

THE PICAYUNE CATCHES UP WITH DAVID DUKE

by Jeanne W. Amend

When David Duke became a Republican candidate for the Louisiana legislature in December 1988, he disavowed the white supremacist and neo-Nazi agenda he had espoused all of his adult life. New Orleans's only daily newspaper, *The Times-Picayune* (circulation 270,000), obligingly covered him as if his past had evaporated. It did report, in January 1989, that in the local telephone directory the addresses listed for Duke's residence and business were the same as the addresses listed for The National Association for the Advancement of White People and the Ku Klux Klan — but Duke assured the *Picayune* reporter that "There's no issue to it," and the story wasn't pursued.

Once Duke made the runoff race, anti-Duke activists began assiduously providing information to *The Times-Picayune* and other media pointing to Duke's continued racist activities. The most alarming revelation to surface involved the racial redistricting plan he had published in the mid-1980s in the newsletter of his white-supremacist National Association for the Advancement of White People: the plan divided the U.S. into separate countries, each reserved for a different minority. The *Shreveport Journal*, a 20,000-circulation daily that has since ceased publication, gave the plan front-page prominence; in *The Times-Picayune*, the issue was examined by a columnist, in the newspaper's "B" section.

In early March 1989, after his legislative victory, Duke addressed a Populist party convention in Chicago, telling the audience of neo-Nazis, white supremacists, and skinheads that he had run for office under the GOP label "because that's where so many of our people are," adding, "I am a Republican, but I



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am and always will be a Populist Republican!" Unbeknownst to Duke, an opponent tape-recorded his remarks and later offered the story to the *Picayune*.

But the *Picayune* wasn't interested. (The story was subsequently offered to other news media, some of which did pick it up.) Nor did the newspaper publish the wire-service photograph of Duke shaking hands at the convention with American Nazi party vice-chairman Art Jones. Instead, the *Picayune*'s first and only acknowledgment of Duke's Populist party convention appearance came when Duke repudiated the picture as a "media smear." The paper duly noted where and when the photograph had been taken, and that Duke had run for president in 1988 on the Populist party ticket, but it failed to explain what the Populist party stands for or what Duke was doing at its convention.

On August 26, 1990, as Duke's U.S. Senate campaign entered its final weeks, *The Times-Picayune* published its first major profile of Duke. But many of the story's "revelations" had already been reported in other publications:

- *Finderskeepers*, the advice book for women Duke published under a female pseudonym in 1976 which included instructions on vaginal exercises, fellatio, and anal sex, had received front-page play in the *Shreveport Journal* on August 21, 1990.

- Duke's anti-Semitism and white-supremacist agenda had been explored in the New Orleans alternative weekly newspaper *Gambit* in June 1990.

- *Gambit* had also reported, in September 1989, that although Duke was in the ROTC at Louisiana State University, his affiliation with Nazism had precluded him from getting a military commission. Information about Duke's dysfunctional family background, attributed by the *Picayune* to an unauthorized biography of Duke published during the summer of 1990, had been first detailed in a *Gambit* article a year earlier.

The *Picayune* did unearth information about Duke's heavy gambling and stock market investing while claiming his income was too low to require filing state income tax returns. And it reported on his extensive plastic surgery and how into the late '80s he had held parties to celebrate Hitler's birthday.

During Duke's 1991 Louisiana gubernatorial primary campaign, *The Times-Picayune* reverted to its earlier minimalist coverage. Then, on October 19, came Duke's second-place finish in the primary elections. Suddenly, faced with the prospect of having a neo-Nazi as Louisiana's governor, *The Times-Picayune* devoted nearly a month of coverage aimed squarely and unapologetically at defeating Duke. A sampling of *Picayune* headlines tells the story:

WHAT THE REPUBLICANS CAN DO ABOUT DAVID DUKE (October 23);
TWO LEGISLATORS ON DUKE PROBLEM (October 24);
DUKE VICTORY WOULD COST LA., EXECS SAY AND IF HE LOSES GOVERNOR'S BID, WILL DUKE TARGET [U.S. Senator John] BREAU? (October 26);
JEWS FEAR RISE OF ANTI-SEMITISM, and BLACKS HAVE SEEN IT BEFORE (October 27);
SPARING DUKE THE TOUGH QUESTIONS (November 6)

In a series of five consecutive editorials beginning October 27, the paper methodically built its case against Duke, marshaling evidence that he was not qualified to govern. The *Picayune* has circulated reprints of this coverage, portraying itself as having contributed to his defeat and as having been at the forefront of investigative reporting about him.

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