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Four Candidates for DA Debate Issues at Meeting

Garrison, Three Challengers Speak

Four of the major candidates for the office of district attorney squared off in a verbal war Tuesday night as they debated

the issues at a meeting of the Young Democrats of New Orleans in a crowded Napoleon Room of the Fontainebleau Motor Hotel.

The three challengers questioned incumbent DA Jim Garrison's ability to run his office, while spending all his time and energy on the Kennedy assassination case.

But Garrison got in his licks by stating that while in office he saw that loan sharks were prosecuted, Bourbon St. night clubs were closed and houses of prostitution were run out of business.

Harry Connick, a former assistant U.S. attorney, said that he would like to "start a trend in the district attorney's office

to separate fact and fancy."

COSA NOSTRA ACTIVITIES

Connick said that in the past month alone, five publications have raised the question of possible Cosa Nostra activities in New Orleans.

He added that Garrison claims all the newspapers, magazines, networks and the federal government are after him. Yet, Connick said, the magazines, not Garrison, have actually "found scandal in New Orleans."

Connick added: "This man (Garrison) treats New Orleans as a vast audience to which he owes amusement. Clowns are for amusement but the time for clowns is past."

"I read somewhere that Garrison would just as soon be back in his own practice and in his own affairs. That is the best idea he has had in eight years."

The second speaker on the night's program was Ross Scaccia, a former member of Garrison's staff.

He said that he felt in February, when he declared his candidacy, that Garrison had "so much power he was beginning to abuse it."

CHECKS AND BALANCES

He said the basic doctrine of the American system of government is one of checks and balances.

"When this breaks down," he said, "a district attorney can do anything he wants."

Scaccia said he feels a "better way is needed to deal with narcotics offenders." He added that he favors the methadone system for treating drug addicts.

The next DA, Scaccia said, must be consistent and stressed that an abuse of power by the district attorney's office is detrimental to the people of the city.

Charles Ray Ward, former assistant to Garrison, said that the number one problem facing the district attorney's office is crime in the streets.

He said that the crime rate continues to increase both on a national and local level.

The crime rate for New Or-

leans in 1967 was up over that of 1966, Ward said, and the rate of crime for 1968 was up over that of 1967.

He said that an increase will probably be observed by the city again this year.

'NEW APPROACHES'

Ward said the city "needs a new DA, one that is willing to try new approaches" to the crime problem.

Ward termed the system of punishing criminals in Louisiana "medieval."

He said the state still takes people from the streets and sends them to Angola "where they learn how to chop cotton or cut cane."

He said he is in favor of sending a man to prison and rehabilitating him while he is there.

Ward added: "We don't believe in giving a man a second

chance. However, I don't believe in coddling criminals either. I favor something like a halfway house where a can could be supervised."

Ward said he is not in favor of suspending sentences since it is "a slap on the wrist" to the criminal and a way of sending him back to the same friends, surroundings and crime.

Concerning the Kennedy assassination case, Ward said New Orleans does not need a district attorney who would continue the investigation.

He said he "never understood why this investigation continued. If he (Garrison) has solved the case, then why investigate it further."

Garrison said that although all his opponents are well qualified to be district attorney, "the best thing I have to offer you is frankness and candor."

KENNEDY CASE

He said the U.S. government is involved in the Kennedy assassination case, and he has been saying so "for 20 months."

He said the reason he has not made any public statement concerning specifics in the case is "because I don't want to prejudice the case."

He said if re-elected, he will continue the probe.

Garrison stated that his opponents "disagree with him concerning his last year in office." Yet, he said, those problems are still unresolved.

Garrison said that during his administration, loan sharks were charged with theft, Bourbon st. was cleaned up and padlock laws were enacted for the first time in Louisiana history, and lottery agents were cleaned out.

He denied that he said organized crime did not exist in New Orleans. Garrison stated that what he said was that organized crime "was not" flourishing in New Orleans."

Garrison concluded his formal opening statement by saying his office in the past seven years has an 84.3 per cent criminal conviction rate.

A question and answer session followed the candidate's opening remarks.