority would be even larger in a second primary. This call was the first of many in which politicians and lobbyists intimated all kinds of offers only to be rejected by Hodges, who told them he was making no arrangements for anybody on anything.⁴⁰ Soon thereafter Roy Rowe conceded the race.⁴¹ In the November election both Umstead and Hodges easily bested their Republican opponents.⁴² The Shelby Dynasty was back in control of Tar Heel politics.

The independence that candidate Hodges demonstrated during the election continued in the weeks leading up to his inauguration as lieutenant governor. Umstead sent a formal note of congratulations, but included Hodges in only one brief meeting and froze him out of all other decisions, including all patronage appointments.⁴³ The one responsibility Umstead could not take away from the new lieutenant governor was appointing senators to their legislative committees.⁴⁴

Hodges, ever the businessman, studied the committee structure with an eye to increasing efficiency and decreasing spending. For advice he turned to the UNC Institute of Government and its director, his former classmate at Carolina, Albert Coates. Although not a popular move, Hodges cut the number of Senate committees from thirty seven to twenty eight. Then he took to the road again to interview every one of the fifty incoming senators, including a freshman named Terry Sanford. He angered many by refusing to tell them on what committees they would serve, but the North Carolina press corps was impressed with "his streak of independence."⁴⁵

A few days before the inauguration, Hodges was standing in the entrance to the Sir Walter Hotel when a lobbyist with more than twenty years of experience approached him. According to Hodges, the lobbyist suggested "Let's you and I take a bottle of Scotch and go up to my room and set up your Senate committees." Astonished, Hodges asked "What was that?" The lobbyist repeated his request and added "I've been doing this for lieutenant governors for many years." "Well this is where it stops," snapped Hodges. "No one is going to make my appointments but me."⁴⁶ Hodges's apolitical actions may appear naïve but his unique election had brought him into politics with, as he would say, "no tie-ups or commitments." Hodges had his prejudices and faults, but he also had a rare opportunity for independent action seldom found in American politics.⁴⁷

What has this exploration of the election of 1952 revealed about Tar Heel politics in the twentieth century? Had there been a political realignment in the preceding critical elections of 1948 or 1950? First, the defining issues of the gubernatorial campaign of 1952 between Umstead and Olive reflected the old politics of the previous thirty years and did not recreate the explosive racial politics of 1950, which suggests that a major realignment had yet to take shape. Second, while the basic factions of the political system remained basically unchanged in 1952, the traditional alliances among elite political actors were disintegrating. In a confusing election Hodges garnered support from segments of both factions, while Rowe's traditional old boy network of legislators, lobbyists, and local court house gangs proved surprisingly weaker than expected. Third, the advent of television was just beginning to provide politicians with new ways to reach voters directly without having to depend on local political bosses to get their name and message out. In sum, the election of 1952 demonstrated a weakening of the old political party system more than a birth of a new one. Instead, it appears that the clear break from the issues, factions, and structures that defined the former political system occurred in the years after 1952, and that change came very quickly.

In North Carolina Inauguration Day falls on the first Thursday in January. In 1953 Governor Umstead and Lieutenant Governor Hodges began their day with a reception and the traditional swearing-in ceremony, followed by the governor's speech. Immediately afterward, the dignitaries rode in their automobiles at the front of the parade before standing for hours on the platform, dressed in formal attire, watching floats, bands, and marchers pass by. Next was a luncheon in which Umstead and Hodges had to shake thousands of well-wishers' hands. Later in the afternoon, they attended a dinner at which there was more shaking of hands and visiting. That evening an estimated 4000 citizens came to the Governor's reception at the Mansion to meet their new leaders. Last, came the Governor's Ball, a gala affair held at Memorial Auditorium in which tradition required Mr. and Mrs. Umstead to lead the first dance. The enthusiastic crowd later demanded that he play his harmonica. For North Carolinians associated with the Shelby Dynasty, it was a day of resurgence, vindication, and celebration. To Luther Hodges it was a day of exhaustion, which he later described as "barbaric." It did not surprise him when somewhere around the time the 2,500 person crushed down on the governor's hand, and then his own, that Umstead turned to him with a grimace to complain that his right leg was hurting him.⁴⁸

The next day Hodges presided over his first session of the Senate. On his way to the State Capitol Building, he stopped at a flower shop and, on an impulse, bought a white carnation for his lapel, "just to lift his spirits" he later explained. The white carnation became his trademark and he wore one every day between that morning in 1953 and Terry Sanford's inauguration in January, 1961.⁴⁹

After the day's business had been completed he closed his office next to the Senate Chamber and went by the Governor's office downstairs. He met with Umstead for just a minute, offering to help him in any way he could. "I know that you will have your budget

message in the next few days," he told the governor. "Let me know about it, what you want and I will try to do everything I can for you."⁵⁰ Umstead thanked him and said he would have it the first two or three days of the following week. That was the first conversation the governor and his lieutenant governor had shared about any matter of government business.

It was also the last. That night Umstead suffered a heart attack. He spent the next 22 months either in the hospital or in bed at the Governor's Mansion. During that time he never relinquished control of his responsibilities. Except for the rare occasion when Umstead could go to his office for a few hours to conduct official business, the executive power of the state government was in the hands of his wife, his personal secretary Ed Rankin, and his legislative counsel Frank W. Taylor. Umstead never once turned to Hodges for help or delegated a single responsibility to his lieutenant governor. On Sunday morning, November 7, 1954, Governor Umstead had a second heart attack. Ed Rankin called Luther Hodges at his home in Leaksville. "Governor Hodges," Rankin said, "Governor Umstead died a little after nine o'clock this morning."⁵¹

The Shelby Dynasty died with William Umstead in 1954. Although Luther Hodges owed his ascent to power to Robert Hanes, B. Everett Jordan, and, perhaps, even to Governor O. Max Gardner, who first brought him into politics in the 1930s, he had no interest in maintaining their political machine or rebuilding its organization. Hodges was not a politician. He disliked politics. He was a businessman in the statehouse who cherished his self-constructed image of an independent public servant beholden to any individual or political faction. Indeed he was so independent that he asked Umstead's personal secretary, Ed Rankin, to stay on in the same capacity in his administration. The position of governor's secretary had traditionally been reserved for his most trusted personal advisor, but Hodges valued competence over loyalty.⁵² When the governor announced that he was adding Paul Johnson, a lawyer from the Institute of Government, to his inner circle of advisors, the press asked if Johnson was a Democrat or a Republican. An embarrassed Hodges had to admit that he had forgotten to ask.⁵³ In 1957, Democratic county officials from across the state called an emergency meeting to insist that the governor stop undercutting them by appointing so many Republicans to state and local positions.⁵⁴ The Shelby Dynasty, built on patronage and loyalty, was done.

But the Shelby Dynasty and the Progressive Plutocracy did not pass from North Carolina history together. Although V. O. Key was correct to conflate the two groups from the late 1920s through 1954, the Progressive Plutocracy outlived the political machine that gave it power. Hodges embraced the principles and the practices of the Progressive Plutocracy throughout his governorship, including the contradictory tendencies of a supposed paternalism towards African Americans and industrial workers while working against civil rights and labor unions. The Pearsall Plan of 1956, with its rhetoric of moderation, was perhaps the final victory of the Progressive Plutocracy before the growing successes of the

civil rights movement undercut the credibility of "the North Carolina Way." If the Shelby Dynasty died with William Umstead, the Progressive Plutocracy ended with Luther Hodges.

The implications of this interpretation are significant. Historians have long been clear about their portrayal of North Carolina politics during the period of the solid South in the first half of the twentieth century. V.O. Key's Progressive Plutocracy remains the dominant paradigm for the period. Likewise scholars are pretty confident about how to describe political history in the state after 1960, usually relying on Paul Luebke's model of modernizers versus traditionalists. But it is the transition between these two political systems that has been confused. In the recent book *The New Politics of North Carolina*, Thomas Eamon describes the period after Kerr Scott as "a return to normalcy."⁵⁵ The 1950s were anything but normal. They marked a distinct realignment in Tar Heel politics.

Thus North Carolina experienced two political realignments in the twentieth century. This first realignment, the racial realignment, from 1948 to 1960 preceded the more frequently acknowledged second realignment, the partisan realignment, marked by the rise of the Republican Party after 1972. The various chapters of our state's political history in the twentieth century cannot be sufficiently integrated into a coherent whole until the overlooked racial realignment of the 1950s is incorporated into the narrative of Tar Heel politics.

¹ Luther H. Hodges (hereafter cited as “LHH”), “Experiences of Luther H. Hodges as Governor of North Carolina,” transcript of dictated remarks, n.d., 11, Luther H. Hodges Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (hereafter cited as “LHHP”), series 2.1, f. 1271 (hereafter cited as “Recollections”).

² The only complete biography of Luther Hodges is a book for teenage readers: A. G. (Pete) Ivey, *Luther H. Hodges, Practical idealist* (Minneapolis: T.S. Denison & Co., 1968). Hodges wrote two books that cover major aspects of his life: Luther H. Hodges, *Businessman in the Statehouse: Six Years as Governor of North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962); Luther H. Hodges, *The Business Conscience* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963).

³ LHH to W. H. Ruffin, 20 March 1950, series 1.1, f. 12. Hodges wrote a series of personal reports to his family and friends in which he describes his experiences in Germany, which can be found in LHHP, series 1.1, f. 19. Hodges also received an offer from Governor Kerr Scott to serve on the committee to promote better labor-management relations in North Carolina, but turned it down after agreeing to go to Germany. Forrest Shuford to LHH, 28 March 1950, LHHP, series 1.1, f. 15.

⁴ Hodges’s friend and business associate sent him the following telegram: “Dear Luther, Your sweet wife is not in politics. Regards, Whit.” Whit Whitcomb to LHH 27 April 1950, LHHP, series 1.1, f. 17. “Six State Women Leaders Endorse Frank Graham’s Candidacy,” *Greensboro Daily News*, 27 April 1950, LHHP, series 1.1, f. 17; B. C. Trotter to LHH, 10 May 1950, LHHP, series 1.1, f. 17; B. C. Trotter to LHH, 20 June 1950, LHHP, series 1.1, f. 17.

⁵ V. O. Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949); 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); William D. Snider, “The Scotts of Haw River,” in *The North Carolina Century: Tar Heels Who Made a Difference, 1900-2000*, ed. Howard Covington Jr. and Marion A. Ellis (Charlotte: Levine Museum of the New South, 2002).

⁶ The best overview of state politics is found 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).

⁷ William A. Link, *North Carolina, Change and Tradition in a Southern State* (Wheeling Illinois: Harlan Davidson, 2009).

⁸ Paul Luebke, *Tar Heel Politics, 2000* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

⁹ The literature on realignment theory is vast and often contradictory. However, a general consensus has emerged over the past decade around the basic theory, although debates continue about specific topics. See Theodore Rosenof, *Realignment: The Theory That Changed the Way We Think About American Politics* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003). For realignment theory applied to recent southern politics see Charles Presby, “The Reshaping of the Political Party System in North Carolina,” in *The New Politics of North Carolina*, eds. Christopher A. Cooper and H. Gibbs Knotts (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press,

2006) 61-85; Alexander P. Lamis, *Southern Politics in the 1990s* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999), 392-406.

There is a great deal of political science literature dedicated to explaining, and debating, various aspects of realignment theory but there is general consensus about how realignments occur. At the beginning of a realignment period the established political system contains two parties or factions that are divided along a set of issues and philosophies rooted in past battles. Then as new issues arise which cut across the former line of cleavage that defined the old parties, the existing political system has difficulty adjusting to the new realities. Eventually the old system disintegrates and a new political system is born. Sometimes a realignment is expressed in a dramatic critical election, such as was the case in Franklin Delano Roosevelt's decisive victory in 1932. At other times a realignment is much slower and develops in stages. For instance, many political scientists believe that the realignment of the formerly solid Democratic South to the Republican majority of today took several decades stretching from the turbulent 1960s to the Reagan revolution of the 1980s or even longer. Rosenof, *Realignment*, 155-167.

¹⁰ Certainly there were competitive political contests between different factions of the Democratic Party during the stable political system that defined Tar Heel politics between 1900 and the 1950s. Some scholars have suggested that a defacto two-party system did function within the state as a contest between conservative and liberal factions of the Democratic Party. Others have argued, perhaps more persuasively, that the political era is better described as being dominated by two sequential organizations—the Simmons Machine and the Shelby Dynasty—which represented substantially the same elite alliance—the Progressive Plutocracy—that was periodically challenged by rebellions from both the left and the right.

¹¹“Luther Hodges Completed His Mission to Germany; Will Be Home This Month,” *The Leaksville News*, 17 May 1951, Rockingham County Historical Collection, James Library, Rockingham Community College (hereafter cited as “RHC”).

¹² Hodges, “Recollections,” 15; Hodges, “Private Memo re Lt. Gov. Race,” LHHP, series 3, f. 1872; Ivey, *Practical Idealist*, 122.

¹³ Jordan told Hodges that he had checked with Kerr Scott and that the Governor was supportive of Hodges running on one condition--that Frank Taylor of Wadesboro did not enter the race. Jordan explained that most of his contacts agreed with the Governor and considered Taylor a good man, but that Taylor had been unclear as to his intentions. A second candidate, Marshall Kurfees, mayor of Winston-Salem, did not inspire confidence nor seem to have a legitimate chance of winning. A third candidate, Ben J. McDonald of Wilmington was seen as an even greater long shot. Hodges, “Private Memo re Lt. Gov. Race,” LHHP, series 3, f. 1872.

¹⁴ Hodges, “Private Memo re Lt. Gov. Race,” LHHP, series 3, f. 1872.

¹⁵ Robert Korstead and James Leloudis, *To Right These Wrongs*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010) 24.

¹⁶ LHH to A. B. Harless, 4 March 1952, LHHP series 1.1, f. 21; LHH to Charlie Reynolds, 10 March 1952, LHHP, series 1.2, f. 24.

¹⁷ LHH to Dewey, n.d. 1952, LHHP, series 1.2, f. 35; Hodges, "Private Memo re Lt. Gov. Race," LHHP, series 3, f. 1872.

¹⁸ LHH to Dewey, n.d. 1952, LHHP, series 1.2, f. 35.

¹⁹ Rowe received substantial support from most regular lobbyists but especially from the soft drink and drug store lobby, the theatre owners (he owned a theatre himself), the "wet" lobby, and most of the legislators. LHH to Hiden Ransey, 22 April 1952, LHHP, series 1.2, f. 33; J. Braxton Craven to LHH, 18 April 1952, LHHP, series 1.2, f. 32.

²⁰ He was personally associated with the Gardner's political machine and Robert Hanes but Jordan had secured Governor Scott's vague support for his candidacy. The old-boy network in the legislature was not acting under the direction of either the Shelby Dynasty or the Branchhead Boys, revealing both the weakness of the old machine and the legislators' independence on the lieutenant governor's race. The traditional split between the old guard and Scott's insurgents did dominate the governor's race. The Shelby Dynasty threw all its weight into pushing Umstead into the Governor's Mansion, and claiming all the patronage that came with it, while Governor Scott did everything he could to keep them out by electing his chosen successor Hubert Olive. Neither side endorsed a candidate for lieutenant governor. LHH to Jack Quinerly, 15 April 1952 LHHP, series 2.1, f. 31; LHH to Troy Hodges, 7 April 1952, LHHP, series 1.2, f. 29. For a description of the Umstead versus Olive race see Covington and Ellis, Terry Sanford, 114-119.

²¹ Hodges, *Businessman in the Statehouse*, 18.

²² John Robinson to LHH, 11 July 1953, LHHP, Series 1.2 folder 52. On another occasion when both men had to travel far out west to Murphy for a rally Hodges asked Umstead suggested that to save money and energy that they might want to ride out together. Umstead made an excuse and drove himself, not arriving in Cherokee County until after 3:00 in the morning. Hodges, "Recollections," 3.

²³ Ibid, 6.

²⁴ Hodges, "Recollections", 1-2, 5-6; Christensen, *Paradox*, 158. One supporter wrote to Hodges "in the strictest confidence" confessing "I am fearful that his physical condition will not hold out, . . . This is a point that can't be publicized." Clarence Griffin to LHH, 12 April 1952, LHHP, series 2.1, folder 32. The tension between Umstead and Hodges further blurred the dividing lines between the political factions in 1952 and added to the confusion about whether Hodges was affiliated with the Shelby Dynasty or the Branchhead Boys. While one well-wisher praised Hodges as "a second O. Max Gardner," while another congratulated him on having Kerr Scott's blessing. When one political supporter warned that "the Scott crowd here is all for Rowe," another celebrated that Rowe was "being opposed bitterly by the Scott forces." A friend suggested Hodges talk to a potential supporter who "was strongly anti-Scott and was anti-Graham," but "he likes you." Another friend reported hearing that "folks thought that Mr. Hodges is simply Governor Scott's candidate." J Braxton Bravel to LHH, 18 April 1952, LHHP, series 2.1, f. 32; C. Sylvester Green to LHH, 21 April 1952, LHHP, series 2.1 f. 32; A.B. Gibson to LHH, 5 February 1952, LHHP, series 1.1, f. 21; Clarence Griffin to LHH, 12 April 1952, LHHP, series 2.1, f. 32; Note on strategy, 1952, LHHP, series 3, f. 1874; D.F. Gillie to LHH, 12 March 1952, LHHP, series 1.2, f. 24.

²⁵ LHH to T.S. Bane, 7 April 1952, LHHP, series 1.2, f. 29. He refused to answer questionnaires from the North Carolina Education Association, from the Citizens' Council for Good Government, or from any other organization. "Although I appreciate you're sending me the questionnaire" he wrote, "and your wanting a detailed expression as to how I feel about specific items I am of the opinion that it is not the proper thing for me to do. As you probably know, I am not a politician and I am not accustomed to making specific statements as to what I will do and will not do unless I am sure of my ground and can make good on my promises." LHH to W. Amos Abrams, North Carolina Education Association, 7 April 1952, LHHP, series 2.7, f. 1755.

²⁶ Hodges's good friend Harriet Herring passed on the traditional advice given to anyone running for any office in North Carolina for many years: "the real place to work is with the people who run the counties and precincts, which is often but not always synonymous with the 'court house gang'—to see them and let them see you." Harriet Herring to LHH, 31 March 1952, LHHP series 1.2, f. 28.

²⁷ Hodges, *Businessman in the Statehouse*, 15.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Hodges, *Businessman in the Statehouse*, 15. An editorial written in support of his candidacy picked up the same theme. "Factions which do not always see eye to eye on all men or issues can look upon Luther Hodges as a mutual friend and a fair-minded, completely able and complete candidate." "Hodges for Lt. Governor," *The Reidsville Review*, 12 March 1952, LHHP, series 1.2, f. 30. People told Hodges they were voting for him for a variety of reasons, including that he was "an experienced and understanding businessman," because he would "reduce taxes," because he had gotten a road paved in the town of Dunn when he was on the Highway Commission in the 1930s, because he was a "dry" (he wasn't), and because he would give "pressure groups a collective kick in the pants." Perhaps the most backhanded endorsement he received was from an acquaintance back home in Leaksville who promised to vote for him "in spite of the fact that you have constantly, throughout our acquaintanceship, fought and opposed me on every occasion, your whole attitude toward me has been unfriendly." An undertaker expressed his qualified support by explaining "You realize that in my business here that we have to bury both Republicans and Democrats as well as communists and Vegetarians, therefore, I can't do or say too much in an open campaign. Ironically, in light of what was to come after the Brown decision, Hodges even earned the endorsement of the Durham Committee on Negro Affairs. M. Hugh Thompson to LHH, 23 May 1952, LHHP, series 1.2, f. 38.

³⁰ Hanes stayed active behind the scenes helping Hodges meet the right people and pulling occasional strings with friends. R.M. Hanes to LHH, 4 April 1952, LHHP, series 1.2, f. 29; Blanc Worley to LHH, 5 February 1952, LHHP, series 1.1, f. 21.

³¹ Hodges financed his campaign himself with the addition of several local supporters who chipped in resources when needed. The exact amount is uncertain, ranging from the reasonable sum of \$7,212.03 which he reported as the official sum, and \$56,000 which he wrote to his campaign manager was available if needed. The official amount is recorded in Ivey, *Practical Idealist*, 123; The figure of \$56,000 is referred to by Makepeace when he wrote "Fifty Six Thousand should go a long ways on your campaign expense." Makepeace to LHH 18 April 1952, LHHP series 2.1, f. 32. Hodges offered a rebate on official campaign donations not spent, which was very different from the usual practice of the day. As he later explained: The fact was that, in state campaigns, it has long been the practice—after a successful race—to claim you had spent more than you actually did spend. This paved the way for a post-election fund drive to cover the campaign 'deficit.' And a lot of people—particularly those who had not supported the successful candidate—felt they couldn't refuse to kick in to these slush funds for politicians who soon would be taking office." Hodges, *Business Conscience*, 91.

³² LHH to Phillip McMullan, 10 March 1952, LHHP, series 1.2, f. 24; LHH to G.T. Page, 31 March 1952, LHHP, series 1.2, f. 24; Curtis Smithdeal to LHH, 6 March 1952, LHHP, series 1.2, f. 23; LHH to Mildred Andrews, 7 April 1952, LHHP, series 2.1, f. 29; Harriet Herring to LHH, 31 March 1952, LHHP, series, 1.2, f. 26; LHH to John Smith, Fr., 17 March 1952, LHHP, series 1.2, f. 25.

³³ Charles B. Deane to LHH, 8 February 1952, LHHP series 3, f. 1868. Also businessman 11-14, campaign notes, LHHP series 2.7, f. 1792.

³⁴ LHH, *Businessman in the Statehouse*, 12.

³⁵ It took a little work to get the political novice to understand how to craft his message into the traditional five minute spots. At first Hodges did the whole segment by himself but his friends convinced him to let someone else introduce him and review his accomplishments before he spoke. "It seems to us," they warned, "that a casual listener, who did not know you, might get the impression that you were bragging." Robert Thompson to LHH, 24 April 1952, LHHP, series 1.2, f. 33.

³⁶ On air Hodges explained, "I am a businessman," he explained, "I have visited every one of the 100 counties. . . I am running for this office with no political tie-ups or commitments. When I am elected I will go into office entirely unhampered by false promises. . . I will be committed to no pressure group." "Prepared Remarks," TV Charlotte, 29 May 1952 LHHP series 3, f. 1876.

³⁷ Gaines Kelley to LHH, 12 June 1952, LHHP, series 1.1, f. 43; Cameron Peterson to LHH, 1 June 1952, LHHP series 1.2, f. 40. Many of the letters of congratulation to Hodges mentioned his commanding presence on the TV show that aired just before the primary. See J. B. Craven to LHH, 2 June 1952, LHHP, series 1.2, f. 40.

³⁸ LHH to Chug and Lyde, 2 June 1952, LHHP, series 1.2, f. 40.

³⁹ "Is a Political Miracle in the Making?," *Chatham News*, 5 June 1952, LHHP, series 3, f. 1870; "Political Miracle Man," *Asheville Citizen*, 9 June 1952, LHHP series 3, f. 1870; Ivey, *Practical Idealist*, 126.

⁴⁰ LHH, *Businessman in the Statehouse*, 16; LHH to Winfield Blackwell, 24 June 1952, LHHP, series 1.1, f. 44.

⁴¹ "Rowe Will Not Seek Second Primary Against Hodges," *Leaksville News*, 12 June 1952, RHC; Roy Rowe to LHH, 7 June 1952, LHHP, series 5.2, f. 2116.

⁴² Eisenhower put a scare into North Carolina Democrats by running a more competitive race against Adlai Stevenson than expected. Hodges summed up the elections explaining, "the vote for Stevenson was 652,000 and for Eisenhower 558,000. We were pulling hard for Stevenson because we believed in him, but understand the situation and the general feeling against Trumanism, et cetera. I received 784,000 votes against my opponent's 375,000, giving me a majority of 40,000. The Democratic Governor's margin was about 10,000 more than this." LHH to Larry Sizer 21 November 1952, LHHP, series 1.2, f. 48.

⁴³ William Umstead to LHH, 17 June 1952, LHHP, series 1.2, f. 43. On assignments Hodges wrote: "Mr. Umstead is handling all these appointments and is not, as far as I know, discussing them with any of his official family—certainly he hasn't with me." LHH to Stafford Hodges, 20 June 1953, LHHP, series 1.2, f. 51.

⁴⁴ Hodges was bombarded with calls and letters from both those who supported him and those who supported Rowe. The worried Rowe supporters explained that they had actually wanted to support Hodges but just could not do so for one reason or another. One senator, concerned that he was in a bad spot, clarified that while he was for Rowe "I don't want you to feel as if I were against you." And, he added, "I did not do any work for him and did not even tell the members of my own family how to vote. My wife told me she voted for you because she heard you over the radio and was much impressed." J. B. Thomas to LHH, 12 June 1952, LHHP series 1.1, f. 43.

⁴⁵ "High Respect Won Quickly by Hodges," *Greensboro Daily News*, 19 January 1953, LHHP, series 1.2, f. 50; Ivey, *Practical Idealist*, 127; Hodges, *Businessman in the Statehouse*, 19-20.

⁴⁶ Hodges, "Recollections", 18; Ivey, *Practical Idealist*, 127, 133; Covington and Ellis, *Terry Sanford*, 122.

⁴⁷ To more fully understand Hodges's ethical worldview see: Hodges, *Business Conscience*.

⁴⁸ Hodges, *Businessman in the Statehouse*, 16-17; Hodges, "Recollections," 3-5; Ivey, *Practical Idealist*, 132.

⁴⁹ Hodges, "Recollections," 20.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 5. Umstead had not allowed Hodges to participate in any of the meetings leading up to the budget, although outgoing Governor Scott had kindly invited Hodges to sit in on the Budget Advisory Committee meetings in December.

⁵¹ "Governor's Heart Attack 'Mild,' Out of Action at Least Two Weeks," *Raleigh News and Observer*, 13 January 1952; Hodges, *Businessman in the Statehouse*, 17-19; Ivey, *Practical Idealist*, 134-135.

⁵² Hodges, *Businessman in the Statehouse*, 4.

⁵³ Ivey, *Practical Idealist*, 146.

⁵⁴ Christensen, *Paradox of Tar Heel Politics*, 158.

⁵⁵ Thomas F. Eamon, "The Seeds of Modern North Carolina Politics," in Cooper and Knotts, *The New Politics of North Carolina*, 24.

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Presented on September 14th and 15th, 2012, the conference "To Gain Attention to Their Various Claims: Historic Political Campaigns in North Carolina" took place at Wilson Library, co-sponsored by the North Carolina Collection and the Southern Historical Collection