

The United States and Louisiana: The Industrial Age through the Modern Era


Chapter 9: The Era of Huey Long – Quick Notes

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Section 1: Politics in the 1920s

➤ Essential Question

- What were some of the contrasting views on prohibition in North and South Louisiana?




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Section 1: Politics in the 1920s

➤ What terms do I need to know?

- prohibition
- Public Service Commission
- Flood of 1927



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Politics in the 1920s

➤ The adoption of the Eighteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution made the manufacture and sale of alcoholic drinks illegal as of January 1, 1920.

➤ Many people in North Louisiana supported **prohibition** (forbidding production and sale of alcoholic beverages).

➤ However, Roman Catholics, who were dominant in South Louisiana, did not support the ban and aided in the smuggling of illegal alcohol.



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Reforming Governors

➤ John Parker, wealthy Louisiana businessman and planter, became a member of the National Progressive Party, organized by former president Theodore Roosevelt.

➤ In 1916, Parker ran for governor of Louisiana on the Progressive Party ticket, but he lost to the Democratic candidate, J. Y. Sanders.

➤ Afterward, Parker returned to the Democratic Party and became governor in 1920.



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Reforming Governors Pt. 2

- As he entered office, Parker was determined to continue reforming Louisiana in line with his progressive ideas.
- He continued gravel road program started by Sanders, but he was hampered by the 1913 Constitution's ban on borrowing money to undertake such projects.
- Many concerns with the 1913 Constitution led to the creation of a new constitution adopted in 1921.




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Reforming Governors Pt. 3

- Louisiana's timber and oil generated large profits, but most of the money was going to out-of-state businesses and corporations.
- Parker made a severance tax, which required companies to pay a percent of the value of the resources removed from the land.
- Some praised Parker for the move, but others criticized him for letting oil and timber companies play a role in making legislation.




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Huey Long and the Railroad Commission

- Huey Long, years before he held any office, wrote to the state's politicians and gave legislators pamphlets to spread his ideas.
- Long's successful law practice gave him a good record to use for his election to the state's Railroad Commission in 1918, which he won at age 25.
- The Railroad Commission, which regulated operations and safety of public services and utilities, changed its name in 1921 to the **Public Service Commission**.




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Huey Long and the Railroad Commission Pt. 2

- Long's energized pursuit of his new job on the Commission gained public notoriety.
- Long became chairman of the Commission in 1921 and established a statewide reputation as a champion for common people against companies and corporations.
- He won a fight to make telephone companies pay back an overcharge and took credit for the small refund checks that customers received.



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Huey Long and the Railroad Commission Pt. 3

- Huey began campaigning for governor in 1923, promising a statewide system of paved roads and improvements in education for children.
- He worked hard, visiting small and remote towns, and he secured loyal voters among the rural population, who often felt ignored.
- He did not pole well in Southern Louisiana in the 1924 election, so he knew he had to find ways to appeal to city voters next time.




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The 1927 Flood

- The **Flood of 1927** was one of the worst natural disasters in the nation's history.
- Rainfall across the Midwest and Mississippi valley throughout the spring combined with the usual spring flooding, lead to the massive Mississippi River flood.
- Unfortunately, the "levees-only" policy by the Army Corps of Engineers to control the river and protect cities worsened the flooding.




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The 1927 Flood Pt. 2

- When the river could not hold the rainfall and flooding, the levees were breached as far north as Illinois.
- Flooding extended to the Gulf of Mexico, and in some places, flooding spread more than fifty miles beyond the riverbanks.
- Arkansas, Mississippi, and Louisiana suffered the worst, with more than 100 breaches in their levees.




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The Citizens Flood Relief Committee

- New Orleans business leaders worried about business in the city if it and its ports flooded, and so a group of powerful and wealthy men formed the Citizens Flood Relief Committee.
- Despite no authority from the state, they decided preventing flooding in New Orleans was their top priority.
- They created a plan to dynamite the levees below New Orleans to ease pressure on the city's levees.



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The Citizens Flood Relief Committee Pt. 2

- Citizens of St. Bernard and Plaquemines Parishes would be flooded instead, and they clashed with committee members.
- The Committee promised to make payments to people who would be flooded and provide them with temporary housing in New Orleans.
- With the blessing of state officials, the Committee used 39 tons of dynamite at Caernarvon, located about a dozen miles downriver from New Orleans.




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Political Impact

- President Calvin Coolidge sent Herbert Hoover to assist with flood relief, and the memory of Hoover aiding people contributed to his victory in the 1928 presidential election.
- Due to the floods, many of the poor became poorer, and Long's message, which focused on the common people's needs, gained lots of support from the downtrodden and ignored.
- Due to this discontent, Long won the election for governor of the state.




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Section 2: Huey Long Elected Governor

- Essential Question
 - What were Huey Long's accomplishments as governor?




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Section 2: Huey Long Elected Governor

- What terms do I need to know?
 - bond
 - deduct box
 - fait accompli
 - unorthodox
 - misappropriate



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Huey Long Elected Governor

- Huey Long worked for four years to increase his popularity, promising to improve the transportation system and provide free schoolbooks to the state's children.
- He also attacked the state's wealthiest people and powerful corporations.
- He promised his election would give a voice to those usually ignored in setting the state's priorities.




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Huey Long Elected Governor Pt. 2

- Long also targeted city dwellers, promising to pave New Orleans' dirt and gravel roads as well as piping natural gas into the city so residents could heat their homes for less money.
- Due to his hard work, promises, and message in favor of the common people, Huey P. Long was inaugurated governor in May 1928.
- Right away, he made good on his promise to distribute free textbooks to the state's schools, even strong-arming those who tried to resist.




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Roads

- Long started a scattered program of paving roads across the state, hoping citizens would demand more paved roads from legislators after experiencing them.
- Road construction was popular because it was paid through selling **bonds**, which are certificates promising payment by a certain date from a government or corporation.
- Investors who bought the bonds would be paid in interest, and people felt they were getting a lot for not much money.




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Roads Pt. 2

- Long put his friend O. K. Allen in charge of the Highway Commission, the body responsible for road construction projects.
- Roads were made quickly, but they were poor quality, and many officials involved benefitted monetarily.
- Allen, Long, and others were involved in a company that sold rocks to the Highway Commission and charged double what competitors charged.
- Rural people welcomed the roads, but the corruption found in doing business with the state was hidden from their view.



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Patronage

- Long had a great deal of power due to his control over state offices and jobs.
- Jobs were especially hard to find as the nation entered the Great Depression in 1929.
- People were desperate for work, so the governor's control of patronage appointments became even more valuable.




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The Deduct Box

- Long initiated a practice known as giving to the **deduct box** to reflect that state workers owed the governor for their jobs.
- State employees were required to pay 10% of their salary to the deduct box, which was supposed to go to Long's political organization.
- Long regularly mixed deducted funds and campaign contributions with his personal funds, giving him access to vast amounts of cash that he did not have to disclose what it was spent on.




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Long and the Legislature

- Long involved himself in every aspect of lawmaking, walking the legislative chambers, sitting in on committee meetings, and making legislators vote for laws he wanted.
- If members opposed his plans, Long took away their committee assignments, and he reconfigured committees with loyal legislators who would vote his way.
- He even threatened to take away jobs from elected official's family members if they didn't fall in line.




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Long and the Legislature Pt. 2

- Long was willing to achieve his goals without legislative approval, with one example being the governor's mansion.
- The governor's mansion needed repairs, and the State Liquidation Board, which Long controlled, gave him a loan of \$15,000.
- Instead of seeking approval to make repairs, Long had a group of inmates come tear down the old mansion.
- Long pacified his critics with a **fait accompli** (something that has been done and cannot be changed), and now a new mansion had to be built.



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Long and the Legislature Pt. 3

- Huey Long was proving to be a formidable opponent, but his **unorthodox** (different from what is usually done or accepted) methods led his opponents to try removing him from office.
- In 1929, his opponents tried to impeach him and charge him with **misappropriating** (take something dishonestly for one's own use) state funds and attempting to bribe legislators.
- The next few days were disorderly, with fist-fighting even breaking out in the House of Representatives.




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Long and the Legislature Pt. 4

- If the House approved the charges, 2/3rds of the Senate would have to agree he was guilty.
- Huey and his supporters convinced fifteen senators to sign an agreement to never cast a guilty vote no matter the evidence.
- By receiving these promises from more than 1/3 of the senators, Long disrupted his impeachment, and he gave the signers desirable government positions afterwards.



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Long and the Legislature Pt. 5

- Long saved himself and handed his opponents another political defeat.
- Long was even more powerful after the impeachment failed, and he was ready for the next step in his plan.




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Section 3: Huey Long in the United States Senate

- Essential Question
 - What were Long's attempts to broaden his national appeal while still controlling state politics?



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Section 3: Huey Long in the United States Senate

- What terms do I need to know?
 - Great Depression
 - Share Our Wealth program
 - grassroots support




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Huey Long in the United States Senate

- Long won one of Louisiana's two United States Senate seats in 1930.
- Long waited to be sworn in until he could help his friend, O. K. Allen, win the election to be Louisiana's governor, which happened in 1932.
- Long, now referring to himself as the Kingfish, was sworn into the United States Senate on January 25, 1932, but his sights were set on the White House.




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Senator Long Goes to Washington

- While tradition stated new Senate members work behind the scenes, shadowing and cooperating with other members, Long had no intention of following tradition.
- Long ignored established rules or found ways to bypass those who tried to block his ideas or ambitions.
- Long spent a lot of time giving speeches to the American people, and when he addressed the Senate, it was usually in the form of filibustering, or long floor speeches to block legislation he opposed.




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Broadening His Appeal

- In 1932, Long traveled with his fleet of campaign trucks to Arkansas, where he rallied and spoke in support of Senator Hattie Caraway's re-election.
- Caraway had been appointed to finish her deceased husband's term, and she sat next to Long in the Senate, where there seemed to be a genuinely good relationship between the two.
- However, Long felt helping Caraway win would show he could influence elections beyond his own state.
- With Long's help, Caraway won the race, making her the first woman elected to the United States Senate.



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Louisiana during the Great Depression

- Long was sworn in during the **Great Depression**, which was the severe economic downturn that began with the stock market crash of 1929 and continued into the 1940s.
- In October 1929, the stock market, the value of which had climbed very high, collapsed, and the nation's wealth disappeared.
- Unemployment rates skyrocketed, and many Americans suffered extreme poverty, especially farm families.




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Louisiana during the Great Depression Pt. 2

- The mostly rural and agriculture-dependent Louisiana faced many economic challenges for the poor that just could not be overcome.
- Farming families could usually grow enough to feed themselves, but city families had no room to plant gardens.
- Many families came close to starvation.



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Share Our Wealth

- Long's populist messages during the Great Depression appealed to the poor and vulnerable like the 1927 Flood in Louisiana.
- Long used every opportunity to promote his proposals for ending the depression, which included a set of ideals called Share Our Wealth.
- The **Share Our Wealth program** focused on making certain that no American was too rich or too poor.




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Share Our Wealth Pt. 2

- Long felt all Americans should have a home, food, and economic security in their old age.
- Long argued the money to achieve these proposals could be raised from higher taxes on the nation's wealthiest citizens.
- These ideas of income redistribution were very appealing to large segments of the nation's poor.
- Share Our Wealth societies sprang up around the country, providing a forum for people to talk about their problems and discuss possible solutions, most of them proposed by Long.



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Share Our Wealth Pt. 3

- Now with a nationwide network of more than 4 million members and a mailing list of 7 million, Long began considering his final step: running for the presidency of the United States.
- Long’s speeches, broadcasts, and Share Our Wealth societies yielded **grassroots support** (support from ordinary people), and he was still actively controlling politics in Louisiana.
- He would travel to Louisiana to oversee legislative sessions and ensure his priorities and plans passed before returning to Washington, DC.




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Public Works

- Long oversaw many public works projects, including continued road construction, a new bridge across the Mississippi River in 1935, and a new, tall State Capitol building in 1932.
- Long cut corners to extend his programs, and many were receiving kickbacks throughout the process.
- One historian estimated the roads cost taxpayers 4 to 5 times as much as they should have because of all the illegal money-handling.




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Was Long a Dictator?

- The idea of Long as a dictator was not far off, as he was serving as a US Senator while still controlling the state government.
- Despite the growing number of supporters, Long still made plenty of enemies, and most of the state’s newspapers were critical of him.
- Concerns rose that his dictatorial tactics may spread to the nation if he was elected, and soon, talk of his assassination began.
- As such, Long travelled with several armed bodyguards and created the Bureau of Investigation, a state police force he controlled and directed.




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Long’s Final Days

- In August 1935, Long announced his intentions to seek the presidency in 1936, and he returned home the following month to run a special session of the legislature.
- As Long was hurrying around a corner in the State Capitol, a young surgeon Carl Austin Weiss, approached him, with Long’s bodyguards testifying he shot Long point-blank.
- Long ran while the bodyguards riddled Weiss with gunfire, killing him instantly.



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Long's Final Days Pt. 2

- Surgeons removed the bullet that struck Long, but they didn't detect a nick in his kidney that continued to bleed internally until his death in September 10, 1935.
- Long's supporters considered him a hero and were saddened by his death, leading to tens of thousands of mourners coming to the Capitol.
- While few questioned Weiss's guilt in the matter, evidence uncovered in more recent decades have raised several questions.




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Long's Final Days Pt. 3

- Photos taken of Weiss's body right after the shooting show no gun in his hand or near his body.
- The gun allegedly used had a poor chain of custody, eventually discovered decades later in possession of the daughter of one of the policemen involved in the initial investigation.
- Theories suggest Weiss approached to confront Long about legislation, and his bodyguards opened fire, striking Long in the process, but there is no evidence for this theory.




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Long's Successors

- Even before burial, discussion about succession got underway.
- Due to Governor Allen dying from a heart attack, Rose Long was appointed to the seat until a special election could be held.
- James A. Noe, a business partner of Long's, was lieutenant governor and served as interim governor from January through May.
- Despite his hopes to be the Long candidate for governor, the Long machine backed New Orleans judge Richard Leche, a controllable supporter.




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The Louisiana Scandals

- Leche became governor in 1936, but he continued many of the Long era problems and corruptions.
- Friends profiting from state deals, misusing construction materials for personal use, and illegal kickbacks are just a few examples.
- While Long did many of these things, his iron grip on the government made it difficult for federal investigators to prove the corruption.



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The Louisiana Scandals Pt. 2

- After Long's death, investigators were finally able to uncover and document proof of the widespread corruption rampant in Louisiana.
- In 1939, more than 250 federal charges were filed against Louisiana citizens and officials, including Richard Leche.
- Leche was forced to resign as governor, and a year later, he and many others were found guilty and sentenced to prison.




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Huey Long's Legacy

- Long drastically improved the state's transportation and education system, as well as access to healthcare.
- He also overhauled the state's government to favor the common people rather than serving the wealthy.
- However, he imposed heavy costs on the state, and many of his actions threatened the freedoms for those who disagreed with him.
- He and his allies also enriched themselves at the expense of the taxpayers.
- While Long did bring Louisiana into the modern world, he damaged the state and its reputation.




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Huey Long's Legacy Pt. 2

- After Leche resigned, Earl K. Long, Huey Long's younger brother, was sworn in to finish his term.
- Entering the 1940s, Earl Long continued many of his brother's political, social, and economic practices.
- However, events beyond Louisiana in the 1940s would drastically change the state and nation for decades to come.



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