

GAMING THE VOTE

Democrat, Edwards knew (made sure?) that there would be no heir apparent in the Democratic Party. With the open primary, the Democratic vote would be more fragmented than usual, and Edwards could therefore count on the split Democratic vote to lead to the election of a Republican-someone to house-sit the governor's mansion for him. Then, in 1983, he would reunify the Democrats and sail to an easy third victory.

If this really was Edwards's plan, it was a bigger gamble than the ones he was making at the craps tables. No Republican had been elected governor of Louisiana since Reconstruction.

This "theory" describes exactly what happened. In 1979, five Democrats ran, and only one Republican. The front-running Democrat, Louis Lambert, was the most liberal of the group. Under the old, party-controlled system, the Democrats surely would have chosen someone more moderate than Lambert. As it was, Lambert ran in the runoff against Republican David Treen, and Treen won. He became Louisiana's first Republican governor since 1877.

And in 1983, Edwin Edwards had no problem making sure that Treen's first term would be his last. He told the press that Treen was "so slow it takes him an hour and a half to watch *60 Minutes*." As Election Day approached, Edwards boasted that he couldn't lose unless he was caught "in bed with a dead girl or a live boy." He won the runoff with 63 percent of the vote.

Is it possible that Edwards planned all this, back when he launched the open primary? Columnist John Maginnis recalls an enigmatic comment Edwards made in 1978 to a Republican Women's Club. The club members were pleased that the then-new open primary was helping Republicans get elected. Edwards said, "You are happy with the open primary now, but there will come a day when you will not be." Without explaining the statement, he left the room.