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Huey Long I

Lead: During the Great Depression, a flamboyant politician dominated state politics. Huey Long transformed a backward state and through the sheer force of his personality, compelled Louisiana into the twentieth century.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: Huey Pierce Long was born on August 30, 1893, in Winnfield, Louisiana, in the north central region of the state. He was seventh of nine children raised in a farming family of modest means. The

“Populist” movement was strong in his parish and Huey absorbed the ideas of the populists. Though his schooling was limited, he was bright, headstrong and very ambitious.

Early on Huey worked in various sales jobs and there sharpened his skills of persuasion that would later advance his political career – persuasion, a folksy style and a connection to common folks which aroused his commitment to serve the underdog. Long briefly studied law at Tulane, and despite his lack of formal education, he managed to pass the state bar in 1915. From that his ambition kicked into overdrive. In 1918 (since he was too young to run for governor), he was elected to the

state Railroad Commission (later called the Public Service Commission). Thus he began his political career challenging corporate wealth and privilege, and clashed again and again with Standard Oil. Long worked to lower consumer rates from public utilities and streetcar fares, and he began to attract followers across the state – particularly among the rural poor who believed that in Huey Long they had a champion.

After an unsuccessful run in 1923, in 1928 he was elected governor. Long targeted the wealthy with tax increases and with this revenue and the use of bonds he set about modernizing Louisiana's education

system, hospitals and transportation infrastructure. Under his tenure, the poll tax was abolished, the homestead exemption was enacted, textbooks were given free to school children, and through a massive public works program - roads were paved, one hundred eleven bridges were built and natural gas was brought to Louisiana. With these massive improvements, Long built a political machine through his loyal supporters who loved him, but he made lots of enemies. Critics considered him arrogant, rude and intimidating. He was often compared to a dictator, one who would sidestep honest and democratic means to get what he wanted. Next Time: “Kingfish” goes to Washington.

**Research by Ann Johnson, at the
University of Richmond, this is Dan
Roberts.**

Resources

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***Huey Long: The Man, His Mission and Legacy*. 14 October 2009**

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