On October 19, 1991, while Anne was still mourning her father's death, David Duke shocked the state and nation by placing second in Louisiana's open primary election for governor. He had bumped the incumbent governor Buddy Roemer from the November 16 runoff. Now the only person standing between him and the governor's mansion was the sole candidate Duke had a realistic chance of defeating—the colorful and controversial three-time former governor, Edwin Edwards. "The election from hell," groaned local pundits. Louisiana had gotten itself into unpleasant situations in the past but this one took the cake. The issue of who was going to run Louisiana's public business for the next four years had come down to a choice between a rogue and a Nazi, and for several suspenseful weeks the outcome was far from certain. The nation looked on in stunned amazement. Because of the state's odd off-year election cycle, the political news from Louisiana commanded the front pages of papers across the country, filling America's television screens each evening. This was the last major state election before the 1992 presidential primary season kicked off, and out-of-state observers were puzzled and more than a little worried. Was this insurgency contagious?

No one was more astonished and terrified at the results of the October primary than Anne Levy. For more than four decades she had been assimilating the values of pluralism and democracy. In her mind they embodied the very essence of American nationalism, so vastly different from the völkisch variety that had brought her family in Poland to ruin. In America citizenship was universal, open to all, not restricted to Jews or gentiles, to this race or that religion; it was not even the exclusive property of the native born. Here, one simply had to subscribe to a common creed. But now those values were under assault by a political candidate whom Anne knew deep down, because of his
evasions on the Holocaust, harbored a secret desire to refurbish Nazism itself. She hardly needed a history class to realize where the impulse for cultural and biological purity can lead when carried to logical conclusions. The lesson was scarred deeply in memory.

So, she was terrified, confused, bewildered, still grieving her father's death. How could this be, this atrocity to his memory so soon after his passing? But greater than fear and bewilderment was his anger. She was angry enough to do something about it.

Anne was hardly alone in her astonishment. Most of the state's political class were numbed by the outcome. Although pre-election polls indicated Duke was gaining ground, much of his support remained hidden, and most pundit predicted an Edwards-Roemer runoff. That was the mood at Ruth's Chris Steak House, in midcity New Orleans. The mother restaurant of the national chain, Ruth's Chris has long been a popular watering hole for the city's political service industry as well as the people they service. They crowd in on Friday afternoons, especially preceding election eve (Louisiana elections usually occur on Saturday). Sometimes things get rowdy, but generally good cheer and smooth whiskey prevail. The day before the October 19, 1991, open primary the mood was jocular as usual, if a little tense. For the past decade, a dozen of the city's leading political reporters, consultants, and pollsters had been reserving a table in the restaurant's main dining area to swap last-minute gossip and organize a betting pool, a luncheon ritual they called FEEDBAG. "That's the 'Friday Evening Ensemble to Develop Feedback and Gossip,'" explains pollster Joe Walker. The betting pool resembles a political trifecta, everyone wagering five dollars for a chance to pick the top three finishers and the winner claiming the entire kitty. The FEEDBAG regulars have been following state politics so long that most election trifectas end in a twelve-person tie, in which case the pool goes to whoever comes closest to guessing the final percentages.

At the Friday luncheon preceding the October primary, only two old-timers picked Duke to make the runoff. Roemer, who had switched to the Republican Party only months earlier in a reckless positioning for a run at the White House (the first sitting governor ever to change parties), was the election's biggest surprise and his supporters' worst disappointment. The Republican Party had invested substantial resources in Roemer's campaign, to defeat Duke and take control of another Deep South state on the eve of a presidential election. But the governor fell short of expectations. "I mean, here's a guy who had the money, the press, the power of the incumbency, and he still did not get as many votes as he had when he ran four years before," says long-time political consultant James Carvin.

"Furthermore, he didn't bother to have any significant field organization for getting out postcards and bumper stickers that would allow supporters to extend their partisanship to friends and neighbors." Lured into false confidence by the massive shift toward the GOP in the rest of the South, Roemer thought he could waltz to reelection by means of airwave appeals alone. But Duke's low-tech campaign walked off with the governor's rural base in the northern parishes. Meanwhile, dithering like Hamlet, Roemer alienated his business supporters by failing to keep his promises and by not returning phone calls. Some of governor's critical upscale vote in the metropolitan areas seems to have "gone fishing" on election day.

Roemer supporters now found themselves in a quandary. For years Edwin Edwards, the silver-haired, Cajun Pentecostal, had in their eyes symbolized everything that was wrong with Longite politics: too much government, too much graft, too much cronyism. Plus Edwards was a rascal. The target of more than a dozen grand jury hearings during his long political career, the former governor had barely avoided conviction on federal racketeering charges in the mid-1980s. His only saving grace was an impish sense of humor, especially where his sex life was concerned. Set to marry a twenty-six-year-old nearly four decades his junior, Edwards cranked to a group of campaign supporters, "A man is as old as he feels." He joked that he and Duke had a lot in common: "We're both wizards under the sheets." Due to the collapse of oil prices, however, the state treasury had been depleted, and Edwards's raffish style was fast losing its entertainment value. Roemer's core constituency was up in arms about the former governor's plan to solve the state's fiscal problems by legalizing casino gambling. Edwards was a heavy bettor in Las Vegas, on at least one occasion paying off his $2 million gambling debt with suitcases stuffed with cash. The state's reformers shuddered at visions of Edwin Edwards fueling his campaigns with contributions from an industry famously connected to organized crime.

The first instinct of most Roemer supporters was to sit this one out. But there were a surprising number of Republican lawmakers who signaled willingness to vote for Duke as the lesser evil, rationalizing that he would last only a single term, while the wily Cajun would be around for two. "Nine out of ten of the people who voted for Roemer are going to vote for Duke," predicted one Republican legislator. That might have been true of the state's Republican delegation in Baton Rouge, but early polling indicated most Roemer supporters, overwhelmingly upscale and Republican in registration, were paralyzed by indecision and reeling from shock. "I guess you could say I'm caught between a rock and a hard place," confessed a New Orleans restaurant owner during the runoff campaign's first week. Ten days after the primary election, a Mason-Dixon Opinion Research poll had Edwards leading Duke by only a
higher negative numbers. Indeed, from the tipoff of the primary to the runoff’s final week, the Duke phenomenon seemed like a runaway train. Duke’s blue-and-white signs hung high on the pines fringing country roads. Supporters whooped it up in bars and festivals across the state, hoisting beer cans aloft as they waved their Duke-emblazoned baseball hats. Duke made a triumphant return to Free Speech Alley on the Louisiana State University campus. A generation earlier he had been comic relief for students heading to lunch in the university cafeteria. Now hundreds jammed the oak-shaded driveway, erupting into choruses of “Duke, Duke, Duke” when their idol lashed out at affirmative action. At Northeastern State University in Monroe, a packed auditorium, primed beforehand by slideshow images of bayou rusticity and strains of Randy Newman’s “Louisiana,” gave way to religious rapture. “I touched him,” squealed a young woman as Duke squeezed through the crowd. Down in the southwest corner of the state, at the annual Rice Festival parade in Crowley, Edwards’s hometown, Duke received a hero’s welcome. At an American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) convention in Baton Rouge, where he stumbled into a verbal brawl with the former governor over welfare, Duke won over the compassion-weary senior citizens, who showered Edwards with boos and catcalls. It was widely conceded that Duke had bested his opponent in the runoff campaign’s first statewide television debate, held in Baton Rouge; Edwards emerged confused and off his stride. Meanwhile, Duke was airing thirty-minute television commercials staged in a book-lined study seeded with potted plants. Relaxing in a wingback chair beside his two adolescent daughters, he reassured Roemer voters that he shared the governor’s belief in leaner government and cleaner air.

From the outset it was obvious that galvanizing Roemer’s benumbed supporters held the key to halting the Duke juggernaut. But it was a surprisingly daunting task in the beginning. Only a month separated the primary and the election. “Good-government” voters would have to be convinced not only to vote but also to vote for their bête noire, Edwin Edwards. The New Orleans business community needed little convincing. Straightaway following the primary many of the state’s major players marched down to Edwards’s Monteleone Hotel headquarters in the Vieux Carré to hand over five-thousand-dollar checks, the legal limit. Within a week of the primary the Edwards campaign had its get-out-the-vote resources fully in place. “The money began coming early, but I don’t think the vote was there until the last two weeks,” said lawyer Donald Mintz, a civic activist and two-time mayoralty candidate, of the Roemer undecideds.

Most everyone agreed that the message would have to be single-mindedly economic: the incalculable damage a Duke victory would inflict on the Louisiana economy. The Chamber of Commerce circulated a position paper by a local university economist proving that very point. The Business Council of New Orleans, made up of the city’s top executives, declared its wholehearted agreement with the argument. Jim Bob Moffett, chief executive officer of Freeport McMoran, then New Orleans’s only Fortune 500 corporation, used the pulpit of his business-oriented political action committee to sound the alarm. “If Duke is elected, . . . Louisiana wouldn’t just be redlined by business around the world; we’d be X-rated,” he told an October 21 press conference. A hastily formed business and professional group called the Louisiana Council for Economic Development (LCED) broadcast the same message and began raising money for an independent statewide get-out-the-vote campaign. Former Republican governor David Treen established “Louisianans for Truth,” to persuade the state’s registered Republicans of the economic importance of voting for Edwards. Although stopping short of endorsing Edwards outright, Roemer did say he would vote for him reluctantly, because Duke would be “death to the state.”

The LCED hired Jim Carvin and his associate Ron Faucheux to create an umbrella organization to coordinate the mushrooming stop-Duke movement. But coordination was easier said than done, for this campaign was no ordinary one. It defied top-down management. To the veteran handler Carvin, the task was like riding a saddleless bronco. “Did I have a plan? Yeah, but it disintegrated in the first week,” he says. “Endless meetings. One law office to the next, or one corporate office to the next, and everybody maneuvering to get the credit, to be the five-star general, and there was room for only one five-star general. A lot of the conversations were basically the same: ‘We want to do this but we don’t want to do that. And we want to do this.’ In the end, it came down to every group doing their own thing.”

Or every individual doing his and her own thing. There was a time when it seemed as though every third Roemer supporter had set himself or herself up as a one-person PAC. Employers wrote employees making known their opposition to Duke. Doctors and dentists sent foreboding messages to their patients. From the old-line Jones, Walker law firm in downtown New Orleans issued a letter cosigned by Uptown establishmentarians to thirty-six hundred “good-government types. “We were trying to legitimize the candidacy of somebody like Edwards,” explains George Denegre, one of the signatories and a senior partner in the firm. “In my brief political career I’ve never seen anything like it,” says the attorney Donald Mintz of the do-your-own-thing activism. “It was absolutely unprecedented.”
With the city's domed stadium as backdrop, the tall and bespectacled Dixon had been the driving force behind the construction of the Superdome and the television private commercials. Owner of a large antique store in the French Quarter and a manufacturer of prefinished plywood before that, David Dixon campaigned to bring a National Football League franchise to the city. Three days following the primary, he began running testimonials on statewide television. Pointedly warned viewers that "David Duke says his election won't hurt the convention industry. He's right. He won't hurt it. He'll eliminate it." Dixon says he seized the initiative because he feared the stop-Duke forces would take too long to get moving. "I felt it was time to put everything in perspective in a hurry." The ads cost him nearly fifty thousand dollars.

But the curious thing about the save-our-economy theme was less the content of the message than the moral fervor with which the message was communicated. You cannot talk to the major principals without gaining the impression that economic self-interest was merely a smoke screen for masking moral concern. "Frankly, I was outraged by the immorality of Duke's candidacy," says Dixon, "but I felt it probably wouldn't do a whole lot of good to express my outrage."

Denegre has said pretty much the same thing. Descending, on one side, from French exiles from the great Saint Domingue slave revolution of the 1790s and, on the other, from the Charles Colcock Joneses of Children of Pride fame, the Denegre family has been a fixture of the local aristocracy since the early antebellum period. "Huey Long always said the state was run by New York banks and New Orleans lawyers, and I think that's still pretty true," says Denegre. "The lawyers in our kind of firm represent the vested interests." Surveying the port from a corner office high above the river, Denegre, a past president of the New Orleans Chamber, grows wistful about his native city. "This is a truly noble city," he says, paraphrasing Gabriel Garcia Márquez's A Hundred Years of Solitude. "We've been trying to kill it for three hundred years, and we haven't succeeded yet." During the runoff, however, Denegre's paramount concern was not solely the economic peril stalking his hometown but also the menace of racial division. "I had never seen an election where you could say, 'This is a moral question. You have to do this. You don't have a choice.' Fortunately, it was also an economic issue."

In short, if the message was economic, the impulse was moral. And frequently the moral passion spoke more loudly than the message itself.

Passion even permeated the press release of Jim Bob Moffett. "People who support reform and good government can't sit this one out. This is beyond politics-as-usual. Dante wrote that the hottest places in hell are reserved for those who, in times of crisis, remain neutral. We can't be neutral. We have to take a stand, and voting for Edwards is our only choice." This is hardly the language of lost jobs and vanishing conventions. It is the idiom of moral principle and civic duty.

A sense of moral urgency seemed to sweep across the top echelons of Louisiana society. Ansel M. Stroud, the commanding general of the fourteen-thousand-member state National Guard, took everyone by surprise when he appeared in television ads wearing his major general's uniform and saying, with hangdog seriousness, that he did not believe a former Nazi and Klansman should serve as governor of the state. Little in this Republican appointee's past foreshadowed his assuming a public stance. Born and raised in Dixie, Louisiana, just north of Shreveport, up to now Stroud had studiously steered clear of partisan politics. His racial views had evolved in tandem with the South's, and it affected his moral outlook. "In 1948, by today's standards, I was an extreme racist. I didn't think I was. Today, by 1948 standards, I'm an ultraliberal. But things have changed, and I've changed with them."

Although headquartered in Jackson Barracks, just downriver from New Orleans, his duties kept him constantly on the road traveling around the state, inspecting local units, delivering luncheon speeches. As the Duke movement ignited grassroots enthusiasm in the hinterland, Stroud grew alarmed. Racial polarization was spreading. What if Duke was elected? He pulled from his personal library books on Huey Long and Adolf Hitler. He even reread the Kingfish's My First Hundred Days in the White House. The ghost of Huey haunts Jackson Barracks where Stroud makes his home. "We have twelve Thompson submachine guns that Huey bought back in our museum." "Hell, [a fascist takeover] could happen here," he said to himself while reading T. Harry Williams's magisterial biography.

Stroud probably would have kept his concerns to himself had one of his senior staff officers not approached him about climbing on the Duke bandwagon. It was the Sunday morning following the primary election. Stroud was in his Jackson Barracks office taking care of last-minute business before departing that afternoon for an air commander's conference in Washington. The officer entered Stroud's office.

"I have supported Duke," he told his commander, "and if you want to stay as the adjutant general I could get it worked out."

Stroud laughed. "You've got to be kidding!"

"No. He's going to be the next governor, and you can be the AG."

"You're really serious?" Stroud asked, incredulously.

"Yeah, and I'm supposed to ask you this question."

The general leveled his gaze. "Well, you tell whoever told you to ask me that, that I wouldn't work for David Duke one fucking minute."

"That kind of ended the conversation," Stroud admits. But his anger was
undiminished. The general shoved his trip preparations off to one side of his desk and immediately drafted a personal letter to every member of the Louisiana Guard, paying for the postage, copying, and stationery costs out of his own pocket. "I didn't tell anybody who to vote for. I just said that in my opinion it would be unwise to have a Klansman and a neo-Nazi as the commander-in-chief of the Louisiana National Guard." When asked a short while later to repeat the same message in a television commercial, he did not hesitate one second. "I did the shoot two ways. One in uniform, one not. I wasn't very effective not in uniform." He decided to go with the uniform version after the Pentagon gave him legal clearance. (The loophole is that he had just reached the legal retirement age from the military.)

His office was soon deluged with letters and abusive phone calls; a few were threatening, and most came from Duke phone banks. "Basically they were all saying the same thing." Two members of his staff were tied up for days just logging all the calls. The Duke camp even contacted the Pentagon and the Justice Department to have Stroud fired or indicted. "This was my first active involvement in an election, and probably my last," Stroud says. "But I'd do it again. There are certain issues [about which] there's no room for compromise. . . . David Duke stands for everything that I fought against in World War II. This was a moral issue."

If Louisiana's "race from hell" was a postmodernist carnival of multiple meanings and concealed motives, its most famous bumper sticker embodied many of the paradoxes: "Vote for the Crook: It's Important." David Brinkley held up the blue-and-white sticker at the conclusion of his Sunday Morning with David Brinkley show. A reporter from the Philadelphia Inquirer wrote an article entitled "In La., a Crook Is Lookin' Good," exclaiming, "And you thought Pennsylvania was the state of champions." To many outsiders the slogan exemplified all that was wrong with Louisiana politics. But the bumper sticker was conceived out of moral urgency and probably played a critical role in helping Roemer voters over the moral hump of voting for Edwin Edwards.

The brainstorm of a young stockbroker by the name of Kirby Newburger, the idea for the bumper sticker came to him suddenly on the Sunday morning following the primary. For more than a week before the primary election, he had the troubling premonition that the state was headed for a runoff between Duke and Edwards, both of whom enjoyed avid support. "I detected very little enthusiasm for Buddy Roemer, although I voted for him," Newburger says. He began asking his friends what they planned to do in the event Roemer was knocked out of the general election by Duke and Edwards. Many replied there was no way they would ever vote for Edwards.

"Then you're not going to vote for Duke?"
"No, I'm not going to vote for Duke, either."

"For some reason they didn't understand that not voting would effect the outcome of the election. But to me it was just so black and white. It was a moral issue. I told my wife that we would have moved immediately had Duke been elected. In fact, I had given her a map of where my company has offices and asked her to pick where she would like to live." Newburger was so upset about the campaign, he left a blistering message on his sister's answering machine for leaving town to visit her husband the day before the election. "I was so mad that she had chosen not to vote in such an important election. If everybody who had supported Roemer had chosen not to vote, David Duke would have been elected governor of the state of Louisiana."

"Also, I was convinced that David Duke had not changed. I knew him personally. We had attended a seminar together. He never opened his mouth; he just sat there on the edge of his seat, very interested. So when friends kept telling me that there was no way they would ever vote for Edwards, I thought let's be cute about it. We have a bad guy on one side, and we have a guy who is nearly as bad on the other. He's a crook. So, vote for the crook. That's what we're going to go with. I thought it just might work."

"That morning I called my printer at home and said, 'Dart, would you print me up 250 bumper stickers that read 'Vote for the Crook: It's Important'? And he said yes. He didn't need to talk about color, size, or any of that stuff. He understood immediately what I wanted and what I was trying to do."

"It really struck a chord with people. They would stop me on the street and say, Where can I get one of those bumper stickers? and I'd say, hold on, I'll get one for you out of my trunk. People called me from Lafayette wanting bumper stickers. I ran through them pretty quickly."

Soon people were calling the printer directly to have extra copies made up. "We must have printed five thousand of them altogether," notes Dart Fee, who did the initial run for Newburger. Rhoda Faust, owner and cofounder of the local Maple Leaf bookstore chain, personally ordered several batches. She explains her motives thus: "The utter cynicism and yet the utter truth of what the bumper sticker said is what caused it to catch on. It was Louisiana outrageous, another example of the fix we've gotten ourselves into without the possibility of graceful exit. I also think it was just fun for people to be able to say out loud that they were going to have to vote for a crook, and maybe it also helped some of the Roemer voters to come out of denial. We still get asked for the bumper stickers now and then."

Even Edwin Edwards got into the act. "He called me personally asking for twelve bumper stickers and sent over an aide to pick them up," Newburger says. "I asked the aide what the governor intended to do with them. He said put them on his car. And Edwards did. Now, I guess it is sickening to have a
governor drive around with a bumper sticker that says "Vote for the Crook." But it's also funny."

So, the bumper sticker had a double meaning all along. "Vote for the Crook" got the laughs. But "It's Important" was the subliminal spur to action. As for the humor, which has always been the saving grace of Louisiana politics, it was mere sugarcoating for the bitter pill of civic duty. And Roemer supporters seemed to swallow it gladly.

"Vote for the Crook" was one of the campaign's few light moments; otherwise, the public mood was serious. It was hard to stand in a supermarket checkout line without being soaked in suspicion: Was he a hidden Duke voter? Did she sympathize with Nazis? Who do I talk to every day that I really don't know? The grim feeling robbed the campaign of all enjoyment. "Louisiana elections to me are fun, and most people who service the political industry have fun at it," says the pollster Joe Walker. "It's part of the reason we do it. But there was no fun in it. It was too damn serious. Everybody was uptight and tense and calling you to meetings to do this and do that, and everybody you ran into was depressed."25

The grave earnestness gripped all strata of the incipient anti-Duke movement. At the grassroots level the moral intensity was even more implacable and difficult to control. In his long career as a political consultant, Jim Carvin had never seen its like: "I've lived through various intense campaigns. But with this one, there was no comparison." Joe Walker agrees: "This was the first time that everyone was involved."26

While rank-and-file Roemer supporters took two weeks to stir, African American voters catapulted into action immediately after the primary election. The mass mobilization reflected a dramatic change in attitude in the black community. "Believe it or not, people were not excited about the primary," says Cleo Fields, who was a state senator at the time. "I've lived through various intense campaigns. But with this one, there was no comparison." Joe Walker agrees: "This was the first time that everyone was involved."26

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The mood was festive considering the circumstances. Southern University's famous marching band showed up to serenade the would-be registrants. Vans and cars jammed with students shuffled back and forth nonstop from the nearby black campus. Automobiles pulled up with trunkloads of soft drinks for distribution to the crowd. Someone even set up a barbecue grill in the parking lot to roast hotdogs. Late in the afternoon a tornado-spawning thunderstorm swept in from the west. As Edwards's north Louisiana coordinator, Fields was on hand to oversee the voter registration drive. He blared from the megaphone that people needed to move inside the underground parking garage and re-form the line there. But the line's tail end was still pelted by the driving rain. A middle-aged black man near the front immediately marched to the rear. "I don't want anybody here to have an excuse to go home and not bother to register to vote," he said. It was five o'clock in the afternoon, and moving to the back of the line meant the man would have to wait another six to seven hours to register.

And then the crowd was taken aback by a ninety-two-year-old, first-time registrant who stood for hours outside the registrar's office and refused to sit down for fear of losing his place in line. He said he intended to cast an absentee ballot as well. There were no pressing travel plans in his future. He merely wanted to ensure his vote was cast in case he died before the election.

"Among these older people the motives were simple," Fields explains. "They saw a vision of the past flash before their eyes, and they saw pain and hurt, and they said 'when that first happened I didn't have the right to vote. But now I do.'" But the motive impelling younger voters was not fear but civic patriotism. They were insulted by the thought the contest might be close. "Let's send a message to the rest of the country that we're not asleep. Let's take it upon

into nearly every significant black community across the state, concentrated immediately on ratcheting up voter registration and voter turnout. But following the primary they faced an unaccustomed challenge. It was not how to drum up interest but how to channel the excitement suddenly engulfs the African American electorate.

In Louisiana voter registration books are customarily reopened for two working days following a primary election, usually to a desultory business. This time things were different. By 8:00 A.M. on Monday morning, registrars across the state were fighting off huge crowds. Black church congregations arrived by the busload. In New Orleans the lines ran for blocks. "It looks like judgement day out here," said an off-duty security guard waiting in a lengthening registration queue in the city's Carrollton section.28 In Baton Rouge, outside the government building where the registrar's office was housed, the column fell away to infinity.

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ourselves to be the champions or saviors of this state. That was their attitude," Fields says. "In my opinion the fear factor played less of a role than these other factors."39

The two-day registration set an all-time record. "We have never seen anything like this before," said state elections commissioner Jerry Fowler. Over sixty-eight thousand new voters were added to the rolls, and half of them were black.30

The excitement pervading the black community intensified rather than lessened after the closing of the registration books. During the primary Fields had needed to scramble to build an audience for Edwards's rallies. But once the runoff campaign shifted into gear, the state senator was overwhelmed by voters who wanted to get involved. His office in Baton Rouge was flooded with phone calls when word leaked out that he or another Edwards staffer was scheduled to appear in some remote town. "I heard that Senator Fields is going to be in town tonight," a caller would say. "I want to talk to him personally about what I can do to help the governor's campaign." No one was ready to take no for an answer. Fields spent significant time mediating organizational rivalries. "Whenever you deal with local politics every group feels that they should be in charge of that particular parish," he says. "But in this campaign everybody wanted to play a major role, everybody was excited, and everybody wanted to wear the chief's hat. That caused some problems."31 It was a headache with which Carvin and his associates were familiar. They too were having trouble controlling this growing moral movement.

If the Roemer electorate was slow to become involved, it moved quickly once it did start. Says Cherie Gauthier, Edwards's coordinator in suburban Jefferson Parish, "It was boom. One week we had one hundred volunteers, the next we had seven hundred. The volunteer base grew so rapidly, we were scrambling to figure out how to fit these people into the campaign." They were caught short in the way of signage and campaign literature and lacked enough trucks to handle the proliferating sign crews. Average citizens streamed through the door waving their checkbooks, insisting on making a campaign contribution then and there. Gauthier, the daughter of a hugely successful personal injury lawyer who organized the class action suit against the major tobacco companies that succeeded, made it a point not to ask whether the recent converts had supported Roemer. "At least that was my rule: 'Ye shalt not harbor a grudge.'"32

For Roemer supporters unable to bring themselves to work in the Edwards organization, there were plenty of campaign alternatives from which to choose. Ten days after the primary election, ad hoc phone banks had been established in several downtown law firms. They operated five days a week and never wanted for volunteers. The Louisiana Coalition alone ran two for several nights, but there were many others.

It was inevitable that the New Americans Social Club would get involved in the burgeoning crusade. Not since Rockwell's 1961 "hate ride" had the city's small survivor community been so riled up. They were considerably older now. Several were infirm; many had died. A few had cut their ties with the club long ago because of feuds and petty squabbles. But the opinionated vim for which members were justly famous was as strong as ever, and their intensely felt obligation to honor the memory of the Holocaust's slaughtered millions had deepened over the years.

Like Anne Levy, as the 1980s drew to a close the city's New Americans were starting to disinter buried memories. By then a wider public had rediscovered the Jewish tragedy and actually seemed willing to bear witness to the stories survivors had to tell. Their status as survivors had undergone a remarkable metamorphosis: from poor cousins to saints and relics in a new Jewish civic religion. The transformation took place in New Orleans, too, as the New Americans's "Warsaw Ghetto Uprising Memorial Service" became a focal point of the Jewish community's rituals of collective memory.33 Grandparenthood was kind to the city's survivors, even if they did grouse about how American mobility had scattered their children to the four winds. People were now listening to them, taking them seriously. Their sons and daughters had scaled the ladder of success with astonishing speed. After the trauma and guilt of survival, the New Americans had finally achieved a measure of inner peace. But the Duke-Edwards runoff shattered the surface calm. The possibility of David Duke winning political power posed an actual, rather than a symbolic, threat. There was no question they had to act. After talking it over with club president Felicia Fuksman, Shep Zitler called an emergency meeting.34

It took place a few days after the primary election in one of the meeting rooms in the Jewish Community Center on the corner of Jefferson and St. Charles Avenue. As these events go, it was well attended: virtually all forty surviving members showed up. Survivor meetings are invariably stormy, and this one also had its inclement moments. Everyone's question was, What are we going to do? Clouding the answer was the ingrained instinct of New Orleans's organized Jewish community to stay in the background. "Jewish institutions should maintain a low profile," declared a letter sent by the city's Jewish federation to its affiliated groups immediately after the primary election. "Jews should get involved as citizens but not as Jewish organizations" to avoid a backlash that might contribute votes to David Duke.
The response was extraordinary," states Forsyth. "We received letters by the basketful. We even had a call-in line for people and transcribed their messages and ran them too. We did some different kinds of things than we would for just an ordinary run."

Zitler, Galler, and Fuksman told Forsyth they had a letter for publication. Forsyth pointed to a stack three feet high sitting on his desk and said, in his soft southern drawl, "yes, and I have these letters for publication."

The three survivors were in no mood to be put off, however. "Basically, my dad, Henry Galler, and Felicia cornered this guy and forced him to read the letter," says Justin Zitler. The recognition on Forsyth's part was instantaneous. "This is just the message we've been looking for," he said. "We're going to put it right at the top of the next bunch of letters that we publish." And that is where it appeared in the November issue of "Readers Respond," under the title, "History Lesson: Tyranny Comes Step by Step."

The letter elicited the wide response desired by the New Americans and dreaded by some federation staffers. Newspaper editors in Lafayette and Alexandria called asking permission to reprint the letter. Ordinary citizens around the state telephoned Shep and Justin Zitler to express approval. The statement touched some kind of nerve. "Everybody in the New Americans club was so proud and happy about that letter," Justin says. "We all felt really proud that we had done what we wanted to do," says Felicia Fuksman. "We felt like we accomplished something. And we were very proud of Justin."

It was as if the New Americans had finally received unfettered freedom to broadcast to the future the message that both guilt and memory dictated that they proclaim. Could any survivor mission have been more therapeutic?

All the while, Anne Levy was struggling to make public her own testimony concerning history's lessons. She was still grieving her father's death six months earlier, yet her grief seems only to have heightened the fear and anger she felt in common with other New Americans toward David Duke's terrifying proximity to actual power. Anne concluded the best medicine for what ailed her was becoming more politically involved. She participated in one of the Louisiana Coalition's phone banks. "It was a good experience," she says. "I was afraid of getting a real Duke supporter. But I was lucky. It was just the opposite. I got mostly people who were voting with us."

But the atmosphere of menace hanging over the election left her deeply unsettled, and itching to do something more. "It was strange," Anne said, not long after the runoff election. "All of a sudden you really had to be cautious who you spoke with, even here at the store. As a matter of fact, a repairman was in right before the election. We're kind of talking, and I was upset about
the campaign. He returned to the store the other day and said, ‘You see, I told you he wouldn’t win.’ But I wasn’t too sure about this man, how he felt. And there were a couple of young people, just draymen, who would come in here. You knew they were for David Duke. I tried to explain to them why he was bad news for all of us. I tried to convince them it was important that he be defeated. But I just knew deep down that they were going to vote for him. It was a bad time for me and for a lot of other people.”

Since the 1990 Senate race, Anne’s close friend Elinor Cohen had been goading her to be more vocal in public. After Anne backed out of speaking at the Rock against Racism concert at the University of New Orleans (UNO), her friend stepped up the needling. Anne’s youngest daughter, Carol, had spoken in her mother’s place at the concert. Elinor was in attendance. “I said to Anne, ‘You would have been so proud of your child.’ What I was thinking was, ‘Your kid said what you needed to say. Your kid told the story to these students that you needed to say, and now you’ve got to go tell it.’”

But Anne was afraid to address large groups, especially ones whose sympathies she held in doubt. Victims of trauma need safe spaces in which to express their feelings of loss and violation, requiring audiences who are willing to bear witness to those sufferings. It is the way survivors reconnect with the larger world, the way they reestablish the basic trust shattered by the original offense. But Duke had poisoned the environment, spreading unreason and hate, especially among young people, the very audience she felt it so important to reach. She had tried to reach them once before, during a Free Speech Forum at the UNO campus in late November 1989 while Duke was positioning himself for a run at Bennett Johnston’s senate seat, and the result was emotionally devastating. In 1990 UNO had opened its doors as the Deep South’s first desegregated public university. But most of its undergraduates, a large percentage of whom worked part-time, were commuter students from surrounding white suburbs, and they were deeply alienated from the political status quo. They blamed corrupt politicians for gorging themselves on Louisiana’s mineral riches instead of using the windfall oil and gas revenues of the 1970s and early 1980s to diversify the economy. All that survived of their patrimony were fouled bayous and streams, an underwater junkyard of rusted pipelines, and the highest cancer rate in the country. Any outsider candidate with the sex appeal of youth and a coherent explanation for why society had suddenly become unfair stood an excellent chance of winning their allegiance. And on the eve of his run for the United States Senate, it was clear that Duke was doing just that. By the summer of 1990, according to a poll conducted for the Louisiana Coalition, nearly 80 percent of the state’s young white men between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four who had graduated from high school or were still in college were favoring Duke in the senate election.50

Staged in an open-air amphitheater called the Student Park, UNO’s Free Speech Forums were usually widely advertised and poorly attended. The forum at which Duke was slated to speak was deliberately played down to keep the audience small. “We did not want to have any publicity in advance, because certain groups who support Duke could have created a serious disturbance,” the president of the Student Government Association told the school newspaper. Many Duke well-wishers showed up for the noontime event anyway, along with the simply curious and clusters of protesters. The crowd surpassed a hundred. The campus police turned out in force to assure Duke’s safety.51 Learning of the forum by word of mouth, Carol Levy asked her mother to attend. Anne said she would. “At that particular time I felt an urge to challenge this man wherever he went, especially when it came to the young people. He had a following with some of them. I had to speak up. And maybe Tara’s illness had something to do with it, too. Who knows why you do certain things at any given moment in your life? It was like I was on automatic pilot.”

Duke, wearing a turtleneck, pacing across the stage, described himself to the audience as “a writer and an environmentalist,” calling his opponents “Zionists,” especially The Times-Picayune, a Newhouse chain paper. An attractive young girlfriend was in tow. He was full of animation. Self-confidence exuded from every pore. “He looked kind of hip,” remembers Tyler Bridges, then covering the event for The Times-Picayune. The high point came during the question-and-answer period, when Anne, lost in her own drama, finally got her turn at the mike. “Mr. Duke, you say that you are a writer and a bookseller. But why don’t you tell them that you sell anti-Semitic books?” Anne’s voice cracked, and her small frame shook. Duke gave his stock answer: the major book chains sold those books, so what was the big deal? Then Carol reached the microphone: “Mr. Duke, the reason why this lady is so upset is because in the past you denied that the Holocaust ever happened. If it never happened, then I’d like you to tell me where my family is. A very simple question. My family was wiped out by the Nazis, and if you say it never happened, then please tell me where my family is.” Duke looked Anne straight in the eye, coolly answering, “Well, actually, I realize the Holocaust may have happened, but it wasn’t as bad as they made it out to be.” Anne jumped to her feet. “You weren’t even there!” she screamed. “Do you want to hear my side of the story? I was there!” She was unrelenting. Duke accused her of paranoia, quickly segueing to his position on welfare illegitimacy. At that point a segment of the crowd began to chant, “Let her speak.” They said it over and over again. But the student moderator denied her another turn at the microphone, and save for a vocal minority, the audience endorsed the decision.52

Anne wanted to leave as quickly as possible. The mood of the crowd scared her. “For me to see the younger generation following and believing him was
devastating,” she says. “It was as though what had happened fifty years ago was in vain; and whatever I had to say was useless.” Carol tried to reassure her mother. “No, this is your place,” she said. “He doesn’t belong. Listen to the crowd. The crowd is behind you 100 percent.”  

Nonetheless, the audience was with the day’s featured speaker, not with Anne. “Duke had generally won over that crowd,” says Bridges. “A lot of the students liked him, and here was this woman raising something that seemed out of left field. She didn’t seem to fit in. Duke did a good job of silencing her.” Anne came away from the forum with powerful feelings of futility and estrangement.

It therefore took her quite a while to recover from the UNO encounter. When campus organizers of the Rock against Racism rally asked her to speak the following summer, during the height of the U.S. Senate campaign, Anne declined. Sharing painful memories with strangers was difficult enough even under ideal circumstances. But testifying before large, potentially hostile audiences made her panic stricken.

But her friend Elinor kept egging her on, growing relentless during the governor’s race. If guilt is what it took to arouse Anne; Elinor would not flinch. “Anne, you have no family. They perished. So that their deaths should not be in vain, get up and talk about Duke. Go tell your story to avenge every cousin, every aunt, every uncle that you lost. For them, go tell your story!” And then Anne would shrug and say, “Yeah, you’re right! That’s what I really ought to do.” But then she would do nothing. “I guess deep down I knew I really should do it,” Anne admits, “but I never had the gumption. I was not a public speaker. I was shy about it. I was also a little uncomfortable about how the audience would react.” Elinor kept up the moral pressure. “I used to stir Anne up to no end,” she confesses. “I used to needle her unmercifully.” “She was persistent, that’s for sure,” Anne says.

Then a speaking opportunity arose at UNO at the height of the Duke-Edwards runoff campaign. A European history professor named Jerry Bodet told Cohen how upset he was at the political support Duke was enjoying among Bodet’s students. A native New Orleanian, Bodet has a smiling affability that belies his cast-iron principles. Campus skinheads had keyed a swastika onto the front fender of his car and smashed the windshield. Bodet was angry and more than a little apprehensive. Elinor Cohen was a former student. “I have a friend who lived through the Holocaust,” she told him. “How would you feel about her coming in here and telling these kids some firsthand stories about how it really was?” Bodet replied, “Oh, I would love nothing better. Who is it?” “Anne Levy.”

Elinor drove directly to the Levy store to tell her friend about a UNO professor interested in having a Holocaust survivor speak to his students, asking if she would like to be that guest speaker. This time Elinor had no need to use cajolery: “I could see Anne go off like a firecracker.” “I would like that,” Anne said. “I think it’s time I told my story.”

About fifty to sixty students were enrolled in Bodet’s European history course, and most showed up for that morning’s class. Anne felt as though her stomach had been invaded by butterflies. She was going to face not warmly disposed friends but avid Duke supporters, and there was no way of gauging ahead of time how they might respond to her remarks. Were they going to display the same callow indifference that many students had exhibited at the Free Speech Forum two years earlier? “I knew she was deathly scared going in, but she was also angry,” Elinor says. “She had gotten to that point where she had to come out in public and say, ‘You’ve heard the David Duke story. Now let me tell you mine.’”

Anne began tentatively, in a soft voice crinkling with emotion. The modulations of tone betrayed faint traces of Jewish singsong. She was immaculately dressed as always—“like somebody’s sharp-looking mother, not somebody’s grandmother,” remembers Cohen. Early in the talk doors kept slamming as the commuter students trickled in late. There was nervous rustling of paper. Then the room became absolutely silent.

As straightforwardly as she could, Anne narrated the key points of the Skorecki saga—the escape from Łódź in a milk wagon, the family’s near starvation in the Warsaw Ghetto, Tata’s miraculous return from Białystok, the days of silence in the vegetable bin, the escape to Praga in a smelly garbage truck and more hiding and more silence, the outtrek to the American zone of occupied Germany—it was all there, in a technicolor detail that even her close friend Elinor was hearing for the first time. Anne sobbed audibly at many points but held tightly to the narrative thread. Then she did a soft landing, gently bringing the class from that place and time to the menacing Louisiana present:

You can’t imagine the cruelty performed on innocent people. And why? [Cries] What did they do? What in the world did four-year-olds or six-year-olds do? Nothing, except we were Jews. We look the same. We eat the same. We breathe the same [air]. We believe in God. But because we didn’t believe in the right God, we weren’t good enough.

People say it couldn’t happen again. I hate to tell you, it can. The hatred, the bigotry… you always have to blame it on someone, whether it’s the Jews, the blacks, the reds, the Catholics. But everybody suffered.
Look how divided we are right now. And how do we pull ourselves together? How can we have one person talking to one group and ignoring the other? I know you are not going to want to hear this, but if you read your history about what happened in Germany in 1930, you're right at the brink of it. And if you don't speak out—and that's why I am here—don't be surprised. It can happen.

The class was speechless. Students stared in slack-jawed amazement. "They were numb," Elinor says. "They were too stunned to ask questions." And then the classroom erupted in loud applause. Bodet went over to hug Anne. Several other students did likewise. "I thought to myself, 'you've come a long way, baby.' And she had. It was a real turning point for her. She's not afraid anymore."

That much was true. But Anne was still seething about the politics of unreason enveloping her community, and she was poised to pounce on the first chance that presented itself for striking back.

Another opportunity did arise as the gubernatorial race entered the home stretch. It followed in the wake of the second televised debate between Duke and Edwards at a public television station in Baton Rouge, on November 6, 1991, less than two weeks from election day. In a campaign famous for its defining moments, the debate was one of the election's more riveting events. Overconfident, Duke had given himself little time to prepare. Earlier that afternoon, during an appearance at an American Legion Hall in Uptown New Orleans, boisterous protesters rattled him as he entered and left the building. Then on the way to the interstate his driver got stuck in rush hour traffic. The debate was slated for six in the evening, it was after four o'clock already, and Baton Rouge was eighty miles away. After his vehicle crawled free of traffic, the car hurtled northwest at Grand Prix speed.

Duke arrived at the station one minute before six, barely enough time to get miked. He was still agitated about the run-in at the American Legion Hall and the last-minute rush to make the debate. Meanwhile, Edwin Edwards, already wired and made up, was going over the notes he had carefully prepared earlier that afternoon.

For Duke the debate could not have gotten off on a worse foot. He was still agitated about the run-in at the American Legion Hall and the last-minute rush to make the debate. Meanwhile, Edwin Edwards, already wired and made up, was going over the notes he had carefully prepared earlier that afternoon.

"They shouted 'nigger' out of the window of the bus. I didn't know whether to laugh or be outraged. And I thought, 'this kind of thing is really awful.' Everywhere I turned I felt this hatred. I'd see little black kids with the same kind of malice and hatred, and I wondered, 'what for?'"

When Louisiana Public Broadcasting (LPB) asked Robinson to be one of the questioners on the second TV debate, he decided then and there to raise the issue of race at some point during the broadcast. He discussed his intentions with his own management and with officials at LPB. They never said not to raise the subject: "What they said was, 'Be nice.' But it was a matter of conviction for me." Robinson was not sure how he would broach the subject until the
debate got under way and he witnessed Duke bobbing and weaving and ducking every question the panelists tossed his way. “Duke is very television savvy, very debate savvy in the way he takes control of the rules and operates according to his own interpretation.”

That was the moment Robinson decided to make the issue personal, to force the former Klansman to deal with Norman Robinson as an African American, not as an abstraction to be sliced into sound-bite morsels for mass consumption. “He had to deal with me,” Robinson says. “I could speak from experience.” It was the same fundamental impulse that had impelled Anne Levy at the Wiesenthal exhibit at the State Capitol two years earlier to confront David Duke with the raw experience of her own tragic history. It was the personal made political, which is the moral essence of politics itself.

“Mr. Duke,” Robinson began, “I have to tell you that I am a very concerned citizen. I am a journalist, but first and foremost I am a concerned citizen. And as a minority who has heard you say some very excoriating and diabolical things about minorities, about blacks, about Jews, about Hispanics, I am scared, sir.”

There was a pause, as though Robinson was mentally flipping through the Media Resource Kit disseminated by the Louisiana Coalition looking for choice Duke quotations. “I have heard you say Jews deserve to be in the ashbin of history. I’ve heard you say that horses have contributed more to the building of America than blacks did. Given that kind of past, sir, given that kind of diabolical, evil, vile mentality, convince me, sir, and other minorities like me to entrust their lives and the lives of their children to you.”

Duke launched into one of his pat answers about everybody at one time or another having been guilty of intolerance. Didn’t Jesse Jackson once confess to having spit in white people’s food as a young man?

But the alibi of amoral equivalency only deepened Robinson’s anger. “Sir,” Robinson barked, “we are talking about political, economic genocide. We’re not talking about intolerance. We are not talking about spitting on people, sir. As a newfound Christian, a born-again, are you here willing now to apologize to the people, the minorities of this state, whom you have so dastardly insulted, sir?”

The former Klansman and the former Marine sparred for a few more rounds. “Look, Mr. Robinson, I don’t think you are really being fair with me,” Duke said in exasperation. “I don’t think you are really being honest, sir,” Robinson replied.

The closing statements by Edwards and Duke placed an exclamation mark at the end of the sharp exchange. Duke was flat and defensive. Edwards was anything but vintage Edwards: serious, moving, even high-minded. The former governor had used the whole afternoon to rest and prepare for the evening’s debate. He was angry that tracking polls showed him pulling only 52.7 percent of the vote. It was enough to win, but not enough to enable Louisianans to redeem their image in the eyes of the nation. Edwards did not want to defeat Duke—he wanted, as Huey used to say, to stomp him. His closest advisers decided that the governor had to become more aggressive. He had to change focus, painting the election as a moral choice. Edwards agreed. The spin, if not the language itself, seems to have been drawn from a strategy paper that Lance Hill at the Louisiana Coalition had mailed to the Edwards camp a week or so earlier. The day of the debate, one of the governor’s staffers called to talk it over. The coalition strategy paper urged Edwards to contrast his “record” with Duke’s, but to do so over the span of twenty years, not eighteen months. Such an approach would make an issue of Duke’s character. It would prevent Duke from running away from his extremist past, as many of his mainstream opposition had been allowing him to do up until now. Edwards’s summation followed the outline of Hill’s suggested strategy: “While David Duke was burning crosses and scaring people, I was building hospitals to heal them. When he was selling Nazi hate literature as late as 1989 in his legislative office, I was providing free textbooks for the children of this state. When he was writing porno books, I was signing anti-pornographic legislation.”

There was a brief pause. “I have been in this business for a long time. I have a record, and he has a record. I suggest to you he has given us twenty years of hate and hurt, and I don’t think he has earned the right to ask you to be governor . . . Don’t let him separate us from the rest of the nation. Don’t let him make a mockery of Louisiana. We’re too important, we’re too good for that. The people of this state need a governor as good as the people of this state, not someone whose reputation, deserved or not, around the nation is one of hate and division. I don’t want my Louisiana to fall into that morass. We went down that road one time a long time ago, and we suffered for it for many decades. We’ll not let David Duke take us down that same road again. Not ever.”

There was in Edward’s concluding remarks echoes of Huey Long’s 1928 Evangeline Oak speech, even resonances of Abraham Lincoln’s appeal to the country’s better angels on the eve of the Civil War. But there was scant evidence of the Edwards of yore—no wisecracks about the women he had bedded or the honest graft he had received. Not even so much as a raffish wink and sly-fox smile at his chuckling supporters. There was only righteous indignation, and it seemingly came straight from the heart. Even the wily Cajun had
come to the realization that the triumphalist victory he desired required tapping a moral current that was now running as wide and deep as the river beyond the levee.

As soon as the debate in Baton Rouge had ended, the switchboards at LPB and Channel 6 in New Orleans lit up. "I would imagine my station received at least a thousand calls, if not several thousand," says Robinson. "At first his people called. It was an organized phone bank. Then, after word got out that Duke's people were calling, people supportive of me began to call." The inflow of letters, many of them accusing Robinson of "reverse discrimination," was just as heavy. A few contained death threats. For the next two weeks Robinson was given round-the-clock police protection. The station changed his parking assignment in the French Quarter. Some Duke supporters even phoned the CBS affiliate swearing they would never watch its programming again. 'We told them he works for Channel 6 now;" said the local news director, "but they don't believe us.'

Channel 6 decided to respond to the uproar by scheduling a television call-in show on November 10, with Duke as the guest and Norman Robinson acting as host. This time Robinson played things strictly according to journalistic Hoyle. "I used a different approach, because he was a guest on my set, a guest in my home. Debates are different. They are like political forums." Robinson gave the candidate untrammeled freedom to deliver pat campaign speeches about how he would reduce crime, end welfare abuse, clean up Lake Pontchartrain. Viewers lined up at remote sites in the new Riverside Marketplace complex in Uptown New Orleans and at Lakeside Shopping Center in Metairie.

Anne went to the Riverside Marketplace, only three blocks from the Levy apartment. People already queued up when she arrived. She immediately pushed her to the front of the line. When it was her turn to ask a question, she ignored the specifics of his agenda. By now everything had become strictly personal. "How is it you ignored me?" she screamed. "Why wouldn't you talk to me when I approached you?" Duke was at a loss for a response. In fairness, no one living would have known what to say to her at that moment. She was seething with anger, she was inconsolable, and she was emotionally spent.

Her daughter Carol went to the Lakeside remote in Metairie. She had intended to join her mother, but because classes had run late at UNO and she lived in Metairie and had her three-month-old baby in tow, she decided to go to the Jefferson Parish location instead. The Lakeside crowd was on the other end of the ideological spectrum from the group at the Uptown remote. "It was like

standing in the middle of a KKK meeting," Carol says. "I had my baby in a sack next to me, and I was upset. I kept rocking him just to control myself, and it put him fast asleep." About twenty-five Duke supporters were standing in the line grousing about black welfare cheats and rehearsing the questions they planned to ask when their turn at the mike arrived. "I started arguing with them because what they said was so stupid. I said, 'Instead of blaming everything on welfare, give them a way out, some kind of job opportunity.' We went back and forth. The voices got louder, but I wasn't going to let them intimidate me." Then somebody asked what she planned to say to the candidate. She said she intended to ask Duke to clarify his statement that the Holocaust was not as bad as people made it out to be. A sixty-year-old man standing next to her then piped up: "Do you believe it happened?"

"I know it happened because my family perished there!"

"No, it's mathematically impossible."

"What do you mean 'mathematically impossible'?" Carol's voice was rising now.

The man coolly answered, "If six million Jews died, there wouldn't be any Jews left on the earth." Carol said, "I lost my cool at that and yelled, 'Where in the fuck is my family?' That's all I want to know. A simple question.'"

The entire Duke crowd erupted. They started piling on, twenty-five against a solitary individual who was maybe four-foot-ten if she stood on tiptoe, carrying an infant in a sack. "Officer, officer, she's cursing right in front of my kid," one Duke supporter screamed. Meanwhile, the "kid" was cursing back at Carol. A Jefferson Parish sheriff's deputy escorted Carol and the baby to the parking lot, threatening to arrest her if she kept it up. The crowd applauded loudly as she left, whooping and hollering. But Carol's back was up. From the trunk of her car she fetched a homemade stop-Duke sign. It was plastered with "No Dukes" bumper stickers, a swastika circled in red with a diagonal slash slanting across the middle, and the bold slogan, "Never Again!" Then she marched back inside the shopping mall. Her adversaries started buzzing. "What is she doing back? I can't believe she's back." She shoved the sign in their face. There was an eruption of yelps and screams. "Ah, no, she's got a sign! She can't hold up a sign!" Then she put it down, did an interview with The Times-Picayune reporter covering the event, and went home.

"That was a bad experience for me," says Carol. But she did manage to change one voter's mind. During the newspaper interview, a young white man waiting in line to question Duke came up to her. He had been leaning toward voting for Duke. Her confrontation with the crowd had unsettled his views. "You know, I never realized what Duke's supporters were like until I saw this go down," he said. "Now, I can see what's going on."
But Carol's shopping center face-off was just one example of the stop-Duke movement at large, as neighbors and relatives across the state made known their moral outrage in ways fence-sitters could neither dismiss nor ignore. The gist of it all was simply this: a Duke victory would do more than hurt the movement at large, as neighbors and relatives across the state made known their moral outrage in ways fence-sitters could neither dismiss nor ignore. The movement would make democratic governance difficult. There was no way you could sit on the sidelines. Economically, it would rend the moral fabric binding family and community. It would make democratic governance difficult. There was no way you could sit on the sidelines.

When the polls closed at 8:00 P.M. five days later, it took the experts all of thirty minutes to call the election. It was Edwards by a landslide—61 to 39 percent—the exact percentage the Louisiana Coalition's Lance Hill had predicted would be the case once the stop-Duke forces were morally aroused. The turnout was enormous. Four-fifths of the electorate went to the polls—a percentage almost unparalleled in contemporary American politics. The van and bus drivers hired by the Edwards campaign and assorted business PACs to carry black voters to the polls drove up to the polling places half full, if they had that many passengers. By midmorning, most black registrants had already trooped to the voting booths on their own.

A New York Times exit poll registered the political tremor, but there is something curious about how it was interpreted. When Edwards's voters were asked to name the most important issue in the election, 69 percent said the "Louisiana economy," a fact that pundits and reporters alike made the focus of their postmortems. Yet those same voters gave an even higher response—81 percent—to the question concerning the "candidates' racial views," a fact strangely shunted aside by conventional wisdom. Indeed, fully three-fifths of the voters (the proportion of the electorate captured by Edwards) said Duke's views remained unchanged from his days in the Ku Klux Klan, and 91 percent of them voted against Duke. The message had finally gotten through that Duke was a moral fraud and a political faker. And it was that realization, as much as economic fear, that finally brought the Duke juggernaut to a grinding halt.

Anne was overjoyed when the television flashed the news that Duke had been soundly defeated. "I thought she was going to dance naked with a beer in her hand on Magazine Street," Elinor Cohen says.

But the closure was more profound than momentary elation. It went to the very core of who she was, to her rulebook approach to life itself. She started relaxing more. She became more adventurous. She laughed and giggled spontaneously, as though the child she never was had finally begun to get out. And she carried her survivor mission into the classroom, speaking with increasing frequency to elementary and high school students throughout the greater metropolitan area.

Invariably, the students are engrossed at hearing a grandmother explain how a childhood much like their own was stolen before it had begun. Just as invariably she is flooded afterward with moving letters from those same students. The mission gives her an ongoing and deepening sense of accomplishment. She feels continuity with her past, not estrangement. She feels whole, complete. And for the first time since she can remember, she is at peace with herself and truly happy.

"We can't be anything but proud of mom," Carol says. "If there's an award to give her, we'd give it to her without question. The metamorphosis she's gone through has been amazing to watch, like from a cocoon to a butterfly. And it's still continuing. It's never ending."

"I guess we have Duke to thank for my mother's transformation," Robin says. "It was very timely that Duke's presence reached a peak at a point when she had recently lost a man whose life was ruined because of something that Duke discounted. The two experiences blew her out of the water. Before she was drowning. Now she is swimming. And the Duke hoopla and the positive feedback strangers gave her along the way made her realize that she could make her way from here on out as an independent woman. 'My father is not here to take care of me any more,' she said to herself. 'I have to take care of me. And, hey, I'm not going to drown.'"

The obligation to remember that Anne Levy embraced for reasons entirely personal turns out to have political meanings after all. For the burden of preserving memory against those who would erase the past was not hers alone. It is a collective responsibility, a civic duty. Erecting monuments and museums is one way to prevent forgetfulness. But in the final analysis only a morally concerned citizenry has the power to transmit the lessons of the past to a present increasingly anxious to get on with the future. For one brief, shining moment, in a state not generally known for political ethics, a moral movement of people from across the spectrum said the past could not be brushed aside so easily.

"I guess that's why I like living here," Anne says. "Even in Louisiana politics there is hope for redemption."