The Runoff: The Rice Festival

David Duke paces a storefront parking lot as the big Crowley Rice Festival parade begins. He runs to pass the Edwin Edwards van, flanked by supporters, pass by toward its parade route position.

"Look at the difference between Edwin's people and mine," he sniffs.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, just look at the element. Look how they're dressed. And look how little enthusiasm there is."

On the street, the Edwards "element" looks much the same as Duke's, except that the former includes blacks as well as whites. It is too hot and humid on this last weekend in October to dress any way but barely on Crowley's streaming streets.

Crowley, in Acadia Parish, is Edwards' second hometown, after his birthplace of Marksville and before his current residence in Baton Rouge and the hotel suite in New Orleans. Crowley is where he got his start as a lawyer and a politician. In 1959, he walked these streets with Senator John Kennedy. This is where he started his law practice and won election to the City Council, then the state Senate, then Congress. It's where his children were born, and at the height of the 1983 campaign, it's where his brother Nolan was murdered, gunned down in his office by a client who then turned his gun on himself. The man was a former drug offender Nolan had represented and Edwin had pardoned.

That loss of his youngest brother started the long dark period for Edwards, broken only briefly by his 1983 landslide. Personally and politically, things were never the same for Edwin Edwards again, even at home. In 1987 Buddy Roemer shocked him by very nearly beating him in Acadia Parish. Many of those voters switched to David Duke in 1991, who trailed Edwards 42-32 percent locally and carried the white vote.

"I knew he when he first moved here," says the woman in her 50s, sitting in a folding chair near the courthouse. "I voted for him last time, but he couldn't do anything. Edwards is burned out."

The man next to her pipes up, "We had Edwards for 12 years for better or worse, and it can't get much worse."

Several sheriff's and state police sharpshooters look down from second- and third-story rooftops on Parkerson Avenue, the main drag and parade route off the courthouse square. The country-western band on the stage near the courthouse finishes its set, and the food booths do brisk business in boudin balls and shrimp-on-a-stick. A giant Duke sign commands the top of a storefront where another group of folks have set up their folding chairs.

One of them is a man in his 60s, a retired farmer and World War II veteran visiting his family from North Louisiana. Like a lot of rural voters, he has voted the straight "aginner" ticket of Edwards in 1983, Roemer in 1987 and Duke in 1991. He doesn't care what he's heard about his candidate. "You can't pin nothing on him."

Years ago my father and my grandfather were no different from the Klan."

"If he could just do a small part of what he's saying, we need it."

Up Parkerson Avenue, the parade is about ready to roll. Duke has been working the bands and floats formed up behind him. Among the Crowley High cheerleaders, the black girls sport their Edwards fans. Duke jokes with the white cheerleaders: "Can we balance this float? Will you wear my sticker?"

Crossing the street, he passes through the ranks of a drill team of black teenaged girls. The team leader bellows, "I said stand at attention," which startups Duke as the marchers snap to around him.

Edwin Edwards will ride in the front seat of a van with a walking security cor- don to keep anyone from getting within six feet. David Duke will ride standing up in the back seat of a 1956 red Thunder- bird. He explains to his assigned trooper, Beau Torres, "I want the people to have access to me." Torres agrees that it is okay for people to shake his hand as long as he does not get out of the car. Over a dozen reporters and photographers, from Sweden to North Carolina, are taking pic- tures and asking questions as he paces back and forth between the Thunderbird and the truck float that will carry his local supporters. From the speaker on the float blares out the new campaign theme song.

When David Duke comes marching in, he's the work-ing man's best friend.

Duke is not through with the details. In this jumpy environment, he wants to be sure that the police have warned his sticker people against their usual method of slapping a Duke sticker on anyone without ask- ing, "They can't just go around giving out stickers," Duke tells the sticker squad. He peels off a sticker on his finger and extends it. "Here's what you do. See?"

He instructs the squad leader. "You don't worry about giving out stickers. You just see that they are well up ahead of me. And get that literature out of me." He is the most famous statewide candidate in the world, a man with hundreds of volunteers and thousands of contributors, and here he is supervising the distrib- ution of stickers in Crowley, Louisiana.

"A lot of details. "Where's my suntan lotion?"

The parade is rolling. Finally, a pep talk to his cheering section that will ride on the state float ahead of him. There are few in- betweeners in this crowd. Many of the whites cheer loudly as the truck float approaches while the blacks boo. "This is the future," the young Duke- ster yells out to boozing blacks.

About a block ahead, the Edwards van simply rolls as the candidate waves. No truck floats, no song, no convertible. No one within six feet. No sticker detail. No warm-up man.

Warm-up man?

Ten feet ahead of the Duke mobile, a young man runs up to the crowd on the sidewalk and waves his hands and cheeks. The people on the sidewalk get the idea and cheer back just as Duke passes and waves. The cheerleader skips the crowds of blacks, who don't need a boo leader to let Duke have it. Duke smiles and waves back.

He's the work-ing man's best friend. Oh how I want to be in that number When David Duke comes marching in.

The parade goes down and back up Parkerson. The barely visible Edwards gives a few waves and cheers. Duke gets a rabid reception, pro or con, nearly every step of the way. On the second pass around the square, the prisoners in the second-floor jail jeer and wave their hands through the wooden slats at Duke. Everybody in Crowley is getting a piece of this one.

Within minutes of the parade's end, Edwards is on his way out of town. Climbing out of the Thunderbird, Duke, still holding his hands with the gang on the truck float. "Now I just want to ask you one more favor. I'm heading to Tiger Stadium. We're gonna work the crowd before the LSU game. Will you follow me there?"

Excerpt From A New Book
On The 1991 Governor's Race.
By John Maginnis

"For Louisiana Voters It Was Like Watching A Train Wreck . . .
But We Were Along For The Ride."

PAGE 14 NOVEMBER 11, 1992 THE TIMES
In a small dining room at Baton Rouge General Hospital, 15 members of the Baton Rouge Ministerial Alliance struggle with a moral and political dilemma. The group of preachers, priests and rabbis plan to issue a statement to be read from pulpits this weekend that would urge churchgoers to vote against David Duke. But they don't want to mention Edwin Edwards. They fear they can stretch their moral authority only so far when it comes to moral absolutes.

This is one for the churchmen. Ethical choices in politics. Can you stretch them? Their ethics are rightly squeezed about defining ethical choices in politics. Can you denounce the greater of evils without promoting the lesser? Is bigotry worse than corruption? Does equality among the mowing the lesaer?... What does the Bible say? Before the meeting begins, Methodist bishops and the archbishop and it's only seemed to make him stronger. Would a pastoral endorsement of Edwin Edwards help Duke even more?

What does the Bible say? Before the meeting begins, Methodist minister Jeff Daye seeks clues in Jeremiah to the sinking feeling he has that nothing the group does now matters. "Nebuchadnezzar is at the door," reads Daye of the fall of Jerusalem to the evil Persian king. "God sent Nebuchadnezzar to chasten you and get you back to your senses." Daye fears that we in Louisiana, like the people of Jerusalem in 537 B.C., are so steeped in corrupt politics and bad living that "you have forgotten how to blush."

If David Duke is at the door, concludes Daye, "We have to prepare to live in exile. We have to redefine what it means to be children of God. We've been smug. Now we must learn 'how to pray in a strange land.'"

NEW EDWIN

Sunday night Edwin Edwards sweeps into the big ballroom of the New Orleans Hilton for one of those good, old-fashioned $1,000 fund-raisers, well catered and wellbooze, and filled with not only all the members of the extended Democratic tribe but also many of the business and social elite last seen lining up for pictures with George Bush. It's been eight years since Edwards has been able to throw this kind of bash like in the old days, when the power train was whirring out of the station with the crush of passengers scrambling to get on board.

Edwards knows why they are here. He would have liked to have seen them in the primary, but that's just his pride. His politics couldn't be happier. He knows what he owes these people, and they know the deal, too. Maybe it wasn't Caftan, but some wise man who said, "If you're with me in the primary, you get what you want. If you're with me in the runoff, you get good treatment." For Edwards, for once, the latter group is so much greater than the former that he may really have the freedom to be this New Edwin—with reasonable, of course.

DAVID DUKE NIGHT

Far from the twinkling cocktail hour, a few determined journalists navigate the back roads between Franklin and Bolton in that isolated region of the Florida parishes that might as well be Mississippi. At the end of the dark, dusty road in the woods shine the light poles of the Yates Rodeo Arena, featuring David Duke Night.

"Whaa, hold up, get that car out of here." With long strides big John Yates moves in to round up the errant journalists.

"They said at the gate we could park here," says the female photographer.

"Don't you raise your voice to me. I own this place," Yates growls with authority and resentment. The photographer shrugs. "We just parked where they told us to."

Yates eases up. "Well, all right. Look, I just got ticked off. It's you people in the press and what drawing a larger than usual crowd, observes one cowboy. "One girl I know rode her horse since 2 o'clock this afternoon to get here to see David Duke." The cars are still coming through the gates, where they pay $5 apiece for adults, and about 400 folks are filling up the bleachers. The rodeo was supposed to start at 15 minutes ago, but the guest of honor has not yet arrived. The concession booth is keeping the hot chocolate and hot coffee pouring for the rodeo fans clustered in little groups behind the stands. Some are talking politics, the chief topic being the President's latest denuncia-

With David Duke as his opponent, Edwin Edwards attracted support from an unlikely coalition.

"As for the governor's race, these guys see Duke taking the rodeo vote big but Edwards having the upper hand, overall. "You look at it," says one. "He's got the blacks, their vote is fixed, ugly. And he should be, the liberals and the gangsters. That's a pretty sizable vote."

David Duke is on the grounds. The fellows by the concession stand crane their necks to spot the candidate's car, surrounded by fans, TV cameras and a woman on horseback. It passes by and deposits Duke at a small building around the side of the stands that $5 apiece owns for an office. The folks in the stands have paid $5 apiece to shiver and wait for David Duke to start the show will just have to wait a little longer. The candidate will have his picture taken by Time and will chat with the French news producer before emerging again for showtime.

Yates has prepared a special entrance. A mule-drawn covered wagon pulls around in position before the arena gates. Duke gingerly mounts and stands on the riding board next to the driver. His bodyguard, in order to ride along, holds on at the back of the wagon. The gates open, the driver snaps the reins and away we go. The reporters and cameramen run alongside the wagon like so many rodeo clowns while Duke holds his balance and waves to the cheering crowd. This may be the most moment of Campaign '91. No, it isn't. Just when Duke begins speaking, one of the mules takes a huge dump. Guy Coates of The Associated Press marvels at the scene: "I wish I could put that in my lead."

Standing on the wagon, Duke is able right away to get this once-shivering crowd red hot, standing up and roaring. David Duke's message tonight is one of compassion for the underclass: "My gosh, just take a look. All the children that are born with love in their eyes. Edwards created a climate of drugs and poverty and crime, and the problems are growing. Ladies and gentlemen, I'm not against the poor people of this state. I want to help the poor people of this state, help them break the cycle of poverty they've been in for so long. But I tell you this, the people who really need the help are the people who have worked all of their lives, the elderly people who have worked and paid taxes."

The rest of the social welfare system tonight microwave Duke is going to clean up and fast, starting with the latest moral outrage that he's promoting as a major issue, that is, "these people caching welfare checks and then buying lottery tickets. I'm gonna change that."

The crowd hoots and bores through the rest of the monologue, until Duke lowers his voice for a sensitive moment. "Finally, ladies and gentlemen, here's the one thing I want to say to you. A lot has been said against me in the press, the liberal media. I've done things in life I'd change...

"Don't apologize," a voice booms out from the stands.

... But I've never been charged with any corruption in government, ladies and gentlemen. And I'll bet you any of us have been intolerant at some times in our lives..."

"Damn right!" boors a young woman.

... But with the power of Jesus

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Christ, we can all change and get better in our lives. But I want you to notice a double standard. The *Times-Picayune* has run 15 years of editorials against the corrupt policies of Edwin Edwards. But suddenly you don't hear any of that, do you? I'll give you an example. A lot has been said about statements I've made in the past, a lot of it taken out of context, changed around. The man I'm running against, when he was governor of Louisiana...

"Okay, you've got him by the balls!"

"... He did an interview with the *Alexandria Daily Town Talk* [it was the *Shreveport Journal*] and the governor of our state was asked if he believed in the life, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. And that man answered no."

"He told us the Bible was a lie. He may be right with Christ now. I don't mean to judge. As a Christian I give him the benefit of the doubt. But then he went onstage and put lipstick on the palms of his hands to signify he was crucified. He took ketchup and put it on his shirt, and he mocked the crucifixion of Christ to howling laughter and derision before the Gridiron Club in Alexandria. Ladies and gentlemen, can you imagine for a moment what would be said in the press if I did something like that? And we've not heard one word from the liberal media about that. Why is there a double standard in the press?"

"They're scared!"

"It's not because of my past that they are attacking me, but it's because of the issues I'm talking about today in Louisiana that the liberal press can't stand. And with your help and God's help, we're gonna turn Louisiana around and we're gonna send a message all around this country..."

The mules maintain remarkable composition despite hundreds of rodeo fans screaming right at them. At the conclusion of Duke's remarks, they respond crisply on command, gallop in a wide turn around the arena and toward the gate, with the bodyguard clinging on the back and the press corps in hot pursuit. What a rush.

As the riders line up for the big show opening of Cowboy Roundup, David Duke, safe on the ground, signs Duke signs for admiring fans, mostly young women. At the edge of the crowd, a tow-headed, pudgy youth, all of 10 years old, tells a friend, "My dad went to school with David Duke. My dad said he was the smartest guy there."

"Oh, yeah?" says his friend.

"Yep, went to LSU with David Duke."

"I want you to write the check to DemoPac. They are coordinating election day activities. You can make it out to them and send it to us here. And come down for the election; we're gonna have some fun. Thank you, and good luck to Edwin Edwards' relationship with his young girlfriend Candy Picou brought a new dimension to the 1991 election."
Walgreens'"

From Main Street to the Strip: Bob d'Hemecourt is on the phone with a Morning Advocate reporter who is asking about a $5,000 check Edwards has received from the Nevada Hilton Corp. D'Hemecourt remembers getting a Nevada Hilton check, sending it back and asking them to reissue from the New Orleans Hilton. That seems a rather brazen admission, but d'Hemecourt had no problem with it as long as all the zip codes were in order. The Morning Advocate, already activating its casino sensors, runs a small item on the Nevada contribution. D'Hemecourt later asks Edwards if he wants to send the check back.

"Hell, no."

Money isn't all that's pouring in. There are so many requests for TV interviews, someone suggests: "We could sell interviews."

"You're about 20 years behind," pipes up old-timer George Fischer. Back then, even the candidate's wardrobe was a profit center. "What do you think happened to those ties he'd wear once and throw away?"

The press, of course, always was and forever will be a big pain in the ass. D'Hemecourt is chapped that Channel 4 pounced on Edwards for a live interview when he had just hurried up three flights of stairs (waiting for a Monteleone elevator was not an option) and caught him out of breath. "I only did it once before, I was standing right there by the power switch on that camera, and I was tempted to turn it off."

Bobby will say things like that because he generally likes reporters.

"No, no, you just tell them they're doing a great job," cautions Fischer, who despises them all.

State Police Lt. Terry Shirley is worried about real threats. He has a picture to go out to other units of a gentleman who was arrested in 1984 lurking about the Edwards transition office with a .22 with a silencer and a list of political names. The security detail supervisor is worried about more than threats to Edwards. "I'm afraid of Duke. He could take out two troopers if someone goes for him." He's not alone. The NOPD told us our job is easy. "If there's trouble, you just have to close off the floor," they said. "If Duke wins, New Orleans will burn down."

END OF THE ROAD

The Japanese film crew prepares for its stand-up in front of David Duke's Cypress Street headquarters. Activity in the quiet Metairie neighborhood is normal for the day before a David Duke election. Volunteers and phone banks and reporters mill about under the carport, waiting for Duke. Four sheriff's deputies' cars, lights flashing, screech to a halt, and officers race inside. Bomb threat. No one seems to pay much mind.

The sign on the wall inside reads: "David will beat Gollath." An out-of-town reporter, sitting patiently in the waiting room, overhears two staffers discussing turnout.

"They say it's gonna rain in North Louisiana."

"That's good," says another. "Niggers hate to vote in the rain."

They notice the reporter and giggle nervously. It's too late to matter.

A local writer straining for an out-of-town paper is unimpressed with the Picayune's all-out runoff offensive on

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Duke. "If Duke wins," editor Jim Amoss says, "Mr. Amoss should go to the closet and find a clothes hanger and hang himself," he says. "They sat on the Duke stuff so long and came out with it so late, people don't believe it."

Some Duke workers are just as displeased with Mr. Amoss, but for other reasons. "What the Picayune has done is shameless," bristles Michelle Shauer on the New Orleans paper's daily shelling of Duke. The Roemer expatriate's night job is at a local hotel, so she should be especially ripe for the Picayune's dire economic argument against Duke. But she doesn't buy it. "People are still calling for Mardi Gras and JazzFest. It might hurt a little at first but not in the long run." One thing is certain: The election itself has been good for tourism. "We've got people extending their stay through the weekend just to see this election."

About the time the bomb squad departs, the Duke caravan slams to a halt. The candidate, surrounded by state troopers and bodyguards, rushes into headquarters while more reporters and photographers are left to mill about the carport.

Minutes later, Duke re-emerges, ready to roll, but his driver has gone to gas up. In typical behavior, he peppers around the carport and driveway, from the gaggle of newsmen to doting volunteers, back into the office and back out again.

Photographers are tripping over themselves trying to follow Duke, but the long-haired shooter from Black Star has it figured out: "Duke is always moving, always pacing. I know if I just plant myself, he will come to me." The photographer compares the two campaigns' press relations to "The Edwards people are far more courteous than Duke's people, but you get far less access to Edwards. "The Duke people, by comparison, are pretty surly, but it's not hard getting close to the guy. Black Star concludes, "It would be a lot harder to knock off Edwards."

The car's back. Duke slips into the front seat. Gotta run.

Despite their differences, Edwards and Duke showed little hostility to each other.

T he sun sets on the race from hell. Edwards' campaign glides through the streets of the Quarter toward its last swing around the city.

The candidate checks his entourage at the door of the Greater St. Stephen Baptist Church on South Liberty Street. "This is a tough neighborhood," says d'Hemecourt, looking over his shoulder. "We lose two or three voters a night over here.

Inside, the Rev. Paul Morton is laying hands on a kneeling Edwin Edwards. It will make a fitting final front-page picture for the Picayune tomorrow morning—no caption needed. The candidate will ask for a better election day visual message: God and the Times-Picayune urge you to vote for Edwin Edwards.

Out on the sidewalk, the white street gang is smoking cigarettes while the last parishioners file in. "This looks terrible," says d'Hemecourt. "This is just the scene Edward wanted to avoid." He lights another cigarette. A dark car rolls slowly down the street and stops in front of them. Out pop Republican City Councilwoman Peggy Wilson, a candidate for state insurance commissioner. She warily approaches the wards of Duke and fleets D'Hemecourt with reserve.

"I'm sorry you backed the wrong candidate," says Wilson, who, before the massive DemoPac alliance coalesced, thought she had a shot at carrying her hometown.

"We thought we needed a change," says d'Hemecourt tersely.

At least there is one gentleman in this gang. Token Republican George Acck oozes up to shake Peggy's hand. "Mrs. Wilson, I'm George Acck Jr., and I voted for you."

The two exchange pleasantries, which makes d'Hemecourt want to puke. "Listen to this . . . " he groans, turning away. "I tell ya, Edwin will get more votes in her home precinct than she will. You watch."

It's a 10-foot-high Marilyn Monroe holding an Edwards sign. Behind her, a huge, fearsome gorilla is doing the same thing. Led by the Landry High School Marching Band, Edwin Edwards waves from his mini-flotilla rolling through Blaine Kern's float barn in Algiers. The fantastic icons of Carnivals past ring the huge barn, including giant heads of Harry Lee and Edwin Edwards, right over there in front of the Joker's. Edwards' final campaign appearance of 1991—perhaps ever—appropriately, is a parade, albeit indoors. The last word belongs to Edwin Lombard, who offers the standard Democratic benediction: "Go vote early and often."

Across the river, Duke is outside the American Legion Hall in Metairie talking to the fans who were smart enough not to squeeze inside the hot, cramped ball. As Todd Gillman of the Dallas Morning News and Ken Brownstein of the Los Angeles Times watch and listen, a Dukester passes behind and says, loud enough, "Hymie liberal press." With Duke railing against the liberal job on him in the press, his crowd starts the chant, "Boycott the Picayune."

Duke predicts an upset win tomorrow, in line with "the trend of Republican victories in Mississippi and Pennsylvania."

"The Democrats won in Pennsylvania," notes a female Tulane student, a liberal Democrat, out political joyriding on this spooky election eve.

Things get a little blurred toward the end.