



Kingfish: The Reign of Huey P. Long

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Book by Richard D. White, Jr.

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From Reader Review Kingfish: The Reign of Huey P. Long for online ebook

Jaret says

This was an okay book about an interesting man. The information was very well-researched. I'm from Louisiana and I'm very familiar with the "Huey Long School of Politics", but even I learned new things from this book. For instance, I never knew the animosity between Roosevelt and Long. I did like how the author tried to explain all sides to the story. He did not blame Huey entirely for everything and pointed out things others did that were just as bad (or worse depending on your perspective) as Huey in Louisiana. My main complaint was the author's writing style. He appeared to be going for an episodic type story. He tried to explain Huey's life as a series of episodes. The problem was that sometimes the chronological story got lost and confused in the episodes. Once I got used to the style, I was able to enjoy the retelling of the life (and death) of our very own Kingfish. I would have liked a little more information on the assassination and the aftermath, but that wasn't the author's focus in this book so I understand why he moved quickly through it.

Sean Chick says

A readable if disjointed account of Huey P. Long, concentrating almost solely on his political career (he is governor by around page 40 out of 270 of text). Long is a controversial figure and known even outside of Louisiana. There are many versions of Long portrayed in film and art. The Long of this book is corrupt, vengeful, defensive, duplicitous, thin-skinned, and an all around bully who did little for common people after his first year in office. A more sympathetic biography might be in order to get another take. Yet, if White is close to the mark, this book serves as a warning against demagoguery and shows how even the ostensibly well-meaning parts of the left can be as bad as anything on the right.

Lastly, Donald Trump comparisons abound as I read the text. In particular, both were underestimated by their opponents and tapped into a special kind of rage brought on by financial ills.

Jill Hutchinson says

This may not be the best biography of Huey "Kingfish" Long but it enthralled me nonetheless.....it will make you shake your head in disbelief as one man became as close to being a dictator as is possible in a democracy. The Kingfish, who served as Louisiana Governor and US Senator from 1928 to 1935, when he was assassinated, ran wild, ignoring laws or creating new ones which were unconstitutional, raiding the state treasury, personally hiring and firing state employees, appointing judges at will, and generally rewarding all those who supported him. His motto was "the end justifies the means".

Granted, in the first few years of his governorship, Long cemented his voter base which was made up of greedy hangers-on and the rural poor by providing free school books to all children, increasing school enrollment, building thousands of miles of much needed highways and bridges, and raising the state university, LSU, to national standards/recognition. But he then turned his attention to his own personal power and true reform faltered and Louisiana sank into debt. Although his boasts of continuing prosperity for the state turned into hollow promises, he continued to build a political stranglehold on the state and he began

to have dreams of a Presidential run. This was never to be as he was shot and killed in the capitol building in Baton Rouge. It leaves one to wonder what might have happened if he had lived.

To many, Huey Long looked like a red-neck buffoon but in fact he was extremely clever. But how could such a person, regardless of his political skills, attain the almost complete power that he had.....here is where the author leaves a bit of a hole in the story as he does not give the reader enough background about the political environment of Louisiana at the time of Long's career. It is important to understand that Louisiana was sunk in a morass of debt, illiteracy, crooked politics and poverty and the people were looking for a savior. They thought they found him in the Kingfish.

I would highly recommend this book which will keep you turning pages far into the night!

Robert Mcfarland says

EASY READ. MORE ENTHRALL WITH HISTORY THAN STORY.

Spike says

I'm not much of a non-fiction reader, and only picked this up because my son checked it out from the library. The writer's style is very engaging. He manages to keep the narrative drive lively and interesting, despite the many names and details presented throughout.

I knew little about Huey Long before reading this. Now I feel at least my knowledge is adequate. I highly recommend this for anyone interested in the history of Louisiana politics or in Huey Long himself. And guess what? Huey Long was the first to put forth the idea of "spreading the wealth around", although not in those exact words. He also was the first to talk about the 1%. Check out Huey Long's "share the wealth" speech on YouTube to get a feel for his oratory style.

Kim Scripture says

If you don't believe something like Hitler can ever happen in America, read this book about this absolute corruption of power in Louisiana.

Michael says

I read this book in preparation for my first trip to New Orleans. Most of what I knew about Long I gleaned from the Randy Newman album "Good Old Boys" with songs like "Louisiana 1927" and "Here Come the Kingfish."

White's take is a straightforward, relatively concise and highly entertaining look at Long's life, in chronological order, from humble beginnings to corrupt end as a US Senator who posed a serious threat to Franklin Roosevelt's re-election in 1936.

One of many conspiracy theories surrounding Long's death (assassinated by Dr. Carl Weiss in the Louisiana State Capitol in 1935) is that FDR was behind it.

Long was one of the most talented yet least scrupulous and disciplined politicians of all time. When each one of Louisiana's newspapers opposed Long, he started his own daily mouthpiece and subsidized it by requiring every state employee to subscribe.

Kickback and graft schemes were legendary. He accepted only cash which he stored in his Deduct Box (which resembled a giant ballot box). He hid the Deduct Box and died without revealing the location. It has never been found. Supposedly it was stuffed with more than \$1 million in cash as well as papers and photos damaging to his enemies. You can see a replica in the opulent Roosevelt Hotel in New Orleans, a place Long was drawn to for its party scene although he detested (and ultimately dismantled) its "Old Regular" power structure.

Long had many enemies whom he sought to destroy not just defeat. He instructed the state legislature to outlaw the sale of funeral insurance, which happened to be the occupation of one vanquished opponent. He attacked opponents with profane epithets and accusations ranging from supporting blacks to beastiality. He called one genteel opponent with a Col. Sanders beard "Old Feather Duster." He threatened rivals with fisticuffs and firearms and employed the State National Guard to do his bidding, including an armed invasion and occupation of New Orleans.

Long consolidated power by rigging elections, bribes, threats, and packing the legislature and courts with his lackeys. When elected to the US Senator he briefly retained his position as Governor and later continued to run the state through his proxy O.K. Allen. Through such remote control, he rammed through dozens of bills penned by Long himself with virtually no floor debate or opposition. This gave him total control over all patronage, courts, and even appointed positions in New Orleans. He was shameless. He once took a parish vote unanimously with more voters than registered by at least 500.

In the Senate he became a scourge to FDR and refused to disburse New Deal funds within Louisiana. In 1932 Long stumped for FDR (who found Long's pig-in-the-sty eating habits and dandified outfits appalling) but by 1935 he spoke of opposing FDR as a third party candidate. Pundits thought a Long-led ticket could take 3 million votes and throw the election to the Republicans.

Long generated fierce and vitriolic opposition. Prominent New Orleans residents spoke openly of assassination. J. Edgar Hoover sought to snag Long on tax evasion and may have been close when Long died. He was almost impeached and censured several times.

With his back to the wall, Long employed two strategies.

First he would turn to the populist base, the poorest of Louisiana poor. Long had a genuine commitment to elevating the lot of poor whites (otherwise he was initially as racist as they come) by providing free textbooks and building roads, clinics and schools. To pay he took on Standard Oil and the Baton Rouge refineries by dramatically raising their taxes. The poor whites of Louisiana supported the Kingfish unconditionally and would rally to his side as needed within hours.

(Long favored radical redistribution of wealth to be funded by corporate taxes and caps on personal income. While his goals were socialists, he used the means of a fascist and was often accused of being a dictator.)

Second, Long could switch on a dime from ranting demagogue to the most persuasive and rational orator. He

possessed a keen (and largely self-taught) legal mind and could build a case like a Darrow or Bailey. Time and again he painted himself into the tightest quarters and literally talked his way out.

He also was a master of the media: vanity newspapers, radio, and a medium he invented: roving trucks mounted with giant loudspeakers. If you've seen "Oh Brother, Where Art Thou," you get the idea.

When Long died (he might have been saved if surgeons rushing from New Orleans had not crashed their car; an inexperienced doctor botched the operation to remove a bullet), huge crowds attended his funeral. For years many refused to believe he was dead.

He was the Elvis of Southern politics. He left his mark everywhere; from artifacts at the Roosevelt Hotel to the massive Huey P. Long Bridge in New Orleans; to the 450-foot-tall State Capitol spire he had designed and built in one year in Baton Rouge and a complete overhaul of his beloved LSU. He also had the Governor's Mansion rebuilt to resemble the White House, so he "could get used to living there."

On to Robert Penn Warren.

Rachel says

I almost did not believe what I was reading - but as I'd heard many of the stories before, I had no choice... But Huey Long was quite the character. And his supporting cast - wow. If you want a tale of fist fights, corruption, dueling (yes - go get your gun and let's shoot at each other), but not into the Western scene - here's your book. Makes me wish there'd been CNN or other network filming the madness that went on in Louisiana during the Great Depression. Makes me wonder how much of the underhanded deals and cronyism still occurs - across the nation...

Great look into Huey's good and bad sides. He had a lot of progressive ideas, he just didn't apply them to himself. Only things I didn't like about the book - a lot of the passages repeated. I know it's difficult to edit and neatly timeline biographies - but if an author is going to re-iterate a particular event or point - new wording or possibly a brief mention of the prior info - it would be wise not to use the same sentences repeatedly.

I wish more insight had been given into the conspiracy theory behind Huey's death. It only mentions possible involvement and who (like everyone) wanted him dead. Because of the sensationalism behind it, the book would have been better to at least focus a few paragraphs on the grand plot to kill Huey - beyond the Old Regulars and Choctaws (still in shock about their influence!)

Gnarly Authenticity . says

This bad book of popular history presents Huey Long as sui generis, with no historical context of any kind. No reference to the long standing tradition of extreme powers of Louisiana governors, the long history of political antics in the region (governors and anti-governors, legislatures and anti-legislatures), no mention of the upland/lowland, Baptist/Catholic, hillbilly/cosmopolitan rivalries and hatreds, no attempt to connect

Long with the generations of Southern agrarianism, Populism and white rebellion of which he was the tail end. If someone hadn't put a library hold on this book when I was on page 20, I'd never have finished it. Library competitiveness takes precedence and I was forced to read the whole crappy thing.

Marc says

I hesitated before reading "The Reign of Huey P. Long" since a Pulitzer Price winning biography based on oral history on Long's life was also tempting. But now I don't regret it because diving in White's portrait of the Kingfish was a real pleasure. First and foremost, I learned about how state politics worked under an ambitious politician.

The book is short on details about Huey Long's formative years prior to his second run for the governorship in 1928. Instead, the author focuses almost exclusively on the era that matters the most as far as power is concerned. The book is great at providing details on how Long was successful (and reckless) at grabbing power, changing laws, amending bills, buying legislators and building a machine across the State during his time as governor and senator.

I especially enjoyed the descriptions of friends and feuds plotting and dealing in shady hotel rooms, packed court houses, lavish restaurants serving bourbon, cigars, fried oysters.

Jeanette "Astute Crabbist" says

Huey P. Long was a richard cranium and a rooster lollipop. The only wonder is that he wasn't killed sooner. He certainly put the 'ass' in assassination.

Thank you, Mr. White, for providing a thorough and highly readable account.

Jim says

A well-written and impeccably researched account of Louisiana's most notorious politician. Enjoyed this book thoroughly. I thought it could have devoted more than a few pages to his assassination and the conspiracy theories that accompanied it, but the portrait of Huey that emerges is rich and memorable.

Seth says

A good short biography of the sui generis Louisiana pol Huey Long. He made himself dictator of Louisiana and was killed as a result, quite possibly as part of a plot by his political enemies. This book touches the high, or low, points of his outrageous career, but it does little to convey an understanding of the milieu that produced Long. To understand this guy, we need to know why corruption has been tolerated more in

Louisiana than anywhere else. White has little to say on the matter. What motivated Huey himself was simpler, and the it is the same thing that motivates all politicians: a lust to dominate other human beings. He differed only in his lack of guile in getting what he wanted. I don't think he stood much of a chance of becoming president; he instantly alienated nearly all other politicians outside of Louisiana and committed so many gaffes that he was doomed to be brought down one way or another. What I perceive as the shortcomings of this book may lead me to read the T. Harry Williams biography, but I have to wonder if I am nearly 900 pages more interested in the Kingfish of the Lodge. Maybe, maybe not.

Troy says

Well written and concise, which serves to underscore just how setting up an absolute dictatorship democratically can happen, even in this country. Sometimes loses the impartiality one finds in books like these, but the facts simply cannot be explained away and the results can only be spoken of in the most stark terms.

Patsye says

This was a very interesting read about Huey Long. It was really eye-opening in that I had no idea how ruthless he was, but really showed why people loved and hated him. His public persona (and some of his private) really bears comparison to Donald Trump, so relevant right now! Crude, narcissistic, and power-hungry, he gave his detractors no quarter and attempted to crush them totally. I found the book a little slow and dry in the beginning, but picked up along the way.
