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# People of the Year

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# Duke Shows His True Colors

For the wizard turned pol, the subject's still race

**D**avid Duke came to the Louisiana state Legislature last February as a prototype of the video-friendly racist for the '90s. He offered game-show-host good looks, a litany of veiled buzzwords to attract angry whites and assurances that his ties to the Ku Klux Klan and neo-Nazism were mere vestiges of a hot-headed youth. But soon after winning election in his nearly all white, suburban New Orleans district, the 39-year-old Republican showed his true colors. In June he was caught selling Nazi books from his legislative office. One of them, "Did Six Million Really Die?" attempts to debunk the Holocaust. Last month he told a Tulane University student in an interview that blacks have "certain behavioral tendencies" toward crime and proposed low-income loans to stimulate birthrates among high-IQ youth. Now Duke is seeking a higher perch: the U.S. Senate seat held by Democrat J. Bennett Johnston.

Duke is a long shot at best to unseat Johnston, who will seek a fourth term in 1990. With blacks comprising 26 percent of the statewide registered vote, the onetime imperial wizard of the Klan would have to capture five of every seven white ballots to win the state's open primary (in which candidates from all parties compete) next October. Recent polls show that while his name is widely recognized, his overall approval rating remains just over 30 percent. Those attracted to Duke respond to a message shrouded in terms often used by mainstream Republicans to attack liberals: "crime," "affirmative action," "welfare." In Duke's lexicon, they are code for something far more virulent. "I do believe in racial science..." he told undergraduate Abby Kaplan in an interview excerpted in area newspapers earlier this month. "Our civilizations reflect the genetic quality of the people, you know, tribes of people."

He runs his organization, the National Association for the Advancement of White People, from a rambling white frame suburban house 30 minutes from the French Quarter. Adept at filibustering questions about his past, the divorced father of two offers up his racist perspective with sunny



Using veiled buzzwords to attract angry whites: David Duke

self-confidence. "Obviously, blacks have a natural affinity to sporting activities that require quick bursts of speed," he said in an interview with *NEWSWEEK*, though he denied any belief in white supremacy. Yet minutes later he explained his opposition to immigration: "I'd like to see this country remain the way it is... with the kind of population mix we now have... I'd rather not see this country become a Third World country..."

During Duke's state legislative campaign, Republican National Committee Chairman Lee Atwater condemned him as a "charlatan." But state party leaders have been reluctant to alienate the white conservatives he brings to the table. In 1988, when he ran as a Democrat (Duke switched to the GOP before running for the state legislature), he drew more than 23,000 votes in Louisiana's Super Tuesday primary. To retain that support, leaders of the state GOP have opted to ignore Duke's ties to the racist right. In Duke's presidential campaign, one of his key supporters was Willis Carto, whose Liberty Lobby is described by the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith as one of the most anti-Semitic organizations in America. In the 1988-89 *New Orleans White Pages*, Duke shared his address and phone listing with the Ku Klux Klan. Soon

after winning his legislative seat Duke traveled to Chicago to address the Populist Party, an ultra-right-wing group that includes ex-Klansmen and neo-Nazis.

The GOP is not the only local institution that has given Duke a niche. He recently hosted a hospitality suite at a \$150-a-couple American Cancer Society ball. At the Covington Rotary Club earlier this month, he blasted welfare mothers with babies out of wedlock and proposed increasing benefits to those who avoid pregnancy.

In the legislature, Duke has been an ineffective backbencher. His agenda, which includes mandatory drug testing for welfare recipients in public housing and elimination of state affirmative-action programs, has gone nowhere. But he is far from isolated. Outside of camera range some colleagues remain on friendly terms, intimidated by his appeal. One lawmaker recalled the huge bags of mail, stuffed with contributions from sympathizers in all 50 states, wheeled to his desk on the House floor after the election. "Some letters would just say 'Duke Louisiana,' and they would get to him," he said.

Duke's detractors portray his ascension in Louisiana

politics as a sorry jumbo of political expediency and racism. "People don't have the guts to get in and do what's right, to step in and tell this man he has no place in their party," says Democratic state Rep. Kip Holden. Under pressure from GOP chairman Billy Nungesser, the Republican state central committee recently quashed a motion to censure him. While it carries no legal weight, anti-Duke Republicans say censure would be an important symbolic repudiation. They intend to try again at the state party's convention next month. Nungesser acknowledges that Duke "hurts our state and our party," but argues that attacks enhance his profile.

Duke's quest for the Senate is off to a slow start. At party caucuses early this month he won just 27 of 544 delegates. Still, pollsters say he might draw enough conservative, blue-collar Democrats to hold Johnston under 50 percent of the vote in the state primary next year, forcing a runoff. Duke expects to raise \$3 million from supporters nationwide. Win or lose, he counts on the campaign to boost his stature. "We're poised for better things," he says. For Louisianans, that means trouble for years to come.

BILL TURQUE with  
CLARA BINGHAM in New Orleans