

Howard Lee: The ability of blacks to make inroads into the political arena, to wield a certain amount of influence has not been tapped to 50% of its potential, and I base that not on the number of people elected to office because I consider that an obvious symbol of progress within itself and that's only one part of it. To start with, the second part and to come back to that part, I'm thinking of the registration, of the educational aspect of it and participation aspect of it. Blacks still do not participate in politics as I think blacks should. We're not registered to levels of potential that we should be, in North Carolina alone, there are about 310,000 blacks registered out of some 750 thousand. If we look into any election, even when Reginald Hawkins was running for governor in 1968, we find that voter participation was relatively low, precinct participation in my own Congressional election in 1972 was such that I lost that election because a large number of blacks didn't go to the polls. But on the other hand, the black who has been elected to office brings a new attitude into office and we've made some changes, we've grown some, too, in the last few years. We've seen the movement from the northern politics where most of the blacks who have been elected, with only a few exceptions, have been elected by a large black populace including the recent election in Detroit, which was along strictly racial lines, to the southern arena where it was not so much a racial line voting. It was a cross-voting type. It seems to me the black who is in politics is there to try to bring a sense of fair play, a sense of equality, and in so doing, there is the possibility that much more courage and better sense of boldness is transferred to the white politician who will also stand up for a greater sense of fairness. Not that there hasn't been those

who haven't done that in the past, but that there will be more in the future. Another quick example, in running for Congress in the 2nd district, we could not get a white politician to take on Congressman L.H. Fountain; the attitude was that Congressman Fountain couldn't be beaten, but after I took him on and made such a good showing, now there are several people ready to take him on. (I received 41.7%). There are some good people ready to take him on and who I think have a fairly decent chance of winning. That's one instance where I ran as a black and caused some change in attitudes of whites about running.

J.B.: If you think 10 years ahead, will that be the trend. (the Raleigh and Atlanta mayor's races) in the North as well as the South, or is this something that is just here as an accident?

Lee: As I see it, and I may be wrong, I see this as the trend in the North for a long time to come, and I say that for the simple reason that interaction among races in the North is quite different from interaction among races in the South. One of my favorite sayings is that in the South we have rejected each other as races but we have accepted each other as individuals. In the North, we have accepted each other as races and rejected each other as individuals. I feel that mainly because of this wide disparity of attitudes among people and people themselves, that this will continue. I think that it will become Atlantas, Raleighs, Chapel Hills and a few other cities thrown in, Richmonds and Charlottes of course, which will be more of the rule than the exception in the South.

J.B.: So, you see coalition politics developing in the South, but not in the North?

Lee: Exactly. . . Los Angeles may be an exception, but that's in the West and I'm not sure there's any way to compare the West with any

other section of the country. Los Angeles and California politics are different from any other I know. I think coalition politics is possible in most parts of California.

J.B.: What sort of coalition do you think will work best?

Lee: I see the trend of the working class black and the working class white, poor white and poor black coalition coming together around common issues affecting these groups and affecting very definitely the direction of politics here. I think there's always been a kind of upper class coalition in the South, that is, among the upper class black and upper class whites, where there's been a sense of communication and a sense of loyalty that has existed between these two groups. But I think it has been these two groups that over the years have kept the lower groups of people separated as much as possible and I believe this will change greatly and this is the kind of coalition that will hold the greatest hope for us in the future.

J.B.: In Raleigh, there have been some analyses that suggest a coalition more of blacks and suburban whites because the issues there were more ones of growth regulation and zoning.

Lee: I think certainly, issues will influence it and there is not enough going now to influence a trend, but in many cases across the South, and I've looked at my own Congressional race and Andy Young's Congressional race and other types of races going on, and this is a kind of a coalition that seems to be coming together. Even Smithfield, North Carolina recently where the big Klan sign continues to stand, tended to try to form a working class black and working class white coalition. In Sanford, it was the same indication, particularly as we had difficulty getting professional blacks to participate in the political

arena.

J.B.: How did you get into politics.

Lee: Backwards. (with a smile) I've always been interested in politics. I suppose I first began actively when Reginald Hawkins ran for governor in 1968. Dr. King had been assassinated, and I had rejected Reginald Hawkins' campaign as being a fluke, a joke campaign. After the assassination of Dr. King, I needed a way to protest and to head up Reginald Hawkins campaign seemed to me to be the healthiest way I could protest. And I did. In so doing, we were able to deliver Chapel Hill for Hawkins, and this was a coalition of what we called the McCarthy forces and the Hawkins forces. After that campaign in late 1968, I got the idea that because Chapel Hill had never had anything other than a conservative businessman mayor, that Chapel Hill ought to have a liberal white mayor, so I went to a friend of mine and suggested that he run and I be his campaign manager. He in turn, went to the newspaper and indicated he had heard I was going to run for mayor. The newspaper printed the story and it was that point that I was drafted.

J.B.: How did that campaign go?

Lee: For me it was initially something that I wasn't sure I should do, in spite of the newspaper story. Naturally, Chapel Hill was split. A lot of people who voted for Reginald Hawkins did so knowing he couldn't win, and they wanted to protest against the Democratic machinery, found it very difficult to accept my candidacy. To make a long story short, I basically decided I should run after we had a meeting here and someone told me the time wasn't right. I had heard that as much as I could take it and it was because of that, mainly, that I declared my candidacy, and without any thought to any organization, without any thought to real issues, without anything that one should usually think about before declaring

a candidacy. Then, the only reality or rationale on which I could base my campaign was that I was really running to raise issues that my opponent would have to deal with after he was elected mayor. We started out with twelve people and raised \$5,000 for the campaign. I had the news media against me and no experience, of course, in public office. My opponent had served twelve years on the board of aldermen. I had only been in Chapel Hill four and a half years. My opponent had been here his whole life. I worked at Duke University. My opponent worked at UNC. All of these things just spelled defeat. As it neared election day, of course, it was determined that the election would be too close to call. To my surprise, although I had geared myself up psychologically to lose, the night of the election, I won. For me, that was the beginning, of a kind.

J.B.: How did you feel that night?

Lee: Scared as hell. I turned to my wife . . . my wife says that I turned to her and said, I don't recall, "Now that I've got it, what in the hell am I going to do with it." I felt frightened, greatly uncertain about how to take on the reins of the mayoralship. I felt as though I had been put on a tightrope because it was not fashionable at that time among blacks to be in the system, so to speak. Blacks were immediately saying that in order for me to win in Chapel Hill, I had to be an Uncle Tom or a sellout. There was a certain amount of apprehension in the white community as to whether a black could really come in here and do the kind of job as mayor that should be done. So, I felt very lonely, very isolated. I felt concerned about my family, too. Immediately, the threatening telephone calls started. The night we got home after the election, my wife got a telephone call and was told she should get the casket picked out because I had two days. So,

for us, the first six months were quite hectic.

J.B.: How did you feel about those kinds of calls? Were they anticipated?

Lee: Yes, they were anticipated. We had gone through this before. Many, many times. So, I did not become paralyzed by these kinds of calls. We had them when I worked in the civil rights movement down in Georgia. I had gone through it when I decided to buy a house in Chapel Hill in 1966 and I decided that I would not buy in the black community, but would instead buy in the white community. So, by this time, we were relatively used to the idea, as used to it as one becomes. I suppose one takes any such calls seriously, but does not allow these calls to paralyze him. My greatest concern was my wife and my family and how they would take it. We often would shore one another up through constant conversation, justifying and rationalizing why I had to do this at this particular time, presenting it to the children as our price that we would have to pay, not just for writing history at this time, but also for opening the doors for them and their grandchildren tomorrow. It was very difficult for our children, naturally, to the extent that our daughter and son, we had two children at that time, who were making A's and B's in school. Their grades fell off to C's and D's. We ultimately had to pull them out of public school and put them in private school for two years. Our daughter never did return to public school. Our son currently is in public school. It leaves one cold. It leaves one frightened, but it also, I think, made me more determined to come into this office and be a success, to be a success for the simple reason that I felt I had been given a tremendous public and social responsibility and if I failed that, I closed the door in the faces of hundreds of minorities

and blacks for years to come. If I succeeded, I made it possible not just in Chapel Hill, for blacks and minorities to have an opportunity, but in North Carolina and possible throughout the South. I feel that I have succeeded, and not alone by any stretch of the imagination. I feel I succeeded, number one, because there was a certain inner strength that made me weather that tightrope I was constantly on, but I feel I succeeded because there was a lot of people, both black and white, who were willing to stand with me in those difficult periods. I think one can look at my administration and where we came from, the fact that Chapel Hill had a pure ceremonial mayor when I was elected, the mayor did not have an office, no budget, no staff and all he ever did was to hold meetings, preside over meetings twice a month and vote in case of a tie. To have brought in the kinds of programs that we have, to have gotten the kinds of support we've gotten and to have been elected in 1969 with 52% of the vote, reelected in 1971 with 63% and reelected in '73 with 92% is an indication of progress and of truly bringing the community together. In 1969, I thought I had only one term to serve in this office and that's about all I gave myself. I really didn't think if I looked ahead in 1969 that I would succeed in getting people to accept me, because I felt as I looked ahead, that there were too many odds stacked against me. There was the black population with its many diversities--a militant element, the radical element, the docile element, the jealous element. The white community with its racist element, the conservative element, the radical element and of course, all of those things didn't seem possible. I looked at the city manager form of government in Chapel Hill and of course, the mayor was at the mercy of the board of aldermen and the

makeup of the board of aldermen at that time was a very independent group of people. I felt the best I could do again, was to propose programs and try to justify why Chapel Hill needed them and to go after them as hard and as aggressively as I could, and that's what I did, on the basis that I would not be reelected in 1971. I made some mistakes in the beginning that made me feel further that I wouldn't be reelected. The first one I made was to make a speech in Washington in September, 1969 after I had been denied an appointment to the faculty here in social work as an associate professor at the University of North Carolina and learned later that the then governor, Robert Scott, had a direct hand in the denial of that. I became very emotional in Washington at a black elected officials conference and called the governor a southern Democratic bigot. That made the news throughout North Carolina probably before I finished saying it, and caused real difficulty here in North Carolina, in Chapel Hill. Even my strongest supporters were ready to turn their backs on me at that time. So, by the time I got back home, I was almost convinced beyond the shadow of a doubt that in addition to all these other problems, that colossal mistake had sealed my defeat for 1971. But at the end of that first year, I felt I was making some progress. I had a mayor's office. The board of aldermen were supporting most of my programs. I had a staff assistant. I had begun to be invited to speak to some of the local civic clubs in the community, and people were beginning to talk to me. Businessmen were beginning to talk. They were beginning to listen. They were beginning to call me mayor, whereas before they called me nothing. From this, I was beginning to believe that I did have a chance. And there were a couple of problems in the community. This was the year of problems. There was a worker's strike

at the UNC campus. The strike had gone on for about two weeks and our policemen had been used in that strike, by basically the establishment, to prolong the strike. And one night, there was a clash on the campus between our policemen and the strikers, and I made the decision to pull the police off. Two days later, the strike ended. That, I got praise for. Then, there were student marches and demonstrations against the Vietnam war, and I made it possible for the students to march and demonstrate without any difficulty, to the extent that when they had sit-downs and sat down in the middle of the street, I would sit down with them, and they would become embarrassed and leave. We did it without police interference. Then there was a young black boy killed by a white motorcycle gang on the campus of UNC and I was able to quell a potential race riot evolving from that. These three things did more, I think, to push me high in the political polls of Chapel Hill. Plus, Governor Scott appointed me, after we mended our political fences, as the first black to hold high office in the North Carolina Democratic party as one of the vice chairmen. That was another plus. All of those things together had put me in a relatively strong position by the end of the first term. I really had come to believe that by 1971, I would not have any opposition. That was a little too much to hope for.

J.B.: How did you mend fences with the governor?

Lee: First of all, I publicly apologized. I sent the governor a telegram indicating to him that I shouldn't have done what I did the way I did it, publicly. I should have come to him and talked about our differences. Secondly, I paid a personal visit to the governor and talked to him. We had a meeting of the minds. Thirdly, I had some friends intervene on my behalf with the governor. The first chance I had, I

supported one of the governor's programs. In return, he supported some of my programs.

J.B.: What are some of your programs?

Lee: The public transportation system is one that I had run on. I felt I had an obligation to get public buses on the street in Chapel Hill, with a subsidy. I still hope those buses will be on the street by August of 1974. The other was to wrestle the utilities from UNC control. That resulted in my appointing first a utilities committee and the governor then appointing a state utilities commission which ultimately advised the university to divest itself of its utilities. Next was to increase the amount of public housing in Chapel Hill. I was successful in making friends with the under secretary of Housing and Urban Development, who at that time was Samuel Jackson. Sam and I became good friends and through Sam, I was able to bring in about 150 units of additional public housing to add to the 60 here. Those are three. To increase the salaries of the employees of the town. To carry employees from their \$4,100 starting salary for policemen and \$4,300 for firemen and garbage collectors from \$3,300 to \$6,000 for policemen, \$5,700 for firemen and \$4,700 for garbage collectors and to establish a \$2 minimum wage. Those were some of the major things I pushed on and was successful in getting through.

J.B.: In context of the civil rights movement, do you see any discreet periods of progress?

Lee: I would say there were periods. From 1948, the time I became quite cognizant of what was going on. It was about 1948 that I decided that I would never leave the South. It was 1948 that I saw my father humiliated in Lithonia, Georgia because of me. He had been very

humiliated in having to pay off a grocery bill he owed, which took all of his paycheck for one week. I became very angry. The following Saturday, this was on a Friday, I went into town and decided I wanted to protest and decided that I was tired of seeing colored and white on bathrooms, so I went into the white male's bathroom and use it, came out and that didn't seem to staisfy me. So, I went into the white female's bathroom and used it and came out and found myself face to face with about four big bullies, all of whom beat me pretty badly. It was then that I first became really aware of what the South was and why I should not follow through with my plans to go to New York as soon as I finished high school. I decided to stay in the South. I didn't feel very much progress was being made at that point. I graduated from high school in '53. It was in '54 that I think the first big spurt came, with school desegregation case, and I don't think much happened then in other areas of society except for public schools. But nothing else was happening. Then in the early 1960's, I feel that when college students really got involved, that was the next big spurt and it focused on public accomodations, but I felt nothing was really happening to offer or solidify a power base, until 1965, when reall progress started to be made in voter registration. Those are the three most signifcant periods, 1954, 1960 and 1965, which stand out in my mind.

J.B.: What humiliation involved your father?

Lee: I was chewing bubble gum and the store owner was trying to figure out the bill. As I look back on it now, it was probably very annoying. I was popping my bubble gum, and he looked at my father and said, "Get that nigger out of here." My father said, "That's my son. That's not a nigger." And he said to my father, "Are you getting smart

with me, boy?" And my father said, "I'm not a boy. This is my son. I'm a man." He said, "O.K., man, you pay off your damn bill," and kept his check and ran him out of his store.

J.B.: How significant is the Voting Rights Act?

Lee: I think the VRA as an action was extremely significant and I think it gave us a significant tool which certainly was used. Voter registration was increased, but I think the VRA was looked at by so many people as an end to all ills, that it was passed and all of our problems were then over, and all of us fell into that basic trap, feeling that everybody was going to register and vote. I think the act is the real difference between the progress we're making now politically as opposed to the progress I think we've made in all other areas of society, even in public accommodations, in housing. I think that this is the one thing that has changed things to this point but will be the one key as we look ahead to the future, to insure that in the South, things will become the South that we've often talked about, that we've often dreamed about and that all of us at one time or another has spoken about. But I think that what we need to do now is to recognize that the VRA only is the key and that it becomes the responsibility of those of us in office to insure that the door is open and people are encouraged to walk through the door. To me at this point, the VRA is the very basis of any future success we have in equality and justice in this country.

J.B.: How important is it for VRA to be renewed after it expires in 1975?

Lee: I think it's very good to always keep a law on the books if it's a good law, and this one is good. I would like to see the act renewed. I do not think we're over the hill yet. There's still too many

sections of our country that are only making it possible for people to participate only because they know the act itself exists. I think it is extremely central that the act be renewed for another period, but I think it more important that we get the message across that we use what has become possible under the act.

J.B.: How do you feel about the idea that the 50s were a period of legal protest, the 60's a period of a protest in a violent phase, the 70's of consolidation with doors opening of the need to exploit every educational and economic opportunity?

Lee: I think the 50's were pretty much legal and the 60's were surely protest, but as we neared the end of the 60's, we began to do what we're doing a lot more of now, to come to understand strategy and to understand that strategy and I view the 70's as much more of a strategy decade. I think the 1980's will then be the real period of implementation and of what we've been able to develop through our thinking, our interaction, and having some success testing out certain strategical type of tools, certain plans and putting them into action. I think, whereas in the 50's and 60's, we had the one leader concept, we all had to rally around, the 70's have taught us there is no such thing as one leader, as Ozzie Davis put it, that we've understood clearly now that it is not the man, it is the plan and it seems to me the plan really is being formulated in the 1970's, and we're getting across a different message, that civil rights is not just civil rights for blacks, that it's civil rights for people. Hopefully, we're getting across that whites and blacks benefit equally from the progress that is made in civil rights. I think this will be the only real hope for talking seriously about successful implementation in the

1980's. If we keep focusing on bl-cks in the 1970's, that this is only for blacks, that by 1980, we will not have made that much progress. I think the emphasis has truly shifted from the public type of social goals to what you indicate - education, politics, economics.

J.B.: Could you have foreseen two or three years ago George Wallace crowning a black homecoming queen or addressing the black mayors conference you attended? Or even sixty days ago?

Lee: I think it's more significant than many people are even willing to accept it as being, mainly because so many people are hung up on what George Wallace used to be. They refuse to accept the kind of influence the man might possibly be. No, I could not have foreseen that sixty days ago. If somebody had asked me sixty days ago if George Wallace would have crowned a black as Miss Alabama, I would have said, "No." I would have taken a bet on it. It's so significant. It is significant, and it's a lesson that many of us ought to learn, that here is the same man that stood in the door of the same school and had to be removed by the National Guard on order of a president, who unfortunately is no longer with us, and then he goes back almost in front of the same door and crowns a female, and it was a female, that he was keeping out of the same school. Because he had been invited to come and welcome black mayors to Alabama on Friday evening and could not make it, he sent word on Saturday that he would like very much to address the black mayors on Sunday, and then came and made what I consider to be as healthy of a speech as I've heard from anyone. It's not the kind of speech I would have expected to hear from George Wallace. I think that this says something. I'm not sure I know what it says. People tried to rationalize at the conference that George Wallace was trying to run for reelection and would do anything to remain governor of Alabama, that that bullet is still in him and has really

affected his brain to the extent that he's not thinking rationally these days, and he'll do anything because he's not thinking rationally. Yet, I think George Wallace stands somewhat as a symbol as a person who is capable and able to make certain kinds of changes, to be somewhat flexible, maybe the assassination attempt did have something to do with it. But I've seen too many George Wallaces in the South who have changed. I've seen people who are not in the limelight change. I saw the man who gave me my first job when I was a junior in high school and paid me nine dollars a week and made me buy a bicycle to deliver his groceries and took five dollars out for the bicycle, ask me to come and have dinner with him and his wife the last time I was home, at his table, and he never let a black walk in his front door before then. I saw a peanut farmer in the second district of North Carolina when I was campaigning for Congress, who asked me to come have dinner with him, his wife, his children and his mother-in-law out at his farm. I think that George Wallace, to many degrees, is representing the changing South, and I think if there's a symbol of where the South has come, it all kind of came together in one ball game in Alabama that weekend.

J.B.: I understand from some of my newspaper friends that someone asked George Wallace why he didn't kiss the homecoming queen and he said that he didn't think she or the state of Alabama was ready for that.

Lee: I doubt that either of them would have been ready for that.
(laughter)

J.B.: One of the persons we interviewed, when asked about the state of the Democratic party in North Carolina, said that it was like a bird with no tail and no body, but just all wings - the black wing, the Sanford wing, the Taylor wing, the Scott wing, the eastern and western wings - all

flapping. Could you give us some insight where the party is and where it might be going?

Lee: That's the best description I've heard of it. The thing that probably concerns me the most about the party right now is that it's being controlled by too small of a group of people, whatever is left of the party. I don't think we really have a party in North Carolina. I think we have a name and we have a few people in a few positions and that's where it is. That's our challenge and I've been involved in some meetings today about how are we going to deal with the Democratic Party. The fact that George Wallace has been invited to North Carolina has been billed as a big unity rally and is in fact causing some real difficulties for a lot of people. The fact that a prominent black has never been invited to speak to any affair of the Democratic party is causing some real difficulties and we'll have to work that out. The fact that we don't have a real leader of this party right now and that most of our leaders are running for something and are more interested in putting together their own teams than they are in trying to see what can be done to put together a real party is a true indication of how weak it is. In 1974, I think there's a good chance that we could probably see the Democratic party change in the middle of the stream, that is, the titular head as well as the chairman of the party being changed. In fact, that is one thing that might have to happen to get us back on the track. As far as 1976 is concerned, I wish I could tell you . . . I think it's going to be done in the convention. I see one of two things developing. One, there is still a group of people who are still very loyal to the Democratic party. But there is also something developing that is called the North State Caucus. On the other hand, there is another group coming together calling themselves the

Progressive Democrats of North Carolina. All of these are developing, around the so called Democratic party. I feel there is a good chance the Democratic coalition and the Progressive Democrats of North Carolina will come together and try to take over the party at the convention in 1974. In 1976, anybody who is a potential leader now, such as Jim Hunt, Skipper Bowles or any of the rest who are going to be running for office, and how that shapes up . . . I wish I could tell you.

J.B.: Do you accept the hypothesis that what happened in '72 was an aberration, an accident, that things are going to get back to "normal" in 1974 and 1976?

Lee: No, I don't think it was an accident. I think it was a happening, something that had to come because the party itself had veered too far away from what the party was supposed to have been and that is an organization that had constantly been concerned about the common man and issues and problems and concerns of that person. I think the Democratic party in 1972 tried to outRepublican the Republicans and I really think that unless the Democratic party is prepared now to take some stands on issues, to stop trying to tiptoe through the tulips, and to stop trying to be so uninvolved that it doesn't make any waves, that in 1976, there is a good chance that it will get defeated again. I feel that over the next two years, it is going to be imperative that we come forth with a very solid program, addressing some of the very basic issues that concern people most. Now, we can do it as a party or as fragments of a party or some of us can do it as individuals. I frankly would like to see it done through the party structure. I'd like to see the party talk about taxes and make some proposals, talk about the energy crisis and make some

proposals, and work on the need for health care delivery and make some proposals, work on the general assembly, because we do have a Democratic majority there. Get those Democrats to act aggressively and progressively on behalf of the common people and take credit for it if necessary. But I don't have any hope that's going to happen. What I think is going to happen is that we'll all go on acting as individuals. I'll go on making my speeches, talking about certain things and working for them, and others will go on doing the same thing . . . I believe that those who believe that 1972 was an accident are the ones who are in power and the seat of decision-making. The view I would prescribe is that nothing was really happening in North Carolina on the one hand, that you had a one-party control. You had no party competition. North Carolina had a good reputation because it has produced some very decent people. Terry Sanford was a very decent governor. A good image of him is built outside of North Carolina and North Carolina benefited from that. Luther Hodges did go on to become Secretary of Commerce and that helped North Carolina. People began to look at North Carolina as sending forth some great leaders and if we were sending forth all these great leaders, we had to have all these great people. Secondly, one of the things that always concerned me about North Carolina was that you found the black leadership basically concentrated mostly in the Durham situation and some other urban areas. Mostly Durham because that's where you had your class. You had the John Wheelers, the John Stewarts, the N.C. Mutual people. Durham is one of the few cities in the South, except Atlanta, where there is such a clearcut class among blacks, economically and otherwise. It's rather easy for these people to be accepted in the role they play and not be concerned with the black in eastern North Carolina. In the meantime, the black in the east was either too powerless or too docile or so uneducated because of the

high migration rate that he didn't or wasn't saying anything. And then, of course, the old adage that one often heard, as I did from Georgia, that when you looked at North Carolina, you were not sure whether North Carolina was a southern state or a northern state. And you just pretty much decided that when you heard the word North Carolina, you weren't thinking about the South and so, you never took a really close look at it. It wasn't until I came here in 1964 that my attitudes about North Carolina, about what was truly inside the boundaries of this state, changed. I came here thinking there was no other state in the southern sphere of this nation that was as racially progressive as North Carolina. I did not know any difference until I got here.

J.B.: You think that Key was just wrong, that it was a myth?

Lee: I think it was a myth. I think the relationship that existed here was a paternal relationship between the blacks and whites and that those blacks in power aided in that relationship.

J.B.: The race issue really had been submerged?

Lee: Yes.

J.B.: We heard one theory that Key just got seduced by Chapel Hill.

Lee: (laughter) That was easy, you know. We try to do that over here.

J.B.: Another theory is that because North Carolina has this progressive image, when the civil rights revolution came, there was less attention focused on North Carolina by anyone and that the effects of change brought about was psychologically not nearly as strong a force, not nearly as traumatic an experience as other southern states, so that what has happened is that even if North Carolina may have been more progressive, it has changed less whereas the rest of the South has changed more.

Lee: I think this is somewhat true. We don't like to admit it, including myself. I often ask myself the question, "how much has North

Carolina really changed, when you get down to the bare bones of it?" To be sure, there has been some change and often, I ask the question of how much is toleration and how much is truly change. I don't know if I can answer that question. I don't know if I really know. I know that the school integration situation here could have been worse if there had not been a Terry Sanford, say. If there had been another governor, I'm sure North Carolina would have gotten a great deal more tension with its desegregation problems. But Terry, I think, handled it in an astute fashion. But also because there were Terry Sanfords and because North Carolina didn't get the attention, the pressure was not brought to bear as greatly on the state. That's one of the reasons why they at UNC at Chapel Hill are having such a hard time right now with HEW. After my election, who would think of coming to Chapel Hill and looking at the UNC campus and its progress toward integration? You would go to the University of Mississippi, the University of Alabama and these other bad states . . . Georgia, but not Chapel Hill. So, they were able to get away with a lot over there that many of us here were unaware of, but you see, I'm friendly with the chancellor, so I sit down with the chancellor and I say, "Chancellor, we ought to do these things . . ." (Not this chancellor, but the one before) and the chancellor says, "Yes, we're going to do these things." But you know, there was no mandate for the chancellor to do it. He was only talking to the mayor. But then when HEW came in, it made it an entirely different thing. I think the same theory applies to North Carolina as it relates to other southern states and as it applies to the North and as it relates to the South. No one has ever really gone to the North and identified the damaging and difficult

problems they have racially there. Therefore, the North is under no pressure to change or do anything differently from what it's ever done. But because the South was held up so much to public view, it was under constant pressure to change and people will not get off the South for some time. You would be amazed how many black faculty people come into Chapel Hill and ask me right now, "Will I be happy as a black living in Chapel Hill? Will my kids be happy? Will they be discriminated against? After all, Chapel Hill is the South. Will I be happy living in Durham? Can my kids go to any school they want to go to? Can I live anywhere I want to live? Can I eat in any restaurant? " There are still these fears that are built into people. There are some restaurants in New York City that would look up the doors and turn out the lights before they would let me in there and some of these people are coming out of New York and don't know that. I've found some in Washington, D.C. that I have had to call to the attention of people there. They didn't know that, but they would yet point a finger at North Carolina, or Mississippi or South Carolina and say, "You idiots down there are still living under an oppressive type of atmosphere." So, North Carolina, in relation to the other southern states, I think is in somewhat that same boat. Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia and all these have been held up. When you look at the political arena, next year, because of reapportionment, Alabama will have approximately twenty-four black legislators. North Carolina has only three. We have nobody in the state Senate. Georgia had a black in the state Senate in 1954. Mississippi, I believe, has more blacks elected to public office than North Carolina. So, when you really look at the amount of actual progress that is being made in practically every category in this state, we're behind.

J.B.: Why is black voter registration so low in North Carolina?

Lee: Several reasons. Again, there has never been the concentration on voter registration in North Carolina as in other southern states. Even when Vernon Jordan headed up the voter education project, he did not give North Carolina the attention he should have given it. Second, the Voter Education Project never put the money into this state that it put into Mississippi and Alabama. Thirdly, the director of voter education we had here in North Carolina was not the strongest person we should have had in that position. Fourthly, blacks in North Carolina are still concentrated very much in agricultural sections of the state, which means they are relatively dependent. And of course, we have not yet been blessed by the return of a lot of our young people into the state of North Carolina and the age of the black is still old and getting older. It's difficult to get a fifty year old man or a forty-five year old lady to go to the polls and register to vote.

J.B.: In South Carolina's agricultural counties, usually a lot of strong indigenous middle class leadership is among blacks, usually traditionally political leaders, either ministers or funeral home directors.

Lee: You might recall that in South Carolina SCLC went in there because of McMillan's activities in relation to the District of Columbia and they spent months there organizing and training people. Although they did not defeat him, they created one heck of a machine that McMillan had to deal with. . . It's absolutely amazing that in three months in the second district in North Carolina, through my campaign effort, we were able to register 18,000 blacks, and that did not get 50% of unregistered blacks in that district, and yet, when voting time came around, 17,000 of the

40,000 of the 65,000 registered voters we needed to get to the polls we couldn't get, mainly because some were in their tobacco fields. The leadership was not there on the local level, and it still isn't to some degree. You can't really get lawyers in eastern North Carolina. There's still a lot of subtle oppressiveness in eastern North Carolina. For example, a lawyer in that part of the state will not become politically active because he has to go and practice in a court and he doesn't want to take that risk. Black teachers are the most difficult to get to become politically active because of the decrease of black teachers in public schools and those who remain are not willing to take any kind of a risk by becoming politically active. Doctors seem to be so involved in practicing medicine, which demands a large part of their time since there are so few there, that they don't have time to get involved. So, when you get down to where political leadership really is coming from, it ends up coming from the man who is working in the textile factory or the mill, or the sharecropper, and he can only do so much.

J.B.: Why hasn't it come from the traditional preacher-politician and undertaker, people who haven't traditionally been economically dependent on the white community?

Lee: You know, that's a funny sort of thing. We find many aggressive undertakers, but we find many who have sold their souls before they would become involved in politics. They either sold it to the casketmaker in order to get caskets on the floor for display or they sold it to the car dealer to get rolling stock to be able to provide the funeral services, or he sold it to the bank in order to get working capital in order to carry on his business. And I found an amazingly high number of people like this in North Carolina, which is not true in South Carolina.

The last time I was in South Carolina and in Mississippi, I found quite a few independent black preacher types of morticians, some of whom had a chain . . . One thing I found again in eastern North Carolina is that so many of the preachers live in the Durhams, Raleighs, and the large urban areas. They commute in on Sundays once a month and then come out again.

J.B.: Could you make some assessment of various administrations in this state? Any that have been outstanding?

Lee: I was coming into North Carolina as Sanford was getting out of office. I had known of Sanford before getting here because of the obvious outstanding work he had done in education. In Georgia, Sanford was being presented as one of the South's most outstanding governors. I think this is part of his initial support of John Kennedy, which gave him a lot of national attention right off the bat. I came at the time the Rich Preyor-Dan Moore-Beverly Lake squareoff was beginning to take shape. I would consider Governor Moore's administration as overtly kind of weak, you didn't see much progress for the state being made there. But when one looked closer at Governor Moore, he probably brought more minorities into the government than any other governor previous to that time. Governor Scott, I do not believe offered us the kind of government he was capable of offering or which North Carolina demanded at that time. With the exception of regionalism, a concept which came out in reorganization and the basic concept of annual sessions, I felt the Scott administration did not have what I would call an outstanding record. Now, those are the only two administrations I've really lived under. If I had to compare the two, I suppose I would have to go with Scott as being a little more progressive. If I add Sanford, I would have to go with it as being the most overtly progressive insofar as producing for the state. I suppose the only thing Sanford has against him is he brought in the sales tax in

North Carolina and that's always going to be around to haunt him. As one tests minority attitudes around the state, I find Sanford stands head and shoulders above any other administration in the state in recent history. Second to Sanford's administration, believe it or not, the Moore administration stands high in the minds of most blacks.

J.B.: How about one year of Holshouser?

Lee: Holshouser, I think, isn't ready yet to make a really conclusive judgement. I do know what he's done up to this point has made him greatly attractive to minorities. My personal view of Holshouser is that he talks a good story, but I don't think he's lived up to rhetoric that he espoused in his campaign or his inaugural address. I certainly have been one of the first to commend him on the boldness with which he has opened up government and to appoint qualified blacks in seats of decision. I think Governor Holshouser has the potential to be a good governor. I think he's an astute type of individual, fairly intelligent. On the other hand, he's surrounded himself by people who are not as bright as I think the governor could surround himself with, and this, I think, could be his ultimate downfall, rather than what he himself is capable of doing. This, I think, was one of Scott's downfalls. He had many good ideas, because I talked to him about them, that never got beyond the front office after they were fed to him. I think the same thing would be true of Governor Holshouser.

J.B.: We hear you're thinking of running for lieutenant governor.

Lee: It's very much on my mind. Unless things change significantly, and if I feel I can put it all together, it will be my intent to be out there in 1976 very much in the heat of things . . . specifically for lieutenant governor. I looked at Secretary of State at one time, but I think

I would be bored to death if I was elected to a record keeping job. I see the lieutenant governor's position in North Carolina being similar to the mayor's position in Chapel Hill. I think that it is something that has not been ever really used to its fullest potential, not that this position can or should be used to overshadow what the governor is or should be, but the lieutenant governor sits in a position to influence so much good legislation and has a different kind of leadership to play.

J.B.: What kind of coalition do you think you'd have to put together to win that?

Lee: I don't know. First of all, I want to get the party locked in to me, if we can get the party together. Number one, I want to zero in on this sleeping, black vote, which has not yet moved. I think it has to be awakened, I really think increased registration and particularly increased education will have to be done. My idea would be to put together a young/black coalition initially and to use this segment of it as the troops, to get these young, energetic people believing in me, believing that I will bring something to government they can believe in, live with and have a part in, and from that I would hope to pull together the impossible dream, the coalition - the central core of my bloc would be the working class blacks and working class white coalition, talking about those issues that affect these groups of people, and I feel certainly that there are other elements out there I can naturally draw in on, but I think I will have to really work at pulling together the working blacks and white coalition.

J.B.: What issues pull it together?

Lee: Delivery of health care, the whole question of taxes and tax reform, situation of housing and more and better housing, the idea of trying

to find a means for North Carolina improving the quality of jobs coming into this state. Education, surely. One of the things missed in Skipper's campaign was the importance of vocational education. I don't know if it was the timing or people just didn't hear it. It needs to be pushed.

J.B.: How is Sam Ervin perceived these days by the black community?

Lee: Amazingly enough, quite well. I just hope he doesn't continue to pound on this busing amendment he's talked about. Senator Sam's stock has gone up by about 200% in the black community, including with me. I probably was as much opposed to him two or three years ago, as anybody in public office, and I didn't hesitate to verbalize my dislike of the Senator. I've come to know the Senator a little better, to have a chance to talk to him, to express some of my views and to hear some of his. We don't agree on many things, but the fact that I found some things we do agree on has certainly made me feel a lot more comfortable with him and a lot better about him. The black community generally, I think, looks at Senator Sam with a greatly positive attitude. If he were to run for reelection, I think that unlike past years, he would get tremendous support out of the black community. I think that Morgan's stock in the black community is very low. For several reasons. One, his ties with I. Beverly Lake, which he hasn't been able to shake very well. Secondly, he has gone around the state and presented himself in many quarters as a conservative, which doesn't sit well with the black community. Thirdly, Morgan has apparently been involved in some cases involving blacks in which he didn't try to insure that justice would be done in these cases. These three things I've heard about him. Henry Hall is not known about the state. People are always going to remember Ervin's votes against the civil rights legislation, including me, but I think what people are looking at now is that Ervin has had a fairly decent vote on individual rights. I think people are willing

to let the civil rights votes be bygone at this point. I don't think people would look kindly on the Senator pushing a strong anti-busing amendment. Amazingly enough, the black community is not all that pro-busing. Based on what I feel, more than 50% of the black community would prefer to see busing discontinued, but they don't like amendments introduced to discontinue it because they perceive, whether it is done so in the spirit or not, it is anti-black and anti-integration. I think Senator Sam could reopen a lot of old wounds and old thoughts with this kind of act, that are being swept under the rug.

J.B.: Do you see reapportionment as having played any significant role in North Carolina?

Lee: Not at this point. As a matter of fact, it has played havoc in North Carolina and I'm not sure the state has gone through in the future sense, any reapportionment. I think we played games with it, just like we did when we took Orange County out of the 4th district and stuck it as a thumb on the 2nd district, all of which was perceived by some of us to be designed for two basic reasons. One was to knock Nick Galifianakis out of Congress and the other was to keep me from going. I think I could have been elected almost hands down from the 4th district. Other than that, I don't personally really see any significant changes that have taken place. Reapportionment did not in any way affect the basis in which the black vote could have any significant impact on the outcome of political elections.

J.B.: What is your personal background? Was your father a farmer?

Lee: When I was born, my father, grandfather, mother, grandmother, and aunt all lived together in one farmhouse and they were sharecroppers. They sharecropped until I was four years old, at which time my father took

a public job with the WPA. He became what they called a rock quarry worker and he remained in that job in a grit mill and went from that job to the Southern Railroad and ultimately to his present position in the X-ray department at Emory University. My mother, when they left the farm, taught school and completed high school. She taught in a one-room country school and completed high school and college. In fact, she graduated two months after I graduated from college in 1959. My grandfather left with my grandmother and aunt the farm when I was eight years old. I stayed with my grandparents on the farm until they finally left, at which time, my grandfather went into the mortician business and also started a fleet of taxi cabs, and he ran the mortician business and then ran the taxicab business until he was sixty-two, at which time he retired, stayed retired for two years and then decided to go back to work and worked in a textile mill in Georgia and then retired at age sixty-seven and died at sixty-nine. I did my undergraduate work at Fort Valley State College in Georgia and then in the Army, three years as a probation officer and then graduate work here at UNC in social work, a master's in social work.

J.B.: You mentioned being active in civil rights in Georgia. What did you do then?

Lee: 1961 to 1964, I worked with Hosea Williams and the Chatham County Crusade for Voters at that time, doing a couple of things. I worked as a juvenile probation officer. We were using a lot of kids in demonstrations and one phase I played in it until I got caught, was that they kids were being brought into the juvenile home and I had the key to the home and they were bringing them in the front door and we were taking them out the back door, kept running the same kids in and out of the same demonstration. After I left there, almost 1964, I had

by then led some civil rights demonstrations and helped plan some strategy and so forth and then I was faced with a choice of going with Dr. King and SCLC or going to graduate school. I chose to come to graduate school. I had had enough of civil rights by 1964. It was the kind of experience that I think you could stay in for two or possibly three years and be nonviolent for two or three years and if you really didn't believe in violence, you had to get out of it for awhile. I felt I was reaching the point where I just couldn't be nonviolent anymore and that I would do the whole movement more damage, and I left and came to graduate school.

J.B.: Where do you see blacks going and the Republican party going, what sort of relation in North Carolina and the South?

Lee: In the South, the Republican party is going to become a party that has to be contended with, and in some ways, I think this is healthy. I feel and have often felt that a two-party system is a lot healthier than a one-party system, and I think we'll see a two-party system grow in the South. I think we'll also see the Republican party grow in North Carolina, probably not as fast as a lot of people will perceive it. I don't think there will be as much Democratic cross-over as a lot of people think, but I really think the Republican party will be here for awhile. I think that generally the attitude of Republicans in the South will tend to shift somewhat because I've never felt that the Republican party in the South, unlike the Republican party nationally, is so much controlled by big business anymore than the Democratic party is controlled in the South by big business. I mean that they've both got big money in there, but both of these parties, because just purely the makeup of the South, are going to be used as a common people's party. I see the Republican party increasing

in the number of blacks, and I see the blacks remaining in the Democratic party as a progressive thinking group, an issue-oriented type of person, and if the Democratic party can stay on that beat. I see the black going to the Republican party more the conservative black and probably the Republican party in the South to some degree, unless it changes nationally, will probably attract the businessman type of black Republican, the lawyer type, that type of individual with a little money, and I think you'll see some blacks tend to turn more conservative in the South. You won't be able to talk about conservative anymore and when you say conservative and actually mean white, or liberal and mean black and white together. It won't be that clear in the South anymore. Nationally, I believe life for blacks is just about as good in the Republican party as in the Democratic. I just happen to be a loyal, totally committed Democrat. My family was Republican for many, many years, and I became a Democrat in the early 1960's, when John Kennedy was running and I got my whole family to switch over to the Democratic party. We've been Democrats ever since. But before Eisenhower, except for the era of Roosevelt, my family voted Republican across the line. So, I'm not unfamiliar with the Republican party and I'm not totally alien to it. I think we'll see a great deal more competitiveness between the two parties. I think the greatest hope, however, and this is my own built-in prejudice, for blacks in the South is still in the Democratic party.

J.B.: What is Dr. Horton's role in the Holshouser administration?

Lee: We're still trying to figure that out. There are many of us who just don't know. He is said to be assistant to the governor with a basic responsibility for minority affairs. But we're not sure what Dr.

Horton is supposed to be doing, what capabilities he has to do what he's been assigned to do. I basically think Dr. Horton is there for one reason and that's to do everything possible to attract as many blacks in any way possible to the Republican party.

J.B.: You were supporting Terry Sanford last year in the presidential primary. What effect did that race have and what effect did it have on Sanford's standing in the state and why were you supporting him?

Lee: I supported him for several reasons. For one, Terry Sanford brought a different southern image to the national scene and I thought we in the South needed that. I did feel at that point that George Wallace's presentation of himself as a southerner did not speak well for us as southerners across the nation and do feel that we have very enlightened southern leaders down here and that the rest of the country ought to be aware of that. Secondly, I felt and still feel very strongly that it's time for us to have a southerner as vice-president. If we really want to talk about bringing the country together, then we can't continue to have northern presidents and vice-presidents up there who have no more understanding or commitment to being able to get things done along any of these lines than some of our southerners do. I can think of a lot of people. So, I felt Terry fitted this bill. I don't know how it hurt his standing in the state. He started, and I've said this to him, his campaign too late. He played it too cozy, and he kept . . . people never knew quite where he was going. He kept saying, "President or nothing," when everybody knew that it would have taken a whole lot of strength to walk away from the vice-presidency if it had been offered to him. So, basically, I think those things affected him, but I don't think Terry left the state any worse off than when he started. My suggestion to him was that he not even run in North Carolina, because I

knew how bad the situation was and I suggested therefore that he
bypass North Carolina.

(End of interview)