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A-382

Interview

with

JAMES E. HOLSHOUSER

November 10, 1995

by Joseph Mosnier

Indexed by Joseph Mosnier

The Southern Oral History Program  
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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**SOHP Series: The North Carolina Politics Project****TAPE LOG -- HON. JAMES E. HOLSHOUSER, JR.**

Interviewee: HON. JAMES E. [EUBERT] HOLSHOUSER, JR.

Interviewer: Joseph Mosnier

Interview Date: Nov. 10, 1995

Location: Chapel Hill, NC

Tape No.: 11.10.95-JH.1 (cassette 1 of 2)  
 11.10.95-JH.2 (cassette 2 of 2; Side B is blank)  
 (approximate total length 105 minutes)

Topic: An oral history of James E. Holshouser, Jr., was Governor of NC from 1973-1977, and the first Republican to win that office in the NC since the turn of the century. A political moderate, Holshouser is a transition figure in the state's recent political history, his electoral success foreshadowing the subsequent dramatic realignment in state party politics. Holshouser was born in Boone, Watauga County, NC, on Oct. 8, 1934. He attended the public schools, graduated from Boone's Appalachian High School in 1952, from Davidson College in 1956, and from the UNC-Chapel Hill law school in 1960. Holshouser served four terms in the NC House (1963, 1965, 1969, and 1971 Sessions). In 1966, he succeeded Jim Gardner as state Republican Party chair at the age of thirty-one. In 1972, he defeated Gardner in the GOP gubernatorial primary, and in November earned a narrow victory over Democratic gubernatorial candidate Hargrove "Skipper" Bowles. He has been engaged in the private practice of law in the years following his term as governor, while also serving on numerous boards and commissions.

Substantively, the interview was organized around one major theme, the re-emergence of the state Republican Party in the last several decades. Attention is given to the evolution of the state GOP during the 1960s and 1970s; to Holshouser's tenure as governor, particularly the comparatively moderate political character ascribed to his legislative accomplishments; to the growth during the 1970s of a more conservative wing of the Party; and, in abbreviated summary fashion, to the evolution of women's and African American political activity in NC since the mid-1960s. The interview proceeds through these matters in roughly chronological fashion, with a focus on Holshouser's political involvements.

Subject

Headings: North Carolina Politics & Government; North Carolina Republican Party; Jim Gardner; Jesse Helms; Jim Broyhill; John East; Reapportionment.

Comments: Only text in quotation marks is verbatim; all other text is paraphrased, including the interviewer's questions.

\* Restricted - Researcher must obtain interviewee's permission to quote from the interview

TAPE INDEX

Counter Index   Topic

[Cassette 1 of 2, Side A -- Tape No. 11.10.95-JH.1]

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|-----|--|
| 001 | [Opening announcement.]  |
| 005 | Father's involvements in Republican Party politics in Watauga County in 1940s and 1950s, and the "mountain variety" of NC Republicanism; family not excessively involved in politics, however, and Holshouser's personal interest in politics developed later, particularly while he was in law school and concerning state issues, particularly court reform. |
| 047 | The court reform issue ca. early 1960s.  |
| 059 | His first race for the NC House in 1962, the issues that most concerned him, and details of his campaign. The earliest stirrings of a Republican Party resurgence in NC in the early 1960s.  |
| 130 | Relationship between the two parties in the legislature in the early and mid-1960s -- the few GOP members were largely ignored by the Democratic leadership.   |
| 146 | GOP candidates and the Party suffered setback in the 1964 elections; emerging GOP leaders in NC in the mid-1960s; the much better election results in 1966.  |
| 177 | The character of GOP politics ca. 1966 when Holshouser became Chair of the state GOP; influence at state GOP conventions of "John Birchers"; Holshouser's belief that a bland, non-controversial state Party platform was best GOP candidates, and his efforts to secure such platforms during his tenure as Chair.  |
| 222 | Operational details of Holshouser's tenure as NC GOP Chair -- the NC GOP was a real "bootstrap operation" in those days, with one secretary and an office at the Carolina Hotel in Raleigh. Candidate workshops; efforts to retire the Party's debt of \$50,000.   |
| 269 | Key NC GOP players ca. 1966-67: J. E. Broyhill, Bob Gavin, Bill Osteen, Jim Harrington.  |
| 290 | The attempt after the 1964 election debacle to build a the GOP around moderate conservatism; the need to make an effort to begin to win the support of registered Democrats.   |
| 319 | Holshouser considered running for Lieutenant Governor in 1968, but thought that he was needed as Party chair, that he wasn't quite yet ready for such a role, and  |



also that he did not want to tie his fortunes too closely to Jim Gardner's, the GOP gubernatorial candidate in 1968.

- 346 Jim Gardner's emergence as the leading GOP figure in the mid- to late 1960s. A growing ideological gap opens between competing wings of the NC GOP, with the traditional fiscal conservatism of NC mountain Republicanism increasingly eclipsed as the organizing principle of the Party.
- 408 The NC GOP ca. 1968 and the growing centrality of race as an issue in politics in those years.
- 455 Why Jim Gardner endorsed Ronald Reagan at the 1968 GOP national convention in Miami, and the fallout for Gardner and the Party, which may have included Gardner's loss in the 1968 gubernatorial race.
- 507 The 1968-1972 period, during which Holshouser worked in the legislature and saw his name recognition grow. Holshouser notes that Gov. Bob Scott's tax increase, which he opposed at the time, in fact provided the cushion that allowed Holshouser to avoid raising taxes during his term as governor 1973-77. The earliest thought that perhaps he might run for governor in 1972; GOP losses in the 1970 election; higher education restructuring, which he considers in its final form a "minor miracle" and a great advance for NC's higher education system in which he takes great pride.
- 650 [End of Side A.]

[Cassette 1 of 2, Side B -- Tape No. 11.10.95-JH.1]

- 017 How the 1972 GOP gubernatorial race took shape; Holshouser's calculations, and consideration of a run perhaps for U.S. Senate or Congress; Jim Gardner's entry. Details of Holshouser's primary campaign and victory over Jim Gardner, which may have resulted, Holshouser thinks, from low turnout and Gardner's overconfidence.
- 053 Details of his general election campaign against Skipper Bowles; George McGovern's weakness at the top of the national Democratic ticket may have been the decisive factor, but Bowles' overexposure on TV also helped.
- 102 How Holshouser carefully crafted a media strategy, knowing that he had to do it on a relatively limited budget of \$400,000. Hence they sought free coverage from local news media on a daily basis, for example. "We got far more exposure from the free TV, I think, than we did from the [paid] ads. We got good newspaper coverage too." How he learned to strike a certain pose before the cameras.
- 140 Jesse Helms' emergence during the 1972 election as a major political force, taking the NC GOP to the right. "You never know what NC politics would have been like since then had he not been in that race. Might have just been totally

different." How the Nixon, Helms, and Holshouser campaign efforts were coordinated.

- 171 Key legislative and policy initiative of Holshouser's tenure as governor, including the Coastal Areas Management Act. How the "less government the better" arm of the GOP has emerged much more recently, in contrast to his own quite different philosophy that government ought to do for the people what they can't do as well for themselves. Holshouser does not see a profound reorientation of GOP governing philosophy across the last twenty years, but rather a shift in emphasis.
- 260 Holshouser's relationship while governor to Jesse Helms in the Senate; for the most part their spheres did not overlap, since they had different roles.
- 271 How the Holshouser-Helms split in the NC GOP opened in the mid-1970s; the role of the Congressional Club, particularly in the 1976 GOP presidential primary upset victory of Ronald Reagan over Gerald Ford. Holshouser's ties to Gerald Ford and the ramifications of Ford's loss to Jimmy Carter for Holshouser's subsequent political opportunities, particularly since a Ford victory may well have resulted in Holshouser's appointment to the Cabinet.
- 354 How Watergate made it very much more difficult for elected officials to establish credibility with the public.
- 365 Holshouser's decision in 1973 to replace NC GOP Chair Frank Rouse with Tom Bennett, who had considerable legislative experience and to whom Holshouser had close personal ties.
- 398 Developments after 1978 and Helms' second successful Senate race: the conservative wing's much greater influence, including the Congressional Club's much greater involvement in state-level politics and the 1980 John East win for Senate.
- 464 The factors that have given rise to a shift in NC politics the last twenty years: mobility, in-migration of industry, arrival of Republican voters from outside the states, the realignment of mountain Democrats and "down east" "Jesse-crats" to the Republican Party, the influence of Ronald Reagan and George Bush when successful at the top of the ticket.
- 536 Why Jesse-crats and other previously self-identified NC Democrats have come over to the Republican Party: less for what has happened in the GOP than for the rules changes that "left the Democratic Party almost hostage to its special interest groups. And that increasing visibility of special interest groups has, I think, done as much as anything to cause these people in NC who've been Jesse-crat types -- or even if weren't Jesse fans but were conservative Democrats, business people -- getting increasingly unhappy with the Democrats and thinking that their party had left them."
- 564 Reapportionment "has tended to maximize the results of the changes [in political alignment] we've been talking about."

622 Summary assessment of the evolution of black political activity in NC since the 1965 Voting Rights Act, including reapportionment and its impact.

682 [End of Side B, Cassette 1 of 2.]

Counter Index   Topic

[Cassette 2 of 2, Side A -- Tape No. 11.10.95-JH.2]

003 [cont'd] Holshouser's own efforts as governor to appoint minorities and women as symbols that all segments of the population are represented in government.

019 Women's gains in the last twenty years have more to do with "culture changes" than changes in the law.

037 The role of electronic media has prompted a "watershed shift" in campaigning, particularly by forcing candidates to spend the majority of their time trying to raise money to by TV and radio time. "It's a very unhealthy thing, but I don't have a better alternative."

081 The GOP's evolution across the last twenty years has mostly to do with events and circumstances beyond any single individual's control, so Holshouser does not think that the GOP would have been a whole lot different today had he been in the Senate rather than Helms. The essential tenets that attracted Holshouser to the GOP -- balanced budgets, fiscal responsibility, strong defense -- remain today the core of the GOP's program.

143 [End of Side A of Cassette 2 of 2; Side B is blank. End of interview.]