

The Emergence of David Duke and the Politics of Race. Edited by Douglas D. Rose. Tulane Studies in Political Science Series. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992. Pp. xxvi, 269. Illustrations, tables, figures, notes, references, index. \$29.95 cloth, \$12.95 paper.)

David Duke first ran for elective office in Louisiana at age twenty-five in 1975, sixteen years before he made it into Louisiana's 1991 gubernatorial run-off election against notorious former governor Edwin Edwards. Duke had begun his political activities at age seventeen, when he first joined the Ku Klux Klan, and three years later, in 1970, he had appeared in public and been photographed dressed in Nazi regalia. He nonetheless received over 33 percent of the vote in that 1975 run for a state senate seat near Baton Rouge, and four years later, running for a state house seat outside New Orleans, Duke received 26 percent of the vote in the initial primary. In 1988 Duke attempted to enter Democratic party *presidential* primaries, where he garnered some 22,000 votes before finally running in some states as the presidential nominee of the "Populist Party" and receiving about 150,000 votes nationwide.

Despite this potentially significant record, however, Duke continued to be almost universally dismissed as a minor, fringe figure until January 1989, when he came in first, with 33 percent of the vote, in a seven candidate primary for a state house seat in the New Orleans suburbs. Four weeks later, despite intense and often hostile press coverage, Duke won the run-off election by a narrow margin and became a member of the Louisiana legislature.

The contributors to this present volume make no pretense of being disinterested analysts. Indeed, all but one of them are Louisianans, and most have worked actively in anti-Duke political and educational efforts. While the quality of individual chapters varies somewhat more widely than is usually the case in edited volumes, this book provides a competent overview of Duke's electoral appeal and initial success in Louisiana, although the heavy emphasis, as editor Rose stresses, is upon "David Duke as a political phenomenon" and not "David Duke as a person" (p. xxii).

If this volume is hence often biographically unsatisfying, its concentration is upon the two ensuing elections that made Duke a subject of national discussion: his fall 1990 challenge to U. S. Senator J. Bennett Johnston and the 1991 gubernatorial race in which Duke faced Edwards in the run-off after coming in ahead of incumbent Governor Buddy Roemer in the initial primary. Against Johnston, Duke received 44 percent of the vote, including some 57 to 60 percent of the white vote (two different contributors to this volume provide *three* different figures for these returns [pp. 231, 242]), and in the 1991 gubernatorial primary Edwards led Duke by only 34 to 32 percent, while Roemer trailed with 27 percent.

But the gubernatorial run-off election resulted in a landslide Edwards victory, 61 to 39 percent, as Louisiana voters rejected Duke by a much larger margin than expected, given the heavily-bruised ethical reputation of the colorful Edwards. Duke *did* receive a 55 percent majority of white votes, but the outcome nonetheless marked his electoral obituary. Six weeks later Duke entered the 1992 Republican presidential race, but his candidacy attracted little support and only modest attention. On April 22 he quietly withdrew, and since that time he has been virtually invisible in the national press.

Interpretively, *The Emergence of David Duke* stands astride a major contradiction. Journalist Ferrell Guillory highlights Louisiana's "punchant for political idiosyncrasy" (p. 1), and political scientists Susan Howell and Sylvia Warren explicate how Duke voters are whites who have intense racial attitudes; in greater New Orleans, they write, "about one-third of white voters hold very intense racial feelings," in part because of "the pervasive racial political conflict in that city" (pp. 90-91). Yet editor Rose is at some pains to emphasize that "David Duke is not just a phenomenon that happens in that weird state of Louisiana. He is not just a passing fad" (p. xxii). While Duke's rapid downward course since this book went to press is powerful evidence to the contrary, a reader can't help feeling that the progressive Louisianans who have authored this book are understandably far too insistent that Duke is *not* peculiar to the Bayou State. Political scientist Ronald King acknowledges that Duke "is largely a homegrown creation" (p. 248), but nonetheless insists that "the David Duke phenomenon cannot be dismissed as something that could occur only within the boundaries of a most unusual and southern state" (p. 244). This insistent denial calls to mind the well-known marginal reminder often attributed to Louisiana's best remembered political orator, Huey Long: "Weak point, shout louder!"

Perhaps this volume's most trenchant commentary on David Duke's modest and idiosyncratic electoral success is offered by the one non-Louisiana contributor, political scientist William Moore. Duke, Moore says in a memorable phrase, "mainstreams extremism" (p. 55). Moore's explication of why that can succeed is the most important and clear-eyed lesson provided by this solid if unremarkable volume: "What makes mainstreaming possible is that the concerns of extremists are not so different from the concerns of ordinary citizens" (p. 56).

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