

Death Row Record May Be Shattered

NEW YORK — While Caryl Chessman was making international headlines in his unsuccessful bid for life, a New Orleans Negro was waging a similar fight against the executioner's hand in virtually complete obscurity.

Today — after more than seven years on the Death Row of Louisiana prisons—37-year-old Edgar Labat and his co-defendant, Clifton Poret, are still fighting a grim, unpublicized battle—a battle that may well break Chessman's death-cell record.

On November 12, 1950, Labat was arrested in New Orleans and charged with assisting Poret in a crime most of the South considers worse than murder—the rape of a white woman.

Since that time, according to an article in the current issue of Look Magazine, Labat has been continuously in custody. For over seven years, he and Poret have been in death cells—at present a room six-feet wide and 10 feet long. For 14 months, they were in solitary confinement.

They have received eight stays of execution, one of them less than three hours before they were to be strapped in the electric chair. Their case has moved through the courts a dozen times.

"Within this legal framework," says Look writer Peter Maas, "there is a tangled web of strange contradictions, allegations of coercion of witnesses and suppression

of evidence, the dramatic emergence of new testimony and the specter of double-standard justice."

Ironically, adds Maas, "Labat in all likelihood would be a free man today had he accepted a proposal over eight years ago to plead guilty to armed robbery alone."

"His lawyer frankly admits he advised Labat to take it if he were guilty of any phase of the crime. Labat replied, 'I'm not guilty.'"

As bits and pieces of evidence mount in their favor, an extraordinary legal battle has swirled around Labat and Poret in their death cells.

A first appeal — to the Louisiana Supreme Court—was primarily on the ground of "systematic exclusion" of Negroes from the grand jury that indicted them.

The case has several times gone as far as the United States Supreme Court and currently has been remanded to the Federal District Court for Eastern Louisiana where lawyers G. Wray Gill and Gerald Schreiber are seeking a new trial on the grounds that Negroes were systematically excluded from the trial jury which convicted them.

"For a capital case," says an expert on U. S. Supreme Court actions, "this is one of the shakiest I've seen".

Waiting in his death cell, Labat declares: "The thing that keeps me from going crazy is the knowledge I'm innocent."

Reeves Going With Kennedy

Frank H. Reeves, Assistant to Senator John F. Kennedy and Democratic National Committeeman from the District of Columbia, will accompany Senator Kennedy on his campaign tours of the South.

Pierre Salinger, Senator Kennedy's press secretary, made this clear when questioned by newsmen on Friday. "We're not going to rejigger our staff for different regions of the country," Salinger said.

Senator Henry M. Jackson of Washington, the Chairman of the Democratic National Committee, revealed that Senator Kennedy had already scheduled campaign swings through North Carolina, Tennessee and Texas. Other Southern tours being planned for the Democratic nominee will be announced later.

Frank Reeves is a well known Washington attorney who has handled many civil rights cases for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

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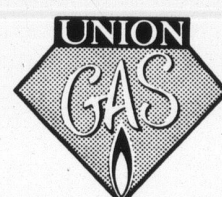
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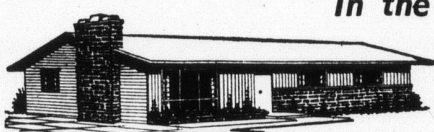
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