Is There Any Basis To Charges Of La. Crime?

Like thousands of other Louisianians, we read with avid interest Life magazine’s article on crime in Louisiana. The newsstands were sold out immediately and we had to borrow a copy from a friend. The periodical’s razzle dazzle plebeian style coupled with Olympian pronouncements hasn’t endeared it enough to us to warrant a subscription.

Nevertheless, this article was well put together and we were confronted with a gallery of excellent color photographs, all of which have long been familiar to residents of this state. The same names we read about three years ago, plus a few new ones, were added to update a twice-told tale.

A couple of our colleagues in the journalistic fraternity elsewhere in the state have intimated that Life, hard put financially as many other national magazines in recent years (Saturday Evening Post, Collier’s, both defunct), fell back on a sure-fire formula to gain circulation: an expose of crime, preferably the Mafia and, particularly, Louisiana, where they “exposed” shenanigans in 1967. A very high-placed state official kissed off the magazine piece as “irresponsible journalism,” a phrase irksomely reminiscent of a vice president’s condemnation of any newspaper article that does not seat him at the right hand of God.

We don’t buy either of these theories, neither that the magazine happened to land on Louisiana as a sales booster, nor that it showed a lack of responsibility. Outside of New Orleans and Lafayette, we could not envision a nation-wide rush to buy Life magazines. Also, whether the reporters were responsible or not can not be finally decided until the verdict is in.

And here’s the rub. We would not like to see the entire question of Mafia influence on the Louisiana political establishment end with a magazine article. We’re all for an investigation, one not led by the administration itself. If the blot on Louisiana’s ‘scutcheon is to be removed, it should be done by an impartial, independent group, either of state legislators or, better yet, a federal commission.

By implication, innuendo, and association, a host of Louisiana figures stands in the shadow of indictment in the eyes of the public. Besides the devious manipulations attributed to Carlos Marcello, shady dealings were mentioned alongside names of a former Lafayette mayor, now commissioner of internal revenue; a former local realtor-attorney who is the commissioner’s assistant; a state police captain who was here until little over a year ago; and a local businessman who is a member of the State Racing Commission.

We’re all for an all-out, open air, no-holds-barred, impartial investigation of wrongdoing on anybody’s part, from the highest state official to the lowliest clerk. When our state stands accused, so do our people stand indicted. When our state is mocked, so do its people become scorned. Louisiana over the years has been prey to political opportunists. Wheeling and dealing and scandal in our state are such an accepted part of the political scene that we have become the butt of jokes throughout the nation. There are those who say this sort of thing has been going on so long it’s too late to stop it now.

This absolutely isn’t so. Let the guilty ones be severely punished, if an investigation justifies that course of action, to show America that never again will we condone a partnership between crime and politics. Give the innocent the right to clear their names. Let our fair state once again hold its head up high among its sister states.