

# The Era of Huey Long

## Chapter Preview

### People

Rose McConnell Long, Huey Pierce Long, John Parker, Theodore Roosevelt, J. Y. Sanders, Herbert Hoover, O. K. Allen, Hattie Caraway, Carl Austin Weiss, Richard Leche, Earl K. Long

### Places

Winnfield, Caernarvon

### Terms

prohibition, Public Service Commission, Flood of 1927, bond, deduct box, *fait accompli*, unorthodox, misappropriate, Great Depression, Share Our Wealth program, grassroots support

Rose McConnell was born in Indiana in 1892 but moved to Louisiana at age nine. After finishing high school, Rose taught school and later learned secretarial skills like typing and dictation. She was working as a secretary for an insurance company in 1910 when a chance meeting with a traveling salesman shaped her future.

The eighteen-year-old salesman had helped organize a cake-baking contest to publicize a lard substitute he was selling. Using the product, Rose baked a “bride’s loaf cake.” The salesman awarded her a prize, and even awarded a prize to her mother. The sometimes rash young salesman was immediately attracted to Rose and proposed marriage right away. She declined at first, but after many visits and a long correspondence, she consented and married Huey Pierce Long in Memphis on April 12, 1913. Rose had to pay the minister \$11 out of her own money because her new husband did not have enough cash on hand. Whether this upset her is not known, but it is clear that this would not be the only time her new husband would depend on her.



Huey Long was not a conventional person, but he had an amazing memory and was willing to study for many hours a day. Calling on these strengths—and Rose’s skill at taking dictation and typing summaries of the books he had read—Long passed the bar exam and became a practicing lawyer in 1915.

Huey set up a law practice, first in Winnfield and later in Shreveport, but his ambitions were always political. Rose later recalled that, early on, Huey had laid out a detailed plan he believed would lead to the presidency of the United States. Rose supported her husband’s ambitions and helped with his early political campaigns.

Huey Long became governor of Louisiana in 1928 and was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1930. He was planning a run for U.S. president when he died in 1935. Shortly afterwards, Rose was appointed and was later elected to finish out Huey’s Senate term. During her year in office, Rose mostly stayed behind the scenes, but she worked diligently on behalf of Louisiana’s people.

Rose supported, stood alongside, and followed into office one of the most interesting American politicians of the twentieth century. Huey Long came to dominate Louisiana’s government, but he also became a national figure whose ideas attracted significant support in the 1930s.

In this chapter, we will explore Louisiana in the years between 1920 and 1940. We will see how Huey Long criticized his opponents and used their records to stir up discontent to raise his own political profile. We will also consider how a great natural disaster aided his ambitions. You will learn about Long’s many accomplishments as well as his controversies, review the circumstances of his death, and see how his successors attempted to model themselves after him. Like Long’s personal legacy, the legacy of Longism was a mixed one for the state and its people.

**Background:** Rose McConnell Long at her desk with a photo of her husband, Huey Long. **Above Right:** Huey Long won the governorship in 1928 in the aftermath of the Great Flood of 1927.

# Signs of the Times



## Architecture

In 1930, the Chrysler Building in New York City was completed. At 1,047 feet, it surpassed the Eiffel Tower as the tallest man-made structure in the world. The next year, New York's Empire State Building (1,454 feet) became the world's tallest building. One of the major construction projects of the Great Depression was the Rockefeller Center complex, also in New York City.



## Fashions

During the 1920s—the “Roaring Twenties”—young women called flappers began to cut their hair short and dress in shorter, looser dresses.

## Food

In 1930, Clarence Birdseye patented a system that packed foods into waxed cartons, which were flash-frozen under high pressure. Frozen food began to have a major impact on food preparation in the U.S.

## Literature

Famous American novelists F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, and William Faulkner were first published in the 1920s. Among the best-selling novels of the 1930s were *Gone With the Wind* and *The Yearling*.

## Movies

The first feature-length “talkie,” *The Jazz Singer*, was released in 1927. In 1929, the first of the awards that were later named “Oscars” were given out. Some of the most popular movies of the 1930s, such as *The Wizard of Oz*, *Gone With the Wind*, and *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, are still enjoyed today.

## Radio

Louisiana's first publicly licensed radio station, WWL in New Orleans, broadcast what is thought to be the first public radio program on the Gulf Coast in 1922. When William K. Henderson took over a Shreveport radio station in 1924, he used his own initials to rename it KWKH. Within five years it was the most popular radio station in the South and by 1930 the most popular in the country.

## Sports

Babe Ruth set the major league home run record in 1927 when he hit 60 for the season. That record remained until Roger Maris broke it in 1961. In 1930, golfer Bobby Jones was the first person to complete the golf “grand slam” (winning the four most important tournaments in a single season). In 1938, tennis star Don Budge became the first player, male or female, and the only American male to win the four tournaments of a tennis “grand slam.”



**1920** - John Parker elected governor

**1921** - Constitution of 1921 adopted

Huey Long became chairman of the Public Service Commission



**1924** - Henry L. Fuqua defeated Huey Long in governor's race

**1927** - Citizens Flood Relief Committee formed

**1928** - Huey Long sworn in as governor

**1929** - New governor's mansion built  
State House of Representatives attempted to impeach Huey Long

**1930** - Huey Long elected to U.S. Senate

**1932** - Huey Long sworn in as U.S. senator  
Current Louisiana State Capitol completed

**1935** - Huey Long died  
State's 1st bridge across Mississippi River completed

**1936** - Rose Long succeeded her husband in U.S. Senate  
Richard Leche became governor

**1939** - Governor Richard Leche was forced to resign;  
Earl Long finished term

## Timeline

### 1920-1940

18th Amendment took effect, making prohibition a national law - **1920**

Mississippi River flood - **1927**

Herbert Hoover elected U.S. president - **1928**

Stock market crash; beginning of Great Depression - **1929**

Franklin D. Roosevelt elected to 1st of 4 terms as president - **1932**

Beginning of New Deal to alleviate the Great Depression - **1933**

18th Amendment repealed, ending national prohibition



World War II broke out in Europe - **1939**



1920

1925

1930

1935

1940

**Below:** Louisiana's coastline made it easy to smuggle illegal whiskey into the state. This fuel truck is being loaded with whiskey in New Orleans.

## Section 1

# Politics in the 1920s

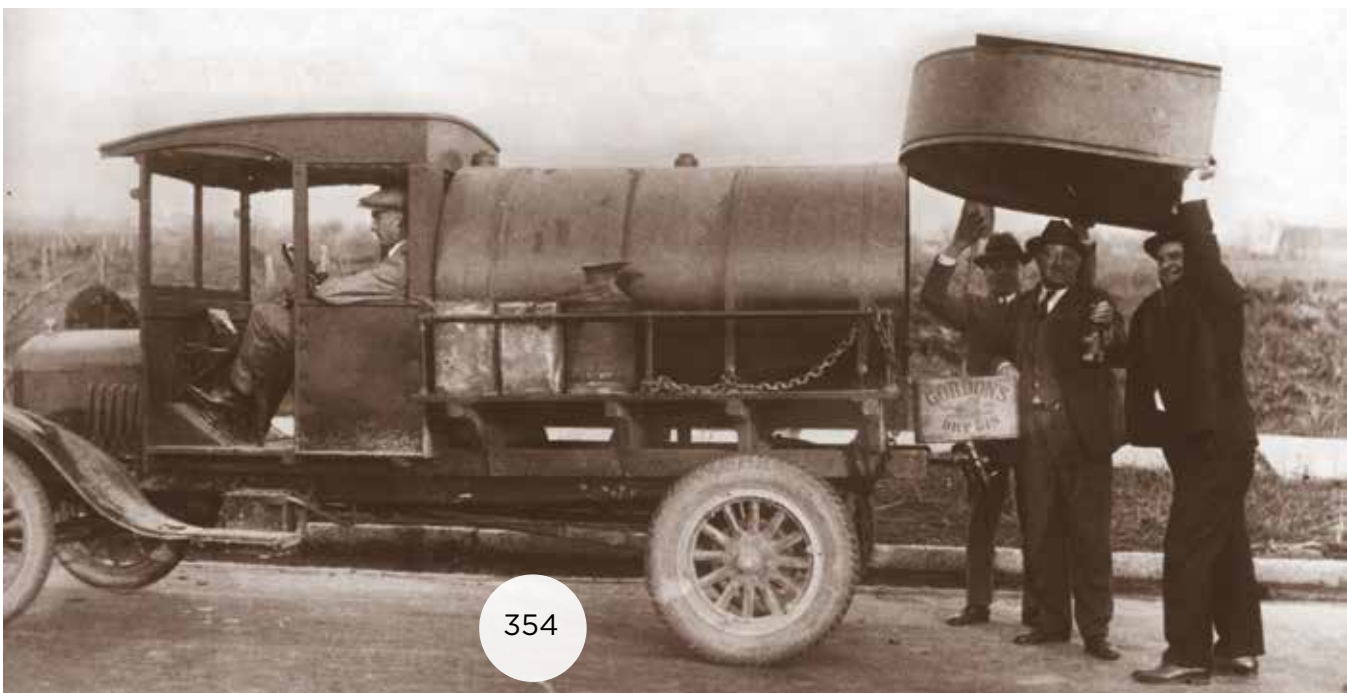
### As you read, look for

- ▶ contrasting views on prohibition in North and South Louisiana;
- ▶ progressive reforms made by Louisiana governors in the 1920s;
- ▶ how Huey Long launched his political career;
- ▶ wide-ranging effects of the Mississippi River Flood of 1927;
- ▶ terms: **prohibition, Public Service Commission, Flood of 1927.**

a-z

GLOSSARY

Great changes had arrived in Louisiana as the 1920s began. Federal legislation and later the adoption of the Eighteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution made the manufacture and sale of alcohol illegal as of January 1, 1920. Many people in North Louisiana supported **prohibition** (forbidding by law the making and selling of alcoholic beverages), and had anticipated these changes by banning the sale of alcohol in their own communities years earlier. Prohibition supporters were often motivated by Protestant religious beliefs that barred alcohol consumption. The Catholics who were dominant in South Louisiana did not have the same restrictions when it came to alcohol, so the coming of prohibition was less popular—and less effective—in the state's southern regions. The complex coastline of the southern parishes also aided smuggling. Prohibition was one victory achieved by reformers in the progressive movement.



## Reforming Governors

John Parker was a wealthy and well-regarded Louisiana businessman and planter. He officially became a member of the national Progressive Party, which was organized by his friend and the former U.S. president, Theodore Roosevelt. In 1916, Parker ran for governor of Louisiana on the Progressive Party ticket. He lost that race to the Democratic candidate, J. Y. Sanders. Afterwards, Parker returned to the Democratic Party and won the state's highest office in 1920.

As he entered the governor's office, Parker was determined to continue reforming Louisiana in line with his progressive ideas. He continued a gravel road-building program begun by Sanders, but he was hampered by the 1913 Constitution's ban on borrowing money to undertake such projects. This, and many other concerns about the 1913 Constitution, led Parker to call for a new constitution, which was adopted in 1921.

Parker was also *lauded* (praised) at the time for his support of the state's first severance tax. Louisiana's timber and oil resources were generating large profits, but much of that money was leaving the state and enriching businesses and corporations like Standard Oil Company of New Jersey. The creation of a severance tax required companies to pay a set percentage of the value or volume of the natural resources they removed from the land. While some praised Parker for taking this step, others criticized him for letting the oil and timber companies play such a central role in developing legislation and setting rates.



John Parker



## Lagniappe

For many years, most gasoline stations of Standard Oil of New Jersey were labeled ESSO (for Standard Oil) or ENCO (for Energy Company). In 1972, the name was changed to EXXON. Originally, the proposed name was EXON—to keep up the tradition of four-letter names. But Nebraska had a Governor Exon, and it was thought best not to copy the name of a specific public figure.

**Top Right:** Governor John Parker.  
**Bottom:** Governor Parker initiated a severance tax on natural resources such as timber and oil.

**Bottom Left:** Huey Long proposed a bridge across the Mississippi River in his first campaign for governor. When Louisiana's first Mississippi River bridge was completed in 1935, it was named for Long, who had died a few months earlier. The Huey P. Long Bridge carries both railroad trains and automobiles across the river. **Bottom Right:** This Illinois Central steam engine is on display at the Louisiana Art and Science Museum in Baton Rouge. The museum is housed in the former depot for the Yazoo & Mississippi Valley Railroad Company. The building was completed in 1925.

## Huey Long and the Railroad Commission

For years before he was elected to any political office, Huey Long had been making his ideas known to the state's politicians by writing them letters or printing up circulars and distributing them to legislators. Long had established a successful law practice, mostly defending common people against large businesses and corporations. Because of this, he had a record to run on when he sought election to the state's Railroad Commission in 1918. The Railroad Commission had been created in 1898 to regulate the operations and safety of railroads, steamboats, and other kinds of emerging utilities like telephone and electricity companies. In 1921, the name was changed to the **Public Service Commission** (the independent state agency that today regulates Louisiana's public utilities and motor carriers). Long won a seat on the three-member panel and, at the age of twenty-five, formally entered state politics.

Huey pursued his role on the Commission with great energy but also in ways that brought him to public notice. By 1921, he became chairman of the Commission and used his role to establish a statewide reputation as a champion for common people against utility companies and corporations. He sought to lower rates on gas and electricity and also to lower railroad and streetcar fares. When he won a fight to make telephone companies pay back an overcharge, he took credit for the small refund checks that flowed back to the customers—all of whom he hoped would one day vote for him.

Huey first began a campaign for governor in 1923 promising the construction of a statewide system of modern, paved roads and bridges, including a Mississippi River bridge. He also promised to improve education for the state's children. He worked tirelessly, visiting the smallest towns and most remote farms. He was able to secure a loyal voting block

among the state's isolated rural people, who often felt ignored by the powerful politicians in Baton Rouge. In the 1924 election, he polled very strongly in North Louisiana but very badly in cities, especially in New Orleans. He knew he would have to find ways to appeal to city voters the next time around—and for him, there was never any question that there would be a next time.



## The 1927 Flood

The **Flood of 1927** was one of the worst natural disasters in the nation's history. Persistent rains fell across the Midwest and Mississippi valley through the spring of the year. Those rains, combined with the usual spring flooding, contributed to the massive Mississippi River flood.

Unfortunately, the "levees-only" policy previously adopted by the Army Corps of Engineers to control the river and protect cities actually made the flooding worse. When the river channel could not hold the rainfall and flooding in 1927, the levees were overtopped or breached as far north as Illinois. Flooding extended all the way to the Gulf of Mexico. In some places, flooding spread more than fifty miles beyond the river's banks. Arkansas, Mississippi, and Louisiana suffered the worst, with floodwaters overtopping or breaching the levees in more than one hundred locations.



### MAP 13.1

#### The 1927 Flood

**Map Skill:** Which rivers that are identified on this map flooded in 1927?



Flood of 1927  
Newspaper Accounts



Flood of 1927 Video

### The Citizens Flood Relief Committee

New Orleans business leaders worried about what would happen to commerce if the city and its port facilities should flood. A group of powerful and wealthy men formed an organization called the Citizens Flood Relief Committee. Although they originally had no authorization from state or local government, the men decided that keeping New Orleans safe from flooding was their top priority. They developed a plan to dynamite the levees below New Orleans to ease pressure on the levees in the city.

**Top Right:** During the 1927 Flood, an out-of-control steamship struck the Mississippi River levee in Louisiana and caused a break in the levee.





**Top:** Dynamiting the levee at Caernarvon.

The people who would be flooded were mostly poor white residents of St. Bernard and Plaquemines Parishes. They and their parish leaders were unhappy about the idea, and clashed with the committee members. The members of the Citizens Flood Relief Committee promised to make payments to people who would be flooded and to provide them temporary housing in New Orleans until the water receded. With the blessing of state officials, the dynamiting went ahead at Caernarvon, located about a dozen miles downriver from New Orleans. Beginning on April 29 and continuing for ten days, officials used thirty-nine tons of dynamite to open a gap that they hoped would keep the city of New Orleans safe.



Flood of 1927  
Photographs

## Lagniappe

The refugees from St. Bernard and Plaquemines Parishes were among the more than 275,000 people who were forced from their homes by the 1927 Mississippi River Flood. The American Red Cross set up camps for refugees, some of whom were forced to live in tents for months.

### Political Impact

President Calvin Coolidge sent Herbert Hoover to assist with flood relief. In part, the perception of Hoover's success in helping the desperate people after the flood contributed to his victory in the presidential election of 1928.

Huey Long's political fortunes also received a boost from the discontent caused by the flood. Many of the poor had become poorer. Long's populist message, which focused on the needs of the common people, had great *resonance* (significance, importance) for people who felt that those in power disregarded their needs. Long was swept into the governor's office in the aftermath of the flood.

## Reviewing the Section

1. Define in sentence form: prohibition, Public Service Commission, Flood of 1927.
2. What were some of Governor John Parker's progressive reforms?
3. Describe Huey Long's entry into elected politics in Louisiana.

## Section 2

# Huey Long Elected Governor

### As you read, look for

- ▶ how Huey Long won the governorship in 1928;
- ▶ Huey Long's accomplishments as governor;
- ▶ controversies that led to an attempt to impeach Governor Long;
- ▶ terms: **bond, deduct box, fait accompli, unorthodox, misappropriate.**



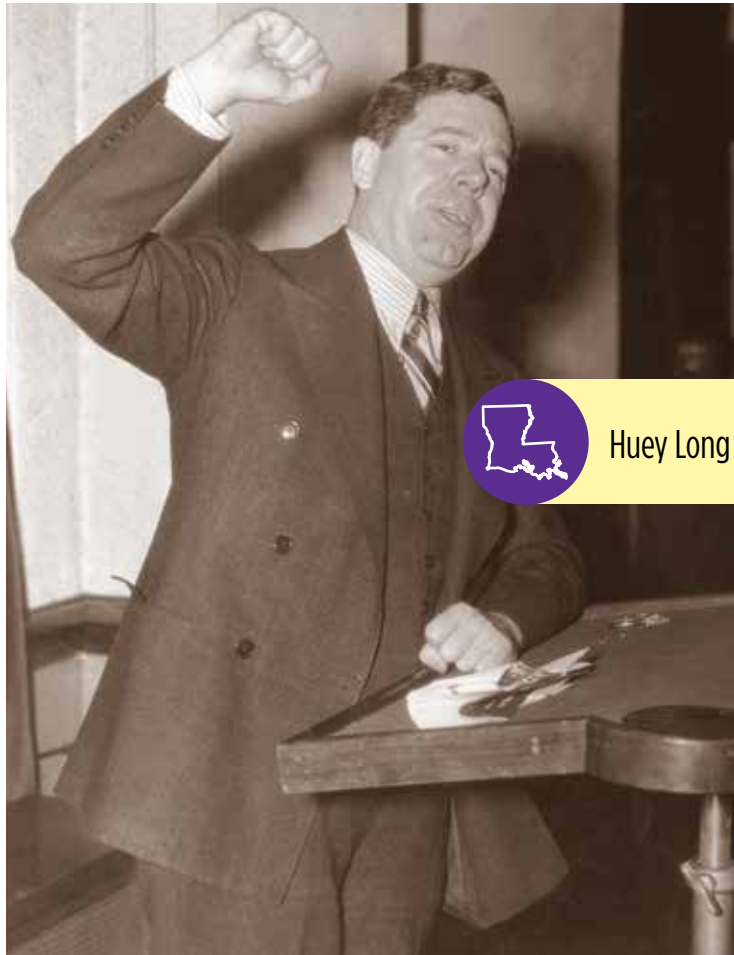
All events of Huey Long's inauguration were open to anyone who could come to Baton Rouge to attend. More than 15,000 people came from all across the state.

Huey Long had worked tirelessly for four years to widen his appeal among the state's voters. He continued to promise vast improvements to the state's undeveloped transportation system. He enhanced his focus on education, promising to provide free schoolbooks to the state's children. He also attacked the state's wealthiest people and its most powerful corporations. He promised that his election would give those who were usually ignored a voice in setting the state's priorities.

Long also sought to enlarge his vote totals among city dwellers. In New Orleans, this meant promising he would begin paving the city's dirt roads and gravel streets. He also promised to have natural gas piped into the city so the residents could heat their homes for less money.

His hard work, many promises, and a message focused on the common people combined to make his second run successful. Huey P. Long was inaugurated governor in May 1928.

**Below:** Huey Long.



Huey Long

Long set to work on an ambitious agenda right away. He made good on his promise to distribute free textbooks to the state's schools. When officials in Caddo Parish refused to take part in his plan, Long took the case to court. In what would become a regular strategy, the governor also threatened to block legislative approval of other plans parish and city leaders had in mind until they agreed to do what he wanted.

## Roads

Long also started a scattered program of constructing paved roads across the state. He reasoned that if people all around the state gained access to even small stretches of paved roads, they would see how superior they were, and demand that their legislators continue the project. Road construction was particularly popular because much of the immediate cost was paid through selling bonds rather than by raising taxes. A **bond** is a certificate promising payment of money by a certain date, which

is issued by a government or corporation as evidence of debt. Investors who bought the bonds would be paid back with interest when the bonds matured. In the short run, however, people felt like they were getting a lot for not very much money.

Governor Long put his friend O. K. Allen in charge of the state's Highway Commission, the body that was responsible for the road construction projects. Although progress was rapid, the roads were often inferior, and many of the officials involved in the program profited personally from their insider knowledge and connections. Allen, Long, and others, for example, were involved in a



**Above:** After he was elected governor in 1928, Long worked for such social reforms as improving the roads and providing free schoolbooks for children.

company that sold rocks to the Highway Commission. Their company charged the state more than double what its competitors would have charged for a better-quality product. Rural people welcomed the roads, but the corruption that became a normal part of doing business with the state was largely hidden from their view.

## Patronage

Long's control over appointments to state offices and jobs yielded him a great deal of power with the public. Jobs were hard to find, especially after the nation entered an era of financial depression beginning in 1929. Long had the ability to appoint people to more than 25,000 state jobs. People were desperate for work, so the governor's control of patronage appointments became even more valuable than usual.

## The Deduct Box

Perhaps reflecting the knowledge that state workers were beholden to the governor for their jobs, Long initiated a practice that came to be known as giving to the **deduct box**. In that system, state employees were required to return 10 percent of their salary to this so-called deduct box. The money was supposed to support Long's political organization. Long, however, routinely mixed deduct funds and campaign contributions with his personal funds. As a result, he had access to vast amounts of cash at a time when there were no laws forcing him to disclose where the money came from or how he spent it.

## Long and the Legislature

In the legislature, Long exercised his power by involving himself in every aspect of the lawmaking process. Whether he was welcome or not, the governor walked the aisles of the legislative chambers, sat in on committee meetings, and personally made sure that legislators voted for laws he wanted passed. If members opposed his plans, Long took away their committee assignments. He then reconfigured the committees with loyal legislators who would always vote his way. He even threatened to take away jobs from the family members of elected officials who refused to follow his orders.

The governor was also willing to achieve his goals without legislative approval. One example of this tactic involved the governor's mansion. Everyone agreed that the existing mansion was termite-infested and in need of substantial repairs. At the beginning of 1929, Long received a loan of \$15,000 from the State Liquidation Board—a board whose membership he controlled. The Board made the loan with the understanding that the governor would seek legislative approval for his plans.

Impatient as always, the governor had the warden of the state penitentiary send a group of inmates down to Baton Rouge to tear down the old governor's mansion. Within days, the old mansion lay in ruins. Long's critics complained bitterly, but the governor had presented them with a **fait accompli** (something that has been done and cannot be changed). With no mansion in existence, a new one had to be built. Seeking legislative approval became a mere formality.



## Lagniappe

The deduct box, which was kept at Long's Roosevelt Hotel headquarters in New Orleans, was never found after his death. It is believed to have been stolen by one of his associates. Today you can see a re-creation of the deduct box in the lobby of the Roosevelt Hotel.

## Lagniappe

The governor's mansion that Huey Long built is reported to be a copy of the original design for the White House in Washington, DC. Some people say that Long wanted to be familiar with the White House when he became president, so he had it duplicated in Baton Rouge. Others simply say that the mansion is a fine example of Georgian-style architecture.



**Above:** Huey Long was a passionate and colorful public speaker.

As his opponents were learning, Huey Long was a *formidable* (powerful, strong) opponent. However, his unconventional behavior and **unorthodox** (different from what is usually done or accepted) methods gave his opponents an opportunity to try to remove him from office. During a special legislative session in March 1929, Long's opponents decided to initiate impeachment charges against him. Among other things, state legislators considered charging the governor with misappropriating state funds and attempting to bribe legislators to assure their votes. To **misappropriate** is to take something dishonestly, for one's own use. The next few days were *raucous* (boisterous, disorderly) ones in Baton Rouge. Widespread fist

fighting broke out on the floor of the state House of Representatives on the last Monday in March, a day that came to be known as Bloody Monday.

If the state House of Representatives approved charges, the state Senate would decide on the governor's guilt or innocence. Two-thirds of the Senate's thirty-nine members would have to proclaim his guilt. Huey and his supporters worked behind the scenes on a strategy that has come to be known as the legislative round-robin. In essence, Long convinced fifteen senators to sign a declaration that they would never cast a guilty vote no matter what evidence was presented. The tactic was unorthodox, but not surprising. By receiving these promises from more than one-third of the state senators, Long short-circuited the impeachment process. Afterwards, many of the round-robin's signers received *plum* (desirable) governmental or judicial appointments.

Long had saved himself and handed his opponents one more in a series of political defeats. After the impeachment attempt failed, Long was even more powerful. He was ready for the next step in his plan.

## Reviewing the Section

1. Define in sentence form: **bond**, **deduct box**, **misappropriate**.
2. Why was the power of patronage so effective for Governor Long?
3. How did Governor Long avoid being impeached?

# Special FEATURE

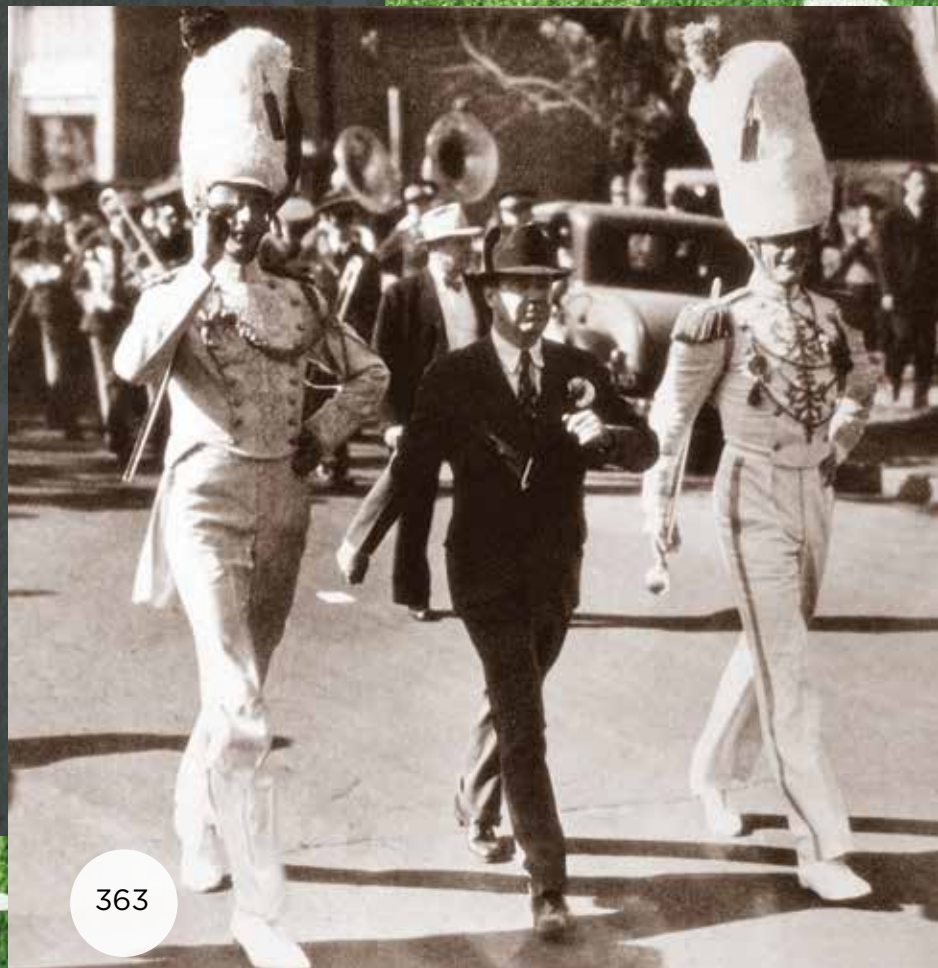


## Long and LSU

Throughout his terms as governor and senator, Huey Long had great enthusiasm for Louisiana State University, going so far as to co-write two football fight songs with his hand-picked band director Castro Carazo. Long also improved some of the university's facilities and programs, but always in ways that reflected his interests and priorities. Long supported the construction of a new student center building, which came to be known as the Huey P. Long Field House. He also saw to it that the football team and band received significant support. As with anything Long cared about, he could not keep himself from meddling in the details. He openly interfered with referees at LSU home games, and forced railroad lines to offer special rates to LSU students so they could travel to away games. He even handed out cash to students so they had spending money during their trips.

Long could be generous to those he supported, but incredibly harsh with those who challenged him. In 1934, LSU's student newspaper, *The Daily Reveille*, published an editorial critical of one of Long's recent political appointments. Long ordered most copies of the issue confiscated and destroyed. He also demanded an apology from the students who were involved. Because state government provided so many of the students at the university with financial support, Long felt he had every right to demand loyalty from them. The university's president owed his job to Long. When a group of students went to him for advice, the president advised the students that they were "living under a dictatorship and the best thing to do is to submit to those in authority." At Long's insistence, seven students were expelled. What do you think about the advice the president of the university gave to the students who visited him?

**Above:** When completed in 1932, the Huey P. Long Field House served as LSU's student union and featured the largest swimming pool in the U.S. at the time. **Below:** Huey Long's devotion to LSU was reflected in his interest in the marching band. The fight song he co-wrote with Castro Carazo, "Touchdown for LSU," is still played in the band's pregame show at LSU games. Long quadrupled the size of the band and sometimes marched with the drum majors at the head of the band.



## Section 3

# Huey Long in the United States Senate

## Lagniappe

The Kingfish was a character in the popular *Amos 'n Andy* radio show. After winning his Senate seat, Huey Long said: "I'm a small fish here in Washington, but I'm 'the Kingfish' to the folks down in Louisiana."

a-z

GLOSSARY

## Lagniappe

Huey Long's 15 hour, 30 minute, filibuster in 1935 was the sixth-longest U.S. Senate filibuster on record. The longest was South Carolina Senator Strom Thurmond's 24 hour, 18 minute, filibuster of a civil rights bill in 1957.

### As you read, look for

- ▶ Huey Long's unconventional behavior as a new U.S. senator;
- ▶ Long's attempts to broaden his national appeal while still controlling state politics;
- ▶ reasons for the popularity of the Share Our Wealth program;
- ▶ the death of Huey Long and attempts to continue his legacy;
- ▶ terms: **Great Depression, Share Our Wealth program, grassroots support.**

In 1930, Long ran for one of Louisiana's two United States Senate seats. He won the election but refused to be sworn in until he could control the election of his replacement as Louisiana's governor. Long helped his completely loyal friend O. K. Allen win the governor's race in 1932. With a man he could control in the governor's office, Long, who now referred to himself as the Kingfish, took a train to Washington, DC, where he was sworn into the U.S. Senate on January 25, 1932. He was now in the nation's capital, but he had his sights set on the White House.

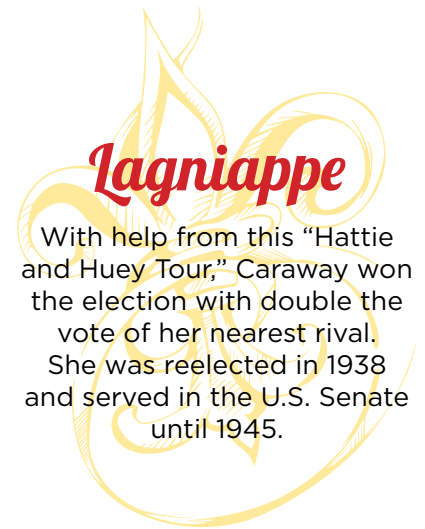
### Senator Long Goes to Washington

There was a tradition in the U.S. Senate that new members worked behind the scenes to learn how the institution functioned. In so doing, senators gradually gained influence by working cooperatively with other members. Long had no intention of deferring to other senators with more seniority. Displaying a familiar pattern of behavior, Long simply ignored the established rules or found ways to go around those who tried to block his ideas or ambitions. Long spent much of his time giving speeches to the American people rather than to his fellow senators. He also engaged in long floor speeches, called filibusters, which blocked legislation he opposed and, not incidentally, raised his profile even further among the nation's voters.



## Broadening His Appeal

Late in 1932, Long took his fleet of campaign trucks—complete with loudspeakers that broadcast his messages—to Arkansas. There he held rallies and gave speeches supporting the reelection of fellow Senator Hattie Caraway, who had been appointed to the Senate to finish her recently deceased husband's term. She sat next to Long in the Senate, and there did seem to be a genuine *rapprochement* (relationship, connection) between the two. However, Long did almost nothing without calculating its political impact. He also believed that helping Caraway win would show that he could influence elections beyond his home state. Caraway was considered a long shot, but with Long's help, she won the race, making her the first woman ever elected to the U.S. Senate. Long's influence beyond Louisiana also scored a victory.



With help from this “Hattie and Huey Tour,” Caraway won the election with double the vote of her nearest rival. She was reelected in 1938 and served in the U.S. Senate until 1945.

## Louisiana during the Great Depression

By the time Long was sworn into the Senate, the nation had been in the *throes* (hard painful struggle) of the Great Depression for three years. The **Great Depression** was the name given to the severe economic downturn that began with the stock market crash of 1929 and continued into the 1940s. In October 1929, the stock market, which had risen to dizzying heights in the previous months, crashed. The values of stocks plummeted, and in an instant, much of the nation's wealth disappeared. Unemployment rates skyrocketed and many Americans suffered extreme poverty.

Farm families were hit especially hard. In a largely rural and agriculture-dependent state like Louisiana, this meant that the poor faced economic challenges that they could not overcome, no matter how hard they worked. And while farm families could usually grow enough to feed themselves, people who lived in cities had no places to plant gardens. Many families literally came close to starvation.



Great Depression



## Lagniappe

The historian Glenn Jeanson notes that, in Louisiana, per capita income fell “from \$415 in 1929 to \$222 in 1933.”



**Background:** Marketplace at New Orleans, 1936.



# Special FEATURE

## The Great Depression in the United States

The period of extreme economic hardship that began in 1929 in the United States had several causes. The economies of many countries in Europe had been suffering since the end of World War I in 1918. For a time, the United States avoided such problems. In fact, the early 1920s were a period of strong economic growth in the United States.

New technologies allowed manufacturers to produce large quantities of goods efficiently. Consumer goods—like fashionable clothing, household appliances, and even cars—became widely available and affordable for many people by the early 1920s. Consumers could even buy large items, like cars, over time on credit. Many people were willing to pay interest, which added to the cost, rather than wait until they could save all of the money in advance. In anticipation of selling more and more goods over time, manufacturers began to produce more goods than they could sell.

There was also significant economic growth in the nation's financial sector during the 1920s. Banks were lending freely. The remarkable gains in the stock market made many people want to become involved in buying stocks, often with borrowed money. This created even more growth in the stock market. Many businesses and individuals overextended themselves in the pursuit of profit, believing that stock prices could only go up. That optimistic belief came to an end in October of 1929. Although the structural problems that led to the Great Depression had been building over time, many people point to Tuesday, October 29, 1929, "Black Tuesday," as the official beginning of the nation's worst economic crisis to date. That day turned into more than a decade of economic suffering that came to be called the Great Depression.

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt was inaugurated president of the United States in early 1933. Roosevelt was determined to use the government to help people deal with widespread unemployment and the hunger and poverty that followed. At one point, the nation's unemployment rate reached 25 percent. People in cities—even people who had been wealthy before Black Tuesday—had little choice but to stand in line for food at soup kitchens. While people in rural areas could grow much of their own food, their lives were also affected by rapidly falling farm prices. Many small farmers and sharecroppers in Louisiana still raised cotton. At the beginning of the depression, cotton was selling for 25 cents a pound. By 1932, its price had fallen to 5 cents a pound.

Roosevelt proposed a large number of government programs designed to provide immediate relief for the poor and to help the economy recover by providing jobs. For example, young single men could join the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). "CCC Boys" lived in camps and worked to improve the nation's infrastructure and its national parks. Family men could seek jobs through another program called the Works Progress Administration (WPA). Like the men in the CCC, some WPA employees worked on roads and bridges. The WPA also paid artists to paint murals in public buildings and to document the nation's people through photography. It paid writers to collect oral histories and to gather



WPA Projects in  
Louisiana



historical material for a series of state and city guides. WPA employees in Louisiana wrote and published a guidebook called *The New Orleans City Guide* in 1938. They followed it in 1941 with *Louisiana: A Guide to the State*.

President Roosevelt's programs to provide relief and employment were known collectively as the New Deal. Although its programs were numerous and varied, the nation recovered slowly. Full economic recovery took until the mid-1940s and was generated, in large part, by the manufacturing and economic activity that resulted from our nation's involvement in World War II.

Why do you think the CCC provided jobs for young, single men, but not for young, single women?

## Figure 13.1 New Deal Programs

Program	Date	Purpose
Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA)	1933	Built dams on the Tennessee River to control flooding and generate electricity.
Public Works Administration (PWA)	1933	Put people to work building roads, buildings, and other public works projects.
Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC)	1933	Insured individual savings accounts so that people did not lose their money if banks failed or closed their doors.
Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA)	1933	Provided federal funds for state and community relief efforts.
Civil Works Administration (CWA)	1933	Provided temporary federal jobs for the unemployed.
Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC)	1933	Provided jobs for young single men building forest trails and roads, planting trees to reforest the land and control flooding, and building parks.
Federal Housing Administration (FHA)	1934	Insured home loans for low-income families.
Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC)	1934	Regulated stocks and gave stock information.
Social Security Administration (SSA)	1935	Created a system for retirement and unemployment insurance.
Works Progress Administration (WPA)	1935	Employed out-of-work Americans to repair roads, and build or repair bridges. Also employed writers, musicians, and artists who painted murals, wrote guidebooks, and provided public performances.
National Youth Administration (NYA)	1935	Provided job training and part-time work for college students.

## Lagniappe

In one special session of the Louisiana legislature, U.S. Senator Huey Long oversaw the adoption of forty-four state laws in six days.



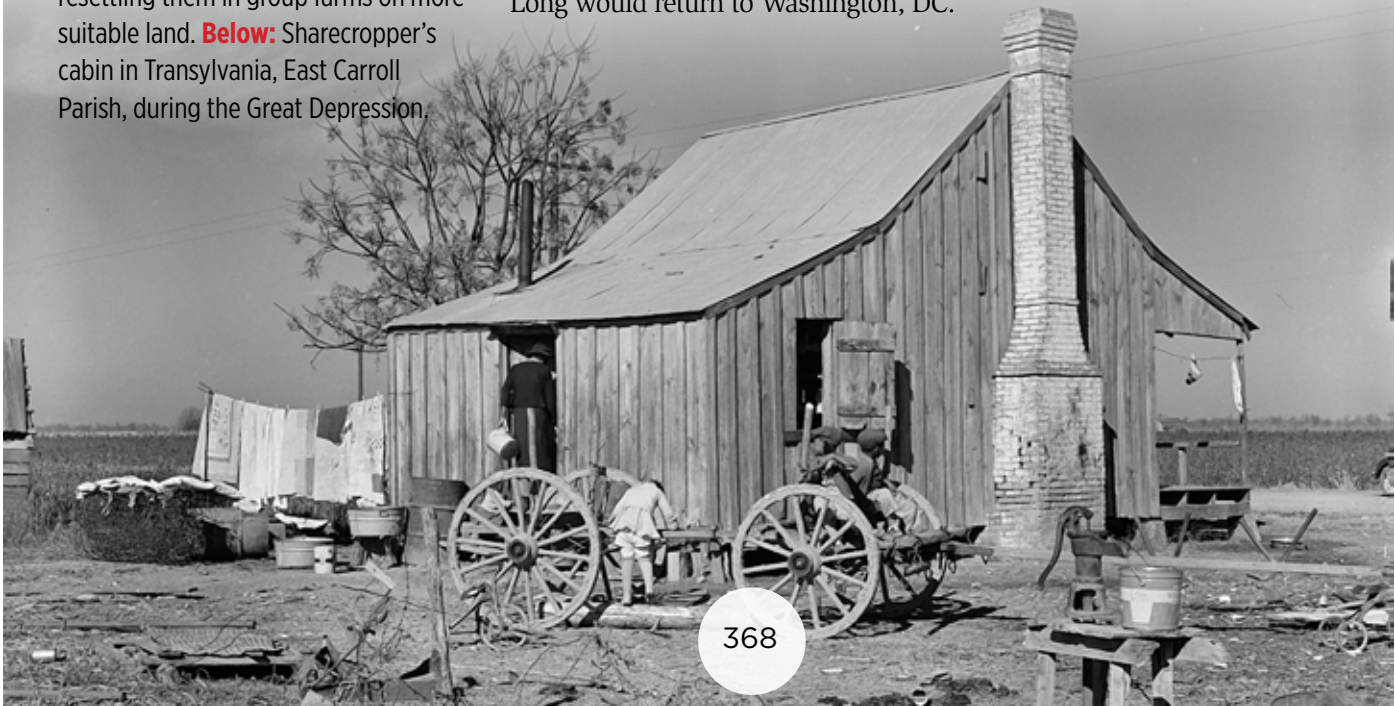
**Above:** This wife and daughter of a Farm Security Administration (FSA) client are sitting in front of a Long-Allen campaign poster. The FSA tried to improve the lives of poor farmers by resettling them in group farms on more suitable land. **Below:** Sharecropper's cabin in Transylvania, East Carroll Parish, during the Great Depression.

## Share Our Wealth

In the midst of the Great Depression, Long's populist messages appealed to the poor. This was much the same way his ideas had appealed to those who felt vulnerable after the 1927 Flood. Long took to the radio, which by the early 1930s had become an important national medium for politicians. Long used every opportunity he could to promote his proposals for ending the depression. He created a set of ideas called Share Our Wealth. Although his proposed solutions varied with time, in general the **Share Our Wealth program** focused on making certain that no American was too rich or too poor. Long felt that all Americans should have a home, enough food to eat, and security in their old age, when they were too old to work. Long argued that the money to secure those goals could be acquired through higher taxes on the nation's wealthiest citizens, especially multimillionaires. Economists would describe Long's program as a redistribution of wealth.

In a period of widespread poverty and economic distress, Long's ideas about income redistribution were very appealing to large segments of the nation's poor. Share Our Wealth societies sprang up around the country. They could be formed very easily, and membership cost nothing. They also provided a forum for people to talk about their problems and to discuss possible solutions—many of them proposed by Long. As the nation's poverty worsened, Long's popularity and appeal grew. With a nationwide network of more than four million members and a mailing list that exceeded seven million by 1935, Long had begun to think seriously about the final step in his long-term plan—a run for the presidency of the United States.

While Long's speeches, radio broadcasts, and Share Our Wealth societies were yielding **grassroots support** (support from ordinary people; support from the ground up) around the country, Senator Long was also still actively controlling politics in Louisiana. During his term in the Senate, he returned to Louisiana regularly to oversee legislative sessions and to ensure that his priorities and plans received legislative passage. Then, as soon as a session was done and he had accomplished what he wished, Long would return to Washington, DC.



## Public Works

Governor O. K. Allen continued the ambitious program of public works that Long had begun in his term as governor. Besides the construction of new roads, Long oversaw the construction of the state's first bridge across the Mississippi River, which was completed near New Orleans in 1935. Long also led the drive for the construction of a new State Capitol building. The soaring thirty-four-story Capitol was impressive at the time of its completion in 1932 and remains the nation's tallest capitol building.

Long also found less visible ways to extend the success of his programs. More than 3,500 miles of paved roads and concrete highways were constructed during Long's term as governor, but the roads were narrower—18 versus 22 feet wide—than the national standard. Many people were also receiving payoffs or kickbacks all throughout the process. One historian estimates that roads cost taxpayers four to five times as much as they should have because of all the *graft* (illegal or unfair gain).



## Was Long a Dictator?

The notion that Huey Long was more of a dictator than an elected official had some basis in fact, because he was serving as U.S. senator while still controlling virtually all the decisions and actions of state government. Even as Long was attracting supporters from around the nation, he was also creating many enemies at home. Most of the state's newspapers were critical of Long. When he could not control them, he started his own newspaper, *The Louisiana Progress*.

As Long's political profile rose, so did concerns that his dictatorial tactics might actually spread beyond the state to the nation if he were elected president. Talk of his assassination arose among those who felt he was dangerous, not just to democracy in Louisiana but, potentially, to the entire nation. Whether it was fear or caution that drove the decision, Long always traveled with several armed bodyguards. He even created a state police force, called the Bureau of Investigation, which he essentially directed and used in whatever way he saw fit.



The Bureau of Investigation was the forerunner of the force that has become the Louisiana Highway Patrol.

**Top:** The Louisiana State Capitol was completed in 1932. **Left:** The Huey P. Long Bridge was opened in 1935. A widening project completed in 2013 made the bridge much safer and more convenient for drivers.

## Lagniappe

Huey Long is also honored with a statue in the U.S. Capitol's National Statuary Hall Collection. Each state is allowed two statues in the Collection. You may recall that the other Louisianian so honored was U.S. Chief Justice Edward Douglass White Jr.



## Lagniappe

The gun supposedly used by Weiss can be viewed along with an exhibit about Long's life and death in the Old State Capitol in Baton Rouge.

## Long's Final Days

There was no doubt about Long's ultimate ambition by August 1935 when he announced his intention to seek the presidency in 1936. The following month, Long returned to Louisiana to run a special session of the legislature he had called. On Sunday evening, September 8, Long was in the State Capitol giving orders and speaking with legislators before the session's opening the next morning. As the senator was hurrying around a corner in the lobby, a young surgeon named Carl Austin Weiss approached Long, whose fast pace put him a few steps ahead of his bodyguards. Many believe that Weiss wanted to confront the senator about pending legislation to remove his father-in-law, the anti-Long judge Benjamin Pavy, from office. Long's bodyguards later testified that Weiss shot the senator at point-blank range. Long turned and ran toward a nearby stairwell, while the bodyguards opened fire on Weiss, whose body was riddled with sixty bullet wounds. He died immediately.

Long was taken to the nearby Our Lady of the Lake Hospital, where surgeons were able to remove a bullet. Despite this success, surgeons did not detect a nick to the kidney that continued to bleed internally. The mighty politician passed away in the early morning hours of September 10, 1935. Despite his many enemies and controversial reputation, Long's supporters considered him a hero of the common people and were deeply saddened by his death. Tens of thousands of mourners made their way to the Capitol to view his body before his burial on the Capitol grounds. In future years, a huge statue that represented Long's accomplishments was placed over the site.

At the time, few questioned Weiss's guilt in Long's death, making it an assassination. However, evidence uncovered in recent decades has raised questions about Weiss's guilt. For instance, photos taken of Weiss's body right after the shooting show no gun in his hand or in the vicinity of his body. The gun he supposedly used to shoot Long also had an irregular chain of custody. It was discovered in the personal possession of the daughter of a policeman involved in the initial investigation of the assassination. It was finally returned to state custody in the 1990s. These and other issues have raised the possibility that Weiss might have approached the senator to confront him, and in response, Long's bodyguards opened fire and shot Long accidentally. No conclusive proof for this theory has ever been uncovered.



**Right:** Carl Austin Weiss.

## Long's Successors

Even before Long's burial, discussion about who would, or could, succeed him and maintain control of state government got underway. Governor O. K. Allen planned to take Huey's seat in the Senate, but died of a heart attack before he could take office. At that time, Rose Long was appointed to the seat until a special election could be held.

There was also a scramble among Huey's loyal followers to decide who would run to fill the next term for governor. James A. Noe, a friend and business partner of Huey's, had become lieutenant governor in 1934 when John Fournet resigned that office. After O.K. Allen died in January 1936, Noe served as interim governor from January through May. He had hoped to be the candidate of the Long machine in the regular election. However, through backroom dealing, Long's most powerful supporters backed a New Orleans judge named Richard Leche. His main qualification was that he was a loyal Long supporter whom many in the background thought they could control.



**Above:** Huey Long's funeral at the State Capitol. **Below:** Governor Leche leaving the governor's mansion after his resignation.

## The Louisiana Scandals

Leche won the governor's office handily in 1936, but many of the problems and corrupt practices that had occurred during the Long era continued. Leche and his *cronies* (close political allies) continued to allow favored associates to make profits from their dealings with state government. Members of the State Highway Commission routinely sold goods and services to the state for construction projects they were supposed to regulate.

Leche and others in power misappropriated construction materials for personal projects. They regularly used state workers to construct and improve their own personal properties and those of their friends. Leche was even taking kickbacks on the purchase of state goods. This included receiving payment for each vehicle an Alexandria auto dealership sold the state.

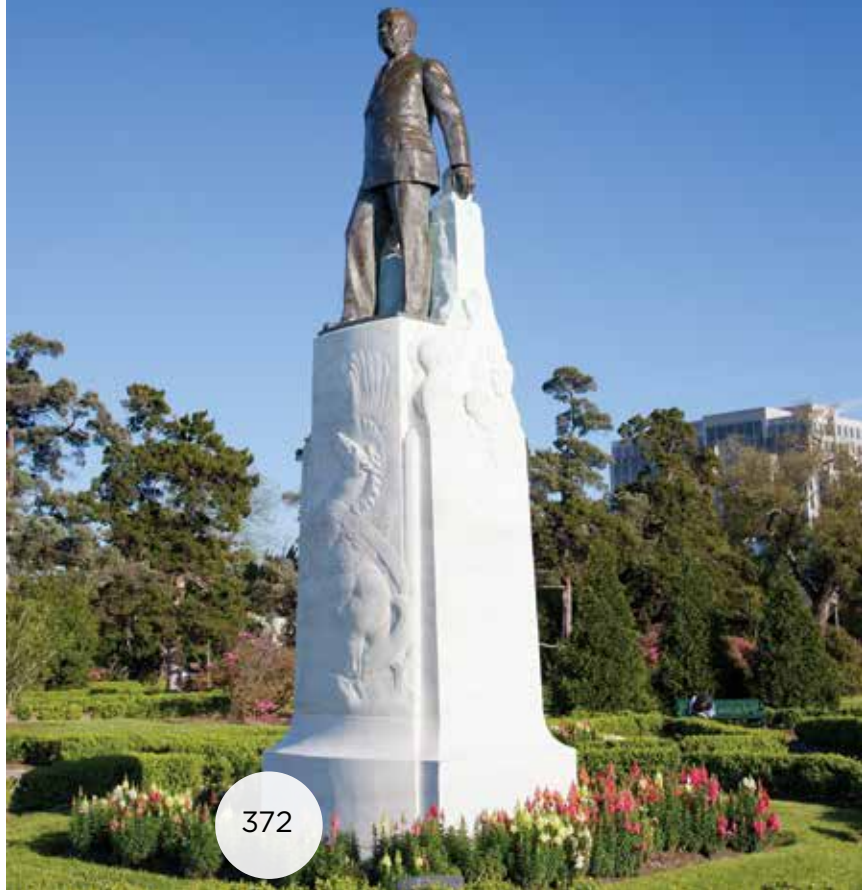


Similar kinds of corruption had been common under Long, but his total control of state government and an atmosphere of intimidation made it difficult for federal investigators to prove corruption while the Kingfish was alive. After Long's death, federal investigators slowly resumed investigations of corruption in the state. By 1939, they had documented and uncovered proof of the kind of widespread corruption that had come to characterize the way business was conducted in Louisiana. Such corrupt practices were so common they came to be known as "The Louisiana Way."

In 1939, more than 250 federal charges were filed against Louisiana citizens and officials. Among those charged was Richard Leche, who was forced to resign as governor. The following year, Leche was found guilty of taking kickbacks and was sentenced to ten years in prison. He was released after serving five years. Other Louisiana officials, including LSU President James Monroe Smith, also served prison time for misdeeds that enriched themselves at the expense of the state and its people.

### Huey Long's Legacy

Huey Long's legacy was a mixed one for the people and the state. His successes included drastically improving the state's transportation system and extending educational opportunity and quality. Long also improved access to health care. Perhaps more important than any individual accomplishment was the way he fundamentally transformed the nature of state government in Louisiana. Before Huey Long's era, the state government had been small and largely focused on protecting property rights, especially for the wealthy. In seven short years, Long transformed the size, nature, and orientation of Louisiana's government in ways that, for the first time, favored the state's common people.



**Right:** Huey Long was buried in the center of the public gardens on the Louisiana State Capitol grounds. The memorial statue over his grave shows him touching a model of the Capitol building that is such an important part of his legacy.



**Left:** WPA workers laying a water main in Madisonville in 1937. **Bottom:** Governor Earl Long.

On the negative side of the ledger, many of these improvements cost the state far more than necessary. And while educational opportunity and access improved, Long's actions threatened freedom of expression, especially for anyone who dared disagree with him. His legacy was further tarnished by the ways he and those who followed him used their official positions to enrich themselves at taxpayer expense. Huey Long was certainly the figure most responsible for bringing Louisiana into the modern world, but he did so in ways that also damaged the state and its reputation across the nation.

After Richard Leche resigned as governor in 1939, Lieutenant Governor Earl K. Long, Huey's younger brother, was sworn in to finish Leche's term. As this event symbolized, the state was hardly done with Longism. As Louisiana entered the 1940s, Earl Long and the ideas and practices begun by his brother continued to be part of the state's political, social, and economic life. However, as the 1940s began, events far beyond Louisiana changed the state and the nation profoundly in the decades to come.



## Reviewing the Section

1. Define in sentence form: Great Depression, Share Our Wealth program, grassroots support.
2. How was Huey Long's behavior in the U.S. Senate different from that of other new senators?
3. Describe the death of Huey P. Long.



# Chapter Review

## Chapter Summary

### Section 1: Politics in the 1920s

- John Parker, who was elected governor in 1920, aimed to reform the state in ways that aligned with his progressive ideas. He continued a program to build roads, supported passage of the state's first severance tax, and called for a new constitution that was adopted in 1921.
- In 1918, Huey Long achieved a seat on the Railroad Commission. He later became the chairman of what became known as the Public Service Commission. He used this position to establish a reputation as champion of the common man.
- In 1923, Long campaigned for governor promising new roads and bridges and education improvements. He became popular in North Louisiana but did not do well in the cities, especially New Orleans, and he ultimately lost the race.
- In 1927, the Mississippi River breached many of the levees along its banks causing widespread flooding. New Orleans business leaders, who feared the city would flood, created the Citizens Flood Relief Committee, which dynamited the levees south of the city to ease pressure on New Orleans, thereby flooding poor white residents of St. Bernard and Plaquemines Parishes.

### Section 2: Huey Long Elected Governor

- In the wake of the flood, Long's populist message became even more attractive to the state's voters. He was inaugurated governor in 1928.
- Once in office, Long began to work toward achieving some of his campaign promises. He succeeded in providing free textbooks to the state's schools. He also began to build paved roads in areas scattered across the state; however, the roads were of inferior quality and the system was corrupt. Long and other officials profited from these road projects.
- Long exerted great control over all of the political processes in the state through patronage and heavy, though often unwanted, involvement in the legislature.

- In March of 1929, Long's opponents started impeachment procedures against him. In what became known as the legislative round-robin, Long secured agreements from 15 state senators that they would not vote to impeach him. The senators who sided with Long were rewarded, and Long's power continued to grow.

### Section 3: Huey Long in the United States Senate

- In 1930, Long was elected to the U.S. Senate. He refused to be sworn in until he first ensured that his loyal friend, O. K. Allen, won the governor's office.
- Long had ambitions to run for president and used his time in the U.S. Senate to increase his national profile. He campaigned for Hattie Caraway in Arkansas. Long helped her win the election, making her the first woman elected to the U.S. Senate.
- Long proposed the Share Our Wealth program to end the Great Depression. His program involved a redistribution of wealth making certain that no American was too rich or too poor. His ideas appealed to many people, and Share Our Wealth societies were created all over the country.
- As he gained national support, Long still controlled politics in Louisiana. This created many enemies, who believed he was acting like a dictator. In September of 1935, Long was assassinated by Carl Weiss in the lobby of the State Capitol.
- Long's successors continued the corrupt practices that began in the Long era. Federal investigators resumed investigations of corruption in the state. In 1939, more than 250 federal charges were filed against Louisiana citizens and officials, including Governor Richard Leche.
- Long's legacy in Louisiana is mixed. However, it cannot be denied that he transformed the state government of Louisiana and brought Louisiana into the modern world.

## Activities for Learning

### Understanding the Facts

1. Which part of Louisiana supported prohibition?
2. What term refers to the payment of a set percentage of the value or volume of the natural resources removed from the land?
3. What three states suffered the worst from the 1927 Flood?
4. What were two major reforms Huey Long accomplished during his term as governor?
5. As governor, how many state jobs were under Huey Long's control?
6. How did Governor Huey Long punish legislators who opposed his plans?
7. What specific impeachment charges were brought against Huey Long?
8. What nickname did Huey Long adopt as a U.S. senator?
9. What was the size of the membership in the Share Our Wealth societies?
10. Describe the construction of Louisiana's State Capitol building.
11. When, where, and by whom was Huey Long allegedly assassinated?
12. Why did Richard Leche resign as governor?

### Developing Critical Thinking

1. Why do you think state officials went along with the dynamiting at Caernavon?
2. How was Huey Long's inauguration as governor consistent with his campaign message?

### Writing across the Curriculum

Go to [http://house.louisiana.gov/pubinfo/virtual%20tour/house\\_chamber.htm](http://house.louisiana.gov/pubinfo/virtual%20tour/house_chamber.htm). Tour the State Capitol building and view the various photographs. Using the visual evidence from one of the photographs and information from this website and the chapter, create a 5" x 8" postcard using a photograph for the front and writing a paragraph about this photograph on the back.

### Exploring Louisiana on the Internet

Go to [www.loc.gov/pictures/item/fsa2000001449/PP/](http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/fsa2000001449/PP/). View the photographs of Dorothea Lange. What did you learn about rural Louisiana during the Great Depression?

### Building 21st-Century Skills: Separating Fact from Opinion

A *fact* is an objectively verifiable truth. A fact statement can be proven through evidence gathered from eye-witness testimony, investigation, observation, research, or written records. By contrast, an *opinion* is a subjective statement of belief, feeling, or judgment. An opinion statement reflects an individual's attitudes, biases, and preferences. If you encounter a statement that can be proven, it is a fact. Conversely, if a statement includes a word or phrase such as, "good," "better," "best," "worst," "should," "I believe," or "I feel," it is probably an opinion. Read a description of Huey Long's speaking ability and identify two facts and two opinions:

(From *The Nation*, January 1935, by Raymond Gram Swing)

"Huey Long is the best stump speaker in America. He is the best political radio speaker, better even than President Roosevelt. Give him time on the air and let him have a week to campaign in each state, and he can sweep the country. He is one of the most persuasive men living."