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RAP BROWN, MARCELLO, LL&T

Former U.S. Attorney Recalls 'Headline' Cases He Prosecuted

By ALLAN KATZ

For eight years, Louis C. LaCour served as U.S. attorney for the eastern district of thousands of cases involving Louisiana.

During that period, LaCour and his staff prosecuted violations of federal law. Most of these got only a passing glance from the general public. A few made headlines across the nation and possibly could have far-reaching effects on what the 1970s will bring. Among these:

—The conviction of black militant H. Rap Brown for transporting an M-1 carbine from New Orleans to New York. Brown was sentenced to five years imprisonment and the conviction is still on appeal. The case set many of the precedents under which the current Chicago trial of seven radical leaders is being conducted.

—The two-year investigation of the Louisiana Loan and Thrift case which culminated in the indictments of Attorney General Jack P. F. Gremillion, State Rep. Salvador Anzelmo and three others.

—Four separate prosecutions of Jefferson Parish rackets figure Carlos Marcello concluding in a conviction in a Houston courtroom for assaulting an FBI man at New Orleans International Airport. Marcello is appealing a two-year sentence and \$5,000 fine.

—The first convictions under the Federal Sports Bribery Act in a case involving an attempted bribe of three Louisiana State University football players in 1966. Four men were convicted and are appealing sentences ranging from one year to four years. The appeal was recently turned down by the U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals.

In late 1969, LaCour informed President Nixon he was resigning his post to enter the private practice of law. On Jan. 9, LaCour was succeeded by another New Orleans attorney, Gerald J. Gallinghouse.

A 42-year-old New Orleansian who resides here with his wife and five children, LaCour reminisced in a recent interview about his eight years as U.S. attorney.

"In all that time, I never ceased to admire the way our entire democratic system revolves around our judicial system and how well the entire procedure works," he says.

"THINK about it—we take our toughest issues into a pub-



LOUIS C. LACOUR—"We take our toughest issues into a public courtroom and thrash them on the basis of law and our ability to reason."

—States-Item photo.

lic courtroom and thrash them out on the basis of law and our ability to reason.

"No decision ever satisfies everyone although the questions are often vital to the nation's future. Yet we accept them rather than take our disputes into the streets. The reason can only be that we deeply respect the system.

"The great truth that was everyday apparent to me is that if we ever lost our respect for our judicial system, then democracy would die because the only test of right remaining would be a test of sheer strength."

LaCour was named U.S. attorney in 1962 by the late President John F. Kennedy. He was then an Orleans Parish assistant district attorney and active in the Third Ward Regular Democratic Organization.

"When friends said they would nominate me to the Kennedy administration, I was surprised," LaCour says. "I never rose above the rank of doorbell-ringer in the Kennedy campaign in 1960."

OF ALL the cases that came across his desk in eight years, he recalls the Rap

Brown trial as "the most hectic and the LL&T case as "the most difficult."

Of the Brown case, LaCour says: "I honestly believe there was an intent by the defense to make a trial impossible. I think they sought to disrupt the trial to the point where it could not be conducted.

"I also believe there is a similarity between that case and the trial now being conducted in Chicago."

On the LL&T case, he says: "Cases where public officials are involved are always the most difficult. They sometimes involve men you've worked with in an official capacity and there is a great deal of strain."

HE ADDS, "A U.S. attorney has a great deal of leeway. He can do only what he must do or he can push vigorously. I suppose the key is that every man must live with his conscience afterwards."

There were many other cases, of course. Included was one involving 13 defendants charged with staging fake automobile accidents for insurance payoffs and a doctor accused of sending in fake

bills to an insurance company. There were many income tax evasion cases.

There were an airline hijacking, several sensational kidnaping cases, many bank robberies and narcotics violations.

On one occasion, eight Chinese seamen were accused of trying to smuggle in 80 pounds of opium on a freighter. None of the eight spoke English.

"If you can imagine finding an interpreter who spoke exactly the right Chinese dialect . . ." recalls LaCour.

And, all through the 1960s, civil rights cases were in the forefront.

It was from LaCour's office that Bourke Marshall, then head of the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department, tried to negotiate by long-distance telephone with former Mississippi Gov. Ross Barnett the peaceful enrollment of James Meredith at the University of Mississippi.

LACOUR'S office served as a headquarters for John Doar and other Justice Department attorneys who worked on civil rights cases throughout Louisiana and Mississippi.

"There was an interesting voting rights incident in 1963 that illustrates how far we've come," says LaCour. "The Justice Department was concerned because no Negro voters had been registered in an upstate parish but wanted to avoid filing a suit.

"I agreed to go up there and talk to the parish officials. We negotiated and dickered and they finally conceded they have to give way.

"THINKING we had reached an agreement, I returned to New Orleans. They allowed four Negroes to register and then cut them off so the suit had to be filed anyway although the 1964 Civil Rights Act finally made it unnecessary. We tend to forget the question of the people's right to vote was an issue just eight years ago."

Today, well into setting up his private practice with Gene S. Palmisano, a former assistant U.S. attorney under him, LaCour says he looks back on the opportunity to serve under three presidents and four U.S. attorney generals with something akin to awe.

"It was a magnificent opportunity," he says. "I don't regret a moment of it nor would I trade a moment of it for any treasure chest you could imagine."