PRIMARIES POSE QUESTION:

What Ties Does Lafayette Have With Jefferson Parish?

The Democratic primaries for Congress are little more than a month away, and while candidates are making their pitch for Congressional seats, we are reminded of the King of Siam who, faced with bewilderment, could only mutter: "Is a puzzlement."

We remain as puzzled as we were last year when the legislature, in a flurry of redistricting, shuffled around the 3rd Congressional District and substituted St. Charles Parish and a goody portion of Jefferson Parish. For almost 70 years the 3rd District was composed of the parishes of Lafayette, St. Martin, Iberia, St. Mary, Vermilion, Terrebonne, Assumption and Lafourche. In common with those parishes, Lafayette has bonds of language, culture, geographical proximity, agricultural and educational ties (USL is Acadiana's University) and, altogether, a homogeneous character that was entirely natural and suitable to its people.

But now slices of St. Martin Parish have been taken out, Assumption and Vermilion are gone, and we can't help but wonder what we're doing in the same district with Jefferson Parish, some 165 miles away. It's not only the geographical distance that separates us but the life-style of an area that because of its nearness to New Orleans is virtually as metropolitan as the Crescent City. Bluntly speaking, we have nothing in common with that faraway parish. Our cultural and economic interests differ and literally as well as figuratively, we just don't speak the same language. We have about as common a bond with Jefferson and St. Charles parishes as we have with, say, Bossier City. (This is not as far-fetched as it sounds, incidentally. In 1856 the legislature put Lafayette in the 4th District where it joined company with Caddo and Winn parishes—all the way up to the Arkansas line! But there were only four congressional districts in the state then. In 1966 there was talk about moving Lafayette over to the 7th District, but that idea died a-bornin'.)

Spreading out a congressional district only makes more difficult the work of the congressman elected to represent it. There are too many diverse elements to contend with, not only the people, but the admixture of various economic interests, such as rice, sugar, oil, heavy industry (along the Mississippi), and the many different kinds of businesses associated with a metropolitan area. This is almost too much to expect a congressman to keep up with and still do the optimum job of representing his constituents. It's not fair to him, and neither to the people of his wide-ranging district.

These remarks are not to be construed as speaking against the brotherhood of man or a United Louisiana. We have nothing ignoble to say about the residents of any parish. We are sure they are as interested in good government and good representation as any of us. It's just that it seemed more in the order of things to have Jefferson, several Orleans wards, and St. Charles, in one tight little Congressional district—the 2nd—rather than move part of that district to the bayou country. As a matter of fact, not all of Jefferson was included in the 3rd District, only certain wards and only certain precincts in those wards. It was all done in the name of proper representation based on population, but we can't help but wonder if the same effect could not have been achieved closer to home.

Now that the '70 census has been taken, it is probable that there will be other changes made in redistricting. If so, we would hope that the legislature take a more realistic view of the state's demographical make-up and put apples with apples, and oranges with oranges. Because the way they shuffled things around last year, indeed is a puzzlement.