



**Abstract:** I argue that from 1963 to 1968, North Carolina transformed from a state controlled by Democrats with a conservative wing openly hostile to racial equality to a two-party state with a Republican Party more subtly opposed to expanding the rights of black Americans. Though the open expression of anti-black sentiment in the state became increasingly rare during those years, white supremacy was not dead or dying, it was evolving. Those who opposed the black freedom movement increasingly did so in the language of “modern racism”— a set of values that promoted resistance to efforts to assist communities of color but that did not explicitly denigrate minority groups as such. I focus on North Carolina’s understudied 1964 Democratic gubernatorial primary and 1968 general election, contending that the candidate most skilled in practicing this modern racism emerged victorious in both elections. I find that the years 1963 to 1968 form a bridge connecting the Solid South to the two-party South, Black belt to Sunbelt, North Carolina’s past to its present. What they do not fully connect is the dreams of black Americans for racial equality with the fulfillment of that aspiration. Black Tar Heels dealt Jim Crow a serious blow between 1963 and 1968, yet they are not yet equal citizens. The story of North Carolina politics in these years helps explain the disquieting persistence of racial inequality nationwide. At a moment when blacks appeared poised to cross the bridge to the Promised Land, a new politics arose that obstructed their progress and granted white supremacy a new lease on life.