

# Outrageous Ambitions, Remarkable Success

Review by John Sanders

*Terry Sanford: Politics, Progress, and Outrageous Ambitions*, by Howard E. Covington, Jr., and Marion A. Ellis. Duke University Press, Fall 1999. 550 pages. \$34.95 hardback.

**T**his is the first book-length biography of Terry Sanford (1917–98), one of North Carolina's most creative and constructive citizens of this century. It should not be the last.

Sanford's long life was so action filled, from his high school years in Laurinburg to his final months in Durham, that a mere catalog of his doings becomes tedious. As an undergraduate at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, he experienced the salutary influence of President

Frank Graham. His study of law at Chapel Hill was interrupted by service with the Federal Bureau of Investigation and by combat as a paratrooper in Europe during World War II. After receiving his law degree in 1946, he joined the Institute of Government staff, where he taught criminal law to law enforcement officers, especially the State Highway Patrol, for two years. On entering law practice in Fayetteville in 1948, he began building the record of civic and church activities and the statewide political network that prepared his way for election to the North Carolina Senate in 1952 and the governorship eight years later.

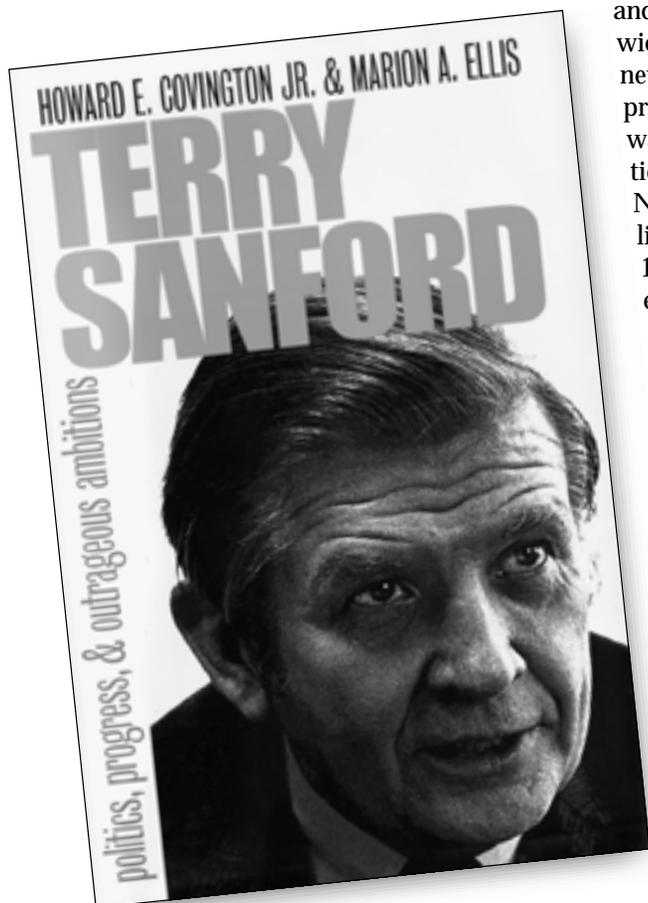
The chief part of this book is properly devoted to Sanford's race for governor in 1960 and his four-year term of office. (Governors could not be immediately reelected until 1977.) What an eventful four years they were! No governor of North Carolina (and few of any other state) has been as fruitful of ideas for improving existing programs and starting new ones, or as creative in finding ways to use the powers of the governor's office to iden-

tify and address social, economic, and especially educational needs of the people. And when the formal state structures would not suffice, Sanford created nonprofit entities, such as the North Carolina Fund, which was financed chiefly by the Ford Foundation and North Carolina foundations, to find and work to eliminate the causes of poverty in the state.

As Covington and Ellis relate, some of Sanford's initiatives—dramatic improvement of state funding for public schools with the aid of a new sales tax on food, creation of the North Carolina School of the Arts, and establishment of the Community College System with state financing, for example—were successful and enduring. Others—the Learning Institute of North Carolina and the North Carolina Film Board,



All photos from the book, courtesy of Duke University Press





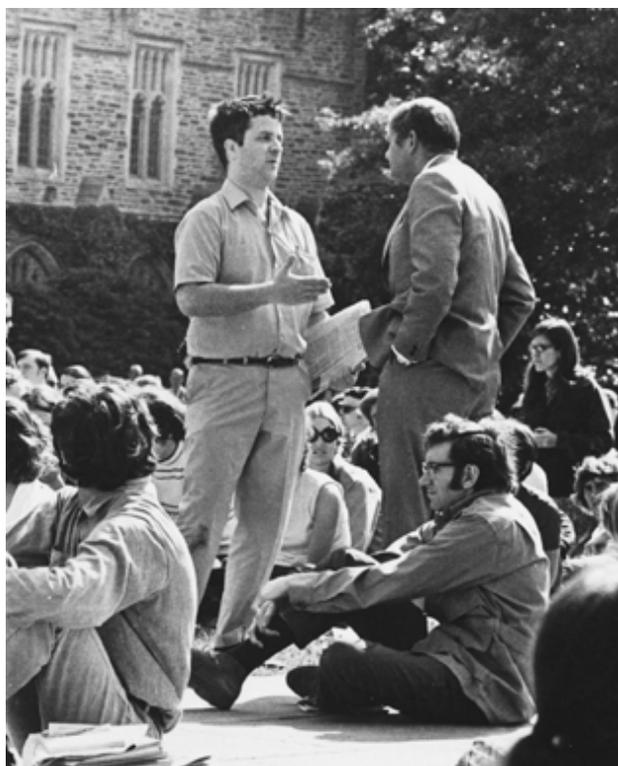
among them—did not last. But the risk of failure did not deter Sanford from attempting to cope with public needs, especially the need for better education for all citizens, not just the college bound. And his success record was remarkable.

Sanford's ability to persuade the General Assembly to fund bold new ventures such as the School of the Arts did not depend entirely on his eloquent advocacy on their behalf. He well understood and skillfully practiced the traditional political arts of bestowing (or withholding) jobs, roads, and other favors within the governor's gift, and so built up capital that was convertible in aid of his causes in the legislature. (It also helped that the General Assembly then functioned largely on a non-partisan basis, being almost entirely Democratic and thus inclined to look to Sanford as their leader to an extent less familiar today.)

The authors pay inadequate tribute to a great strength of Sanford's, one that enabled him to accomplish so much in four years. That was his ability to identify and attract into his service a remarkably creative group of young men; to encourage them to devise new approaches, new policies, and new programs; and to give his full political support to many of their innovations. He did not draw his governor's office staff chiefly from his campaign staff and so avoided being constrained by their limitations. He was not afraid to surround himself with people who were, in their



**Clockwise from top left: Governor-elect Sanford meeting with President-elect John F. Kennedy in November 1960; former paratrooper Sanford preparing to jump from a training tower in August 1964, at the twentieth reunion of the 517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team; Governor Sanford joining President Lyndon B. Johnson during the latter's visit to a tenant farmer's home in Rocky Mount, N.C., in 1964; Duke University President Sanford making himself accessible to student antiwar demonstrators in spring 1970.**





**Clockwise from top left: Candidate Sanford campaigning in western North Carolina for the U.S. Senate, flanked by basketball stars Tommy Amaker (left) and Tommy Burleson (right); Senator Sanford talking with Soviet Union President Mikhail Gorbachev; Senator Sanford greeting Queen Elizabeth II at a reception in London; Duke Professor Sanford greeting Duke Professor Emeritus John Hope Franklin, whom President Bill Clinton later appointed chair of a national commission on racial conflict in America.**



spheres, smarter than he was. He knew that, in the retrospect of history, he would be credited with their achievements.

The book treats Sanford's years and accomplishments as president of Duke University (1970–85) in only sixty pages, leaving to others the more detailed review that episode deserves. There too he was served by several able subordinates who saw to the internal management of the institution (and often took the criticism for unpopular decisions and actions), while he played the loftier public role of advocate and fundraiser.

Due note is taken of Sanford's two runs for the presidency of the United States, conducted while he was presi-

dent of Duke. The first was in 1972, when he was humiliated in the North Carolina presidential primary by the demagogic governor of Alabama, George Wallace, who took 50 percent of the vote to Sanford's 37 percent (three other candidates shared the remaining 13 percent). Sanford even trailed Wallace badly in his home county, Cumberland. His second run was aborted early in 1976, following a heart attack scare.

The account of Sanford's term in the U.S. Senate (1987–93) is limited and depends heavily on Sanford's own journal and other writings.

The reader who did not observe the Sanford years from 1960 to 1965 will learn much of interest from this fact-

ual account. But one finds almost no critical evaluation of Sanford the man—his motives, his methods, or his actions. The authors are both experienced newspapermen, and they give us essentially a straightforward, always kindly, newsman's account of Sanford's life and works. Oh yes; they do reveal one little-known fact, suppressed by Sanford from early childhood: he shared with all North Carolina governors since 1977 the first name of James.

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Terry Sanford: Politics, Progress, and Outrageous Ambitions *is available at bookstores or by contacting Duke University Press, phone (888) 651-0122, fax (888) 651-0124.*