

Andrew Ferguson

THE WIZARDRY OF DAVID DUKE

The making of a "conservative Republican."

Metairie, Louisiana

David Duke does not hesitate to talk about what he invariably calls "my controversial past"—his past as a Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, his neo-Nazi past, his race-baiting ambulance-chaser past. In fact, he usually raises the subject himself, and then the question quickly becomes whether he'll ever shut up. I had no sooner settled onto the couch of his spartan office here than the confession commenced unbeckoned. "Certainly I've made mistakes in my past," he said, "no question about it, I freely admit that. I mean I was too strident, too intolerant as a younger man on the racial issue, no question about it, there are things I regret . . ."

But David Duke is a politician these days, and he has learned the professional pol's trick of turning his mind into a tape deck, sliding in one pre-recorded cassette after another until his controversial past glides into his glorious present and the campaign that's scaring hell out of the big boys—the Republican National Committee, the Anti-Defamation League, the Republican party of Louisiana, and, pre-eminently, J. Bennett Johnston, the three-term Democratic senator whose statewide unpopularity has done much to lift Duke to a strong second place in the polls. On October 6, Louisianians cast ballots for their U.S. senator in a non-partisan primary; if, as seems likely, none of the seven candidates receives a majority, the two top finishers will meet in a run-off in November. It seems likely, too, that the candidates will then be Johnston and David Duke.

Many state Republicans are therefore proceeding according to their party's single deeply held principle: If you can't beat him, join him. A gaggle of Republican leaders in Louisiana—now putative supporters of the party-endorsed candidate, state senator Ben Bagert—have agreed to endorse

Duke the day after the primary. In doing so they hope to forestall the intervention of the national party, whose chairman, Lee Atwater, enlisted George Bush and Ronald Reagan to campaign against Duke when he narrowly won a seat in the Louisiana legislature last year.

But Duke's progress isn't limited to the party organization. He has solemnly renounced his youthful "indiscretions," and declares himself a "good conservative Republican"; polls show him moving beyond his base of blue-collar support into the ranks of the better educated and more affluent. The conservative movement also is beginning to be kind. Duke proudly offers reporters a newspaper column written by Pat Buchanan on the heels of the legislative victory last year. The photocopied clip is from the *New York Post*, but Duke didn't like the headline so he had an assistant typeset one more agreeable to him: "How David Duke Shows GOP the Way." That's not ex-

actly the upshot of Buchanan's column, but it's close enough for politics. "I knew from an early age that the struggle would be long and difficult," Duke once said, back in the days when he still wore a bedsheet. It's getting easier all the time.

Duke first sought elective office in 1975, when, as Grand Wizard of the Louisiana Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, he unsuccessfully challenged a conservative state senator from Baton Rouge. But he has been in politics, generously understood, all his adult life, as a member of the small brotherhood of kooks and consultants, activists and pamphleteers, who, having outfitted themselves with a post office box, a letterhead, and a mailing list, pursue no definable profession save that furnished by their peripheral engagement with public affairs and all the press coverage they can rouse. The showhorse of this breed is the Rev.

Jackson, whose phenomenal success Duke often cites, with the slightest touch of envy.

But you need an angle, and from the beginning Duke's angle, like Jackson's, has been race. Bookish and withdrawn as a youngster, Duke found companionship at last as a high school student, in the offices of the local White Citizens Council, where the concerned citizens loaded him up with books about "racial science" and the perils of intermingling.¹ Duke calls this the beginning of his "intellectual odyssey," but to an outsider it looks more like a puddle jump. "I came to believe that race was the most important thing to civilization in building a society and a nation," he said later. "I came to feel our race was being overcome by the non-white world."

At Louisiana State University he served the cause by handing out pamphlets by the martyred George Lincoln Rockwell. Duke allied himself with the LSU chapter of the neo-Nazi National Socialist Liberation Front before forming the White Student Alliance, the first of a long string of organizations of which he appointed himself commander-in-chief. Around the same time, he was photographed wearing a Nazi uniform during a one-man demonstration against William Kunstler, the radical lawyer (or, in Duke's phrase, "Communist Jew"). "It was a stupid teenage prank," he says now, "and I've paid for it all my life."

The odyssey continued when Duke dropped out of LSU in 1971 to visit his father in Laos, where the elder Duke was stationed as a full colonel. By the strange alchemy of campaign rhetoric



¹For an account of Duke's early life, see Michael Zatarain's new biography, *David Duke: Evolution of a Klansman* (Pelican, \$19.95). Zatarain calls his biography "unauthorized," but he had Duke's full cooperation in putting it together, and long passages of it fit better into the convivial "astold-to" genre favored by athletes, movie stars, and—of course—budding pols.

Andrew Ferguson is an editorial writer for Scripps Howard News Service.

and for the benefit of Louisiana voters, this brief interlude has been transformed into life-threatening "service of our country in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam conflict." Thence to India, where he saw what happens when the Aryan race goes squishy-soft and submits to "mongrelization"; and on to the "Nazi society" of Israel, where, he now claims, the Mossad tried to poison him with (what else?) a chicken salad sandwich.

The WSA evolved into the National party, which preceded his very own Klan faction, which predated the National Association for the Advancement of White People, which still operates from the basement of his home here. Duke became boss of each and then, easily bored, abandoned each in its turn, making sure to grab the mailing list as he headed out the door. The press, however, seldom had trouble finding him. Beginning in the early '70s, he engineered a series of media events of which the present senatorial campaign is the consummation. The murder of a white marine by black marines brought him to Camp Pendleton. The busing standoff brought him to Boston. With some thick-necked colleagues he established a "Mexican Border Watch" to chase down immigrants, leaving after a few days—presumably once the borders were water-tight. He "lectured" (as his campaign literature grandly puts it) at any college willing to pay \$1,200, plus expenses. The local press usually obliged his hunger for attention, with interview shows and a few seconds on the nightly news.

But the coverage more often than not was unkind. With his over-the-ears haircut, artificial-fabric suits, and soft-spoken manner, Duke thought he could modernize the Klan's message, adapt it to younger tastes, make it *hip*—the same doomed optimism, endemic to the '70s, that led the producers of *Godspell* to trick out the Twelve Apostles in baggy pants and fright wigs. Duke failed, he says, because the Klan's "negative media image" was insurmountable. He quit the Klan in 1980. (As late as last year, however, the Klan's phone number and his own were the same.) He devoted himself to his new "civil rights organization," publishing the *NAACP News*, enrolling in est, and, according to colleagues, indulging in some cosmetic surgery.

When racial tensions heated up in Forsyth County, Georgia, in 1987, the new Duke emerged more telegenic than the old Duke but with the same élan, hogging the cameras and sporting a "Keep Forsyth White" button on his lapel. His reception was so grand that he once again turned to electoral politics, running for President in 1988.

To manage his campaign he called on Ralph Forbes, an old pal and a former leader of the American Nazi party, and enlisted his financial backers from Willis Carto's Liberty Lobby, considered by the ADL to be the country's leading anti-Semitic organization. Even so, he ran as a moderate conservative, complaining, as he does today, about busing, welfare freeloaders, and affirmative action.

Like the other media events, Duke's various political campaigns (five in all) have served to keep his name before the public, thus allowing him to beef up the

As late as last year, the Klan's phone number and his were the same.

mailing lists and invent different institutional rubrics under which to raise funds. After being arrested for parading without a permit in Forsyth County, he established a "Forsyth County Defense Fund," raised nearly \$20,000 through the *NAACP News*, and promptly pled guilty, with a fine of \$55. What happened to the rest of the money no one knows. More recently, Tyler Bridges of the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* disclosed that Duke's various campaign organizations had paid more than \$120,000 to a company called BC&E—David Duke, prop.—for "mailing list maintenance" and rent on Duke's home in Metairie. Nice work, if you can get it.

The *NAACP News*, with a mailing list of 25,000, also afforded Duke the opportunity to operate his "bookstore," a curious mail-order enterprise aimed at scholars and idiot savants who specialized in "racial science," Nazi and Klan history, eugenics, and David Duke studies. Duke was careful to carry a disclaimer in his catalogue—"It should be understood that this listing does not mean that this publication endorses or agrees with every book listed"—but the blurbs exhibited his salesmanship at peak form:

THE GRAND DRAGON, Kurtz—Perhaps the most revealing book ever published exposing Jewish attitudes toward Aryans. The author reveals the intense hatred and duplicity of Jews. . . . This book is a must for all seekers of truth.

WHO RUNS THE MEDIA? Duke—Excellent booklet documenting the Zionist control of America's mass media, how the control was achieved and the ramifications of this alien domination.

THE HOAX OF THE 20TH CENTURY, Butz—The most important refutation of the "Holocaust" ever written. The intensely documented book that demolishes the "Holocaust" fraud.

JEWS MUST LIVE, Roth—A Jew reveals shady business practices of Jews.

PROTOCOLS OF THE ELDERS OF ZION—Zionists claim it is a forgery, but it is uncannily accurate since pub. in 1905.

On and on: *Our Nordic Race*, *The Best of Instauration*, the complete set (four volumes!) of Henry Ford's *The International Jew*, *Racial Hybridity* ("Survey of dysgenic results of race mixing"), Klan encomiums, the diaries of Goebels, *Racial Differences in Mental Growth and Achievement*. For the less bookish, Duke also peddled movies, records, and tapes—everything, it seems, but the sheet music for "Spring-

time for Hitler." There was *Triumph of the Will* (along with a soundtrack of its "speeches, marching songs, and inspiring orchestral music"), a complete set of George Lincoln Rockwell's recorded discourses, and videos of the conservative Republican himself, "considered by most to be the most articulate spokesman on race and race-related issues in the Western world today," who, moreover, "through the power of his presence and his eloquence, wins the audience over to a basic racial understanding."

Duke was selling each of these as late as July of last year—well into his first term as Louisiana legislator—when the book service was exposed in the newspapers. By that time his standing as a "conservative Republican" had become

more widely accepted, and there are so few conservative Republicans who sell *The Holy Book of Adolf Hitler* that he looked . . . well, conspicuous. "I stopped selling books," he told me, "because I knew that if there was even a controversial paragraph in a book I sold they would use it against me."

Duke has every reason to be protective of his present position. He attributes his current standing in the polls to his "willingness to say what no other politician will say," and some conservatives are increasingly eager to see in Duke's "issues" a platform the Republican party has abandoned at its peril: against affirmative-action quotas and set-asides; for low taxes; and for workfare in place of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). But his positions here are perfectly unexceptionable for almost any Republican. They are shared, in fact, by his mainstream Republican opponent, Ben Bagert, who wrote Louisiana's landmark "workfare" law last year. Yet Bagert, a forceful speaker with a long background in conservative causes, will almost certainly finish far behind Duke on October 9. Why does Duke prosper and Bagert languish?

Two reasons. The first is the salience Duke gives to welfare and affirmative action as campaign issues. In David Duke's America every social ill is subordinate to—and almost always symptomatic of—the problem of the "rising welfare underclass" and its amazing reproductive capacities. For Duke it matters not at all that less than one per-



FREE REPORT

The Wrong Driver Is About to Get a Ticket (really, it isn't the policeman's fault)

Radar displays a speed, but doesn't say which car it is clocking. Who gets the ticket? It's a guess—sometimes the wrong guess.

Our engineers have prepared a full report on traffic radar. We feel every driver should have a copy. It's just off the press, written in plain English. Some of its conclusions may startle you. If you want one, it's yours free.

Why You Should Have This Report

As a motorist, you should know how radar works...and why radar operators don't always guess right. If they're wrong just 1% of the time, that's 100,000 undeserved tickets each year.

Call or write for your free report today.

(At Cincinnati Microwave, we make Escort, Passport, and the remarkable new miniaturized Solo radar detectors.)

FOR YOUR FREE COPY OF THIS COMPLETE REPORT MAIL COUPON OR CALL TOLL FREE 1-800-543-1608



Cincinnati Microwave
Department 637800
One Microwave Plaza
Cincinnati, Ohio 45249

Send my free copy of your private Traffic Radar Report

Name _____
Address _____
City _____
State, Zip _____

cent of Louisiana's budget goes to AFDC, or that the average AFDC mother spends less than twenty-two months on the dole, or that her fertility rate is about the same as the general population's, or that, in the country at large, the underclass constitutes about 1.5 percent of the population. "The rising welfare underclass is the biggest issue facing Americans," he says. "Bar none." It may not make much sense, but in Louisiana, where unemployment is over ten percent and quite a few white folks still can't figure out how the government started siding with the black folks, it makes a nice sound.

Duke seems uncomfortable with issues that he can't trace to the underclass, and when questioned about them he often arrives, foundering, at positions more commonly associated with liberal Democrats. In foreign affairs he is fastidiously isolationist. Immigration he sees as a kind of mucky swamp overtaking, rather than rejuvenating, our economy. "We can bring our troops home from Europe," he told me, "and put them all along the Mexican border." He has proposed strict limits on the amount of foreign investment in the United States, and when I asked him about Louisiana's economic troubles—the state has been in recession for most of the decade—he blamed an uneven distribution of federal aid among the states (Louisiana ranks 47th in return on federal revenue) and emphasized the need for high tariffs "to keep American jobs here." Richard Gephardt couldn't have put it better.

Duke's other distinguishing characteristic as a candidate is, of course, that controversial past. Duke has a 98 percent name recognition in the state—higher than Bennett Johnston's—and the voters know him as the ex-Klansman who sits in the legislature. His opponents have blanketed the state with the infamous Nazi photograph; Duke even uses it himself in TV ads. It gives him a chance to grimace slightly and shake his head more in sorrow than in anger—"a stupid teenage prank"—and besides, this is Louisiana: there's always the chance that out there in the back



country some voter may see it on the television and holler, "That's my man!"

"At least my past shows that I've always had the courage of my convictions," he says. "I'm a man who hasn't been afraid to stand up and say what I believe." That's why, as a candidate, Duke brings up his past every chance he gets—and why his opponents' attempts to alarm the voters with it are supererogatory, if not counterproductive. For a relatively small portion of his constituency, his Klan affiliation is

Duke seems uncomfortable with issues that he can't trace to the underclass, and often arrives at positions more commonly associated with liberal Democrats.

a credential—a signal that he's a guy who means business. For the others, who are drawn to him more by his unexceptionable "conservatism" and their own disenchantment with Bennett Johnston, it reveals him to be vulnerable, humble, contrite; always attractive qualities in a politician, because so utterly implausible. In his stump speech he admits he's "made mistakes," and asks anyone in his audience "who's without sin to go ahead and cast that first stone at me." But beyond vague disclaimers of his earlier intolerance and stridency, he's unclear about what it is from his past that he's abandoned. He says nothing today, as a "conservative Republican," that he didn't say as the Grand Wizard when he first ran for public office in 1975. The rest, as they don't say in Louisiana, is silence.

Which makes Duke a kind of Rorschach blot for his public, liberals and conservatives alike, a blank screen onto which the left projects its perpetual alarm over impending fascism, and the right its frustration and anger at liberal lunacy. Both sides deserve a word of caution: chill out.

I attended a Duke rally one evening in a banquet room of the Holiday Inn in Kenner, a suburb outside New Orleans that sprung up almost overnight during the white flight of the '60s. All day, Duke staffers had prepared me for the excitement to come: "The charisma is just incredible," one lady said. I had also been warned that the folks at the rally would probably be unaccommodating if I asked about the controversial past, and indeed they were.

"Leave it alone," one supporter told me impatiently. "You all concentrate on just one thing he did when he was a kid," his wife chimed in. "Listen to what he's saying now." And what is that? I asked. "This whole welfare

thing, getting it under control," she said. "Keeping people from stealing our jobs. But all you think about is we're racists."

The crowd at the Holiday Inn, about three hundred strong, looked reasonably prosperous: the men wore sport shirts and gimme caps, the women wore slacks, with costume jewelry dangling from every ear and wrist. The banquet room was a long, low-slung affair papered in oil cloth and lit by brass-plated chandeliers. The crowd

rose and hollered and whistled when Duke walked in, and remained standing for the pledge of allegiance and a rousing version of Elvis's "American Trilogy," rendered to tape-recorded accompaniment by a local chanteuse with blinding blonde hair piled on her head in loops.

I am old enough to remember George Wallace in his prime, and have read a good deal about the other great Southern demagogues—Theodore Bilbo, Cotton Tom Heflin, the Longs—so I braced myself for a strong dose of the old-time religion when Duke took the microphone. Tall and thick-chested, with his famous blow-dried hair, he is bloodlessly handsome; his features could have been chiseled from ice. He most resembles the actor Richard Chamberlain, another showpiece of the cosmetic surgeon's art. But his voice is a high tenor and his manner is uneasy, and when he faces the audience he stands stiff-legged, his shoulders slumped, one arm frozen to his side, the other bent like a wooden doll's. His stump speech, refined over these fifteen years, includes all the necessary whoop-whoop, with cannon fire for the media and the liberals and the Washington politicians and rose petals for the purity and comfort and assurance of an earlier America; but he has the baby-boomer's debility of punctuating his sentences with "I mean" and "you know" and the stand-up comic's technique of ending them with "ladies and gentlemen." When he reaches a sure-fire applause line he dips his head and wraps his mouth around the microphone, overloading the p.a. and rendering himself incomprehensible. The brimstone of the message and the banality of the delivery made for a disorienting combination, like listening to Pat Sajak recite "Horatius at the Bridge."

Is this what demagoguery has come

to? It was a good ten minutes before he drew sustained applause from his partisan audience. I had earlier spent several hours with Duke, and his material was much the same in public as in private—the cassette tapes unwound without a break. There was no mention of racial science, no recounts of the six million, but long recitations on the debasement of America by affirmative action; the turncoat tenure of Bennett Johnston; the government's demotion of productive working people to second class citizenship; the profligacy of foreign aid; the drugs brought in by illegal immigrants—each degradation, each insult administered to hard-working Americans by a world gone wacky, each led back, as in a maze, to the rising welfare underclass.

Such great material! The crowd was his, begging for it . . . but like the high-school stud on his first date, he wasn't quite sure what to do. Consider, he said, one welfare mother he'd heard about. Pregnant again, she already had four teenage daughters, each of whom was also pregnant. "And you know what, ladies and gentlemen?" he said flatly. "They were all pregnant by the same man. They get a—you know—bigger check this way. So like Johnny—the father—he can have more money for his, you know, Friday night card game, ladies and gentlemen. I mean . . ." and his voice trailed off to tepid applause.

I tremble to think what Bilbo or Cotton Tom could have done with such a story. Instead, Duke galumphed along, and closed his forty minutes with a mincing "I love you all very much." This was the candidate in full throttle; you could sense it; and his rally had all the charge of a weekend real-estate sales seminar, dozens of which had probably been held in that very room. Duke has the poll numbers, but not the passion. The rhetorical heights achieved by those earlier demagogues are beyond him. Always a small-time operator, David Duke is even yet a man too small for the forces he would exploit.

Left-wing alarmists and right-wing populists disagree with this assessment, of course. It's likely that Duke will emerge from the October primary as Bennett Johnston's sole challenger in the general election, the standard-bearer of the Republican party of Louisiana. It's possible, even, that Mr. Duke will go to Washington. But does this buffoon's lunge for legitimacy mean, as he himself says, that "the long sleeping tiger of the American majority is awakening"? Or that, as the *Nation* magazine suggests, "It can happen here"?

They wish. □

Michael Ledeen

THE SECOND DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION

Cold War or no Cold War, the worldwide movement toward democracy will be reversed if the United States does not continue to lead it.

We have entered the Age of the Second Democratic Revolution. Just as the last quarter of the eighteenth century saw democracy sweep across Western Europe, laying waste to monarchies, duchies, and principalities, so today anti-democratic regimes are falling in Europe, Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Yet, just as the triumphs of the first democratic revolution were fragile, so the wonderful democratic achievements of the recent past require active support if they are to endure. Our record is disappointing; twice this century we have led a successful campaign against the enemies of democracy and bungled the peace. After the First World War, we unleashed Woodrow Wilson on Europe, calling for the moralization of international affairs and supporting the spiteful Versailles Peace Treaty, then abruptly withdrew when the Senate decided not to participate in the League of Nations. This pattern—a brief, moralistic spasm followed by an extended isolationism—became the model for this century, and after the Wilsonian spasm we remained in righteous solitude, unmoved even by the onslaught of Fascism, until the Japanese bombed us into the Second World War.

It might have been hoped that we had learned our lesson, and would remain vigorously engaged in (at a minimum) Europe and Asia. But no sooner was the Axis defeated than we speedily brought the boys home. When Stalin attempted to expand his empire into Western Europe and the Persian Gulf, we managed a spasm between 1945 and 1948 (the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan), and once again lapsed into isolationism, encouraging the Soviets and the Chinese to try once more—in Korea.

On the one hand, our behavior encouraged our enemies to believe that we would not respond to hostile actions,

Michael Ledeen is resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute.

making conflict more likely and, because we generally responded late, more violent. On the other, it left our allies unsure that we would defend them. As a Turkish general once put it, "The trouble with having the United States for an ally is that you never know when the Americans are going to turn around and stab themselves in the back."

Our failures derived in part from one of the paradoxes of American political culture: we desire the spread of democracy, but we are reluctant to meddle in the internal affairs of other countries. We rail against the enemies of democracy, but ignore them unless we feel directly threatened. And since we very rarely feel threatened, we are slow to engage, and overeager to return to "normalcy" as soon as the struggles seem to be over.

So it was with the Cold War. While the academic left would have us be-

lieve that the United States was driven by a near-pathological anti-Communism, we were typically quite slow to respond to the Communist threat, and showed little appetite for sponsoring the spread of democracy. Insofar as we had a grand strategy, it was based not on anti-Communism but on George Kennan's vision of the need to contain Soviet Russia until it mellowed or collapsed. Even the Marshall Plan was offered to the Soviet Union and its satellites.

From the very beginning, we were always looking for a convenient escape from the Cold War. When the East Germans and Hungarians rose against Soviet oppression, we made it clear that "containment" did not involve helping freedom fighters in the satellite countries. And we were always eager to read signs of moderation in the tea leaves from the Kremlin. Each new Soviet dictator was hailed as a closet liberal, beginning with Stalin himself and culminating in the phantasmagorical

portrayal of former KGB chief Yuri Andropov as a Scotch-drinking, jazz-loving aficionado of English-language pulp novels. The CIA seems invariably to have given the Kremlin the benefit of the doubt; the agency's estimates of Soviet military spending—as we now know from the Russians themselves—were shockingly low. From the late sixties on, a succession of administrations and most of the top journalists and producers fought valiantly against the very idea that the Soviet Union supported international terrorism, and until the late seventies we stopped developing new intercontinental ballistic missiles, permitting the Soviets to catch up.

American withdrawal was justified by the theory of "apes on a treadmill," which held that the nuclear arms race would continue as long as the United States held strategic superiority. The unstated premise of this fantasy was that the Soviet Union was somehow entitled to strategic parity, and it lasted until Jimmy Carter discovered that the Soviets were not satisfied with parity; they wanted superiority. In order to avoid a drastic inversion of the strategic balance, Carter's last budget began the surge in American defense spending that carried through Reagan's first term.

Both the American government and scores of American intellectuals went through amazing mental contortions to avoid admitting the truth about Soviet involvement in international terrorism. When PLO spokesmen bragged about the money, weapons, and training they received from the Soviet Union, they were dismissed on the grounds that the PLO was not really a terrorist organization. When a series of high-level Soviet-bloc defectors—from Czechoslovakia's General Jan Sejna to Romania's General Ion Mihai Pacepa—gave firsthand accounts of terrorist training camps run by Soviet military and intelligence officers, their testimony was rejected. And when Claire Sterling marshaled

