

# Jimmie Davis Off Again On a Louisiana Hayride



—Associated Press Wirephoto.

Gov. Jimmie Davis, . . .  
Returning to Baton  
Rouge.

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BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) —  
Deep in the moss-hung bayous a  
rain-lattered placard tacked to a  
cypress tree proclaimed: "Jimmie  
Davis for Governor."

In the scraggy red hills at the  
opposite end of the state, foot-  
tapping teen-agers gathered  
around a juke box to writhe to the  
rhythm of selection 8-J, "You Are  
My Sunshine," written and sung  
by Jimmie Davis.

Both the Jimmie Davis of the  
campaign poster and the Jimmie  
Davis of the juke box label take  
office this coming Tuesday as the  
new governor of Louisiana, suc-  
ceeding sulphur-tongued Earl  
Long, younger brother of the late  
Kingfish Huey P. Long. Both the  
Frenchmen in the bayous and the  
rednecks in the hills will be in-  
terested in seeing what happens.

A Decca recording artist, a one-  
time star grade B cowboy mov-  
ies and a former governor (1944-  
1948), lanky, drawing Jimmie  
Houston Davis is once again out  
to convince scoffers that he is  
more of a statesman than an en-  
tertainer.

"Singing is my hobby, the way  
some folks play golf or go fish-  
ing," Davis insisted for the thou-  
sandth time over a glass of goat's  
milk, which he guzzles by the  
gallon to maintain gubernatorial  
energy. "You know, I thought for  
a long time before taking the  
band along on this campaign and  
doing a little singing.

**THE MAN WHO WROTE** "You  
Are My Sunshine," "Nobody's  
Darling," "It Makes No Difference  
Now" and some 200 other songs  
can't read or play a note of music,  
but he sure has a knack for har-  
monizing at the polling booth. Davis  
has never lost an election. This  
year Louisiana gave him a  
margin of 70,000 votes over New  
Orleans Mayor deLesseps Morris-  
son in the governor's race.

Part of this popularity is due  
to the Davis personality: home-  
spun, taciturn, friendly in a bash-  
ful way that appeals to rural vot-  
ers without alienating city dwell-  
ers. "He's got sincerity," says his  
admirers. "Country cunning," an-  
swer his foes.

Part of his popularity is due to

his own life story: Up from a  
sharecropper's cabin, where he  
was one of 11 children, to a mas-  
ter's degree in education and  
psychology, a varied career as a  
country school teacher, college in-  
structor, singer, song writer, movie  
actor, then the final triumphs  
in politics.

Now a handsome, well preserved  
58, Davis can step before cham-  
bers of commerce as a well-heeled  
businessman with a tree farm at  
Jonesboro, a cattle ranch on the  
Delta and a seat on the board of  
a Nashville insurance company.  
Quick as he can knot the bow in  
a string tie, he can appear before  
his country cousins as a farmer  
who still plows his own land, a  
hunter with the reputation of be-  
ing the best squirrel shot in Ten-  
nessee Parish (county) and a fam-  
iliar guest on Grand Old Opry.

But the greatest part of the Dav-  
is appeal, at least to professional  
politicians, stems from his unique  
role in Louisiana politics. He is  
not a reformer; he is not a tax-  
and spender. He is not a Long;  
nor is he anti-Long. He doesn't  
bother to build a machine, seldom  
browbeats the legislature, never  
has an unkind word for anybody,  
particularly the opposition.

**MOST POLITICIANS** try to be  
all things to all people. Davis just  
tries to be Jimmie Davis. Out on  
the stump, he'll talk a little, sing  
a little and promise next to noth-  
ing. While the boys in the band  
are packing up their instruments  
and knocking down the trailer for  
the hop to the next crossroads  
(knockdown time: 58 seconds), Dav-  
is will smile shyly at the crowd  
and say, "I'm not promising to  
do everything you ask because  
I don't know what you will ask.  
But I will promise an honest, busi-  
nesslike administration."

In a state where campaigns tra-  
ditionally are conducted on a  
flagrant promissory note, only  
Jimmie Davis could play that kind  
of a tune and expect any voter to  
dance to it. He offered a platform  
all right — an industry induc-  
ement plan, more money for  
schools and institutions, continued  
segregation, some welfare in-  
creases.

Nevertheless, it was a rip roar-  
ing campaign, even by Louisiana

standards. After busting out of a  
mental hospital on a headline  
rampage that included threats to  
divorce his wife, a wild trip to  
Mexico and a fascination for the  
art of stripper Blaze Starr, Long  
gave up the idea of trying to  
dodge the constitutional ban on  
governors succeeding themselves.  
Instead, he ran for lieutenant gov-  
ernor and lost, leaving the main  
race to Davis and Morrison.

Morrison, a Catholic who built  
a brilliant record as mayor, just  
couldn't convince enough voters,  
particularly in Protestant North  
Louisiana, that he was strong for  
segregation. As often happens in  
Louisiana, the campaign included  
its share of absurdities.

Morrison was accused of "de-  
segregating the toilets in city hall  
without a federal court order" and  
of being a "tool of Jimmy Hoffa."  
Davis was accused of being palsy  
walsy with Negro guests at "The  
Stables," a nightclub he once op-  
erated in Palm Springs, Calif., and  
of writing "dirty songs."

To show that all Davis' songs  
weren't worthy of a hymnal, the  
Morrison camp distributed copies  
of "Red Nightgown Blues," "High  
Geared Momma" and other diti-  
es with a backwoods Freudian  
beat.

Davis also was labeled the  
"phantom of the governor's chair"  
for ducking out to Hollywood dur-  
ing his last term to make "Louis-  
iana," a souped up film biography,  
and a couple of other oat burners.  
As usual Davis refused to answer  
the shafts, but found other ways  
of pinking the opposition, espe-  
cially on the touchy segregation  
issue. Challenged to debate the  
mayor to show where their posi-  
tions differed, he replied loftily:  
"I could argue forever and still  
not be convicted that integration  
is the right way."

**AND BEFORE** anyone could  
figure out what he said, Moon  
Mulligan's band was playing, the  
Plainsmen's Quartet was singing  
"Peace in the Valley" and Jimmie  
Davis, statesman, singer and stu-  
dent of psychology, was ready for  
another massive assault on the si-  
lent city vote.

Back in the governor's mansion  
after a 12-year absence, Davis

plans to do less singing and per-  
forming than in his previous term.  
He already has given up his daily  
15-minute radio show, quietly fold-  
ed up his fan club (450 active  
members) and turned down an in-  
vitation to go on the Ed Sullivan  
Show. But he did manage to get  
up to Nashville for a strenuous,  
enough 2-day recording session to  
get enough material in the can to  
hold him through the next four  
years and may, if the spirit moves  
him, dash off a few more songs.  
"At night when the day's work  
is done, an idea may come to  
me. I'll sing it over and over  
again to myself until it jells. Usu-  
ally the words and melody come  
at the same time, but I have to be  
relaxed and politics don't give you  
much chance to relax."