

This is an interview with Frank Rouse, conducted in Kinston, North Carolina on December 17, 1973 by Jack Bass.

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Jack Bass: How did you get started in politics?

Frank Rouse: It was a heredity thing, I think. My mother's family are politically motivated. They never, you know, made any big licks in politics, my uncle was a county commissioner, you know, that kind of stuff. Guilford County Democrats, liberal Democrats. And I know that this sounds strange, I don't really understand it myself, but I grew up on a damn tobacco farm out here. Nothing, you know, we had a radio and a News and Observer every day. And you know how political the News and Observer is. And I'd just read the damn paper from cover to cover every day and it was just from a heredity thing plus environmental, with my mother I think. I was just real interested in politics. In 1960, I got involved in the Nixon campaign and I organized the YR Club at State College and then I didn't do anything in politics for three or four years, because I was so involved in business. Then, the first time that I had any time, I dived right back into it. I sort of came up through the YR ranks.

J.B.: Were you involved in the Goldwater campaign?

Rouse: Not really. That was the first year, really, that my business was going and I spent most of the time in Alabama. I know that when Lady Bird Johnson came through down there on the train, you know, with Hale Boggs and some others, I hired about fifty people to walk around with those big signs. . . (laughter by Rouse) Goldwater was in Montgomery during the campaign and of course, I went over there for that rally. But to say that I was involved in it, no, not at all.

J.B.: So, when did you really get involved?

Rouse: Well, my wife died in the fall of '67 and I was sort of out of everything for six or eight months and I got involved in primarily YR politics. I went to the national convention in '68, but I wasn't a delegate. But I met a lot of people and then started getting more and more involved. Well, our YR Club here got extremely active. In 1970, we ran a hell of a . . .

J.B.: Were you involved in Gardner's race?

Rouse: No. By you being a reporter, you'll say, "Why sure, Rouse is one of these Gardner people." But I wasn't. I gave some money and I did some flying for him, but I didn't, you know, I wasn't involved any at all. I really didn't get involved in state politics at all until about 1970. And I ran a campaign for a fellow that ran for state Young Republican chairman. I was organizational chairman for the YR . And I traveled all over the state and organized

and

about twenty-five counties.

J.B.: You're how old now?

Rouse: Thirty-five.

J.B.: So, your big effort in 1970 was organizing the Young Republicans?

Rouse: Yeah. And in the county here. We had a hell of a campaign.

See, '70 was a bad year for Republicans state-wide, but in the county we made tremendous gains here. When I say that, I. . .we elected some people on the school board. But we had a full ticket and we had some races that were damn close. State senate, I think our candidate got 49% of the vote. Sherrif was 43% of the vote, which is terrible, but if you figure that we were out-registered ten to one, it isn't all that bad. Nobody had ever done it before.

J.B.: How do you account for eastern North Carolina going Republican in 1972?

Rouse: Simple.

J.B.: The first time, though, isn't it?

Rouse: Yeah. The Democrats in eastern North Carolina are extremely conservative, primarily redneck. Even the damn, you know, the lawyers and everybody else. We're redneck people. And of course, some people use that term wrong, but. . .

J.B.: When you say that you're redneck people, what do you mean by it?

Rouse: We're country. Redneck to me, I think probably has a little different meaning than it does to somebody from Mecklenburg County. To people from Mecklenburg County, when you say, "redneck", you think

that a guy is stupid. To me redneck means country, but it means country in a different context. It means that he's rural, that he's extremely honest, that he's plainspoken and ultra-conservative. Both in living and. . .high morality, both in living habits and of course, his politics.

J.B.: Is religion tied to that?

Rouse: Yeah, yeah, I think so. I think that my definition of a redneck, he would be, if not religious on a day to day basis, he would have inherent. . .he would be inherent Southern Baptist. In other words, he would have. . .he may not go to church and Sunday School every week and go to choir practice on Thursday night, but because of his environment and because of his family, he would be religious.

J.B.: Let me ask you if you would add one other element to that. Do you add his being very independent as a person?

Rouse: Oh hell yes. That's the thing that I overlooked. But by that, when I said conservative, that's really what I meant. Because, my father is a classic example of that. He inherited a farm from his father, who inherited it from his father, who inherited it from his, I mean back four generations. And he pays cash for every damn thing he does. And if he likes you, you know, he'd say, "Jack, I don't like that goddamn moustache." And he'd say it. And then he wouldn't think anything about it. And the first time you meet him, you'd think, "Well, that's the most obnoxious son of a bitch I've ever seen." But once you got to know him, you know, he'd just seem an honest, out spoken

person. And this is true of. . .

J.B.: Do you acquaint, again, this same type of person that we're talking about, do you acquaint him with what is referred to in the days of Kerr Scott as the Branch Head Boys?

Rouse: No. That, to me, was a. . .they were anti-machine. There are some similarities, but I do not equate them. The Branch Head Boys were, you know, he was the guy that got there first in Scott's campaign. This is everybody that I'm talking about. When I say everybody, you know. . .and again, we're talking about eastern North Carolina. We're talking about this area in the south right here. (goes to map) This area right here.

J.B.: Your hand is going across the whole coastal region of the Carolinas, the Cotton Belt, the Black Belt, whatever you want to call it.

Rouse: Right. The Bible Belt, all those. . .so what happened. These people, by being this way, they're all, you know, yellow dog Democrats. The courthouse, you know, that whole area, the courthouse is run by Democrats, the sherrif's a Democrat, their state legislator is a Democrat, their governor's a Democrat, you know. Hell, they don't know anything but the Democratic Party. And if you take that whole area and exclude some cities involved that have grown up in the last thirty-four years, and there's not really many of thoe, you know, except maybe Jacksonville, Florida or something like that, and then this is Democrat country and the registration is still ten to one.

And these people didn't know anything but the Democratic Party. They were. . .

J.B.: Let me ask you one question, I don't want to interrupt your train of thought, but on that point. . .where your hand just swept across the map there was pretty much very strong Goldwater country, except eastern North Carolina wasn't that strong. Why wasn't eastern North Carolina that way. Why was it different from those other areas?

Rouse: Eastern North Carolina was different because you have registration by party in North Carolina. I think that had a lot to do with it. I was getting to that. These Democrats in North Carolina particularly. . .well, of course, South Carolina was the opposite because you had Thurmond, and that made the damn difference in South Carolina. But in eastern North Carolina, when a guy goes and registers as a Democrat, all the way back to the Civil War, you know, they've all been Democrats. All of his family. But when he signs his name as a Democrat, that's sort of a contract between himself and the Democratic Party. You know, "I signed my name. I'm a Democrat." And where, in the Myers Park section of Charlotte, they guy wouldn't consider it a moral obligation at all. That fellow that drove up there to register with, you know, a pickup and a gun rack in the back. You know, that's a contract he has, a moral contract he has. And because these people did this, they voted Democrat. That's why in '52 and '56 these damn people voted for Stevenson instead of Eisenhower, I think. O.K., but what happened, this thing just kept on and on and

they kept seeing Johnson on television and the race thing was obviously a hell of a big part of it, they just got tired of it and tired of it and in '68 they compromised their political morality, you know, just a little bit and voted for Wallace. They didn't vote for a Republican, but yet, they still didn't vote for a Democrat. They violated their conscience a little bit. . .

J.B.: Well, except some of them. . .I'd run into this occasionally, in that '68 campaign. Someone would say that they were a Democrat, and I'd say, "But you're voting for Wallace." And they'd say, "But he's a Democrat."

Rouse: Well, right. But what I'm saying is, that they didn't vote for the Democrat nominee for President. And that was the first time they'd ever done it. But they broke that thing, you know, they broke that bond. . .this coffee is cold, but you're welcome to have some. . . so, in '72, the difference between Nixon and McGovern in their eyes was black and white. And the Republicans had Jesse. And Jesse, of course, two years since had been a Democrat, and because of t.v. news and whatever else, particularly in Eastern North Carolina, they identified with Jesse. And they voted for Nixon and they voted for Jesse, for Nixon and for Holshouser in that order. I think that if Jesse had. . .I agree with De Vries one thousand percent, that Jesse's coattails elected Holshouser, not Nixon's coattails. Nixon helped, but Jesse made the difference.

J.B.: Does Holshouser agree with that?

Rouse: Anderson does. It's just a question of whether Gene told him or not. If Gene told him, then he does.

J.B.: How dependent do you think Holshouser is on Gene?

Rouse: One thousand percent. He'd be sitting in the goddamn corner with his head between his legs if it wasn't for Anderson.

J.B.: How much power does Anderson have in the governor's office? I mean, on policy matters?

Rouse: Whatever he wants. Holshouser is a . . . well, you know, one indication of the kind of person he is, of course, he had stomach problems or some kind of health problem, but his mother came to college and cooked for him when he was in college. But he is a typical little guy, you really can't say spoiled, but that's the way it comes out, even though I'm sure that he's not the typical rich kid -spoiled brat type. But he's, you know, "I had things my way and I'm going to have my way. I don't care what you say, I'm going to have things my way." And he's extremely stubborn and that's the kind of person he is.

J.B.: Well, what's going to be the effect of the inter-party fight, the one that involved you and Bennett? On the Republicans, particularly Republicans in eastern North Carolina? Or maybe I should ask about Republicans in North Carolina first and then eastern North Carolina.

Rouse: Well, I don't think that the Republicans have but one thing to sell. . . and this is in the South, not necessarily just North Carolina, it's in the whole South. . . it's that we're the, I don't know if you read Ferrel Guillory Sunday, but he hit it right on the

goddamn nose, but he was slanted toward Holshouser because he's a liberal and he likes Holshouser. But. . .and I could be wrong, hell, I'd be the first one to admit it, but I read the thing as, the only thing Republican Party has to offer in the South, as growth is concerned, the only way they can grow, is they are going to have attract the Wallace Democrat. You can call him a racist or you can call them conservatives or rednecks, you can call them whatever in hell you want to call them, but that is the majority of the voters in North Carolina. And we're sitting here with one Republican for every three Democrats. Now, if this crowd in the Democratic Party is by far the biggest bloc, I think that by Sugg and Bowles getting Wallace in here for this dinner for the Democratic Party was the smartest damn thing they could do. Because that's where we got our votes from, that's where we get our votes from in the Democratic Party and these are the people that we've got to get if we are going to grow. And then the only way we're going to grow and the only way we're going to continue to grow is that our party is going to have to be exactly what I just described this eastern North Carolina redneck as being. Not a fool, not an idiot, not a racist, in other words, it's going to have to be the party of the individual. The party of principle. We can't out-promise the Democrats, we can't out-spend them, we can't out-liberalize them, we're going to have to be the strong right arm sticking out there as the alternative to all this mess we've got in state government.

J.B.: What's going to happen. . .Holshouser's seeking what is usually called a more moderate position, you know, more broadening in different directions. Is that a basic fair statement?

Rouse: Yeah.

J.B.: What effect is that going to have on eastern North Carolina voters who last year voters who voted Republican for the first time?

Rouse: They're not going to do it.

J.B.: Do you think they'll go back Democrat?

Rouse: Yes sir. They're Democrats anyway. Hell, they voted for Holshouser and they voted for Jesse and they voted for the President and they reached over for a couple, but they still voted for that Democratic. . .

J.B.: Do you think that the Holshouser victory last year represented more of a fluke, it doesn't represent a clear cut change?

Rouse: A fluke.

J.B.: What do you think will happen in the legislature next year?

Rouse: They are going to get the hell beat out of them. You mean in the legislature, or the legislative races?

J.B.: The legislative races.

Rouse: They are going to get the hell beat out of them.

J.B.: Why? Is Watergate going to be a factor?

Rouse: No. You know, I can't be objective about it, but I really believe that the rank and file voter in North Carolina just sort of resents this whole damn. . .they resent the treatment that Nixon is

getting. Now, this energy crisis and the money crunch and the steel crisis and the crisis and the paper crisis and all this, that's different. Now, they are going to blame Nixon for that. But by the same token, on the other side of the spectrum, they, I think they resent and I think that if he would just solve these other damn problems, they would be a backlash toward the treatment he's had from the national media. And from others, you know. But I don't think that Watergate. . .

J.B.: How about on his tax business?

Rouse: Well, I understand a little bit about taxes. Now, they're scalding the hell out of him today or yesterday on the fact that he's donating his damn estate at San Clemente and he's getting a damn tax break now. Well, the way I read it, the guy is giving them two million bucks and he's going to get six or seven hundred thousand dollars in tax credit back for it. But I don't know from the way that the press has presented it, hell, you know, it's hurting him. It's got to hurt him.

J.B.: I'm thinking not so much about the San Clemente thing, but the amount of tax that he paid these last three years.

Rouse: Well, the. . .

J.B.: Which is less tax than the average tobacco farmer around here pays.

Rouse: Yes, but really, you know, but. . .I don't know for which President they did it for, I don't know for which Vice-president

they did it

they did it for, but they passed a goddamn bill, in Congress, to say that, you know, that you could donate Presidential papers and Vice-Presidential papers to the archives up there and consider it a damn tax deduction. Now, it is a law and it is no more illegal for him to do that than it is for me to use the double declining balance method investment credit on a pick-up truck.

J.B.: Getting back to North Carolina Republicans and the Republican Party in the South. Guillory's column suggests that Holshouser is going a different direction from the Republican Party. . .

Rouse: Yes. And I agree with that and I think that that is going to be a real damn problem.

J.B.: Do you think that Holshouser is going in the wrong direction?

Rouse: Yes.

J.B.: For party growth?

Rouse: Yes.

J.B.: Do you think that he will be able to ~~succeed~~ in party growth in other sections of the state to overcome that?

Rouse: It's possible. Holshouser reads, and again, this is why I could be wrong. Holshouser has got his finger on the pulse of the cities. It's obvious from his actions and reactions that that is what he's doing. And he may be right.

J.B.: Can you see any Democrats putting together a coalition of the Wallace vote and the black vote and the liberal vote?

Rouse: I can see two Democrats that can do that in a damn instant.

J.B.: Who?

Rouse: Hunt and Morgan both.

J.B.: What would they have to do to do that?

Rouse: Just be Democrats. Hunt, by being the disguised liberal that he is, is going to be able to handle labor and the blacks and the liberal Democrats without any damn problems. And he's going to be able to handle the conservative Democrats, unless he blunders and you know, he's done a pretty good job of disguising it so far, just because he's a farm boy from eastern North Carolina. Now, that probably doesn't make sense to you, but it does to me.

J.B.: It does to me, but I'm just not that familiar with North Carolina politics. I've covered South Carolina more.

Rouse: Morgan has been all things to all people. He really got his start in politics with Dr. Lake and became very identified with Dr. Lake. Now, he's a big damn consumer nut and hell, the same thing, the same thing. Morgan or Hunt could beat the hell out of us anywhere they want to do it.

J.B.: Do you see Hunt as the strongest potential candidate of the Democrats for governor?

Rouse: Yeah.

J.B.: How about Leo Jenkins?

Rouse: Well, this is. . .again, I sometimes have trouble being objective. Leo wouldn't scratch, you know, west of the zipper. He's, you know. . . I used to despise his ass, but I've grown to respect the man. And

personally I respect him and he's got a tremendous amount of personal appeal. But, he doesn't have the right accent for North Carolina politics. And the East Carolina thing would beat him to death. I mean, he cannot be a factor in state wide politics in this state.

J.B.: How about in the senate race? You have a senate race next year.

Rouse: Well, three months ago, four months ago, I thought that probably Morgan would chicken out and not run against Ervin and that's still very possible. And that we could beat Ervin with Mizell, because of the backlash. I didn't feel like Nixon was that unpopular and I didn't feel like the Republican Party was in that bad a shape. And that Mizell, by being a tremendous campaigner and being able to put together a million bucks or so would be able probably to beat Ervin. At this point in time, I don't know. I think that the national situation has deteriorated, primarily because of the economy, you know, the fuel crisis and all, and I don't think we've got a Republican that could beat either one of them now.

J.B.: Where does the Republican money come from in North Carolina? Where would Mizell get a million dollars?

Rouse: From the tobacco people and the textile people and primarily from industry.

J.B.: Are these people who support Democrats and Republicans? How about the disclosure laws? Does that hurt?

Rouse: Not really. One problem that we are going to have, after Holshouser, is that we, you know, Bowles got this so called smart money

but we were beginning to make tremendous damn strides into these people. . .the Cannon Mills, the Reynoldses, Wachovia Bank, we were making inroads into them because of our Congressmen and of course, Jesse, goddamn, he just got it all. But they are saying now that "we feel like we'd be better off supporting conservative Democrats than we would taking a chance with a damn another Republican." Now, I'm sure that time. . .fifteen minutes you know, is a long time in politics. And everything we're talking about today could turn upside down tomorrow as far as current races are concerned.

J.B.: How do you feel, you know, about your own defeat?

Rouse: I feel like that it's a defeat for the Republican Party. Because I represent, I think, the people where I think we need to grow. And what happened is that I underestimated the governor. I underestimated his vindictiveness and I underestimated his raw power, I mean, they turned every damn thing loose on me. I don't know if you realize that or not, but hell, they must have had a couple of hundred people at least, working full time. You know, of course on state money and state time and state telephones and everything else. But they did a damn real job on me and I've gotten a stack of mail that high since I've been back and most of the mail I've got is from people who. . .well, a good example would be a doctor friend of mine, from a Piedmont county who is as good a friend as I've got in this state. He said, "Frank, the governor is a shit. But we don't have any damn

choice. If we don't support Bennett, then this guy is going to loose his job, this guy is going. . ." I mean people that just got on board. . ."this guy is going to loose his job. We're not going to get any goddamn help at all. We're going to be completely cut off. And all that we've worked for, as far as credibility is concerned, is going to be cut off. There's nothing else that we can do." And I agreed with him.

J.B.: Are you going to stay in the party?

Rouse: Oh hell yes.

J.B.: What caused you to become a Republican in the first place?

You said that you grew up on the News and Observer, that the family connections were all Democratic, the News and Observer is certainly not a Republican paper and was certainly far less so, far more of a Democratic paper when you were reading it. . .

Rouse: I guess I learned how to read, I don't know. But because, the Republican Party was basically the conservative party and the Democratic Party was basically the liberal party. And hell, I don't mean that. . .by being a conservative, I'm supposed to be a racist. But by local definition, I'm a damn screaming liberal on race. I think people get caught up in conservative and liberal and they label themselves when really it's not true. But that's basically the reason that I did it. And I'll tell you, I became tremendously enlightened by serving on the national committee. I can understand how the

Republican Party could have Rockefeller and Percy and Javitts and that damn crowd. I didn't understand how they could be Republicans, and yet when I met these damn national committee people from all over the country and of course, by being to two national conventions and talking to a lot of people, I found out that the rank and file Republican across the damn country, is just as conservative as the conservatives in North Carolina are, in the Republican Party. In a state like Illinois, for example, Percy had to move over to the left to get elected. Now, of course, Percy is a damn liberal, I'm not saying that. I saw that on the convention floor when his own goddamned delegation was ready to vote against him. But he could get elected as a Republican because he had the right locked up and he moved over into the mainstream of politics enough to get the votes to win. The Democratic Party, for all practical purposes nationally had given us, you know, the whole Nixon thing, had given us the right and the majority. . .

(interruption on tape)

Rouse: . . .don't you think so?

J.B.: So, you don't really see the Republicans making gains in North Carolina in the next few years?

Rouse: I think it's been slowed up tremendously. Of course, the same thing could happen to us that happened in Virginia, now. Virginia elected a liberal for governor and Bill Godwin saved the Republican

Party. Well, I think that the Republicans saved themselves. Now, two years ago, they had the same situation in Virginia that they had in North Carolina. Dick Obenshain ran for state chairman in the Republican Party against the damn. . .well, you know, he's just a good old Virginia conservative. . .ran for state chairman and the governor tried to beat him. But yet, Obenshain won and then he got in and got involved in Bill Scott's campaign and I wouldn't want to categorize myself as being a Bill Scott Republican, but they did elect him, you know.

J.B.: Of course, you've got John Dalton, who got elected by 150,000 more votes than Godwin did. Running for lieutenant governor.

Rouse: Right. I'm not familiar with the lieutenant governor's race at all. I don't know the person. And you know, Holshouser may be right. I know that he's reading the Vice-Presidency right. I know that he's reading that damn thing right. And that may be where our growth is, our growth may be in suburbia, I don't know. But you can go back and look at statistics for twenty years in North Carolina and we come out of the damn mountains and the Piedmont, you know, with a decent vote. Maybe I'm being more pragmatic about the damn thing and using it for my own. . .well, rationalizing it because I'm eastern North Carolina oriented. But the only way we could have elected a governor and the only way we could have elected a senator, or the only way we could have carried this state for a Republican candidate

for President is to crack eastern North Carolina. And we've got to do that. The thing didn't work with Gardner and we may, by making the gains in eastern North Carolina and we lose the cities, well, hell we're. . .

J.B.: Do you think Gardner would have won last year if he had gotten the nomination?

Rouse: I don't have any goddamn idea. I don't know. I think that Holshouser got a tremendously good press and he's still getting a damn decent press and I think that had a tremendous damn effect on the race. And they would have torn Gardner to pieces. And he would have deserved most of it. So, I just don't know.

J.B.: How bad did Gardner hurt himself in '68 when he switched from Nixon to Reagan? At the convention?

Rouse: I think that if he had stayed with one or the other, it wouldn't have made that much difference. I think that the fact that he switched is what made the damn people mad. I think at the time a majority, even the people that were after Gardner's ass afterwards, a majority of the people supported Reagan over Nixon. Gardner, and this is. . . you've got the mike on and I would never want him to know that I said this about him. . .but Gardner doesn't have the damn, well, character, that. . .that's the only thing about the guy, as far as I'm concerned, that would keep him from being a tremendous success in anything he wanted to be. Because he's got the charisma, you know, the wherewithal

to do anything he'd want to do except, you know, you crowd the guy in a corner, he's going to crumble. And he just doesn't have the character. And I don't know what kind of deal was made, I don't know anything about the circumstances, and I might have done the same damn thing, I don't know. But the fact that Gardner lied, just lied, just flat ass lied and got caught lying, I think it destroyed him in '68 and I think that this. . .

J.B.: Now, what was that where he got caught lying?

Rouse: Well, one time, he was with Earl Cox, he was having a press conference and somebody asked him what was Earl Cox's role in the campaign. I forgot exactly what he said, something about how he was handling his press or something. Then, they wanted to know if Earl was on Congressional payroll, and he said, "No." And then they came back and caught him, and I'm not sure of the damn details, but they caught him and proved that he was on the Congressional payroll and then he said that he wasn't doing anything to help him in his campaign. I mean, shit, he lied twice and just whatever was expedient at the moment, that's what he would say. And it destroyed him, I think.

J.B.: Who at this point do you see as the most likely successor to Holshouser? For a Republican candidate?

Rouse: Well, there are a half a dozen of them or so that are running just as damn hard as they can. Charlie Taylor, David Flaherty, Tom Bennett, David Jones, at least those. You look in the legislature, Senator Horton is going to do something. He may go for the Senate this

time, I don't know what his thinking has been, I haven't talked to him about it that much in the last 60 days.

J.B.: You mean the U.S. Senate?

Rouse: Yeah. That's basically where it is now. Rountree's got tremendous ambitions. Clark, George Clark, both of them from Wilmington. Most of these people are from the so-called, I wouldn't say the Holshouser wing of the party, but they're all identified with Holshouser. Possibly with the exception of Horton. Fred Hutchins, the representative from Winston-Salem has got gubernatorial ambitions. I don't. . . Earl Ruth won't run, Broyhill won't now, unless it's so goddamn. . . unless somebody gives it to him on a silver platter. He hadn't got any guts at all. Mizell, I don't think is going to run for governor, ever. I mean he just doesn't have gubernatorial ambitions. Now, he's sure has senatorial ambitions. I think that it would come out of that group. And I don't think that there's a one in the crowd that could cut it. I have done, so far in this discussion we're having, a miserable job of trying to explain to you what I'm explaining. I hope maybe you've been able to dig out what I'm trying to say, but. . .

J.B.: Oh, I think it's coming across all right. Well, if you had to summarize, right now, where do you see the party and where do you see it heading?

Rouse: Well, I agreed with Harry Dent's Southern Strategy. And Kevin Phillips's southern strategy. I agree with it.

J.B.: All right, how do you define that southern strategy,

Rouse: Well, the President defines it as treating the South like any other part of the country. That ain't necessarily all wrong. But in reality, I think that the southern strategy was to try and woo the Thurmond type Democrats. Woo them into the Republican Party. That's really where they belong, I think.

J.B.: Do you see the easing off on desegregation as being a big part of that?

Rouse: I don't think that there's any question but what that the race issue is part of it, but it's a part of it. . .but you can't say it's the whole issue. Because even here, it's just changing dramatically. The attitude toward the race issue.

J.B.: Changing in what way?

Rouse: Hell, people are tolerant. They're accepting it. Ten years ago, you know. . .hell, I had lunch with two black guys today and a couple of people stared at me, but ten years ago I wouldn't have done that for any goddamned amount of money in the world. They just happened to be two good friends of mine, and shit, I went over and had them sit down with me. Just the fact that it's happened and they are accepting it.

J.B.: Do you see the Republican Party attracting blacks in any numbers in North Carolina?

Rouse: No.

J.B.: Why?

Rouse: Well, for the very reason that blacks aren't capitalists, blacks

aren't conservatives. Now, my approach to the thing was, you know, when I was chairman, was, let's get the damn people in the party, welcome everybody in the party that share our philosophies and will support our candidates. And as a result, we got a pretty damn strong black organization in the state, in the Republican Party. But they're lawyers and businessmen, these kind of people. Not the rabble rousers by any stretch of the imagination. And hell, just by nature, they wouldn't be conservatives, but the ones that are, hell, yeah, we welcome them in the party. You know, if you looked at our delegates to the national convention and the participation within the party, the state central committee, blacks play a significant role in our party. There are minorities, Indians, too. There are a lot of Indians in the Republican Party.

J.B.: Is Dr. Horton's primary role to build the black strength in the party? Is that his primary role in Holshouser's office?

Rouse: His primary role is to get black support for Holshouser. Now, here again is where we disagree, violently. This is primarily Anderson and I. Anderson believes that everybody has got a price and that whatever is expedient, that's the goddamn route to take. Horton, for example, is a goddamn screaming liberal. An absolute screaming liberal. And he wants to attract blacks and say that you know, "we can do more for you than the Democrats can." And I just don't believe that. . .I believe that there are two things that build a party and that's patronage and patriotism. I think a person

has to have a damn gut feeling about what he is doing or you can't really build a lasting friendship or bond or coalition or organization. I believe that if he wants a job, he'll come out and bust his ass for you for thirty days or two months or whatever, but when he gets that job, he's just another bureaucrat and he won't ever help you again. But you find somebody that's waving the damn flag, that's really turned on. . .and I think I fit that. This thing has cost me, there's no way to measure how much my involvement in politics has cost me financially and every other way. I did it because it was an ego trip, first of all, and I'd be the first to admit it, but I also did it because I felt like it was the right thing to do. And Anderson, his attitude is, "what's in it for me?" Everybody has a price. And that's the way they're trying to build the party. And it would work in a state chairman's race and it would work on a one county deal where you could go in there and concentrate on electing somebody sheriff or beating somebody that you didn't want to be sheriff. But on a mass situation, in a state wide election, it won't work.

J.B.: How about, you know, these old Democrat old constitutional officers. Are the Republicans going to go big after those seats and win them or not?

Rouse: If I was state chairman, we wouldn't. Now, I don't know what the hell they're going to do.

J.B.: You say that if you were state chairman, you wouldn't?

Rouse: Hell no.

J.B.: Why?

Rouse: They're not worth the damn time. You should just go after what you think you can win. But what I was going to say, my basic idea about the growth of the party coincides with Harry Dent. It coincides with Bob *Shaw*, the state chairman in Georgia, it coincides just like that with Clark^e Reed, who is state chairman in Mississippi, who is chairman of the southern chairmen. This is a guy you ought to spend a lot of time with. He has got probably as much clout on the Republican National Committee as any one person. He's hell of a strong. . .he's sort of the spokesman for the Republican, for the conservative members of the Republican National Committee.

J.B.: So, you see the primary growth as recruiting from the Democratic Party?

Rouse: Where else are we going to get them? There's nowhere else to get them.

J.B.: What about candidates? Where are you going to get/candidates? Are you going to get them from the Democratic Party or. . .

Rouse: Hell, yeah. Yes sir.

J.B.: Or are you going to get your own?

Rouse: Both.And, I registered Republican when I was old enough to vote and there is a tremendous damn. . .particularly in party circles, they bad mouth the hell out of switchers. And I've always been the opposite and I've always said, "Goddamn it, I can say this because I am a life long Republican. The damn switchers are the

lifeblood of our party." You don't know what I went through with Mel Broughton . Goddamn, you don't know what I went through. I went to the guy a week after I was elected chairman. I said, " Mel, we need you in the Republican Party and I know damn well that you haven't got any love for the Democratic Party. We've got to get together." And he agreed, I mean, it was sort of wild, but hell, I was grabbing at straws. He agreed to serve as Broyhill's campaign manager for governor if Broyhill would run. Which, of course now looks silly. But at the time, when Holshouser was the only goddamn candidate for governor, I didn't think it was so silly. But the establishment. . .you know, Holshouser is out of the old guard wing. And they'd rather control, really, than win. They don't want goddamn mass registration changes. And shit, because we have party registration, we've got to have it. We've got to get them changed. We've got to change the registration. You know, we may elect another governor sometime, or we may elect a senator or we may have some more flukes, but we're not going to elect sheriffs and county commissioners and legislators until we get registration changes. We're not getting them now, we're not going to get them. Not unless, you know, you show these people what they want to see. And again, he may have exactly the right idea, you know, to go back to the suburban vote and tell eastern North Carolina to go to hell. He's done it. As governor. He may be exactly. . .

J.B.: What's the reaction in eastern North Carolina to his appointments?

Particularly black appointments?

Rouse: Bad, bad. He's deader than hell in eastern North Carolina right now.

J.B.: How many Republican legislators are there now, from eastern North Carolina?

Rouse: Jack Blanchard from Sampson County. Tom Haralson from Brunswick, Tommy Rhodes, Representative Tommy Rhodes from New Hanover, Senator George Clark, Senator George Rountree from New Hanover. If you count Wake, we've got Ward Perrington, Senator Perrington. . .

J.B.: Do you count Wake usually when you talk about eastern North Carolina?

Rouse: Shit, yeah. I'll tell you. Maybe I've got a little different definition of eastern North Carolina from most people. But I consider from right about here back as eastern North Carolina. (illustrates on map)

J.B.: Leo Jenkins said that he considered everything east of Wake?

Rouse: The reason I say that is because the damn people think the same way in Montgomery County as they do in Jones. We've got basically two kinds of Republicans in North Carolina. We've got the Civil War draft dodgers. . . (end of side A of tape). . . the damn country club Republicans, and us. The Civil War draft dodgers are Republicans for the same reason that nine out of ten people here are Democrats. You know, they don't have any gut feeling. They didn't ever have to think about it. What they were going to do.

J.B.: So, you see the basic battleground as you either concentrate on your suburban voters or eastern North Carolina voters? You either concentrate on taking the '68 Nixon voters and trying to expand on that or taking the Wallace voters and trying to build that into the party?

(interruption on the tape)

Rouse:. . .even Hank Wilmer who is. . .

J.B.: So, you don't

Rouse: No, hell no. (interruption on tape) Even Wilmer. Now, Wilmer is an insurance executive up there, he makes about \$200,000 a year, he says. I doubt it, but. . .and he sees the Republican Party, he's the county chairman in Mecklenburg County. . .he's a hard working chairman, they have a good county chairman. But he's got one basic fault, I think. He sees the Republican Party as being a closed club of millionaires and, you know, he sees it as the country club party.

J.B.: Now, who is this?

Rouse: Hank Wilmer. And I think that is one hell of a big mistake. But he admitted to me one time, sometime in the last six months, that Charlotte. . .and I didn't even bring it up, he just said it and I thought "Hell, I won't even talk to him about the thing." Because I know how he feels. And if I told him that I was a redneck, he probably wouldn't speak to me again. He's that uptight about it. But he said that Charlotte was a redneck town. It is. So, I don't think that we've

got to be Populist, I don't think that we've got to out-promise the Democrats to get this damn Ervin vote. I think if we do what we need to do to get that damn tobacco farmer in Pitt County, we're going to get that guy that's a mechanic or that's an executive with Exxon or whatever. I think we are going to get those damn people too.

J.B.: What are you going to get them with other than race?

Rouse: I don't look at race as being, maybe I'm , you know, maybe race is hell of a big wall here and I'm just looking over the wall and I don't see the damn wall because I'm trying to look over it. Of course, you'd have to say that race is one of the things, but I think the basic flag-waving ideals that. . . (interruption on tape) . . . my contention was that these folks in North Carolina think the same way that we think. But we didn't have credibility, we didn't have the sherrif, we didn't have the governor, we didn't have the senator, we didn't have anything. Now, after we elected a governor and a senator, we shared a majority basic philosophy and we had credibility. And if we had moved in then and if Holshouser hadn't appointed Rene Westcott and here we are going right back to race again, but if he had taken a two degree to the left of him stance, we could turn this goddman state upside down. But he didn't do it. And he may be right. He's playing it right for Charlotte and he's playing it right for Vice-President. But I don't think he's playing it right for the Republican Party.

J.B.: You think he's actively shooting for Vice-President?

Rouse: Oh sure. No doubt about that. I mean, that's very obvious. I mean, these people. . .

J.B.: He's serious about it? That's not just show?

Rouse: Oh, no. He's very serious about it. Very serious about it.

J.B.: Who do you see as the strongest potential for the Republican candidate for President?

Rouse: Ford.

J.B.: Is there anything that we didn't cover that you want to talk about?

Rouse: We covered it, I just think that I muffed it.

J.B.: No, I don't think so.

(interruption on tape)

Rouse: . . .and I think that people ought to do it because they think it's the right thing to do. And I think that the only way you're going to be able to build a party, is build a party with people who think they are doing what they ought to be doing. They think it's the right thing to do. And it goes back to the basic thing that government shouldn't do anything for a person that a person can do better for himself. And Nixon, hell, Nixon is trying to do this. Nixon is a hell of a lot more conservative than his damn campaign in '68 was.

J.B.: How big a factor in the south is Nixon's close relationship to

Rouse: I think it's a tremendous asset.

J.B.: Do you think that it's helped Republicans in general across the south? Is that a big asset?

Rouse: It's with everybody in the south.

J.B.: Well, I mean, does it help Republicans across the south, on a broad basis? Not just the presidential race? In other words, race is a factor?

Rouse: Sure it does. It doesn't always work. You know how he endorsed his North Carolina candidates. You know, he invites them up to go to church with him the weekend before the damn election. Or to go play golf with him the week before the election. He did that to Bob Scott in '68. In '72, he did it with Skipper Bowles and Jesse. This has been said a thousand times, and there's no reason for me to say it again, but Jim Holshouser didn't win in 1972, Bowles lost.

J.B.: Why?

Rouse: Primarily because Bowles shut out the Taylor Democrats, who were the courthouse Democrats. When he won the primary, everything looked so damn good for him that his palace guard closed in around and said, "Look, we've got this damn thing won, we're not going to share it with these other sons of bitches." Well, these other sons of bitches just happen to be the old guard in the Democratic Party, who control the courthouses and who controlled the damn minority votes. Now, I don't give a damn how much money you spend trying to buy the black vote, if you don't know how to buy it, you're throwing it away. And that's what Bowles did. And as a result, the black vote didn't

vote. And you know that. Of course, there were a hell of a lot of other things. Jesse's coattails, this Bob Scott. . . people were just goddamn tired of Bob Scott and politics as usual and they voted against Bob Scott and against the Democratic Party and against Skipper Bowles.

J.B.: What do you think is going to be the effect of all these firings?

Rouse: What firings? Hell, he hasn't fired anybody.

J.B.: Well, the reported firings.

Rouse: Well, you get in a goddamn helicopter and you fly across the state and you fire twenty-five people. Now, shit, you know, Scott fired more people than Holshouser's fired.

J.B.: My question really is, is this going to hurt him or is it going to help him?

Rouse: I think he's being hurt by the publicity and I think he's being hurt within the party because the goddamn party people know he's not firing. They see the same old sons of bitches doing the same old thing. You know, the saying in Raleigh now is "Same old people doing the same old things to a new crowd." And that's essentially what they're doing.

J.B.: By same old people, you mean Democrats?

Rouse: Yeah.

J.B.: So, you think the problem with the firing is that you haven't fired enough?

Rouse: He didn't fire enough and he didn't. . . see, Holshouser is the most insecure person I think that I have ever met in my whole life.

If he h

MILLERS FALLS
B. G. B. R. A. S. S. E.
COTTON CONTENT

If he had walked in there, you know, he had plenty of time to do it. But if he had put together some blue ribbon committees, and you know. . . I told him one day, I said, "Jim, you could get twenty-five of the smartest goddamn people in North Carolina around you instantly. In case nobody told you, you're the governor. You don't have to worry about paying them. Shit, these goddamn people come down here because they want to help you and they want to help the Republican Party. You don't have to put up with this goddamn white trash." But see, Anderson. . . of course, Anderson is the same way. Anderson is nothing but damn poor white trash. And as a result, look at the goddamn people that are around him. They're, you know, they're little people. And as a result. . .

J.B.: We've had several people make the observation that Holshouser's . . . one of Holshouser's problems is the quality of his staff. It's too much like the quality of the staff that Bob Scott had.

Rouse: Amen. Amen. I think that Bob probably had a better staff than Holshouser's got. In terms of political expertise. I mean, they're goddamn children. And as a result, they won't move, they can't move because they've got to get the damn word from Anderson before they can do anything. And hell, he just can't do that much. But if they had gone in there right after he was elected and got committees put together and just sworn them in and fired five thousand people, you know, just over night, and not even worried about replacing them, then the people would have got what they voted for. Now, you

know that the damn Democrats voted for a change and the Republicans voted for a change too. But as a result, he's got the press, you know, just the normal guy in the street, they think that Holshouser's firing everybody and he ain't. And the Republicans know that he's not. So, he's hurt both ways. But if he'd gone in there when he first got in and just wiped their ass out, it would have been over with. Because they expected it. Don't you think so?

J.B.: I don't know.

(interruption on tape)

Rouse: . . .some good folks in the thing. And mass firings, if he had fired some people that shouldn't have been fired. . .there would have been more than one suicide up there, you know. And that's bad. But you know, hell, you live by the sword, and you die by the sword. He hasn't really fired anybody. And he promised the people in the campaign that if they were doing a good job, you know, not to worry about their job. And the state employees voted for him. And they voted for the same reason that non-state employees voted. They voted for a damn change. They voted to clean out the goddamn hacks. Lentz, for example. That's the place, in his inaugural address, Holshouser said, "That's where I'm going to begin, right over there." And Lentz, he's a nice fellow, shit, very capable, but they've got him so goddamned snowed under, he's got more shit on his desk than I have. And they keep him so goddamned bogged down over there that he doesn't know where in the hell he is. said that

if it took more than four hours a day to be chairman of the goddamn highway commission up here, then I wasn't doing my job. In other words, if he couldn't handle the routine stuff in half a day, then he needed at least another half a day to find out what was going on. Hell, it makes sense.

(interruption on tape)

Rouse: . . .we do have a potential in this administration of some hellacious scandals. If that happens, then everything else that we've said, you can throw it away. Because nobody's strategy is going to work then.

J.B.: Scandals involving the governor's staff?

Rouse: Anderson. Primarily Anderson and Horton. Both of them are on the take and I understand that with Horton, it's just a question of time, because he's stolen some money from Kittrell College, as I understand and it's just a question of time before the Feds get him. And Anderson is a goddamn walking bomb. And it could happen any minute, I mean, he's just a dishonest person. (interruption on tape)

. . .my relations that I've had in politics. . .I don't know, maybe everybody is. I'm too damn idealistic and too honest to be involved in politics. And as a result, it's just as disenheartening as hell for me to see some of the things that go on and possibly some of the things that go on that have to go on. Does that make sense?

(interruption on tape)

J.B.: You were chairman, when. . .in '70? You were elected in '70?

Rouse: In November of '71 to November of '73. Two years.

J.B.: And how did the meetings of southern chairmen go? I mean, you succeeded Holshouser as chairman?

Rouse: Yeah.

J.B.: And how often did the southern chairmen meet?

Rouse: Oh, every couple of months.

J.B.: In Washington, usually?

Rouse: Yeah.

J.B.: With Harry Dent, usually?

Rouse: Yeah.

J.B.: And what sort of things went on?

Rouse: Well, we talked about, you know, strategy, we talked about patronage. We normally would have somebody from the White House or Cabinet officer or somebody to come over and talk to us and we'd tear his ass up on what they were doing to us down here, you know, this kind of stuff. On the national committee, we had the reputation of running it, because we stuck together. We met, and you know, the other regions didn't ever meet. We were real active. As is obvious from the meeting in Atlanta, from the few press accounts I saw from it, the National Republican Committee knows that the south is going to be swing on the national committee and in the Republican Party from now on.

J.B.: Do you think the south is more or less committed to the Republican Party in presidential elections?

Rouse: Not necessarily. If the Democrats continue to keep nominating McGovern and Kennedys, it will be. But, you know, they might get smart. Well, you know, you've got a piece of pie here and there's basically three pieces of pie. The right and the left and the middle. And if the damn Democrats continue to settle for just piece of the pie, then give us two, you know, it doesn't matter what the damn registration is, we're going to have a pretty good chance to win. And if they do it again, we'll beat them again. Even in spite of what's happening in Washington. But I can't see them being that dumb.

J.B.: How about if Wallace was campaigning for the Democratic national ticket, but were not on it?

Rouse: Hell of a difference. They say that you can't transfer popularity from one person to another, but I don't buy that. Strom Thurmond has sure as hell proved that's not the case. Nixon beat Wallace in South Carolina in '68, right?

J.B.: Right.

Rouse: And you know, South Carolina is at least as redneck, hell, it's more redneck than North Carolina. You don't have as much Piedmont in it.

J.B.: Well, the vote was very similar to that of North Carolina, in '68. Almost identical.

(interruption on tape)

Rouse: . . .yeah, and Shaw is sort of mediocre. Bennett, hell, what's his name? Is it Bennett, in Alabama? Of course, Clark is stronger than

hell.

J.B.: Why is he so strong?

Rouse: Well, he's hard working and he's been around a long time.

J.B.: Well, Mississippi doesn't do much in electing Republicans. Of course, they elected some mayors this year.

Rouse: They've got two out of five Congressmen now. And they had the highest percentage of vote for the President of any state in the country.'

J.B.: Very few legislators.

Rouse: Right. . .he spends a lot of time in Washington, Clark does. He's a hardworking. . .he's more oriented on national politics than he is on state politics.

J.B.: What do you see as Harry Dent's role in the future of the Republican Party in the south?

Rouse: Well, he's going to have to have a base. . .

J.B.: He's now general counsel to the Republican National Committee.

Rouse: Well, that ain't no damn base.

J.B.: You mean he's going to have to get a party position like national committeeman or state chairman or something. . .that kind of base?

Rouse: At least that strong. I always thought that Harry was going to run for governor. His situation with his wife, that's having a tremendous influence on his political life. You know, she says, "I gave you the first twenty years, now, you are going to give me some

years." And I really think that has a tremendous influence on his life. Because she didn't want him to go to Washington. You know, she stayed in South Carolina a long time. She finally went up there. Harry Dent deserves a hell of a lot of credit, because you know, he had a tremendous base to operate from. And that was his damn job and he did a hell of a good job doing it.

J.B.: What did he do? Can you give me any examples of something that Harry Dent did, say, at a Republican state chairmen's meeting. . .

Rouse: Hell, it wasn't that. Hell, when he was in the White House, you know, hell, I was state chairman of North Carolina and I had a damn direct line to anywhere I wanted to go. And there wasn't any question about getting the job done, because if it could be done, he got it done.

J.B.: What kind of request would go to him?

Rouse: These were, you know, just getting some old lady on some board, or something like that. But these things are as important as hell. But Harry. . .

J.B.: I know that people in Georgia went to him about school problems from time to time. . .was there any of that stuff?

Rouse: Harry was involved in. . .and when I was chairman, hell, I was a damn pawn for Harry Dent, because I did what they told me to do. For example, we were faced with, we didn't have a goddamned candidate for the senate when I came on board for state chairman. Holshouser was our only candidate for governor. And shit, Harry Dent was terrified

at the thought of Holshouser being the Republican candidate for governor. And Nixon having to run on the same damn ticket with him.

J.B.: Why?

Rouse: Because he didn't think he'd be a strong candidate.

J.B.: Because he's too liberal, or something else?

Rouse: No, just because he's a pussy, and he is. Of course, beating Gardner is one thing. . . (interruption on tape)

J.B.: What did he take you into Mitchell about?

Rouse: Well, we had a double problem. They nominated. . . he ran the damn Nixon campaign. Holshouser nominated the damn Nixon chairman before he went out and all it was was a goddamn front group for Holshouser. Now, there was more Nixon money spent in North Carolina in '72 for Holshouser than there was for Nixon. And he was involved in cleaning that damn mess up and of course, the thing with Dent, with Mitchell was, he said, "We don't like Jim Gardner." Mitchell didn't make any damn bones about it, he said, "Hell, we just can't stand for. . ." He was involved in me doing what I did in that goddamn primary which turned out to be my Waterloo.

J.B.: Supporting Gardner?

Rouse: Yeah.

J.B.: Dent or Mitchell?

Rouse: Both of them, really. But neither one of them told me to do it, but both of them were terrified at the thought of Holshouser being the candidate for governor.

J.B.: En ot

J.B.: They made it clear they'd like for you to support. . .

Rouse: Yes.

J.B.: There's one thing I want to clear up, and it's been covered in some stories, but I'd like to get it from you. And that was the story about you and Dent trying to dig up some dirt on Ervin. . .you know what I'm talking about?

Rouse: Yeah, shit yeah.

J.B.: What did happen on that?

Rouse: This is a typical job that Harry would do. He called me and said, "Goddamn it, do something. . ." well, he didn't cuss, but he said, "dig up something on Ervin as quick as you can. To get his attention. And we did, and this ain't what was in the damn paper, but we did, and we didn't, we couldn't find anything. We got some shit that was ten years old, but nobody would pay any attention to that and he called me back and said, "Get something moving on Ervin." I said, "Man, I can't find anything." Well, somehow or another, I mentioned it to somebody in Jesse's office. And Clancy just grabbed me out there cold turkey, said, "O.K., what the shit's going on?" And he had it, and one of the biggest problems that I had in politics is that I can't lie to the damn people. So, I told Clancy essentially what had happened, but I left out the part that we couldn't find anything. So, of course, they called Harry, and goddamn, he was in Europe and he just went bananas. . .it just scared the hell out of him. I forgot some goddamn story that he concocted, I don't remember what it

was

was now. That was exactly what happened. I think that the story was that we discussed it and didn't. . .shit, I've forgotten what the damn story was supposed to be.

J.B.: Do you think that Ervin can be beaten in North Carolina, by anybody?

Rouse: I think he can be beaten by Morgan. With the right kind of money, I think that Mizell could beat him, but it's just. . .

J.B.: You'll think he will run?

(interruption on tape)

Rouse:. . .state wide and national votes. The future of the party is to build a party based on the conservative Democrats. The overwhelming majority of Republicans nation wide are conservative, something over 80%. And the overwhelming majority of the voters in the south are conservative and we've just got to lock up, and it's not that hard to do.

J.B.: These conservative voters in the south, I'm think of, are pretty much Wallace voters to some extent.

Rouse: Well, Mel Broughton probably wouldn't have voted for Wallace. Yet, Mel Broughton wants to be a Republican. I think the conservative line is better. . .to me in the south, the Democrat party is out in damn left field. The national Democratic Party, the George McGovern Democratic Party is just totally out in left field. 90% of the damn schemes they come up with are totally alien. . .(interruption on tape)

MILLERS FALLS

ERASE

. . .is a goddamn screaming liberal, but the rednecks and the damn conservatives voted for him.

J.B.: Do you think the Democratic strength in the south in the future is going to be with the Populist candidates? Do you consider Morgan basically a Populist candidate?

Rouse: Morgan is everything for everybody. Of course, that's essentially what a Populist candidate is, but Morgan is so damn hard. . . . I can't. . . .depends on what kind of campaign he runs. Hell, you know, he's prepared to go either way.'

J.B.: Does he stand a real chance of falling on that?

Rouse: I don't think you could ever get him tagged.

J.B.: Yeah, but does he have a chance of falling on his face if voters perceive him as somebody who. . .

Rouse: That's the point I'm making. I don't think you could ever tag him. I know that and you know that, but I don't believe you could ever really tag him with it. He's never done anything except his initial go around with. . . .he's never really taken a hard line position anywhere except his support for Lake.

(J.B.: Rouse called Holshouser a mean and hard-disciplined fighter.)
end of tape

ERASE
COTTON CONTENT