



# Triumph of Good Will: How Terry Sanford Beat a Champion of Segregation and Reshaped the South

*John Drescher*

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A history of Sanford's ground-breaking strategy that established the winning centrist formula for southern politics

In the spring of 1960 two talented, capable men, each with great passion and conviction, opposed each other in a pivotal governor's race that was to shake North Carolina and change southern politics forever. Both Terry Sanford and I. Beverly Lake were Democrats in the one-party South of that era. Yet they were different in almost every other way. Lake, a middle-aged law professor, was committed to segregation. Sanford, an ambitious young politician and lawyer, believed in expanding opportunities for all citizens.

In their run-off Lake wanted the contest to be a referendum on preserving segregation. Sanford's platform rested on the improvement of public schools. It was a heated struggle that would bind them together for the rest of their lives. With unparalleled access to both sides and an objective correspondent's hindsight view, John Drescher has written the biography of a campaign that set the winning strategy for many who followed, and of a winning candidate, a governor rated as one of the finest of the twentieth century.

Sanford, the moderate, won, and his victory is an oddity, for in the civil rights period from 1957 to 1973 only twice in the South did racial moderates defeat strong segregationists in a governor's race. In a gamble that almost cost Sanford the election, he became the first major politician in the Bible Belt to endorse the Catholic John F. Kennedy for president. In the November vote he defeated his Republican opponent in what was then the closest North Carolina governor's race of the century. His win validated his belief in the triumph of good will among North Carolina's people.

Sanford became a bold, aggressive governor of unusual energy and creativity. His school program added teachers and dramatically raised teacher pay. He helped establish a statewide system of community colleges and started an anti-poverty fund later emulated by LBJ as a model for the War on Poverty. He was the first southern governor to call for employment without regard to race or creed. Sanford became the model for other southern governors who stressed education and a moderate stand on race relations. He influenced other gubernatorial candidates across Dixie -- Jim Hunt in his own state, William Winter in Mississippi, Dick Riley in South Carolina, Bill Clinton in Arkansas. The effects of that 1960 race continue to be felt in North Carolina, in the South, and across the nation.

John Drescher is on the staff of the *Charlotte Observer*, where he has been state capital reporter, government editor, city editor, front-page editor, and regional editor. He lives in Charlotte, North Carolina.

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