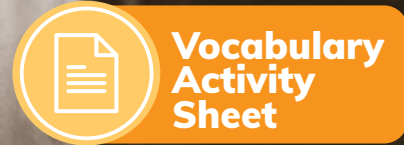


Chapter 9

The Era Of Huey Long



Rose McConnell was born in Indiana in 1892 but moved to Louisiana at age nine. After finishing high school, Rose taught and later learned secretarial skills like typing and dictation. She worked 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, Tennessee, 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 this would not be the only time her new husband would depend on her.

Huey Long was an unusual man with an amazing memory and willingness 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.

CHAPTER PREVIEW

a-z

GLOSSARY

PEOPLE:

Rose McConnell Long, Huey Pierce Long, John Parker, Theodore Roosevelt, 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

Background: Rose McConnell Long at her desk with a photo of her husband, Huey Long.

Huey set up a law practice in Winnfield, Louisiana, and later in Shreveport. His goals were always political. Rose recalled that, early on, Huey had laid out a detailed plan he believed would lead him to be president 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 began serving in the United States Senate in 1932. He was planning a run for president when he was assassinated in 1935. Shortly afterward, Rose was appointed and was later elected to finish 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 20th century. Huey Long came to dominate Louisiana's government, but he also became a national figure whose ideas attracted significant nationwide support in the 1930s.

In this chapter, we will explore Louisiana 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 and 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 Louisiana and its people.



Signs of the Times

Architecture

In 1930, the Chrysler Building in New York City was completed. At 1,047 feet, it passed 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. The Rockefeller Center complex, also in New York City, was one of the major construction projects completed during the Great Depression.

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 United States.

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.

Literature

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

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.”



Timeline 1920-1940

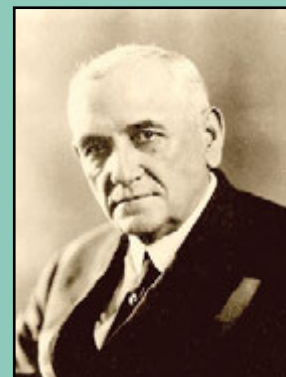
State/
National
Timeline

1920

1920 John Parker elected governor
18th Amendment took effect, making prohibition a national law

1921 Louisiana Constitution of 1921 adopted
Huey Long became chairman of the Public Service Commission

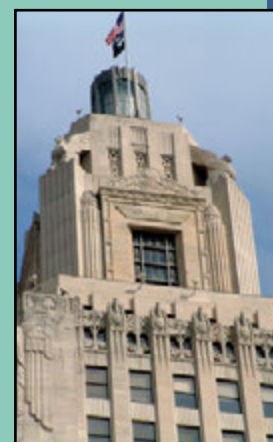
1924 Henry L. Fuqua defeated Huey Long in governor's race



1927 Citizens Flood Relief Committee formed
Mississippi River flood

1928 Huey Long sworn in as governor
Herbert Hoover elected United States president

1929 New governor's mansion built
State House of Representatives attempted to impeach Huey Long
Stock market crash; the beginning of the Great Depression



1930 Huey Long elected to U.S. Senate

1932 Huey Long sworn in as U.S. senator
Current Louisiana State Capitol completed
Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected to 1st of 4 terms as president

1933 Beginning of New Deal to alleviate the Great Depression

1935 Huey Long died
State's first bridge across Mississippi River completed



1936 Rose Long succeeded her husband in United States Senate
Richard Leche became governor

1939 Governor Richard Leche was forced to resign; Earl Long finished term
18th Amendment repealed, ending national prohibition
World War II broke out in Europe

1940

Background: The Chrysler Building. **Top to Bottom:** Henry L. Fuqua, The top of the Louisiana State Capitol, Rose Long.

SECTION 1

Louisiana Politics in the 1920s



Section 1
PowerPoint



Section 1
Quick Notes



Section 1
Audiobook



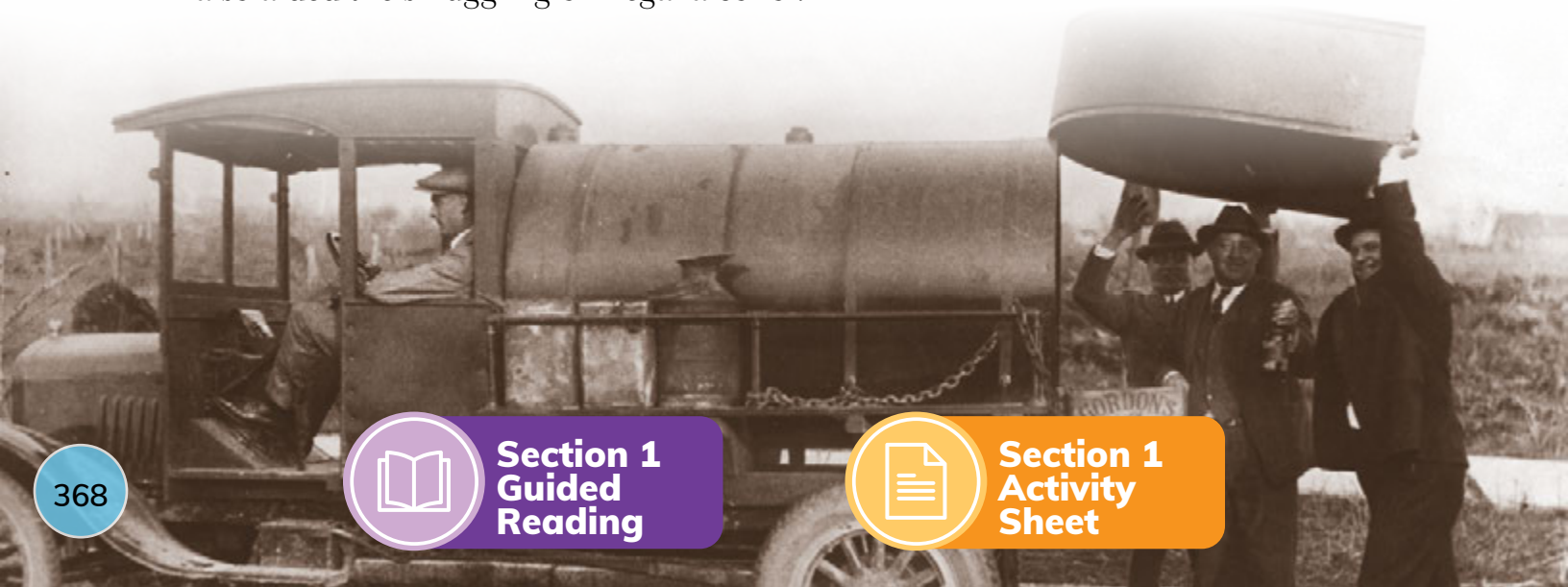
As you read, look for...

a-z

GLOSSARY

- » 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**.

Great changes came to Louisiana at the start of the 1920s. Federal legislation and 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 by law the making and selling of alcoholic beverages). They had anticipated these changes by banning the sale of alcohol in their communities years earlier. Prohibition supporters were often motivated by Protestant religious beliefs that barred alcohol consumption. Roman Catholics, who were dominant in South Louisiana, did not have the same restrictions regarding 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 the smuggling of illegal alcohol.



Section 1
Guided
Reading



Section 1
Activity
Sheet

Reforming Governors

John Parker was a wealthy and well-regarded Louisiana businessman and planter. He became a member of the National Progressive Party, organized by his friend and the former United States president, Theodore Roosevelt. In 1916, Parker ran for governor of Louisiana on the Progressive Party ticket. He lost that race to the Democratic candidate, Ruffin G. Pleasant. Afterward, 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 program of building gravel roads that was begun by Governor J. Y. 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 praised for supporting the state's first severance tax. Louisiana's timber and oil resources were generating large profits, but much of the money was leaving the state and enriching businesses and corporations like the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey. Creating a severance tax required companies to pay a 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 a central role in developing legislation and setting rates.



Opposite Page:

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

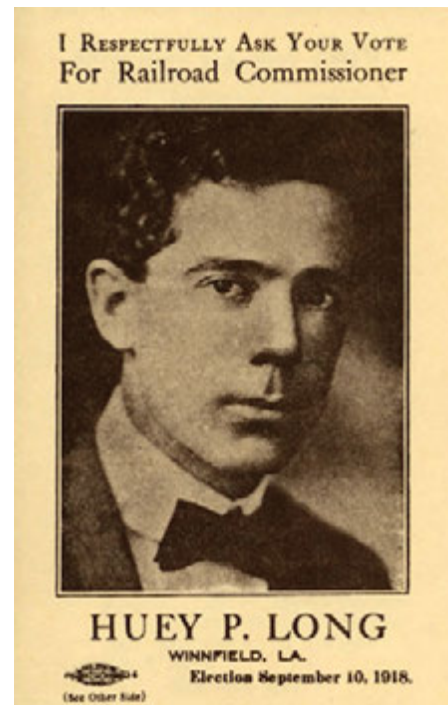
Above: Businessman John Parker served as governor from 1920 to 1924.

Huey Long and the Railroad Commission

Right: Huey Long's Railroad Commissioner campaign card.

Below: 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.

Before he was elected to any political office, Huey Long had made his ideas known to the state's politicians by writing letters or printing 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



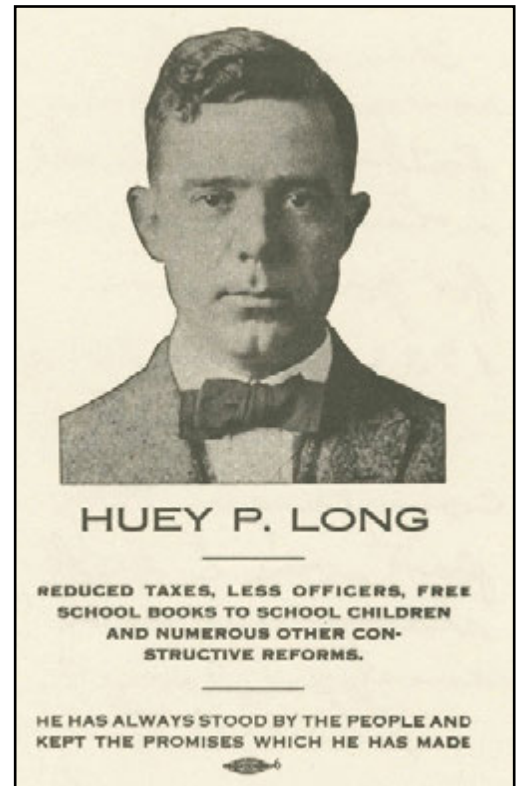
kinds of emerging utilities like telephone and electricity companies. In 1921, the name was changed to the **Public Service Commission**. Long won a seat on the three-member panel and, at the age of twenty-five, entered state politics.

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 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 Long's First Campaign for Governor

Huey 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 secured 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, Long had strong support in North Louisiana. In the first Democratic primary, he won all but three parishes in northern and central Louisiana, but he polled very badly in cities, especially in New Orleans.. He knew he would have to find ways to appeal to city voters the next time—and for him, there was never any question that there would be a next time.



Above: This campaign card promoted Huey Long's 1924 run for governor.

Left: The USS New Orleans was seen passing under the Huey P. Long Bridge in New Orleans in March 2007.



**Huey P.
Long Bridge**



The 1927 Flood

The **Flood of 1927** was one of the worst natural disasters in the nation's history. 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 worsened the flooding. 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 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 9.1 SKILL

Which rivers that are named on this map flooded in 1927?

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

MAP 9.1 THE 1927 FLOOD



The Great Flood of 1927 Photos

The Citizens Flood Relief Committee

New Orleans business leaders worried about what would happen to businesses if the city and its port facilities flooded. A group of powerful and wealthy men formed an organization called the Citizens Flood Relief Committee. Although they originally had no authorization from the 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.

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 with 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.

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 support from people who felt that those in power did not pay attention to their needs. Long won the election for governor of the state.

REVIEW AND SUMMARIZE

1. How did opinions about prohibition differ in North Louisiana and South Louisiana?
2. What were some of Governor John Parker's progressive reforms?
3. How did Huey Long begin his career in Louisiana politics?
4. How did the Flood of 1927 affect Louisianans?
5. How did the Flood of 1927 help the political career of Huey Long?

SECTION 2

Section 2
Guided
ReadingSection 2
Activity
Sheet

Huey Long Elected Governor

Section 2
PowerPointSection 2
Quick NotesSection 2
Audiobook*As you read, look for...*

a-z

GLOSSARY

- » 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.**

Huey Long had worked tirelessly for four years to increase his popularity 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 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 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.





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 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, which was a form of borrowing rather than raising taxes. A **bond** is a certificate promising payment of money by a certain date, 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 they were getting a lot for not very much money.

Opposite Page: After winning the election by the largest margin in Louisiana's history, Huey P. Long was inaugurated governor in May 1928. **Above:** Huey Long's desk is still on display in his governor's mansion, which is now a historic house museum. In the corner of the office is the gown he wore at his law school graduation.





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

Above: O. K. Allen was in charge of the state's Highway Commission.

Below: After Huey Long was elected governor in 1928, he had the ability to appoint people to more than 25,000 state jobs.



The Deduct Box

Perhaps reflecting the knowledge that state workers owed 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 ten percent of their salary to this so-called deduct box. The money was supposed to support Long's political organization. Long, however, routinely mixed deducted 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 in place that required him to disclose where the money came from or how it was spent.



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.

Above: 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.

FIGURE 9.1
Funding Huey Long's Economic Reform in Louisiana

Improvement	Source of Funding
Roads and Bridges	Voter-approved bonds and gasoline tax
Hospital Expansion	Tax on carbon black
Schools (free education and books, buses for transporting students)	Severance tax on natural resources such as oil removed from the state

Did You Know?

The deduct box, 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.

Did You Know?

The governor's mansion that Huey Long built was reportedly a copy of the original design for the White House in Washington, D.C.

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 say that the mansion is a fine example of Georgian-style architecture.

The governor was 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.

Right: The governor's mansion that Huey Long built is a fine example of Georgian-style architecture.

Opposite Page, Top: The rotunda of the Old State Capitol, where Huey Long began his governorship.

Opposite Page, Bottom: 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 allowed his opponents 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 ensure 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.





Above: Huey Long was sworn in as governor on the grounds of the Old State Capitol. It was in this building that the Louisiana House of Representatives later voted to impeach him.

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. Afterward, 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.

REVIEW AND SUMMARIZE

1. What accomplishments made Huey Long popular as governor?
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

Audiobook:
Special
Feature

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 handpicked 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 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 money to spend 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 the 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 told them 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.



Background and Above: Huey Long was devoted to LSU and sometimes marched with the drum majors at the head of the marching band.

SECTION 3

Section 3
Guided
ReadingSection 3
Activity
Sheet

Huey Long in the United States Senate

Section 3
PowerPointSection 3
Quick NotesSection 3
Audiobook

As you read, look for...

a-z

GLOSSARY

- » reasons for the popularity of the Share Our Wealth program;
- » Huey Long's unconventional behavior as a new United States senator;
- » Long's attempts to broaden his national appeal while still controlling state politics;
- » 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 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 United States Senate on January 25, 1932. He was in the nation's capitol, but he had his sights set on the White House.

Left: A statue of Huey Long is displayed in the U.S. Capitol's National Statuary Hall. **Opposite Page, Top:** Huey Long spent more time giving speeches to the American people than to his fellow senators. **Opposite Page, Bottom:** Senator Hattie Caraway.



Senator Long Goes to Washington

There was a tradition in the United States 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 experience. 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 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 rapport (relationship, connection) between the two. However, Long did almost nothing without calculating its political impact. He believed 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 United States Senate. Long's influence beyond Louisiana scored a victory.



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, 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 came close to starvation.



Above: An anxious crowd gathered on Wall Street in New York City after the 1929 stock market crash.

Below: This marketplace scene in New Orleans was photographed in 1936, during the height of the Great Depression.



Share Our Wealth

Amid 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 way of communicating for politicians. Long used every opportunity 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.



Above: A Share Our Wealth Society button.
Below: Long's populist messages appealed to families in economic distress.





Above: The cabin of a sharecropper in Transylvania, East Carroll Parish, during the Great Depression.
Below: The Louisiana State Capitol was completed in 1932.

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 public works program that Long had begun in his term as governor. Besides constructing 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 to construct a new State Capitol building. The soaring thirty-four-story Capitol was impressive at 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 throughout the process. One historian estimated that roads cost taxpayers four to five times as much as they should have because of all the graft (illegal or unfair gain).

Left: Huey Long's 15 hour, 30 minute, filibuster in 1935 was the sixth-longest U.S. Senate filibuster on record.

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 a United States senator while still controlling virtually all the decisions and actions of state government. Even as Long was attracting supporters from around the nation, he created 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 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.

Did You Know?

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."

Special Feature Louisiana's New Capitol Building



Audiobook:
Special
Feature

When Huey Long became governor in 1928, the governor's office was in what we now call the Old State Capitol, also known as the State House. Construction on that building started in 1847. The building, which looked like a medieval castle, needed many improvements including plumbing and wiring for electricity and telephones.

As part of Governor Long's plan to improve the state's infrastructure, he worked to construct a new capitol building. He envisioned a grand representation of past, present, and future Louisiana. In 1930, Long hired architects to begin planning the new building. One of the key features that he wanted was a modern tower. The architects modeled the capitol after the Nebraska State Capitol, which was under construction at the same time. These capitols were designed in the art deco style, blending function with geometric and artistic touches. The result is the current Louisiana State Capitol, which stands 450 feet tall with 34 floors. It is the tallest capitol building in the United States, and its unique features make it one of the most distinctive state capitols in the country.

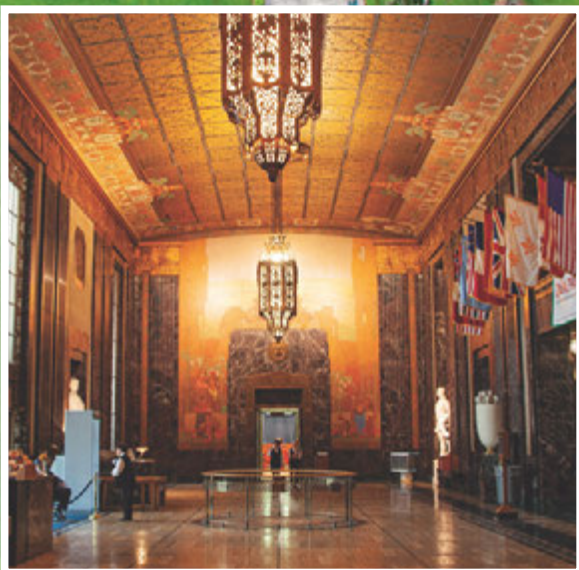
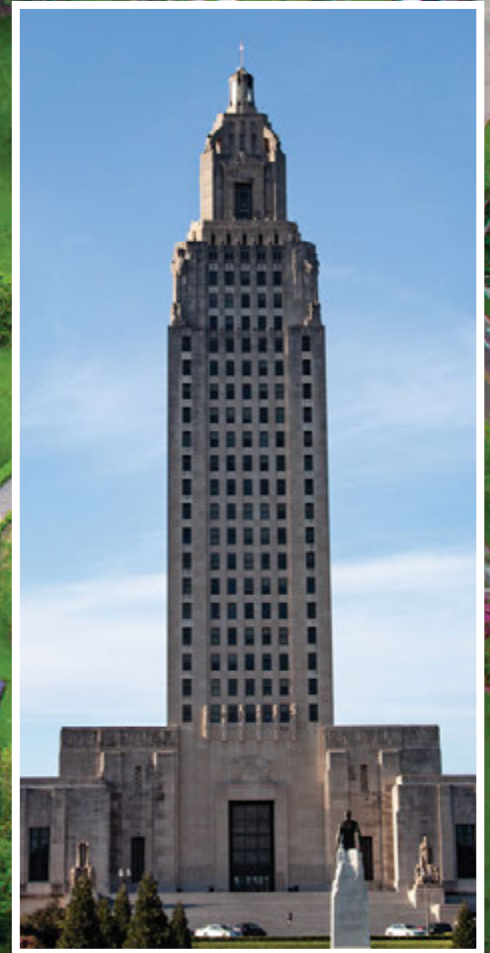
Set on 27 acres of beautifully maintained grounds, the building has one large tower in the center, two wings for the legislature on each side, and offices for the executive branch in the back. Forty-nine steps lead to the main entrance. These steps have the names of every state and the year they joined the Union. The last step lists both Alaska and Hawaii.

The exterior of the capitol is embellished with symbolic carvings. The main entrance has large, dramatic sculptures that remind visitors of patriotism and the pioneer spirit. On either side of the doors are panels that symbolize government, liberty, and peace. Further up the tower are figures representing the various governments of Louisiana and symbols of the heritage of indigenous people. Even further up, there is a carving that shows Louisiana's history. On the 22nd floor, large female figures represent the law, science, philosophy, and art. At the top of the tower are four giant eagles that support an electric beacon.

Background: A bird's-eye view of the Louisiana State Capitol grounds. **Opposite Page, Top Left to Bottom Right:** Pioneers sculpture, Huey Long statue at his gravesite, the Capitol, Memorial Hall in the Capitol, Patriots sculpture.

Visitors enter the building under carved eagles above the main doors into Memorial Hall. The room is a massive open space with the House and Senate Chambers on either side. Its walls are covered in 24 types of colored stone and murals depicting the abundant resources of the state. Entrances to the legislative chambers and the elevators are made of bronze with a bronze medallion above each door. The flooring was imported from Italy and marble was imported from France. In the center is a large bronze relief map of Louisiana created by one of the architects.

The impressive building took only fourteen months to complete and was dedicated on May 16, 1932. Although it was largely Huey Long's passion for the project that inspired the building's construction, he was unable to attend the dedication ceremony because of business in the United States Senate. Only three years later, Long was shot in this building and died from his wounds two days later. He is buried in the park in front of the Capitol. In 1940, a monument was erected there that stands as a reminder of his influence in building the state's center of government.



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 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





Opposite Page Top: The statue at Huey Long's gravesite depicts him looking up at the new State Capitol he had built. **Opposite Page, Bottom:** Carl Austin Weiss. **Left:** Huey Long's funeral at the State Capitol. **Below:** James A. Noe.

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.

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 some 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.



The Louisiana Scandals

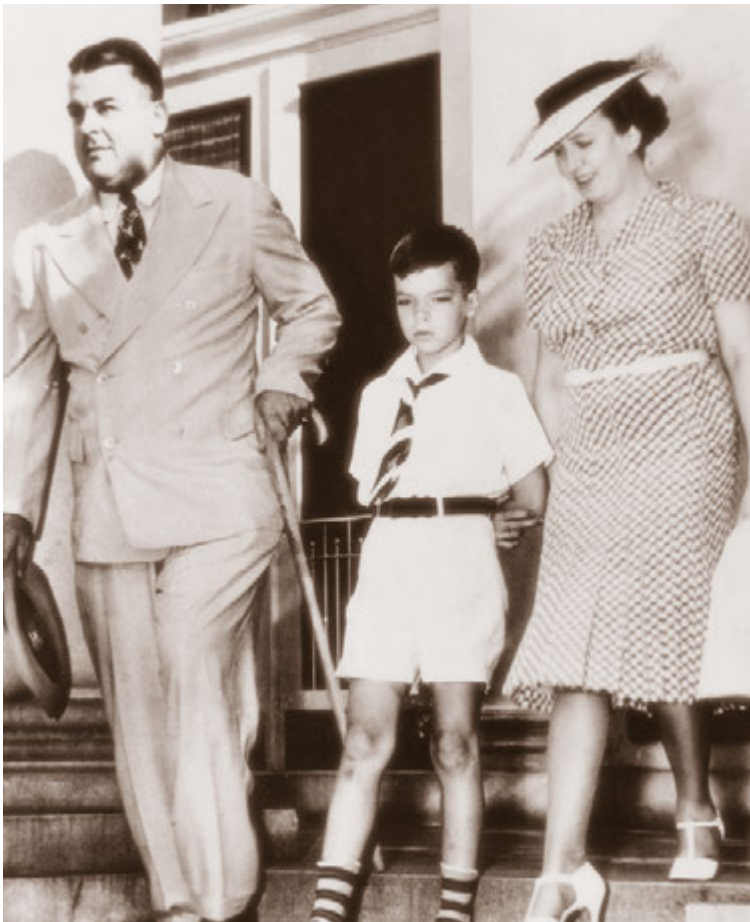
Leche won the governor's office handily in 1936, but many of the problems and corrupt practices that had occurred during the Long era continued. Leche and his cronies (close political allies) continued to allow favored associates to make profits from their dealings with state government. Members of the 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 to 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 widespread corruption that had come to characterize the way business was conducted in Louisiana. Such corrupt practices were so common that they became 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.

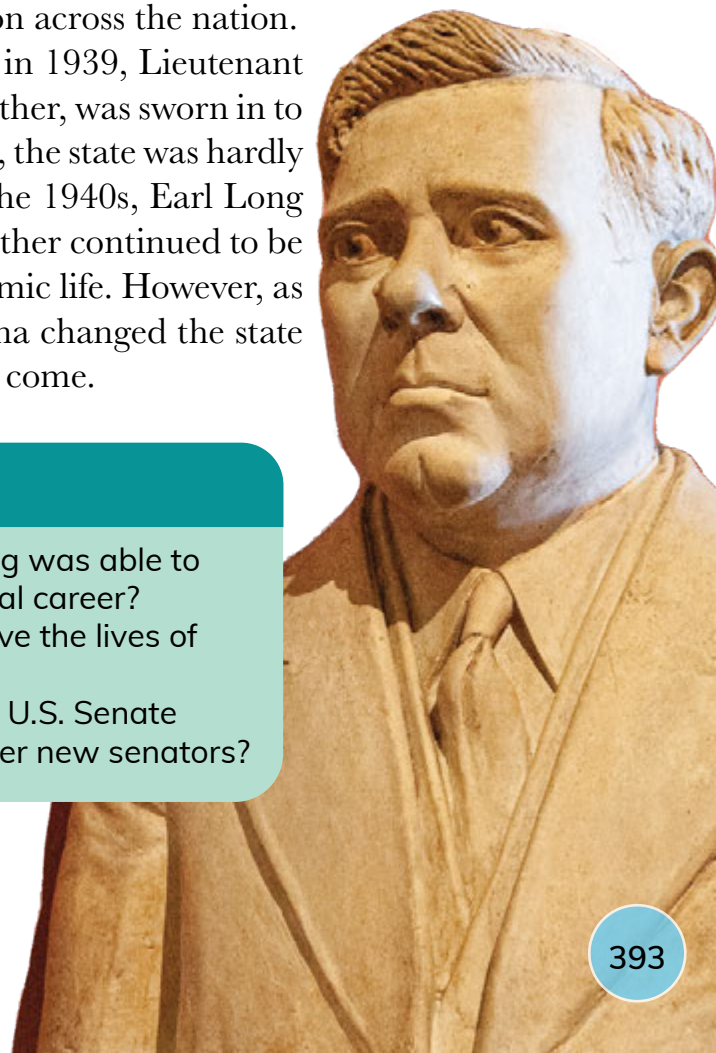
On the negative side of the ledger, many of these improvements cost the state far more than necessary. And while educational opportunity and access improved, Long's actions threatened freedom of expression, especially for anyone who dared disagree with him. His legacy was further tarnished by how he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

Opposite Page: Governor Leche leaving the governor's mansion after his resignation.
Below: This bust of Huey Long is in the Old Louisiana Capitol Museum.

REVIEW AND SUMMARIZE

1. What evidence is given that Huey Long was able to use the 1927 Flood to boost his political career?
2. What state programs helped to improve the lives of poor Louisianans?
3. How was Huey Long's behavior in the U.S. Senate described as different from that of other new senators?





Chapter Review



CHAPTER SUMMARY

Section 1: Louisiana Politics in the 1920s

- Progressive governor John Parker built roads, supported passage of the state's first severance tax, and called for a new constitution.
- In 1918, Huey Long won a seat on the Railroad Commission. He later became chairman of the Public Service Commission, gaining a reputation as champion of the common man.
- Long campaigned for governor in the 1924 election, promising improved roads, bridges, and education. He lost the race.
- In 1927, the Mississippi River breached many of its levees causing widespread flooding. The Citizens Flood Relief Committee dynamited 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

- Long's populist message became more attractive to voters. He was sworn in as governor in 1928.
- Governor Long provided free school textbooks. He built paved roads in scattered areas, but the roads were inferior and the system was corrupt. Long and others profited from the road projects.
- Long exerted great control over all of the state's political processes through patronage and heavy involvement in the legislature.

- In March 1929, Long's opponents started impeachment procedures against him. Long secured agreements from 15 state senators that they would not vote to impeach him. Those senators 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 O. K. Allen became governor.
- Long wanted to run for president and worked to raise his national profile. He helped Hattie Caraway win the Senate race in Arkansas, making her the first woman elected to the U.S. Senate.
- Long proposed the Share Our Wealth program, which involved a redistribution of wealth. His ideas appealed to many people, and Share Our Wealth societies were created nationwide.
- Long still controlled Louisiana politics. His many enemies thought he was acting like a dictator. In September 1935, Carl Weiss assassinated Long in the State Capitol.
- Long's successors continued the corruption of the Long era. In 1939, more than 250 federal charges were filed against Louisiana citizens and officials, including Governor Richard Leche.
- Long's legacy is mixed, but he did transform the state's government and he brought Louisiana into the modern world.

ACTIVITIES FOR LEARNING

Vocabulary

Match each of the following with the correct definition that follows:

bond	misappropriate
fait accompli	prohibition
grassroots support	unorthodox

1. A certificate promising payment of money by a certain date, which is issued by a government or corporation as evidence of debt
2. Forbidding by law the making and selling of alcoholic beverages
3. Different from what is usually done or accepted
4. Something that has been done and cannot be changed
5. Support from ordinary people; support from the ground up
6. To take something dishonestly, for one's own sake

Understanding the Facts

1. What was Huey Long's occupation when he met his future wife, Rose McConnell?
2. Which part of Louisiana supported prohibition?
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 Caernarvon?
2. How was Huey Long's inauguration as governor consistent with his campaign message?

Writing across the Curriculum

Go to <https://house.louisiana.gov/pubinfo/VirtualTour/default.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.

Applying Your Skills

A *fact* is an objectively verifiable truth. A fact statement can be proven through evidence gathered from eyewitness testimony, investigation, observation, research, or written records. An *opinion* is a subjective statement of belief, feeling, or judgment; it reflects an individual's attitudes, biases, and preferences. A statement that includes a word or phrase such as *good, better, best, worst, should, I believe, or I feel* 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."

Exploring Technology

Go to <https://www.loc.gov/photos/?q=dor-thea+lange+louisiana&sp=1>. What did you learn about rural Louisiana during the Great Depression?