



Mayor Victor H. Schiro: New Orleans in Transition, 1961-1970

Edward F. Haas

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During the turbulent 1960s, the city of New Orleans experienced unprecedented economic growth, racial tensions and desegregation, political realignment, and natural disaster. Presiding over this period of sweeping change was Mayor Victor H. Schiro (1904-1992), an unassuming, moderate Democrat who sought the best for his city and adhered strictly to the rule of law in a region where laissez faire was standard practice and hardened defiance was a social norm. Schiro sought fairness for all and navigated a gauntlet of conflicting pressures. African Americans sought their civil rights, and whites resisted the new racial environment. Despite vigorous opposition and an unfriendly press, Schiro won election twice.

Under his direction, the city experienced numerous municipal reforms, the inclusion of African Americans in executive positions, and the broad extension of city services. The mayor, a businessman, recruited new corporations for his city, heralded the development of New Orleans East, and brought major professional sports to the Crescent City. He also initiated the plans for the construction of the Superdome.

At the height of this activity, Hurricane Betsy devastated New Orleans. In response, Schiro coordinated with the federal government to initiate rescue and recovery at a rapid pace. In the aftermath, he lobbied Congress for relief funds that set the precedent for National Federal flood insurance.

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