

This is an interview with Jay Jenkins conducted in Chapel Hill, North Carolina on December 14, 1973 by Jack Bass and Walter De Vries.

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Jack Bass: Jay, you were in Raleigh for how long?

Jay Jenkins: Twenty years, in the newspaper business.

J.B.: And you were up there really through the Moore administration and excepting the Scott administration, so you were in Raleigh the whole period from '48?

Jenkins: Yeah.

J.B.: Whose administration do you think had the most lasting effect on North Carolina?

Jenkins: Well, I think. . .of course, Kerr Scott's had an impact. I'd rank Scott and Terry Sanford sort of on par. Scott, of course with his roads program and his extending power to the rural areas and incidentally, he wasn't concerned about rates, he just said, "String the wires," you know. He didn't raise any objections to the utility rates as such. I think he had the major impact, so of course, that marked the first break with the Gardner machine, you know. O. Max Gardner's crowd that had had it so long. Because,

you know that O. Max Gardner died before Scott beat Charles Johnson. Johnson was a Gardner organization man. And this is a pretty major breakthrough. And Sanford for reasons that are well known, his educational program he had that was his major breakthrough. People tend to remember Sanford for the sales tax on food, but Melville Broughton got elected governor and one of the major planks in his platform was to repeal that tax, the sales tax went on in '33. But it took a lot of courage to do what he did, and I think that those administrations are characterized by more motion and action than any other administration I've known about.

J.B.: How do you assess the impact of the Sanford administration in terms of what has happened since?

Jenkins: Well, of course, what Sanford did was to enlarge the base for the public schools and so forth and he brought a lot of vigor and he also introduced youth. . .you got a youthful element in there that you never had had before. For instance, his personal office staff. I suppose the average age was about thirty, or maybe less. As to the lasting effect, I don't know. Except, of course, some of his lieutenants. . .Skipper Bowles ran for governor, Henry Hall Wilson now is running for the senate. I don't know whether the Sanford administration had anything to do with that or not, but I think it did. I hate to use the word, but it's the "vigor" he brought to the office. It was refreshing, you know. Instead of

being a caretaker type of governor, he was a real active fellow.

J.B.: How do you assess Bob Scott's administration? You had a different perspective there.

Jenkins: Well, I thought Scott, he talks about the reorganization of higher education as his major achievement and so forth, and I suppose it was, but I felt many times that Scott was not too much interested in the form that restructuring took. He just wanted to get it on his record that he restructured the business and so forth. And the reorganization of state government, I don't think that means very much. I was skeptical about it in the beginning. I don't think Scott, I really don't think he made any major contributions.

J.B.: Exactly what did he do on higher education? You should know.

Jenkins: Well, the University of North Carolina consisted of six campuses: Chapel Hill, N.C. State, Ashville, Wilmington. . . I'm not sure I can think of the other. . .

Walter De Vries: Charlotte and Greensboro.

Jenkins: Charlotte and Greensboro. And then there were ten others, public senior institutions with their own boards of trustees and so forth. So, the restructuring he brought about created a . . . merged all those other ten institutions into the University of North Carolina. He created a thirty-two member Board of Governors responsible for governing the sixteen institutions and left the local boards of trustees with largely honorary duties. They have some

limited functions, but insofar as policy and so forth is concerned, the Board of Governors is the ruling body. It's now eighteen months old and so far, it's gone very smoothly, but of course, we have controversies about East Carolina medical school, things like that that continue. The purpose was to cut down on duplication, develop some long range plan for the state and define the role and scope of these institutions so you didn't have everybody trying to get a law school, and this kind of thing. And I'm not minimizing the achievement, I think it's a pretty significant thing, but I . . . and Scott of course, deserves credit for pulling it off. But I think about education, that Scott had sort of the same jaundiced view that his Daddy had about the legal profession. Kerr Scott appointed some judges that could barely find their way out the front door and to me, it seemed like he was showing contempt for the situation. I'm not doubting Scott's sincerity and all, but I don't know whether his real interest. . . I don't know how deep his interest was in making this thing work.

J.B.: What effect did it have on UNC at Chapel Hill?

Jenkins: I don't think it's had any effect yet. Of course, it's too young at this point to really assess it.

J.B.: Well, where did it shift power from and to?

Jenkins: Well one. . . it shifted power from these local boards, of course, the Consolidated University had one board of trustees, a hundred member board for the six institutions. These other

institutions had their own local boards and what you had in every legislative session was a grab bag, you know. Everybody going in there for money for his own cause and so forth. I think that a lot of legislators voted for it to get those local boards out of their hair. Instead of having chancellors coming at them from every direction. As for the power shift, I don't know.

J.B.: Who now has the power?

Jenkins: The Board of Governors. And they chose them carefully so you'd have somebody from every institution.

J.B.: Is Friday the chief executive officer for the Board of Governors?

Jenkins: Right.

J.B.: So he's the chief executive officer for the whole higher education structure in North Carolina?

Jenkins: That's right.

W.D.V.: How does that structure relate to the Democratic Party? Do you have people from both?

Jenkins: Yeah, when they set it up, they specified minority representation. Both as to race and political party.

J.B.: Who appoints the members?

Jenkins: The legislature elects them, a class of eight every two years. They have to have a certain percentage of women, Republicans and so forth. They don't call them Republicans, they just say minority. party.

J.B.: How many institutions are now involved?

Jenkins: Sixteen. There's more than ninety-four thousand students and so forth.

J.B.: And there are thirty-two members on the Board?

Jenkins: Yes.

J.B.: Is that two from each institution?

Jenkins: No, they set it up so that each institution, to get the things started, they set it up so that each institution, I believe that's right. . . named a member of their original board to be on it. We've already gone through one election, the last General Assembly elected eight. To ease the transition, they picked somebody from each one of the ten plus five or six universities.

W.D.V.: How many members of the Board are powerful in the Democratic Party or are somehow related to it?

Jenkins: Well, of course, in this reorganization, you can't have any full time state official or his spouse on the Board. And that was sort of to de-politicise the thing. That took the legislators off, for example. And the governor used to be ex-officio chairman of the Board, but it took him off.

W.D.V.: Who is now the chairman?

Jenkins: William A. Dees, Jr., of Goldsboro. An attorney down there. I don't think we have on that board any political people, people of any political clout to speak of. You have somebody like Watts Hill, Sr., you know, the banker and insurance executive in

Durham. He's been active, contributes money and so forth, but is not in any. . .

J.B.: Is Dees the cheif man for say, working with the legislature in so far as the Board is concerned?

Jenkins: Well, the legislature. . .

J.B.: What kind of political role does he have?

Jenkins: Well, the president is the cheif spokesman for the University. Of course, Dees appears before legislative committees and so forth. But usually, what they do is to appoint a legislative committee to deal with day to day legislative matters and last time, it was John who is a former state senator, in Raleigh now, a ran for lieutenant governor against Scott, I believe. But the other political infighting and all has largely disappeared. Under this new setup.

J.B.: Well, it resulted in a more orderly means of shaping higher education?

Jenkins: I think it has, yeah.

J.B.: How significant is this? My understanding is that the Board has opposed expansion of the medical college at East Carolina?

Jenkins: Yeah, it had a five man consulting team come in and study it and the liason committee, which is the arm of the accrediting agency of the American Medical Association and somebody else, took a look at that place and made some recommendations and they are pretty critical of it. They said that Chapel Hill had to take

control of it and made numerous other recommendations. They aren't going to review the accreditation until March 27. Of course, the legislature will be well along then. The Board, following the consultants recommendations, recommended that they not expand it at this time. They'll take a look in 74-75, and re-evaluate it and let the president make recommendations, which could include expanding it to a two year school. But you know, this thing has got to be a real emotional issue down east and of course, those easterners, for various reasons, carry more power in the legislature.

J.B.: Why do they?

Jenkins: Well, for several reasons. One, they tend to stay there longer and learn the byways and corridors of power and so forth. Your average Piedmont legislator comes down here and he doesn't stay in there very long. They are also more unified. As you know from your experience, the Piedmont delegation splits all over the place. Charlotte, Mecklenburg County sends a delegation down here and ordinarily, they run off four or five directions. You don't have this spirit of community, or something, I don't know, that you have down east. And they are just more skilled. They're just a real crowd, they work at it year round. And they never had, until recently, any Republican threat down there. So, they could look with scorn at a Piedmont fellow that had to go through a bruising primary and then fight for his life in the November elections. I don't know whether the Piedmonters are so busy making

money or what. They aren't as close to Raleigh geographically. There are any number of reasons, but the easterners are more effective. They know which committees to get on and all that kind of thing.

J.B.: Who would be the most powerful two or three legislators in North Carolina now.

Jenkins: Well, I remember that during the early days of Hodges's administration, you could watch three or four members of that legislature and tell how the thing was going. You can't do that any more. You've got a different kind of fellow coming in there. More independent and you don't have one issue legislators as much as you used to. You used to get a fellow who would come in there and make himself an expert on one particular issue. And be very effective, but it seems to me that the type of legislator has sort of undergone a subtle change. And I think that the physical facilities have something to do with it. You know, you used to find them up there cheek by jowl in that old state capitol and now they're down there with these commodious quarters and scattered. Some legislators tell me they don't even meet all the members in the course of the session. That's just my impression. One thing I think you ought to look into in this study is the question of just how liberal North Carolina is.

J.B.: Let me ask you a question about that, the question we have been asking people. V.O. Key wrote that not only did he find

North Carolina a progressive plutocracy, but North Carolina was

somehow different from the other Southern states. It was more progressive, far more progressive in race relations, in providing government services and unlike the rest of the South. Was Key wrong and if he was not wrong, did North Carolina change?

Jenkins: Well, I don't think that Key necessarily was wrong, but I think that given a few different sets of circumstances and the crucial times, you find out that liberalism might not be as deeply engrained as some people think it is. I'm thinking particularly of the 1954 desegregation decision up in Washington. And they had a special session of the legislature up here in 1956 and I watched all that and I think if we hadn't had Hodges as governor, a cosmopolite, been around, and so forth, that we would have gone the way of Virginia. I think that because Hodges went around before the session and got them all staked out. He had regional meetings all around the state on this school plan he had. Well, what it did, it made it almost impossible to close the schools, through a series of procedural things. He held regional meetings all over the state and he got these guys committed to support his plan. But, they were just like they were tied to the stake. I mean they were just real eager to go. ^{Interposition} ~~Inner positions~~ raised, and all these other things. And I think on a subject of liberalization of the state, I think the greatest influence has been the university. I'm thinking of Frank Graham's reign, you know, when it was real unpopular to be as liberal as he was. And the fact that they had

these alumni lawyers and so forth all across the state. And the newspapers in the state. I think if I had to name the two factors that helped us keep a level head all during these years, it would be those. Because look at Bob McNair. I think that he was about as liberal as any governor in the South, but he didn't have newspaper support. At least, that's my theory. If you travel around the state and you stop at filling stations and so forth and you talk to people, I don't find you have them much different from any of our neighboring states.

J.B.: Well, if you look at your election returns, your two Congressmen who voted against the Southern Manifesto got defeated. Frank Porter Graham got defeated on his campaign, George Wallace beat Terry Sanford. Jesse Helms is one.

Jenkins: That's right. Now, I'm inclined to think that the Holshouser and Helms thing were. . . I don't think that's a trend. I think it's more of a. . . I think that McGovern brought that on. People just. . .

J.B.: What do you think is going to happen. What do you think the trend is? Where are things headed politically in North Carolina?

Jenkins: Well, I think, assuming that the Democrats don't. . . you know, it's always seemed to me that the Republican Party in this state has had sort of a death wish. They blow their chances. I think they might have elected [Charlie Jonas] in '60. But see, Jonas didn't want to give up his little sinecure here in

Congress. I believe that the Democrats will take it all again in '76. That's just my opinion.

J.B.: Well, what do you think they are going to have to do to accomplish that?

Jenkins: Well, they're going to have to, in the first place, get together. They are going to have to avoid a fratricidal primary, if possible. And then, Holshouser is going to have to keep on making some gas. I think that this Rouse-Bennett chairmanship battle, you heard about that I suppose? I think that Holshouser was guilty of a little overkill in that. And for example, sending helicopters around the state to fire career employees, you know, things like that. One of them was down in Moore County, which is normally a close county and the Republicans down there say that it has done them untold damage.

J.B.: What happened in Moore County?

Jenkins: This business of sending helicopters in there to fire a woman who. . .

J.B.: I'm not familiar with the details.

Jenkins: Some lady who ran a training school for girls, 41 years of service, no blemishes on her record or anything else. They sent the helicopters down there to fire her and two or three veteran highway employees. I think that Holshouser runs a risk from the kind of advice he's getting, from Gene Anderson particularly. Gene's a smart political type, but he strikes me as being impulsive and so

forth. Maybe these are just peripheral matters, but Holshouser carried Wake County, of course, where you had all the state employees and now they are all shaking in their boots over there, wondering if the axe is going to hit them next. And I just think that unless the Democrats make some major mistakes, they'll take it over next time.

W.D.V.: How do you avoid that primary battle if someone doesn't emerge as the leader?

Jenkins: Well, of course, you can't avoid it if. . .I think a lot of it depends on how nasty the campaign gets, you know. Some of them are fairly sedate. But I think that if you can avoid any real major bloodletting, I believe they'll come together. I don't know. You can't guarantee anything like that, of course.

W.D.V.: Jay, I'd like to go back to something you said earlier about. . .you said that they two leveling influences in the state keep the people from losing their heads and that the alumni of Chapel Hill. . .

Jenkins: Let's say the University.

W.D.V.: Well, the University. . .

Jenkins: The University of North Carolina. Yeah, I was thinking of Frank Graham's days.

W.D.V.: Well, that and the newspapers as the two leveling influences. Otherwise, this state wouldn't be any different from Virginia or other states.

Jenkins: I don't think it would. Maybe I have a jaundiced view of it. And I base this on these years that I spent going out into the boondocks. I just don't. . .

W.D.V.: Well, where does North Carolina get that image, that it has a progressive elite, it is progressive and so on?

Jenkins: Well, it is progressive. But my point is that sometimes a large number, a mass of the people have just sort of been drug along with it. Certainly, after you get a certain pride in being progressive. . .I think it's a sort of. . .but just to give you an example. On this integration thing, which of course, was very volatile, when Charlotte and Greensboro were going to integrate their schools, the newspapers collaborated with the local school boards. . .Jack, I'm sure you remember this. . .and very carefully orchestrated this thing. To minimize the emotional impact and so forth. I just think that the newspapers have been a real, when you see papers from other states, I think they are a real force in this state. Frank Graham, of course, his record is well known. And he did it to a great extent through personal loyalty. These people were loyal to him and charmed little women would just flock to his cause and so forth. He developed an image and I think that those two forces were it.

J.B.: What is the difference between Graham and Friday?

Jenkins: Well, during Graham's day, it was more leisurely, a relaxed kind of office. He could sit up on the campus and feed

the squirrels and chat with the students and so forth. There were about 6,000 students. And now, it's gotten to be a managerial monstrosity. With one crisis after another, student unrest and just the sheer size of the job has made it a different type of operation. Frank Graham, in his day, he had time to. . .he'd not only go over there and defend the university appropriations, but he'd go to bat for public schools, you know, teacher's salaries and so forth. I may be entirely wrong, this is just a visceral sort of thing.

J.B.: No, we keep hearing this sort of thing. It comes up from different people. But it's still not quite clear in my mind just what it was about Frank Porter Graham that made him such an institutional force.

Jenkins: Well, I've seen him in the General Assembly, he'd go over there, just a little small mite of a man, but he'd just charm them out of their shoes, you know. People who disagreed violently with his personal philosophy. And of course, . . .

J.B.: Well, was it his personality that was so effective?

Jenkins: Personality and his following in the state.

J.B.: He was in effect, the source from which liberal ideas flowed in North Carolina?

Jenkins: Well, no doubt, he was the foremost champion of them. There are some instances. . .I remember when, back in the days when some black was speaking and they were going to segregate him

or something and Graham just put his foot down, "None of that." He was way ahead of the rest of the people in this state in his philosophy. But he was a very gentle appearing fellow, you know. He didn't look like an ogre and he didn't wave his arms and so forth. And he had a real following in the state.

W.D.V.: If we could go back to the newspapers again, I'd like to ask something. One thing about the state that has intrigued me is first of all, the number of newspapers. Every major city has at least one major morning paper and probably an afternoon paper. I forget the number of dailies, now. I came from Michigan, where there was one morning paper, the Free Press and here you can get, I don't know, about seven or eight.

Jenkins: Yes.

W.D.V.: That's one fact. The second fact is the excellence of the papers. That is, the Charlotte Observer, the News and Observer the Greensboro paper, that kind of excellence as well as the number. Do you have any inclination about that or. . .

Jenkins: Well, once more, you have to. . .to get back to the University, if you look around the state, you'll see that these university fellows, coming out of the University of North Carolina, for years have had major responsibilities in these newspapers. The Journalism School, Skipper Coffin and these people have turned out these editors. That's been a factor. One fellow told me the other day that if Leo Jenkins really wanted to get a school of

medicine down there, the first thing he should do is start a school of journalism. The thought hadn't occurred to me. Once again, if you look around the state. . . of course, Pete McKnight in Charlotte went to Davidson, but I think if you chased pedigree in most of the other editorial writers in this state now, you'd find a university man. Of course, it would be wrong to say that those were the only two factors, because you had Billy Petite over here at Wake Forest during the Scopes trial, the monkey trial out in Dayton, and we fought that same battle here. And Petite stuck his neck way out on that thing and beat down the anti-evolutionists. That was in the twenties.

W.D.V.: Well, do the newspapers have an effect on the opinion news in these various communities, or does it go all the way down?

Jenkins: Well, I think the newspapers have an effect on the opinion makers, but I wouldn't say that it would penetrate the grass roots. I just don't know, but you see, I know of one factor that played in this state during the segregation business, the height of it. The fact that turmoil is bad for business, you know. It sort of disrupts your economic life when you get demonstrations and all this business and I'm sure that's one argument Hodges used with his business associates and so forth. And I think it affects that class of managerial types, but I wouldn't say, especially in this day and age, I don't know how much skepticism there is about newspapers down there at that level, at the grass roots.

W.D.V.: But still, this state supports more newspapers than the average state.

Jenkins: Yeah. Well, of course, the case of Michigan and. . .
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