

Mercer University School of Law

Mercer Law School Digital Commons

Articles

Faculty Scholarship

7-2020

Creating North Carolina Populism, 1900–1960: Part 2: The Progressive Era Legacy, 1930–1960

James L. Hunt

Mercer University School of Law, hunt_jl@mercer.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.law.mercer.edu/fac_pubs



Part of the [American Politics Commons](#), and the [Political History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

James L. Hunt, *Creating North Carolina Populism, 1900–1960: Part 2: The Progressive Era Legacy, 1930–1960*, 97 N.C. Hist. Rev. 305 (2020).

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Faculty Scholarship at Mercer Law School Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Articles by an authorized administrator of Mercer Law School Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository@law.mercer.edu.

Creating North Carolina Populism, 1900–1960: Part 2: The Progressive Era Legacy, 1930–1960

JAMES L. HUNT

Between 1900 and 1930, North Carolina's first generation of professional historians constructed scholarly accounts of Tar Heel Populism. These pioneers offered a version of the recent past that supported white supremacy and the current Progressive Era political leadership. They agreed Populism's destruction had been desirable. University-based historians opposed the Populist Party's support for significant changes to tax policy, broad-based democracy, and radical forms of corporate regulation, especially of railroads, banks, and monopolies. The key figures included J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton, Simeon A. DeLapp, Florence E. Smith, and John D. Hicks. Most earned Ph.D. degrees in history from northern universities, including Columbia, Chicago, and Wisconsin. In North Carolina, they worked as salaried employees of leading colleges, including the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill and the North Carolina College for Women in Greensboro. Their writing provided an intellectual foundation that served political Progressivism and themselves, the new class of paid historians.

But the Progressive generation's method sowed the seeds of its own obsolescence. Ultimately, historians' conclusions about Populism reflected little more than temporary values and a culture of agreement between the historians and political power. Between 1930 and 1960, Progressive Era ideology lost most of its following in the universities. Equally important, during these decades, faculty members became less linked to local political leadership. In fact, evolving shifts in the wage economy of universities and their history teachers accelerated a repudiation of the initial interpretations. These changes increasingly incentivized younger historians, the second professional generation, to offer different perspectives about the past,

especially perspectives likely to be endorsed by their academic peers. Success in the university eventually became measured by reputation among other historians and not by approval from state-level politicians. While the Progressive Era generation of North Carolina Populist historians viewed nonacademic elites as their target audience, by 1960, employee-historians, now overwhelmingly political liberals, focused on impressing each other. Overall, a decline in Progressive Era political faiths, a growing separation of the profession from political power, changing attitudes toward white racism and the Democratic Party, and the experiences of the Great Depression and its aftermath produced a recasting of North Carolina Populism.

The outstanding early figure in this transformation was C. Vann Woodward (1908–1999). Woodward’s career represented one southern white man’s use of history to attack his elders’ understanding of politics, economics, and morality. His beliefs broadly challenged dominant interpretations of nineteenth-century southern and North Carolina history for Reconstruction, Populism, and the Progressive Era.¹ Woodward spent the mid-1930s in Chapel Hill as a history graduate student, in the same department that employed Progressive Era stalwarts R. D. W. Connor and J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton. He received a Ph.D. from the University of North Carolina and began teaching at the University of Florida in 1937. Woodward’s dissertation biography of Georgia populist Thomas E. Watson (1856–1922), published in 1938, offered a spectacular reinterpretation of southern and North Carolina Populism. Woodward’s opus did not concentrate on North Carolina, but it addressed the movement there. Most importantly, Woodward used Watson to portray southern Democratic Progressives, the heroes of earlier Tar Heel historians, as unjust and

1. Woodward was not the only young North Carolina-based historian offering a generational challenge to the Progressive view. William Alexander Mabry (1906–1980) completed a Ph.D. in 1933 on “The Disfranchisement of the Negro in the South” under Duke professor William Boyd. Mabry also wrote “The Disfranchisement of the Negro in North Carolina” (master’s thesis, Duke University, 1928); *The Negro in North Carolina Politics since Reconstruction* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1940); “Negro Suffrage and Fusion Rule in North Carolina,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 12, no. 2 (April 1935): 79–102; and “‘White Supremacy’ and the North Carolina Suffrage Amendment,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 13, no. 1 (January 1936): 1–24. In contrast to Progressives, Mabry suggested Democrats overreacted to the Populist challenge and even argued “the Negro vote did not contribute materially to the Fusion victory” in 1894, contradicting a basic tenet of earlier accounts. It was also a “matter of opinion” as to whether the “ends of justice” were advanced by Democratic restrictions on Populist democracy. Mabry, “Negro Suffrage and Fusion Rule in North Carolina,” 79–91. Philip Johnson Weaver (1914–1969) also belongs among the challengers. Weaver, a Winston-Salem native, wrote his master’s thesis in 1937 on “The Gubernatorial Election of 1896 in North Carolina” at the University of North Carolina. His adviser was Howard K. Beale. Weaver later became superintendent of the Greensboro City Schools. “Philip Johnson Weaver,” *Carolina Alumni Review* 57, no. 7 (April 1969): 21; *Bulletin of Duke University, Catalogue Number, 1932–1933* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University, 1933), 356. Weaver stressed the reactionary quality of Democratic leadership in the mid-1890s (9, 23) and the party’s negative obsession with Reconstruction (10). However, he repeated the Progressive thesis that Fusion stimulated modern Democrats to bring progress in the state (82).



Emory University senior Comer Vann Woodward, 1930 [Emory University] *Campus*, 44, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, Atlanta, Ga.

backward-looking. In his telling, their best men thwarted what Woodward considered worthy racial and economic reforms.²

For North Carolina, Woodward's reconstruction was not primarily the product of more intense research. Instead, it reflected a consciously political view of history's purpose. He strongly believed historians must interpret the past for the present generation. This principle was not new in North Carolina and in fact coincided with Hamilton and other Progressive historians' assumptions. It was an essential part of the Progressive legacy because the Progressives also taught that professional history demanded relevance. But in the 1930s, as a product of the second generation, Woodward's work implied an endless cycle of reinterpretation driven by the perceived needs and values of a changing audience. It suggested the arguments of a trained historian would, after a passage of time, always be wrong. Woodward understood and welcomed contradiction and disagreement, accepting that revolutions were inherent in academic history. This, however, was a conclusion about their profession the

2. John H. Roper, *C. Vann Woodward, Southerner* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 6-133; C. Vann Woodward, *Tom Watson, Agrarian Rebel* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1938); C. Vann Woodward, "The Political and Literary Career of Thomas E. Watson" (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina, 1937).

Progressives did not accept, as they were more likely to believe in an ultimate “Truth in History.” Woodward’s beliefs derived from fundamental differences between his life experiences and those of the Progressives. While an undergraduate at Emory University in the early 1930s, he visited Atlanta’s black higher educational institutions and “emerged from college determined to combat racial and class injustice.” North Carolina’s young Progressive historians, in sharp contrast, always saw their task as condemning Reconstruction and promoting white supremacy. In 1932, Woodward traveled to Berlin, Paris, and Moscow. The trip to the Soviet Union caused him to be “deeply impressed by Josef Stalin’s quickstep industrial development,” and he considered teaching there. Communism lacked enduring appeal, however, and radicalism did not dictate Woodward’s future. His biographer, John Herbert Roper Sr., observes that after 1934, “Woodward’s life would be taken up with a continuing effort to find a proper balance between the competing masters of political causes and of disinterested scholarship.” Woodward failed to achieve such a balance with the Watson dissertation. Even before he enrolled in the Ph.D. program at Chapel Hill, he planned to write Watson’s life story, a choice that aimed to overturn key portions of the Progressive version of Populism.³

Woodward’s method was more sophisticated than simply discrediting predecessors. An advantage of having Progressive Era scholarship available was that selected portions of it could be used to support his interpretation. Paradoxically, scholarly norms encouraged drawing on helpful portions of the Progressive denigration of North Carolina Populism, despite Woodward’s assault on the older history’s outdated political function. As a result, the Watson biography deftly affirmed as well as rejected important tenets of the North Carolina Progressive project. Specifically, Woodward’s conclusions piggy-backed on the Progressives’ screed against Tar Heel agrarians because Watson hated his North Carolina Populist colleagues as much as the Democrats and their Progressive apologists hated them. Woodward’s perspective required that he portray Watson, or at least Watson in his Populist phase, as a relevant and positive role model for the 1930s. Because Watson condemned North Carolina Populism, in this decisive moment in Populist historiography Woodward did not invite North Carolinians along for his laudatory reconfiguration of Populist meaning. Henceforth, there would be real and fake Populists because the Tar Heels did not measure up either to Woodward’s or to Watson’s Populist vision, which were essentially identical. In Woodward’s telling, Watson was right about Populism, while Marion Butler and

3. Roper, *C. Vann Woodward*, 51, 53–55, 59; Brady M. Banta, “Comer Vann Woodward (1908–1999),” *Encyclopedia of Arkansas*, Central Arkansas Library System, <http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=2763>. John Herbert Roper Sr., “Ransack Roulhac and Racism,” in *The Dunning School: Historians, Race, and the Meaning of Reconstruction*, ed. John David Smith and J. Vincent Lowery (Lexington: Press of Kentucky, 2013), 193, notes opposition to the Progressive perspective during the 1930s among students in Chapel Hill.



Prof. C. Vann Woodward (standing in middle) and University of Florida Humanities College faculty colleagues, 1939 [University of Florida] *Seminole*, 27, University Archives, George A. Smathers Libraries, University of Florida, Gainesville.

his North Carolina followers were wrong. The Watson biography introduced North Carolina Populism by describing Butler as an “astute young politician” whose main interest was Fusion with Republicans. Woodward’s account of the 1896 presidential election divided Populists into “radical” middle-of-the-roaders such as Watson, who represented desirable Populism, and Fusionists, including Butler, who Woodward (like Watson) assigned the quisling role of half-hearted compromisers. The White Judas theme proved exceedingly useful, as it had to the Progressives. Above all, the approach elevated the significance of Woodward’s subject, Watson, by equating him with Real Populism. Equally important, Woodward’s attempt to link the “facts” of political expediency, failure, Fusion, and Republicans through Watson skillfully repeated North Carolina Progressive historians’ contentions about the ineptness and dishonesty of Tar Heel Populists. Much like Hamilton in his 1919 *History*, Woodward did not appear to do much research in North Carolina sources. According to the references in his dissertation and the published *Watson*, he consulted the Progressives John Hicks and Florence Smith.⁴

Woodward frankly admitted his political goals in an unpublished 1938 manuscript, given as speeches during a tour to promote the new biography. Aptly titled, “The Political Philosophy of Tom Watson and the Usable Past,” it shows Woodward created a Tom Watson and a Populism to inspire contemporary liberals,

4. Roper, *C. Vann Woodward*, 80–102; Woodward, *Tom Watson*, 288, 298–301, 315–318, 328–329, 333; Woodward, “The Political and Literary Career of Thomas E. Watson,” 315; Michael Kraus and Davis D. Joyce,

much like Hamilton, Connor, DeLapp, Smith, and Hicks built a Populism in order to praise white Progressives. Woodward told potential book buyers that the Georgia Populist symbolized a foundational revolt. Watson challenged the idea of “reconciliation” advanced by southern white elites after Reconstruction. Reconciliation meant the welcoming of northern capital and the subordination of the southern worker, especially black and rural labor. This economic strategy failed, according to Woodward, leaving the masses impoverished while greedy plutocrats took the money. In contrast, Watson’s Populism sought to link labor in the South and West, not southern and northern capital. It also tried to connect urban and rural labor, and in the South, the white and black races. A doomed nightmare to Hamilton’s Progressives, to Woodward this Dixie Marxism of labor over capital and black and white equality promised human fulfillment. Whether the theory derived from Populist texts or from Woodward’s Depression-era experience, however, is unclear. Woodward announced that Populist beliefs “sound more like the 1930’s than the 1890’s.” Conveniently for the professional historian, government control of railroads and utilities, an increased money supply, and farm credits represented both contemporary and Populist solutions. Woodward’s *Watson* was also relevant because it described the allegedly devastating effects of Populism’s political annihilation. Watson, depicted by Woodward as a Peach State Jekyll and Hyde, fit the bill perfectly. While Progressives praised Populism’s destruction as a victory, Woodward recast its defeat as tragedy. Instead of hoped for progress, Populist loss gave birth to a new

The Writing of American History (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 309–310. One scholar who has described the motivations behind Woodward’s Populist work is Robert C. McMath Jr., “C. Vann Woodward and the Burden of Southern Populism,” in *Origins of the New South Fifty Years Later: The Continuing Influence of a Historical Classic*, ed. John B. Boles and Bethany L. Johnson (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003), 189–217. Recognizing that the “young Woodward could not have avoided ‘history-with-a-purpose’ even if he had tried,” McMath (b. 1944) argues that Woodward’s political goals should still serve as the starting point for writing about Populism. Thus, flawed and limited interpretations of “populism form an unnecessary impediment for those who still seek in that legacy forgotten alternatives of what American could have become. I would like to believe that by opening up new perspectives we will encourage a new generation of scholars and citizens to pursue Woodward’s purposes.” In 1938, Woodward welcomed *Tom Watson*’s political impact. He was “amused, as well as pleased, to learn that the Communist Book Union had chosen my book as the alternate selection for this month and to see at the same time a letter of congratulations from the Georgia Division of the United Daughters of the Confederacy.” Woodward’s subtle method was effective. In the early 1960s, historian Walter T. K. Nugent (b. 1935) praised his writing style, which offered the “mailed fist in the velvet glove approach.” Woodward stressed the tactic to his students and complimented Bruce Palmer (b. 1942), author of *Man over Money: The Southern Populist Critique of American Capitalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), for the “temperateness and fairness of [his] tone. Another [accomplishment] is the forbearance of historiographical polemics. In a way your temperate tone answers many of the historiographical problems and corrects many former writers. I think the subject has suffered from intemperance both pro and con. You have a consistent way of balancing blame with credit without being flat and bland.” C. Vann Woodward to William M. Doerflinger, April 21, 1938; Walter K. Nugent to C. Vann Woodward, November 27, 1961; C. Vann Woodward to Bruce Palmer, June 13, 1976, all in C. Vann Woodward Papers (hereinafter Woodward Papers), Manuscripts and Archives, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University, New Haven, Conn.

Tom Watson, a man corrupted by hate. Watson abandoned old beliefs, becoming a chief bigot and collaborator with unjust economic power. The moral of Woodward's two Watsons was obvious: In the 1930s, failure to achieve reform could lead to irrational bitterness and perhaps American fascism. Woodward's Real Populism, without the half-hearted North Carolinians both Watson and the racist Progressives despised, offered a new way for liberals to perceive Reconstruction, Progressivism, the New Deal, and in fact the whole of southern and American history.⁵

The interconnections between Woodward and the Progressives' attacks on North Carolina Populism extended well beyond the *Watson* book. In the end, what distinguished Woodward from the Progressives was not primarily his portrayal of North Carolina Populism, as the two agreed on several essential elements, especially Fusion. Instead, it concerned how Woodward and the Progressives used Populism to advance different political values: Bumbling, unwitting stimulators of a new form of Democratic white supremacy, or tragically prescient precursors to southern liberalism. A mutually beneficial academic contest resulted, based on the shared assumption that Populist meaning had an important connection to the present and that Fusion was wrong. The second generation of professional historians, including Woodward, gained in other ways from the Progressive achievement. Hamilton acquired Tom Watson's papers in 1930 for the Southern Historical Collection, which drew Woodward to Chapel Hill. Following a protracted courtship with the Butler family, Hamilton also obtained the Marion Butler Papers, although not until after Woodward left the university. When Butler died in June 1938, Hamilton drove to Washington, D.C., to retrieve them. In the capital he consulted with his former colleague R. D. W. Connor, now the National Archivist. Connor agreed with Hamilton's assessment that "for our sake the collection should remain under seal for a long time."⁶ The Progressives' decision to delay public access "for our sake" represented an unusually candid expression of the political functions of academic history. Not surprisingly, given that he agreed history was to be used for political

5. "The Political Philosophy of Tom Watson and the Usable Past," [1938], Box 65, Folder 43, Woodward Papers. Woodward repeated these themes thirteen years later in *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951). The book replayed the earlier negative portrayal of North Carolina's Populists. They were "Badly handicapped for leadership in 1892 by the death of Polk, bungled their nomination for governor, and finished with only eleven seats in the legislature." Although the Populist-Republican triumph two years later was an "outstanding victory," Fusion itself was "expediency." Tar Heels, and especially Marion Butler, believed in the narrow reforms of silver and Fusion, not the entire program of the national Populist platform. Accordingly, real Populists, such as Tom Watson, regarded Butler with "distrust" and "suspicion." Because of Fusion "the masses lost confidence and became apathetic." Woodward's linking of political "expediency," failure, and Republicans restated Hamilton's conclusions about the foolishness and dishonesty of North Carolina Populism, if for a different purpose. Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913*, 261, 276-277, 287, 289.

6. Roper, *C. Vann Woodward*, 97; J. D. Watson to J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton, May 26, 1930; J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton to Florence Faison Butler, November 2, 1928; "Manuscript Collection Form [1936]," all in Marion

purposes, Woodward made the most of this Progressive document gathering, with Hamilton's cooperation. He was among the first scholars permitted to view the officially "sealed" Butler Papers. Hamilton responded to his inquiry: "Dear Woodward: Read the Butler papers to 1900, do not quote, and keep your face closed about using them. Good luck." On September 6, 1939, one year after *Tom Watson* appeared, Woodward read some of the Butler manuscripts.⁷

The symbiosis between Woodward and the Progressives persisted. While writing *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (1955), Woodward sent a draft to Howard K. Beale (1899–1959), his dissertation adviser. By then, Beale, a northern liberal who disliked life in provincial Chapel Hill and complained about the low quality of undergraduates there, had moved to the University of Wisconsin, where he did not enjoy the weather. Partly because of his experiences in North Carolina, Beale appreciated Woodward's desire to sustain the contest with Progressives. Beale advised Woodward that "you perhaps do not want to mention our friend J.G. de R. Hamilton by name, but it seems to me pertinent to your story that the Wilmington riot [in 1898] was used by both him and Connor to give the impression that the Negroes did the rioting, and to bolster their general thesis that under

Butler Papers #114 (hereinafter Butler Papers), Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton to Marion Butler, June 19, 1929; Florence Faison Butler to J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton, June 24, 1929, June 5, 1936, September 10, 1938; J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton to Florence Faison Butler, June 28, 1929, June 15, 1936, November 10, 1937, September 13, 22, 1938; J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton to Marion Butler, April 8, 1937; J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton to Algernon Butler, August 24, 1938; Algernon Butler to J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton, September 6, 1938, all in Manuscripts Department of the Library of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Records, 1926–2006 #40052 (hereinafter Manuscripts Department Records), Southern Historical Collection; Hamilton Diary Entries, October 30, November 1, 4, 5, 1937, September 18, 19, 20, 23–28 (quotation, September 23), October 1, 7, 12, 21, 25, 1938, J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton Papers #01743, Southern Historical Collection. 7. J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton to C. Vann Woodward, August 23, [1939], Woodward Papers; entry for September 6, 1939, Registration Book S-1 (1937–1961), Manuscripts Department Records. The first historian to view the Butler Papers, other than Hamilton and Connor, appears to have been William Mabry, who preceded Woodward by about two months. Entry for July 3, 1939, Registration Book S-1 (1937–1961), Manuscripts Department Records. The Southern Historical Collection Registration Book does not indicate that Woodward ever consulted the Butler Papers again through 1955, the period that included publication of his *Origins of the New South* and *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955). It is difficult to discern the details of Woodward's brief 1939 excursion into the Butler Papers. Nonetheless, he appears to have viewed only the small portion available, mostly letters to Butler during the 1896 election. From this selective experience, as well as limited work in North Carolina Progressive secondary sources for the Watson dissertation, he derived a lasting impression of the negative features of Fusion. This perspective had a profound effect on twentieth-century writing about Populist politics. Certainly, other paths were possible. One Reconstruction scholar, for example, described political strategy based on the broader American two-party tradition: "Men change parties from time to time, but only under extreme conditions do they try to find new ones. It is true that the supreme effort to organize a third party of principle is occasionally called forth. But its only chance of success . . . seems to depend on its ability to break down or swallow up one of the two majority parties and to become a majority party itself. As a matter of history and practice, that process has worked more often in reverse. Every institutional interest of the two major parties will inspire them figuratively to turn upon the third and suck away its life. . . . Inherent, then, in the very launching of a third party is the activation of forces that work to sap its energy." Eric L. McKittrick, *Andrew Johnson and Reconstruction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 396–397.



Howard K. Beale, former professor and director of graduate studies in history at the University of North Carolina, at the University of Wisconsin, 1958. Image courtesy of the University of Wisconsin-Madison Archives, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Negro-Republican rule no white woman, as they put it, was safe on the streets of North Carolina.” Beale thought “there is a beautiful irony in [Woodward’s] use of that riot to prove the opposite . . . was true.” Woodward’s attack on Jim Crow, like Hamilton’s defense of it, reflected the kind of purposeful professional history invented by the Progressives.⁸

8. Howard K. Beale to C. Vann Woodward, October 22, 1954, Woodward Papers. John Herbert Roper Sr. describes Woodward’s assumption that historians must “look for facts to question one another” as a “tragic view of the nature of knowledge, yes, but a grandly tragic view and not one cutely ironic or harmfully consumed with its own futility.” John Herbert Roper Sr., “C. Vann Woodward, *Southern Historian*,” in *Reading Southern History: Essays on Interpreters and Interpretations*, ed. Glenn Feldman (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001), 149–150. Beale, a Chicago native and Harvard Ph.D. (1927), was at Chapel Hill from 1935 to 1948. He disagreed with the Dunning approach and represented a political position, including on racial matters, decidedly more liberal than other history faculty at Chapel Hill. See, for example, Howard K. Beale, “On Rewriting Reconstruction History,” *American Historical Review* 45, no. 4 (July 1940): 807–827; and “Biography/History,” Howard K. Beale Papers, 1913-1959, University of Wisconsin-Madison Libraries Digital Collections, <http://digioll.library.wisc.edu/cgi/f/findaid/findaid-idx?c=wiarchives;view=reslist;subview=standard;didno=uw-whs-mss00098;focusrgn=bioghist;cc=wiarchives;byte=78696218>. “Howard K. Beale Papers, 1913-1959; Biography/History,” University of Wisconsin-Madison Libraries Digital Collections, <http://digioll.library.wisc.edu/cgi/f/findaid/findaid-idx?c=wiarchives;view=reslist;subview=standard;didno=uw-whs-mss00098;focusrgn=bioghist;cc=wiarchives;byte=160955162>.



The University of North Carolina during the 1930s, when C. Vann Woodward and Howard K. Beale were associated with its history department. Wilson Library, home of J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton's Southern Historical Collection, is in the foreground. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Image Collection, 1799-1999 (#P4), Folder 0174, Aerial Views, 1930-1939, Scan 9, P004_0174_16798.tif, North Carolina Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

During the 1940s and 1950s, other scholars joined the contest over North Carolina Populism. By this time the need to produce supposedly relevant political and economic Populist history had become integral to the mission of the history graduate student and the university-paid historian.⁹ A uniquely important scholar during these years was Helen G. Edmonds (1911-1995). An African American, she grew up in Southside Virginia's Lawrenceville, not far from the North Carolina

9. In the early 1940s, despite Woodward's volley, the Progressive interpretation continued to shape accounts of North Carolina Populism. Albert R. Newsome (1894-1951) and Hugh T. Lefler's (1901-1981) *The Growth of North Carolina* (Yonkers-on-Hudson, N.Y.: World Book Co., 1940), a textbook intended for public schools, argued that in the 1880s, the "farmers' tax burden . . . was heavy and unjust," while the "wealthy businessmen in the towns were . . . able to avoid paying their just share of taxes" (341). Newsome (Ph.D. University of Michigan) and Lefler (Ph.D. University of Pennsylvania), younger professors at the University of North Carolina, presented the goals of the Alliance sympathetically (363-366). Further, because neither Republicans nor Democrats supported Alliance proposals, farmers created the Populist Party (367-368). But, using history with caution, Newsome and Lefler promoted a Democratic perspective. After Populist and Republican success, "Conditions like those in the days of Reconstruction returned to parts of North Carolina. Life and property became unsafe" (371). In 1898, Red Shirts benignly "warned the Negroes not to vote" (371). Aycock was "a new kind of Democratic leader" who was "a friend" to black people (373).



Dr. Helen G. Edmonds, professor and dean, 1966 [North Carolina College at Durham] *Eagle*, 38, North Carolina Central University Digital Yearbook Collection, University Archives, Records and History Center, North Carolina Central University, Durham.

border. Her experiences contrasted sharply with those of the Progressives and Woodward. As a young woman she attended St. Paul's school, an institution founded in 1888 by James Solomon Russell (1857-1935), a religious leader, teacher, and former slave. Edmonds graduated from Morgan College, then a private black institution in Baltimore. After working at two Virginia colleges, including St. Paul's, she enrolled at Ohio State University, receiving an M.A. in history in 1938. In 1941, she accepted a teaching position at the North Carolina College for Negroes

Aycock's success meant there were "new leaders" who were "young and wide awake. They had their eyes to the future and were friendly to education and the welfare of the whole state. . . . An age of progress lay ahead" (373-374). But even this endorsement of white supremacy was too critical for some. A. J. Maxwell (1873-1946), Democratic state revenue commissioner, publicly rebuked the professors for their unflattering portrait of the state's history. Retreating, Newsome and Lefler responded defensively. They conceded Fusion made mistakes, including putting blacks in politics. They agreed with the Progressives' analogy to Reconstruction. They praised the "progress" of the state after 1900. A. R. Newsome and Hugh T. Lefler, "A Letter to the Governor," April 17, 1941, North Carolina Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Howard K. Beale to C. Vann Woodward, May 3, 1941, Woodward Papers. The flap produced a competing and more Progressive school textbook. Describing the 1898 election, Democratic journalist Jule B. Warren's (1887-1960) *North Carolina: Yesterday and Today* (Raleigh, N.C.: Edwards and Broughton Co., 1941), 215-216, told children Democrats won because "the Republicans allowed the Negroes to vote."

in Durham. Five years later, Edmonds completed a Ph.D. at Ohio State with a dissertation on “The Negro and Fusion Politics in North Carolina, 1894-1901.” In Columbus, Henry Harrison Simms (1896-1994), a white historian who specialized in slavery and Reconstruction, deeply influenced Edmonds. She wrote that it was in Simms’s “classes that I became inspired, my historical imagination enriched, and my attention focused on Southern History.” Edmonds remained at North Carolina College, later North Carolina Central University, until her retirement in 1977.¹⁰

Following the path constructed by the Progressives and Woodward, Edmonds used Populism for her own purposes. Even the Ph.D. research process itself reflected history’s politicization. Edmonds, on the recommendation of University of North Carolina professors Hugh T. Lefler and Albert R. Newsome, gained access to the Southern Historical Collection while preparing her dissertation. She first visited there in the fall of 1944. Edmonds recorded that she viewed the Marion Butler Papers, the “shorter collection” only, the Daniel L. Russell Papers, as well as manuscripts from various Democratic politicians. In a revealing gesture, she described her research in the Southern Historical Collection registration book as “An Appraisal of Fusion Politics with Emphasis upon the Question of Negro Domination, 1895-1901.” Edmonds was the first black woman either to view the Populist manuscripts or to perform any research at the Southern Historical Collection, the embodiment of Hamilton’s vision of Progressive southern history. A Ph.D. candidate at a northern university, she visited the segregated white campus from its black neighbor approximately ten miles away in Durham. Her declaration that she intended to explore the “Question of Negro Domination,” implying that there may not have been such a thing, represented a clear, if subtle, assault on Progressive history in one of its most sacred temples.¹¹

More clearly, “To prevent the ignorant Negroes from controlling the state, the Democrats did everything possible to keep them from voting” (216-238). Ten years earlier, R. D. W. Connor’s textbook, *Makers of North Carolina History*, 2nd ed. (Raleigh, N.C.: A. Williams, 1930) simply omitted Populism. The book’s biographical sketch of Charles Aycock described the 1900 disfranchisement amendment as a laudable effort to “keep ignorant [but racially unidentified] men from voting” (296). Aycock was the “education governor,” who “loved justice and hated injustice” (296-301).

10. Helen G. Edmonds, *The Negro and Fusion Politics in North Carolina, 1894-1901* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1951), vii (quotation); Leslie Hurt, “Helen Grey Edmonds, 1911-1995,” BlackPast, <http://www.blackpast.org/aah/edmonds-helen-grey-1911-1995>; “Biographical Information,” Helen G. Edmonds Papers, 1936-1995 #50003, University Archives, Records and History, James E. Shepard Memorial Library, North Carolina Central University, Durham, N.C., http://www2.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/e/Edmonds,Helen_G.html#d1e77; Philip W. Stanley and the *Dictionary of Virginia Biography*, s.v. “James Solomon Russell (1857-1935),” Encyclopedia Virginia, http://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Russell_James_Solomon_1857-1935; “Brief History of Morgan State University,” Morgan State University, <http://www.morgan.edu/about/history.html>; *Ohio State University Bulletin, College of Arts and Sciences*, 1936-1937 60, no. 14 (January 31, 1936), 90-91. St. Paul’s made a lasting impression, as Edmonds wrote her 1938 master’s thesis on “A Movement in Negro Education for Fifty Years under the Influence of the Episcopal Church: St. Paul’s School.”

11. Entry for September 11, 1944, Registration Book S-1 (1937-1961), Manuscripts Department Records. Edmonds was the first African American to view the Butler Papers. The second was Frenise Avedis Logan



North Carolina College at Durham History Department, 1964 [North Carolina College at Durham] *Eagle*, 30, North Carolina Central University Digital Yearbook Collection, University Archives, Records and History Center, North Carolina Central University. Prof. Edmonds is pictured second from right.

Like Hamilton and Woodward, Edmonds actively participated in politics and held strong beliefs about proper public policy. But Edmonds's determined defense of black equality rested uneasily with her Republicanism. A supporter of both Dwight D. Eisenhower and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), she expressed outrage at conservative William F. Buckley's 1957 *National Review* editorial, "The South Must Prevail." It denounced the new federal Civil Rights Act and defended voter fraud by whites in black majority communities because whites were "the advanced race." According to Buckley (1925–2008), the "median cultural supremacy" of whites was superior, despite the arguments of "ever-so-busy egalitarians and anthropologists." Buckley thought the "claims of civilization supersede those of universal suffrage," and it was "more important" for whites to "affirm and live by civilized standards, than to bow to the demands of the numerical majority." After receiving an advertisement asking her to subscribe to the *Review*, Edmonds wrote Buckley and condemned his periodical because it "seeks to support a point of view which deprives me as a human being of my God-given liberties and freedoms." She asked its New York City-based editors to "somehow find it possible to view the Negro as a human being with the same aspirations as you." Edmonds communicated hopes for the *Review's* quick death, given that it "sets one class of citizens apart from another, and then grants the majority class rights and privileges solely on the basis of the color of their skin." Maureen Buckley, William Buckley's sister and an editor at the journal, responded without empathy: "It is with deep sadness that we received your letter for its emotionalism reminded us of the practical impossibility of discussing the segregation issue rationally and without recrimination. If it were not futile [sic], we would ask which approach to the problem has set race against race, that of the Supreme Court [finding school segregation by race unconstitutional in the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision] or that taken by the conservatives."¹²

(1920–1995), who viewed them on March 15, 1951, while preparing a dissertation for Cleveland's Western Reserve University on "The Negro in North Carolina, 1876–1894." Logan taught at the segregated predecessor to Greensboro's North Carolina A&T State University. Entry for March 15, 1951, Registration Book S-1 (1937–1961), Manuscripts Department Records; Albert W. Spruill, "Professors Created Rich A&T History," *Greensboro News and Record*, January 12, 1991, http://www.greensboro.com/professors-created-rich-a-t-history/article_76910c32-dc44-5636-a866-318ca6ce4891.html. Virgil Calvin Stroud (1914–1986), a graduate student at New York University, also viewed the Butler Papers in 1951. Stroud, a military veteran and A&T graduate, was denied admission to Duke University in 1950 because of his race. He completed a 1955 dissertation at New York University on "Congressional Investigations of the Conduct of War" and later taught at his North Carolina alma mater. Entry for September 12, 1951, Registration Book S-1 (1937–1961), Manuscripts Department Records; Virgil C. Stroud to Hollis Edens, May 26, 1950, "Duke during Segregation," Duke University Libraries, <https://exhibits.library.duke.edu/exhibits/show/desegregation/before>. Both Logan and Stroud, like Edmonds, became vocal supporters of the civil rights movement. See Virgil C. Stroud, *In Quest of Freedom* (Dallas, Tex.: Royal Publishing Co., 1963).

12. "The South Must Prevail," *National Review*, August 24, 1957, 148–149; Helen G. Edmonds to William F. Buckley, November 1, 1957; Maureen Buckley to Helen G. Edmonds, November 19, 1957, both

Despite the limitations of fellow Republicans, North Carolina's segregationist Democrats did not offer a better alternative. Instead, in the 1950s, Edmonds wanted a "more liberal Republican party, but not to the extent of out-New Dealing the New Deal Party." The GOP's pre-Depression model seemed lacking, so "The Republican party must find more efficient ways to find new solutions to housing, unemployment and other problems." Edmonds soldiered through the 1960s and 1970s, even as her party transformed itself to attract the Progressives' close political heirs, white southern Democratic conservatives who admired right-wing media spokesmen like Buckley. Edmonds recognized the shift, admitting to one correspondent in 1970 that she would have good job opportunities as a Democrat. Always remaining a Republican, however, she believed "[w]e must solve the black-black (middle class versus ghetto) and white-black polarization. But we will not support revolution." Edmonds accepted several prestigious appointments from President Richard Nixon with the United Nations, the Peace Corps, and the Departments of State and Defense. She complained that black leaders failed to recognize Nixon's achievements. During the 1970s, she corresponded with and supported United States senator Jesse A. Helms and Gov. James E. Holshouser (1934–2013), the first North Carolina Republicans to hold those positions since Fusion. Governor Holshouser appointed Edmonds to the North Carolina Historical Commission, which she joined in 1975. Edmonds also served on the board of directors of the NAACP. Appropriately, Edmonds's personal experiences mirrored her academic specialty, the contradictions and opportunities of Republican-Populist Fusion.¹³

Like the work by Progressives and Woodward, Edmonds's scholarship embraced the idea that perspective shaped interpretation. But *The Negro and Fusion Politics*, when published in 1951, did not simply challenge earlier histories. It offered an entirely different understanding of how Populist history could be constructed. As she explained, "Any writer who deals with the turbulent 1890's in this state's history will find that there are two schools of opinion relative to the interpretation of Fusion politics: the old and the new." The "old" simplistically condemned Fusion and its adherents and cheered triumphant white Democracy, while the "new" asked more complex questions and was willing to give Populists and black Republicans credit for

in Helen Edmonds Papers, 1951–1994, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book Room and Manuscript Library, Duke University (hereinafter Edmonds Papers, Duke). Maureen Buckley (1933–1964) grew up in France and England, graduated from Smith College, and married business cosmetics and perfume executive Gerald O'Reilly in 1958. "Mrs. G. A. O'Reilly, Ex-Magazine Aide, 31," obituary, *New York Times*, July 18, 1964. 13. "GOP Urged to Clarify '60 Plans," Newspaper Clipping, [*Pittsburgh Courier?*], November 11, 1958; "Links President Visits," Newspaper Clipping, [*Portland Oregonian*], November 2, 1970; Helen G. Edmonds to Russell Barringer, January 7, 1970; Richard M. Nixon to Helen G. Edmonds, September 26, 1970; George H. W. Bush to Helen G. Edmonds, May 4, 1971; Jesse A. Helms to Helen G. Edmonds, June 13, 1975; James E. Holshouser to Helen G. Edmonds, September 5, 1975; "GOP Blacks Give Nixon High Marks," Newspaper Clipping, [*New York Post*], June 9, 1971, all in Edmonds Papers, Duke.

positive accomplishments. Edmonds named names, classifying Hamilton as well as Florence Smith, J. Fred Rippy (1892–1977), and Connor among the paleo-historians. In contrast, Edmonds found hope in Hugh Lefler and Albert Newsome’s recent histories and believed Philip Weaver’s 1937 University of North Carolina master’s thesis offered the “most authentic and dispassionate interpretation of the Fusion election of 1896,” primarily because he concluded Fusion would have prevailed without black votes. This meant Weaver “was not unduly influenced by the racial propaganda of the period,” a condition Edmonds viewed as pathological among her historian neighbors in Chapel Hill. Notably, she also praised fellow Republican Sim DeLapp as the “first writer to see in Populism any benefits to this state.”¹⁴

Edmonds’s study offered a sweeping challenge to the moral, social, and political basis for white Democratic rule. It was not true that black leadership in the 1890s was incompetent. In fact, black officials were often college-educated and experienced in community affairs. Reconstruction was not an evil experience, as it brought needed changes, including increased democracy. It was not true that the Democratic Party ever represented a Progressive force. That was a white myth. It was not true that Populists favored black officeholding. Hamilton and Connor’s Democratic heroes, including Aycock, sold out white workers for power. Democrats misled voters regarding their intention to implement disfranchisement. They even made secret promises to keep taxes low for corporations and not increase appropriations for Hamilton’s University of North Carolina. Based on a review of officeholding and voting, Edmonds concluded there was no “Negro domination.” Very few black men held office, and white, not black, votes caused Fusion success. The Wilmington “race riot” was a coup d’état, unrelated to Fusionist misgovernment because there had been no misgovernment. Aycock’s support for public education was nothing more than a cynical gesture to achieve the disfranchisement of blacks. Josephus Daniels represented a hideous form of journalistic brutality. In short, the Progressive historians were not only racists. They were also liars. Edmonds attacked white scholarship, the greed and hypocrisy of white people, and the discriminatory society they created. Edmonds’s history reversed the Progressive version of good and evil, with black meaning democratic and reform-oriented, while white stood for violent, criminal, and reactionary. African Americans, not Professor Hamilton or even Woodward’s Populist-phase Tom Watson, were the real reformers.¹⁵

14. Edmonds, *The Negro and Fusion Politics in North Carolina*, 3–7. Rippy, a University of California Ph.D., taught at Duke in the 1920s and 1930s. He edited F. M. Simmons, *Statesman of the New South: Memoirs and Addresses* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1936). Edmonds disdained its celebratory description of Simmons. *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, s.v. “Rippy, James Fred,” <http://ncpedia.org/biography/rippy-james-fred>.

15. Edmonds, *The Negro and Fusion Politics in North Carolina*, 84, 89, 92, 97–98, 102–103, 109, 136–154, 158–174, 205, 219–221.

Other aspects of Edmonds's study revealed its dramatic political message. The book spent considerable effort describing the achievements of previously ignored black Republican leaders, including George H. White (1852-1918), James H. Young (1860-1921), and John C. Dancy (1857-1920). The tactic reflected Edmonds's desire to elevate men stereotyped or dismissed by white historians. Moreover, Edmonds maintained that important distinctions existed among African Americans, which bigoted white historians failed to discern. She described criticisms of state representative Isaac Smith, who fellow Republicans condemned as an "Uncle Tom." She contrasted the "shiftless and illiterate" part of the black population with the educated and religious. Edmonds expressed dismay at early twentieth-century white Republicans who hoped to create a "lily-white party" after disfranchisement. The focus on her own Republican Party meant, however, that she was less interested in Populists. Black Populism received no attention, and the agrarian movement appeared as almost exclusively white. Reversing the kind of language used by Progressives against poor blacks, she insulted the Alliance base as a "mass of ignorant white rural Democrats." Populists, because of their frequent opposition to black officeholding, opposed racial equality and were supposedly "anti-Negro." Her perspective highlighted political Fusion, especially the agreement between Populists and Republicans to legislate new local government and voting procedures. But Edmonds, without mentioning Woodward by name, criticized his views on Fusion. Edmonds praised Fusion as a rational device that increased democracy and responsible government. And of course it still mattered in the 1950s. Edmonds concluded her study with a suggestion: It "may be questionable whether a minority group should vote a straight party ticket if it is outnumbered by its opponents who are bent on destroying its effectiveness." The upshot was that Fusion provided a blueprint for contemporary black political power with either Republicans or Democrats. Without complex strategies, minority black voters lacked the ability to influence politics. White historians, including Hamilton and Woodward, seemed not to grasp that point.¹⁶

The publication process as well as reactions to the completed book displayed the movement away from Progressive history. Almost immediately after Ohio State awarded Edmonds a Ph.D. in 1946, she sent her manuscript to the University of North Carolina Press. The press already promoted newer views toward African American history and offered more than one hundred titles in that subject by 1950. In 1943, it published her North Carolina College colleague John Hope Franklin's (1915-2009) Harvard thesis, *The Free Negro in North Carolina, 1790-1860*. Crucially, press directors Thomas J. Wilson (1902-1969) and later Lambert Davis (1905-

16. Edmonds, *The Negro and Fusion Politics in North Carolina*, 84-92, 97-98, 106-111, 164-169, 173, 213-214, 222.

1993), along with two friendly academic reviewers and essential inside support from Professors Newsome and Lefler, endorsed publication. Edmonds understood that political factors would determine her dissertation's fate. At the beginning of the submission process she informed Director Wilson that although the work was formally approved at Ohio State, the "entire collection, interpretation, and composition of the data was done under the personal supervision of Dr. Albert N. Newsome and Dr. Hugh T. Lefler of the Department of History, University of North Carolina." This avoided the "general custom of some writers to treat subjects which pertain to the South under advisers who are not familiar with the geographical area or materials used."¹⁷

Fortuitously, the two reviewers selected by the press to evaluate the manuscript had already challenged Progressive history. Wilson first chose William Mabry, the Duke Ph.D. and Randolph-Macon College history professor whose 1930s publications cast doubt on the earlier interpretations of Progressive historians. Mabry recommended publication, describing the manuscript as "very good," based on "sound and extensive research," and the "most detailed study of the period, 1895-1901" to date. Probably thinking about his own writing, he concluded that her "major conclusions do not differ materially from those of other recent historians of North Carolina." In fact, the evidence simply "tends to strengthen rather than alter the conclusions which some of us had held." Nonetheless, perhaps she leaned "a little farther in her direction of approving the Fusionist program and condemning the disfranchisement of the Negro." Mabry, however, "would not quarrel with her" about disfranchisement, which he believed was "motivated mainly by considerations of racial prejudice and Democratic party expediency." Even more positive was the second reviewer, Vernon L. Wharton (1907-1964), a 1940 Chapel Hill Ph.D. teaching at Millsaps College. In 1947, the press published Wharton's dissertation, a landmark rejection of the Progressive interpretation of Reconstruction in Mississippi. Wharton's review positioned Edmonds's work as clearly within this emerging tradition: "As you know, the 'revisionist' approach to Southern history of the Reconstruction and post-Reconstruction periods has in the last few years attracted the attention and interest of a steadily increasing number of historians." Thus, Edmonds "contradicts in almost every detail the generally accepted story based on white Democratic propaganda." Wharton complained about Edmonds's frequently harsh tone, but "I can sympathize with the attitude. To the person who values common honesty, there naturally comes

17. Lorene Freeman to Helen G. Edmonds, February 20, 1947; Helen G. Edmonds to Thomas J. Wilson, June 14, 1947, both in University of North Carolina Press Papers #40073 (hereinafter UNC Press Papers), Southern Historical Collection; "About [the University of North Carolina Press]," University of North Carolina Press, <https://uncpress.org/about/>. The author would like to thank his sister, Del H. Helton, for her excellent research assistance with the UNC Press Papers.

some feeling of emotion with the discovery of evidence that stories long accepted as facts were deliberate, calculated lies.”¹⁸

A final, and necessary, vote of confidence came from University of North Carolina history faculty members Newsome and Lefler. Both encouraged Edmonds’s work while she was still researching and writing the dissertation. And when the press’s board of governors tentatively approved publication in fall 1947, full acceptance was expressly contingent on support from Newsome and Lefler. In their review for the press, the professors said they were most impressed by the “new light . . . thrown on the Negro in politics, especially in state, county, and municipal affairs.” They cited the “good chapter on the white supremacy campaign and a very interesting one on the Wilmington Riot of 1898.” Unlike Wharton, Lefler and Newsome downplayed Edmonds’s radical perspective, probably for strategic reasons: “The author’s interpretation of [the events of the 1890s] is naturally quite different from that in most of the North Carolina histories.” The precise meaning of “naturally” was to be inferred. Similarly, Edmonds “presents Governor Russell in a little different light than the ordinary stories. One wonders if she has not gone too far to the other extreme.” Overall, Lefler and Newsome communicated merely that the submission was acceptable because it was “new,” “good,” “interesting,” and a “little different,” without illuminating the ways it attacked Hamilton and Connor. With these safe endorsements from southern-based history professors, the press accepted the manuscript, subject to a substantial \$2,000 publishing subsidy, to be paid by Edmonds.¹⁹

The book, when released in May 1951, provoked revealing reactions. Edmonds enthusiastically joined in the press’s marketing efforts, including arranging reviews in scholarly journals and newspapers, particularly those related to African American studies. George F. Scheer (1917-1996), sales and advertising manager at the press, issued a breathless promotional document pointing out the challenging, relevant,

18. William A. Mabry to Thomas J. Wilson, June 15, 1947; Vernon L. Wharton to Porter Cowles, September 8, 1947, both in UNC Press Papers. Wharton, a native Mississippian, graduated from Millsaps College in 1928 and earned M.A. and Ph.D. degrees at Chapel Hill. He was later dean at the Texas State College for Women and the University of Southwestern Louisiana. See Vernon Lane Wharton Papers, Collection 34, University Archives and Manuscripts, University of Louisiana at Lafayette, <https://library.louisiana.edu/collections/university-archives-manuscripts/manuscripts-collections/vernon-lane-wharton-papers>.

19. Report on Helen Edmonds Manuscript [by Lefler and Newsome, 1947?]; Porter Cowles to Hugh T. Lefler, February 17, 1948, both in UNC Press Papers. The \$2,000 subsidy appears to have been relatively unusual. The press, however, told Edmonds she would be paid \$1.25 for each copy sold, meaning she could recoup the entire amount by selling 1,600 books. This set off a fundraising struggle that lasted for several years and delayed publication. Edmonds received some money from her employer, North Carolina College, and had raised the entire amount by early 1950. Porter Cowles to Helen G. Edmonds, November 25, 1947, January 21, 1948; A. E. Manley to Helen G. Edmonds, November 26, 1947; Porter Cowles to W. W. Pierson, April 26, 1948; Helen G. Edmonds to Lambert Davis, January 9, 1950; Lambert Davis to Helen G. Edmonds, January 17, 1950; Helen G. Edmonds to Porter Cowles, February 15, 1950; Helen G. Edmonds to Kathryn Norman, March 6, 1951, all in UNC Press Papers.

and timely nature of Edmonds's scholarship. It was "making its appearance in a modern atmosphere of racial-political tension," and "holds up a warning from the past." Readers would see a "fuller and more objective treatment than ever before," and learn that "even such great editors as the late Josephus Daniels dragged the red herring of race prejudice across the pages of his newspaper."²⁰

Scheer's materials elicited denunciations from Louis T. Moore (1885–1961), a leading Wilmington citizen and head of the New Hanover County Historical Commission. Moore represented the persistent effects of Progressive teaching. A member of the local elite who traced his family origins to colonial times, Moore grew up in Wilmington, attended the University of North Carolina between 1902 and 1906, and spent much of his life as a tireless promoter for the region. Moore feared Edmonds's book threatened to stir up racial tensions, and worse, he believed she had the facts wrong. In a May 1951 letter to University of North Carolina System president Gordon Gray (1909–1982), he assumed "this Dr. Edmonds is a Negress," although if "she is of the Negro race, certainly that is nothing to her discredit." As for the book, it was "inflammatory, false, distorted, and sensational" as well as "calculated to disturb the present pleasant and agreeable racial relations which exist in North Carolina." Essentially repeating Hamilton's history, Moore claimed that in 1898, North Carolina and Wilmington were under the domination of a misguided black majority and "unprincipled and rascally whites." Decent white men were arrested by black policemen without good reason and then subjected to "ignorant and power drunk magistrates." Corrupt Republicans encouraged blacks to "the extreme of pushing white ladies into gutters, and slapping and abusing young white children." Of course, whites necessarily mounted a "REVOLUTION" against such conditions. Edmonds's new book could accomplish nothing positive by "rehashing the acrimony and bitterness between the races which existed a half century ago."²¹ President Gray passed Moore's letter to Director Lambert Davis and asked him for advice as well as a proper response. Davis forthrightly stood up for the book but dealt carefully with both Gray and Moore. Davis told Gray that Moore's views were "an appalling combination of ignorance, prejudice, carelessness, and unwarranted interference." Nonetheless, he provided the president with a detailed description of the review and editing process, emphasizing Lefler and Newsome's approval and the \$2,000 subsidy. Davis also took the opportunity to shield Gray and the university from additional criticism by writing Moore an intensely personal statement of the press's values. According to Davis, "every generation has to rewrite history in

20. Helen G. Edmonds to Porter Cowles, May 4, 1951; "News of Books from Chapel Hill," May 26, 1951, both in UNC Press Papers.

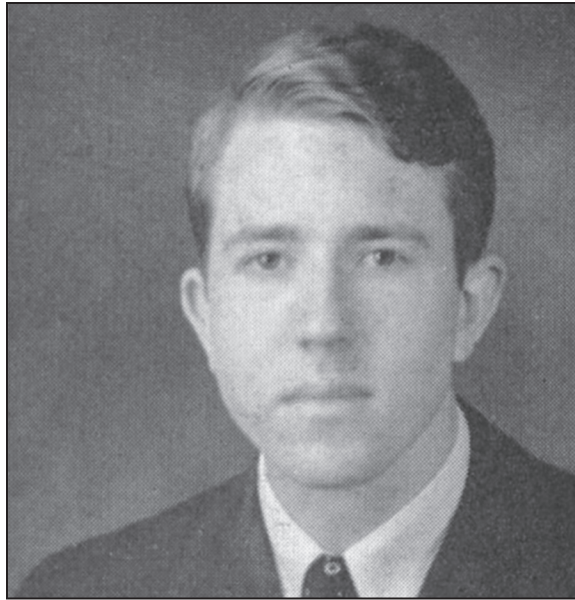
21. Louis T. Moore to Gordon Gray, May 30, 1951; Louis T. Moore to Editors, May 30, 1951, both in UNC Press Papers. On Moore, see *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, s.v. "Moore, Louis Toomer," <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/moore-louis-toomer>.

terms of the knowledge it has acquired and the values it believes in. It is a task that requires both humility and courage: humility because no individual can claim that he or she has the ultimate truth; and courage because new facts will from time to time challenge the most cherished beliefs.” Contributions like Edmonds’s were part of this “continuous remodeling of the house of history.” Moore apparently read Davis’s letter, but still grumbled that the Edmonds volume contained fundamental untruths and threatened to open old wounds: After all, “both races here had buried the [former] differences under a blanket of understanding and goodwill.”²²

During and following World War II, the Progressive edifice received direct challenges from white North Carolinians. The most significant came from Joseph F. Steelman (1922–2015). A Wilkes County native, Steelman attended the University of North Carolina, receiving an undergraduate degree in 1943 and a Ph.D. in 1955 with his dissertation, “The Progressive Era in North Carolina, 1881–1917.” Steelman’s long tenure as a student at Chapel Hill, interrupted by military service, occurred during a period of important change. When Steelman enrolled as an undergraduate in 1939, the American history faculty included Lefler, Newsome, Fletcher Green (1895–1978), and Howard Beale. Despite Lefler and Newsome’s caution and public reluctance to fully jettison Progressive history, as well as the fact that Green had been Hamilton’s Ph.D. student, this represented a meaningful shift in perspective from ten years earlier. In the late 1920s, Connor and Hamilton taught American history through Reconstruction, including North Carolina history. By the mid-1950s, when Steelman received his doctorate, Green offered the course in southern history, Lefler in North Carolina history, while two younger historians, J. Carlyle Sitterson (1911–1995) and Frank Klingberg (1919–2015) covered the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the recent past.²³

22. Lambert Davis to Gordon Gray, June 7, 1951; Memorandum from Lambert Davis to Gordon Gray, June 6, 1951; Lambert Davis to Louis T. Moore, June 15, 1951; Louis T. Moore to Lambert Davis, June 19, 1951, all in UNC Press Papers. The reception by professional historians was more positive. Among the especially perceptive reviewers was Williston H. Lofton (1907–1986), a history professor at Howard University. Lofton understood Edmonds’s distinctive characterization of Progressive Era political leadership: “It would seem that the Negro leaders, irrespective of party affiliation, were honest and courageous. They stand in distinct contrast to the pusillanimous and venal character of the white Republican and Populist leaders.” “The Elimination of the Negro from Politics,” review of Helen G. Edmonds, *The Negro and Fusion Politics in North Carolina*, in *Journal of Negro Education* 23, no. 1 (Winter 1954): 66–67.

23. Obituary, Joseph Flake Steelman, *Greenville Reflector*, January 24, 2015; Joseph Flake Steelman, “Southern Prosperity, 1820–1860: A Study of Conflicting Views” (honors essay, Department of History, University of North Carolina, 1943); Joseph Flake Steelman, “The Progressive Era in North Carolina, 1884–1917” (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina, 1955); *The University of North Carolina Record: The Catalog, 1929–1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1930), 154–156; *The University of North Carolina Record: The Abridged General Catalog (Undergraduate), Catalogue Issue 1938–1939* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1939), 153–158; *The University of North Carolina Record: The General Catalog Issue, 1954–1955* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1954), 271–274; *Dictionary of the North Carolina Biography*, s.v. “Green, Fletcher Melvin,” <http://ncpedia.org/biography/green-fletcher-melvin/>; “Collection Overview,” J. Carlyle Sitterson Papers, 1930s–1999s #4770, Southern Historical Collection, <https://finding-aids.lib.unc.edu/04770/>.



University of North Carolina senior Joseph F. Steelman, 1943 [University of North Carolina] *Yackety Yack*, 82, North Carolina Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Talented history students like Steelman got the message. The best of them agreed that their professional role was to use history to promote the kind of American political liberalism that seized control of the national Democratic Party during the 1930s and 1940s. This direction appeared in Steelman's correspondence with Arthur S. Link (1920–1998), later a distinguished professor of history at Northwestern and Princeton Universities. Link completed an undergraduate degree at the University of North Carolina in 1941 and stayed in Chapel Hill to write a dissertation on “The South and the Democratic Campaign of 1912” under Fletcher Green. Link steered Steelman to also study with Green and told him historians needed to work on the Progressive movement in “key southern states.” Especially revealing was how Link intended to connect his political beliefs to professional history. In 1944, Link reported he was “working on the monographs in the field of Populism in the southern states” so as to “secure proof for my position that there was a great progressive tradition in the South from 1870 to [Woodrow] Wilson’s time.” Link also wanted contemporary postwar England to prove that “socialism, or a modified form of it, will work exceedingly well in a country that is highly advanced culturally and technologically.” But he feared the “majority of business men and capitalists in our country would start a counter fascist revolution before they would allow it to happen [in the United States].” Link complained that whites deprived southern African Americans “of social, political, and economic opportunity simply

because” of their color and “because we think it to our advantage to keep them serfs.” Pessimistic about meaningful change, he believed “the South has never accepted the American democratic tradition—when Negroes are concerned.”²⁴

Steelman adopted a similar faith and, like Link, planned to advance it in his history employment. In the late 1940s, the young Ph.D. candidate was “thoroughly convinced that progressive democratic reforms are the best answer to the Communist menace, and the time is ripe for another era that will compare with those earlier reform periods such as: Jacksonian democracy, the Populist era, Roosevelt’s square deal, Wilson’s new freedom, and F.D. Roosevelt’s new deal.” In 1951, he wrote North Carolina Democrat Aubrey Lee Brooks (1871–1958) that his dissertation would trace “the idea and evolution of the idea of progress and its peculiar application to American life.” An essential part of this story, according to Steelman, was North Carolina’s Populism and Fusion, which “forced a change of leadership and a more liberal approach to the state’s problems.” While teaching in a temporary position at the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas, later Texas A & M University, in the early 1950s, Steelman told fellow North Carolina graduate student and Green advisee Dewey W. Grantham (1921–2004) that unfortunately his colleagues were “all ‘Ike’ fans and hate the [New Deal] heritage of the last twenty years, if not the twentieth century.”²⁵

In 1955, Steelman secured a permanent position at East Carolina College, after 1967 East Carolina University, in Greenville. He remained a full-time faculty member

24. “Arthur Link, 77, Editor of Wilson Papers, Dies,” *New York Times*, March 29, 1998; Arthur S. Link, “A History of the Buildings at the University of North Carolina” (bachelor’s thesis, University of North Carolina, 1941); Arthur S. Link, “The South and the Democratic Campaign of 1912” (Ph.D. diss., University of North Carolina, 1945); Arthur S. Link to Joseph F. Steelman, January 19, 1944, July 31, September 6, 1945, March 30, 1947, January 27, 1948, all in Joseph F. and Lala Carr Steelman Papers #924 (hereinafter Steelman Papers), East Carolina Manuscript Collection, Joyner Library Special Collections, East Carolina University, Greenville, N.C. Link’s review of Edmonds’s book reflected a strongly instrumental attitude toward history: It “will come as a shock and a revelation to white North Carolinians reared on the fables of Thomas Dixon and dedicated to the perpetuation of white supremacy. Of course, none of them will read this book; but perhaps scholars and teachers will. In the long run, the book is bound to help in the job of converting North Carolina mythology into history.” “A Shock and a Revelation,” *Phylon: The Atlanta University Review of Race and Culture* 12, no. 4 (Fourth Quarter, 1951): 389–390.

25. Joseph F. Steelman to C. B. Deane, July 27, 1949; Joseph F. Steelman to Aubrey L. Brooks, October 2, 1951; Joseph F. Steelman to Dewey Grantham, October 10, 1952, all in Steelman Papers; Paul Conkin, “In Memoriam: Dewey W. Grantham (1921–2004),” American Historical Association *Perspectives on History*, <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/march-2005/in-memoriam-dewey-w-grantham>. Woodward’s liberal approach became the starting point for all subsequent university-based Tar Heel Populist studies. Fully developed conservative histories of North Carolina Populism died with the Progressives, as recent conservatives have chosen not to waste their time with what they view as an obviously wrong-headed movement. One survey of American economic history portrays Populist ideology as little more than a selfish attempt to increase farmers’ share of the national income. Jonathan Hughes and Louis P. Cain, *American Economic History*, 7th ed. (Boston: Pearson Addison Wesley, 2007), 400–403. A business historian, similarly, describes Populists as classic rent-seekers, concluding that their political movement failed because of rational market behavior: agricultural prices rose, and so the protest lost its narrow economic purpose. Glenn Porter, *The Rise of Big Business, 1860–1920* (Wheeling, Ill.: Harlan Davidson, 2006), 95–96.

there until 1985. Throughout his early career he and his wife, Lala Carr Steelman (1923–1998), also a University of North Carolina American political history Ph.D. and East Carolina professor, supported liberal Democratic politics. In the late 1950s, Steelman sent North Carolina legislators a resolution from the East Carolina chapter of the American Association of University Professors condemning the loyalty oath requirement of the National Defense Education Act. He criticized North Carolina's conservative congressmen. In contrast, the Steelmans enthusiastically praised North Carolina governor Terry Sanford (1917–1998), Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson, as well as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the creation of Medicare in 1965. Steelman noted a disappointing “rising trend of conservatism” among Tar Heel Democrats and hopefully predicted that if “the ultra conservatives and reactionary elements decide on a race baiter in the 1964 gubernatorial election” that their choice could be defeated. He also assumed the “younger and more liberal elements in the Democratic party can get together on a candidate and carry forward the Sanford program.” He complained that Greenville Democrats were “overwhelmed by a crowd that had been fed on fear, emotion, and hysteria—the race issue,” and that “those responsible for this irrationality were, of course, economic reactionaries who skillfully ‘used’ the voters.” Steelman told one Democratic leader that North Carolinians who supported Richard Nixon for president were “composed of sorehead Democrats, mavericks with no place to go, [and] defectors who lack any sense of party loyalty or discipline.” In 1960, he contributed money to another history Ph.D., George S. McGovern (1922–2012), who ran unsuccessfully that year for the United States Senate in South Dakota.²⁶

Stelman continued the pattern established by the Progressives, Woodward, and Edmonds, expressing his political views in writing about North Carolina Populism, especially in his 1955 dissertation on the “Progressive Era” in North Carolina. Steelman was among the first white professional historians from North Carolina to discard the racist biases of the Progressives. His dissertation described the 1895

26. Joseph F. Steelman to Sam Ervin, March 10, 1959; Joseph F. Steelman to Arthur S. Link, April 30, 1958; Joseph Steelman to Bert L. Bennett, October 6, 1960, November 14, 1961; Joseph F. Steelman to Terry Sanford, May 31, 1960; Joseph F. Steelman to Ray Billington, October 6, 1960, all in Steelman Papers. Steelman corresponded with another like-minded Populist historian, Robert F. Durden (1925–2016) of Duke University. Durden, who by 1960 had conducted extensive research on Populism and would soon publish *Reconstruction Bonds and Twentieth Century Politics: South Dakota v. North Carolina, 1904* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1962) and *The Climax of Populism: The Election of 1896* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1965), complemented Steelman's work for Kennedy and also supported Sanford. Robert F. Durden to Joseph F. Steelman, September 17, November 4, 1960, Steelman Papers. Durden had asked Woodward about Populism while still in graduate school and told him in 1964 that “there was no one in the profession whose opinion I respect more than your own.” Eventually, he requested Woodward's guidance as to Populist historian Lawrence Goodwyn's tenure review at Duke. Robert F. Durden to C. Vann Woodward, September 18, 1950, February 22, 1964, November 20, 1975, all in Woodward Papers. Another proud “liberal Democrat,” Dewey Grantham, cheered Kennedy's victory. Dewey Grantham to Joseph F. Steelman, November 14, 1960, Steelman Papers.



Social Studies faculty, East Carolina College, 1961 [East Carolina University] *Buccaneer*, 43, University Archives Department, J. Y. Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, N.C. Prof. Joseph F. Steelman is seated in the front row, far right.

revisions to the election laws, which increased the likelihood of black and poor white voting, as “commendable and long-needed changes.” The Democrats’ use of race as a campaign issue was “unwarranted and served no constructive purpose.” The first Populist convention was “notable for the liberal state reforms it advocated.” Steelman felt sympathy for farmers’ depressed conditions. He believed concerns over radical Populist economic proposals, and not a genuine threat to white supremacy, motivated conservative Democrats to cynically manipulate the race issue in 1898 and 1900. Steelman clearly disagreed with Hamilton, Connor, and the Progressive tradition. But his portrayal of Populists as rational reformers battling conservative elements of the Democracy contained a more ambiguous message about Populist political strategy. Probably influenced by Woodward’s views, he affirmed a key component of the Progressive attack on Populism by doubting whether North Carolina Populists’ political strategies advanced reform. This meant he disagreed with Edmonds’s claim that Fusion was partly a commonsense protection of minority rights. As a result, the future Kennedy Democrat spent a great deal of time describing the “vicissitudes” of 1890s politics, detailing the compromises and deals of various election arrangements. His overall message seemed to be that Hamilton and Connor were wrong about racial and economic motives of the Democratic Party, but that both the Progressives and Woodward had a point about the limitations of Tar Heel Populist politics and Fusion.²⁷

27. Steelman, “The Progressive Era in North Carolina, 1884-1917,” 34, 121-122, 158. Steelman never published any scholarship focused exclusively on Populism, choosing instead to concentrate on Republicans

Perhaps the most revealing political aspect of Steelman's dissertation involved failed efforts to have it published as a book. Well before its completion Steelman recognized that his perspective challenged the Progressive view, which still maintained influential academic and political support in North Carolina. In 1954, he wrote University of Virginia historian Edward E. Younger (1909–1979) that he was “impressed by the many shortcomings of the [Democratic Progressive Era] reform movement, of measures that failed of enactment, [and] the predominately conservative nature of [Democratic] political leadership.” In fact, a “very interesting criticism can be made of the notion that North Carolina was an outstandingly progressive state, foremost of any in the South.” Three years later, the University of North Carolina Press rejected the dissertation. An apparently decisive factor was that one reviewer disagreed with Steelman's forthright attack on Progressive Era history. According to this reader, Steelman incorrectly gave “virtues to Populists, and iniquities to Bourbons, railroads, and conservatives. [Marion] Butler, for instance, is essentially good and wise; [Furnifold M.] Simmons [(1854–1940), leader of the 1898 Democratic white supremacy campaign,] if not dishonest [was] at least leader of conservatives.” In the reviewer's mind, “In trying to associate agrarian and rural needs with progressive legislation, Dr. Steelman may have discovered insurmountable hurdles.” The reviewer believed Progressive historians were right: Disfranchisement, the product of an enlightened urban industrial leadership, and not farmers, led to real reform. Steelman unfortunately did not see this, and “writes as though the elimination of the Negro was ‘wicked,’ but [ironically] trumpets the ‘Progressive’ legislation which followed the triumph of conservatives.” Perhaps the critic was Hamilton, making a final volley for his generation's view that progress depended on Populism's failure. Undoubtedly Steelman was disappointed, but he was fully aware of the political purposes of professional history. He wrote press director Davis: “I do not believe that the reader would ever agree with me on the Populist legacy, the role of the suffrage amendment, a critical appraisal of the Aycock contribution, and an assessment of the position of Furnifold M. Simmons.”²⁸

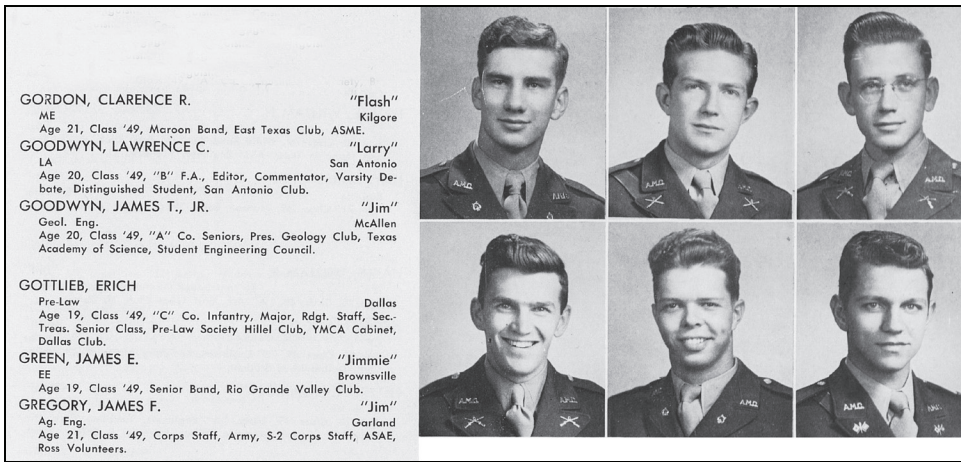
and Fusion. See Joseph F. Steelman, “Vicissitudes of Republican Party Politics: The Campaign of 1892 in North Carolina,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 43, no. 4 (October 1966): 430–442; Joseph F. Steelman, “Republican Party Strategists and the Issue of Fusion with Populists in North Carolina, 1893–1894,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 47, no. 3 (July 1970): 244–269.

28. Joseph F. Steelman to Edward E. Younger, February 9, 1954; Lambert Davis to Joseph F. Steelman, December 9, 1957; Joseph F. Steelman to Lambert Davis, December 24, 1957, all in Steelman Papers. Unfortunately, the University of North Carolina Press Papers in the Southern Historical Collection do not include correspondence about manuscripts rejected during the late 1950s, so the identity of the negative reviewer remains unknown. There was a different publishing outcome for Oliver H. Orr Jr. (1921–2018), who completed a Ph.D. in 1958 at Chapel Hill, “Charles Brantley Aycock: A Biography.” While preparing for publication, Orr sent the manuscript to Steelman. Steelman advised Orr to show courage, noting that he, Woodward, and Edmonds had already described how Democrats used race to defeat liberal reform: “I doubt that you will ever be able to satisfy Clarence Poe [(1881–1964), son-in-law of Aycock, publisher

Hamilton died in 1961, symbolically ending the Progressive historian era. But he and his colleagues had made a lasting mark on North Carolina Populist history. They established the foundations of university-based professionalism for historians, including its politicization and hoped-for relevance. They criticized the North Carolina Populists' Fusion strategy, which although initially based in anti-Republican racism, proved useful to C. Vann Woodward and influential in Populist historiography generally. They built the archives collections and history departments that helped educate and inspire the second generation of Populist historians, which in turn offered a history of the North Carolina Populist movement that both rejected and affirmed earlier interpretations. And their impact endured in novel forms.

A fitting postscript to the lasting effects of the Progressives' political and intellectual achievement is Duke University history professor Lawrence Goodwyn's (1928–2013) characterization of North Carolina Populism. Goodwyn's career, like Hamilton's, embodied the salaried historian as political advocate. According to his obituary in the *New York Times*, Goodwyn's "experience building cross-racial political coalitions in the 1960s led him to write an authoritative history of the rise of American populism in the 19th century." Goodwyn was "drawn into political and civil rights activism in the early 1960s while working as a reporter and editor for the *Texas Observer*." He "helped galvanize support for liberal Democrats" by bringing together "blacks, Mexican immigrants, liberal whites and labor unions." In 1963, Goodwyn spearheaded "the Democratic Coalition, a more formalized version of the multiracial grass-roots groups" developed for the 1962 elections. Most importantly, as "he traveled [Texas] and the South, as both an activist and a freelance journalist, he found that the lore of the populist movement had endured." Through his political activism, Goodwyn "was starting to hear whispers of this earlier [Populist]

of the *Progressive Farmer*, and prominent Democrat] and his like who insist upon repeating the myths and images about Aycock. Ignore them and do a candid job; let the chips fall where they may." Orr, however, compromised. He believed Steelman was "right about my not being able to satisfy Clarence Poe. [Poe] has already accused me of having deliberately set out to disprove everything he and [R. D. W.] Connor wrote about Aycock. I will not please Hamilton, or Chancellor [Robert B.] House [(1892–1987), of the University of North Carolina], or Henry Belk [(1898–1972), Goldsboro Democratic newspaper editor and member of the Aycock Memorial Commission], or the Democratic Party." Yet Orr admitted that "at the same time, I doubt that I will please Woodward, Edmonds, [Louis R.] Harlan [(1922–2010), recent author of *Separate and Unequal: Public School Campaigns and Racism in the Southern Seaboard States, 1901–1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1958)], or Steelman." Orr's biography, published in 1961 by the same university press that rejected Steelman's dissertation, portrayed Aycock in a friendly manner, so much so that J. Morgan Kousser (b. 1943), in *The Shaping of Southern Politics: Suffrage Restriction and the Establishment of the One-Party South, 1880–1910* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1974), 292, wrote that Orr "idolized Aycock and berated the governor's critics," apparently "because Orr seems to have shared Aycock's racism." Orr wrote Steelman in late 1959 that he "noticed that you have not published either your dissertation or the articles based upon it—both of which you could do—and I have entertained the thought that perhaps you are waiting until you live in a more sympathetic community." Oliver H. Orr Jr. to Joseph F. Steelman, December 22, 1959, Steelman Papers. Steelman did not publish an article from his dissertation until 1966, more than ten years after its completion.



Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas senior Lawrence C. Goodwyn (top row, center), 1949 [Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas] Aggieldand, 39, Cushing Memorial Library and Archives, Texas A&M University, College Station.

coalition,” and “Some of those memories were still alive, and that’s what drove him to want to dig deeper.”²⁹

Appropriately, Goodwyn’s strong links to the Progressive tradition of historian advocacy ran directly through Woodward, the original heir to the North Carolina Progressives. In 1967, before choosing a doctoral program in history, he wrote Woodward about Populist research and visited him in New Haven. That year, Goodwyn applied for a National Foundation for the Humanities grant for an Alliance-Populist project. The Foundation denied the application, but Goodwyn already believed the “schism that rent the Populist Party [during the 1890s] may be seen as a clash between Alliance organizers, holding fast to radical, long-range goals, and Populist politicians who faced the compelling short-run objective of surviving the next election.” In general, “where the Alliance had deep structural roots, the People’s Party tended to be mid-road; where it did not, fusion tended to prevail.” The Tar Heel Progressive historians, who created the political-Populist-as-traitor thesis to justify white supremacy and link Populism to Reconstruction, lived on. According to Goodwyn, Marion Butler and the North Carolina Populists, just as for Hamilton, Connor, and Woodward, played half-hearted reformers, “expedient politicians who betrayed the cause of reform.” Perhaps predictably, Goodwyn’s home state provided the best model for Real Populism. Seeking the relevance that motivated Hamilton’s Reconstruction analogy and Woodward’s 1930s anti-fascist liberal Populism,

29. William Yardley, “Lawrence Goodwyn, Historian of Populism, Dies at 85,” *New York Times*, October 4, 2013.

Goodwyn tried to address political needs during the Nixon administration. And like Hamilton and Woodward, Goodwyn saw the history department as the best platform from which to promote his cause. Goodwyn left journalism, enrolled in the Ph.D. program in history at the University of Texas, and completed a dissertation on Populism in 1971.³⁰

Revised and published in 1976 as *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America*, it argued that Real Populism never existed in North Carolina. Goodwyn maintained that Populism arose out of the cooperative buying and selling business experiences of the Farmers' Alliance. Populism thus offered a thorough critique of American capitalism, promoting a desirable "cooperative commonwealth" in opposition to the "emerging corporate state." North Carolina Populist leader Marion Butler and most of his followers came up short because Butler allegedly believed only in the limited reforms of "free silver, tariff protection, white supremacy, and good government." Butler's understanding of Populism, although he had been president of the southern Farmers' Alliance and national chairman of Populist Party, was "unrelated" to the broad program articulated in Populism's 1892 national platform. L. L. Polk, also national president of the Alliance, was too "cautious within the cooperative movement. . . . [As a result,] the North Carolina Alliance had never implemented a statewide marketing and purchasing cooperative."³¹

Goodwyn produced a distinctive version of Populism for contemporary purposes. And like earlier historians, he ardently defended this achievement.³² Goodwyn privately told Woodward that the latter's *Origins of the New South, 1877–1913* "made the scales fall from my eyes and conditioned my perceptions for the meanings I was to find when I inquired into Populism." These "conditioned" meanings stood for the proposition that dissent against the American political consensus, which he

30. Lawrence Goodwyn to C. Vann Woodward, April 21, June 13, 1967, Woodward Papers.

31. Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), xx, 341, 409–411, 440–445, 503–505.

32. Woodward supported Goodwyn's efforts. In 1967, he wrote Goodwyn that he was "right that [the Populist story] was material for a novelist as well as a historian." Woodward assured Goodwyn he "would take a personal interest" in his application to the Ph.D. program at Yale if Goodwyn decided to apply there. He praised Goodwyn's conclusion that disfranchisement was the product of the so-called "best" whites. He approved Goodwyn's tactical restraint in opposing "received views without rancor," noting that historian Norman Pollack (1933–2017) had failed by going "much too far in his polemics." He agreed Texas was "the most important state in the Populist movement." C. Vann Woodward to Larry Goodwyn, April 25, June 27, November 13, 1967; January 6, October 30, 1970; February 10, December 10, 1971; January 31, March 27, 1972; April 9, December 4, 1973; May 20, 1975, all in Woodward Papers. Woodward had been less enthusiastic about Norman Pollack's *The Populist Response to Industrial America: Midwestern Populist Thought* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1962). He rejected Pollack's attempts to link Populism with socialism. Woodward also thought Pollack's favorable views on Fusion were "hard to accept." Instead, "A study of Senator Butler's papers should persuade you of the demoralizing consequences of fusion." Perhaps Woodward relied on his own brief review of the Butler Papers in 1939. At any rate, like other Populist historians, Pollack shared Woodward's political purposes. He admired *Tom Watson* and *Origins of the New South*: "[T]hey are profoundly radical books, not only in showing the region's exploitation, but in a firmer



Prof. Lawrence C. Goodwyn, March 1977, Duke University Archives Photographic Negative Collection, 1855-1995, University Archives, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University, Durham, N.C.

defined as conservative and racist, deserved to be taken seriously. Hicks, according to Goodwyn, misread Populism because he did not understand its allegedly radical sources in mid-road politics and the Alliance cooperatives. Perhaps that was because Hicks wanted to use Populism for a different political purpose, to comprehend and justify Progressivism. Goodwyn, by contrast, aspired to write a 1960s and 1970s civil rights generation history of “the people.” He did not want to describe an articulate or powerful component of society, such as the Progressives. Populists and African Americans, as political and economic losers, fit the bill. White apostates, like the North Carolina Fusionists, helped round out the drama, just as they had for Hamilton and Woodward. Goodwyn attacked the idea of an “American past in terms of triumph” and wanted to promote “human strivings” made “against the

sense: a very deep humaneness which sides with the underdog, a humaneness which uncovers so much that could not be revealed from any other perspective.” Personally, he found modern American society “deeply unjust and unfair.” In 1968 and 1969, Woodward responded skeptically to Pollack’s evolving manuscript on Marion Butler, complaining about its overindulgence in theory and tedious detail. Pollack fought back, calling Woodward’s remarks “unimaginative” and “trivial,” adding that Woodward acted “as the protective mother hovering over Tom Watson, afraid that [Watson’s] reputation might suffer in the comparison [with Butler].” Woodward claimed he was not defensive about “old codger” Watson and that “Butler is worth

prevailing American consensus.” He complained, “Sometimes I think the [history] profession is absolutely transfixed by its fear and passivity, masquerading both as ‘scholarship.’” Goodwyn believed the university scholar must “take whatever risks [are] necessary to convey to our readers our own sense of the real meaning of the national experience.” Hamilton, as well as Woodward, Connor, DeLapp, Smith, Hicks, Edmonds, and Steelman, would have agreed. After all, Populism had been used to project their “sense of the real meaning of the national experience.”³³

North Carolina’s Progressive Era historians created the first version of Tar Heel Populism. As part of their advocacy for a new history profession, they used Populism to achieve relevance and make political arguments about the present. They expressly linked Populism, Reconstruction, moderate economic reform, and white supremacy. It did not matter if the research was poor (Hamilton, Connor) or

just as much serious attention.” Woodward wrote that if he “saw Butler through Watson’s eyes and you saw Watson through Butler’s standpoint that you would come to us with different estimates of both and corrective insights about Southern Populism.” Pollack announced that his political intention with Butler was to offer “a conception of authentic reform which falls between radicalism (I am now denying the radical character to Populism) and [weaker] 20th century liberal reform.” Pollock’s faith in “democratic capitalism,” with an “authentic public sector” and a real “commitment to social welfare” supported his favorable judgment on Populism. Pollack eventually laid aside the Butler project. The correspondence ended in the 1990s with both men agreeing that “multiculturalism” and the smugness of race and gender studies in universities produced a “holier than thou attitude” by some administrators and faculty, who act as though they were “standing on the barricades of justice, democracy, and progress.” Similarly, Woodward confided to historian Bennett H. Wall (1914–2003) that he did not “see any answer in the trivialization of the college curriculum to accommodate every ethnic fad, the deconstruction of every traditional canon of classics or history, or the overpaying and overpraising the handful of black scholars available.” Norman Pollack to C. Vann Woodward, January 8, October 13, 22, 1966; January 24, February 14, September 28, 1967; September 4, October 9, 21, 1968; January 17, July 13, September 5, October 18, 1969; June 20, 1972; August 30, 1992; C. Vann Woodward to Norman Pollack, December 24, 1962; January 14, October 16, 1966; February 1, 1967; October 3, 17, 1968; October 14, 1969; C. Vann Woodward to Bennett H. Wall, June 27, 1990, all in Woodward Papers. 33. Lawrence Goodwyn to C. Vann Woodward, January 18, March 16, 1972; January 24, 1980; May 31, 1981, all in Woodward Papers. Goodwyn’s correspondence with Woodward brings to mind historian Wendell Holmes Stephenson (1899–1970), who believed “A present view, a present cause, needs historic support.” He meant that “A crusade may be skillfully and subtly embedded in fairly sound history; it may be expressed openly in private correspondence.” Wendell Holmes Stephenson, *Southern History in the Making: Pioneer Historians of the South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1964), 249–250. Constructing a line between “sound history” and “private correspondence,” however, proved difficult for North Carolina Populism. As Bruce Palmer wrote Woodward in 1970: “It seems to me that some of the historians of the New Left have rejected history for a simple inversion of the same past that [conservatives] admire so. I agree whole-heartedly with emphasis on the craft and profession of history at a time when myths of the past serve more often to confuse than to illuminate. I would add, however, that ultimately the historian’s responsibility is to his brothers and not to his craft. While I do not think that a historian can fulfill his responsibility to his brothers without being as true as he can to his craft, neither can he be true to his craft if he does not finally use it to serve his brothers.” And Woodward gently chided his student James R. Green (1944–2016), author of *Grass-Roots Socialism: Radical Movements in the Southwest, 1895–1943* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), for crossing the instrumentalist line: “All [your] Socialists are so damned noble, Mother Jones is so motherly, etc., etc. Are there not in this political party, as in all others of my acquaintance, a representative quota of double-dyed sons of bitches and certified crooks? I guess my implication is that you are tending to romanticize these people,” although “Some historians of my acquaintance have been charged with doing the same thing to Populists, Communists, and Confederate generals.” Bruce Palmer to C. Vann Woodward, June 1, 1970; C. Vann Woodward to James R. Green, November 13, 19, 1974.

better developed (Smith, Hicks). To the initial group of young historians, Populism's defeat helped produce a desirable form of Democratic Progressivism. After 1930, although reacting against the racial and economic beliefs of the Progressives, C. Vann Woodward also described North Carolina Populism negatively. It generated the disapproval of his dissertation subject, Tom Watson, and thus fell outside the true liberal potential. Woodward's arguments rested partly on claims articulated by Progressive historians, especially their contention that Tar Heel Populism suffered from self-seeking politicians. During the 1940s and 1950s, Helen G. Edmonds and Joseph F. Steelman reimagined Populism without Progressive assumptions about race. But they also accepted the Progressive ideal of the academic historian-as-politician by interpreting Populism from the vantage of their Republican and Democratic faiths. Tellingly, only Edmonds endorsed Fusion. Even long after Hamilton's death, Progressive Era values reappeared in Lawrence Goodwyn's work. Goodwyn enthusiastically endorsed the political function of university-based historians as well as the notion that a shallow selfishness fatally infected Tar Heel Populism. The history of North Carolina Populism stands as one of the outstanding legacies of the professional ideals and conclusions of its Progressive Era founders.

*Dr. Hunt received undergraduate and law degrees from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in American history from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He also earned an LL.M. degree from Harvard Law School. After law school, he worked as a judicial clerk for the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit and then practiced law in Raleigh for five years. He has been teaching at Mercer University's business and law schools in Macon, Georgia, since 1998. He is currently a member of the Georgia Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. He is the author of *Marion Butler and American Populism* (2003) and *Relationship Banker: Eugene W. Stetson, Wall Street, and American Business, 1916-1959* (2009). His primary research interests are legal history, business history, and political history.*

Copyright of North Carolina Historical Review is the property of North Carolina Division of Archives & History and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.