

Huey Long

**His Life in Photos,
Drawings, and Cartoons**



(Courtesy the Library of Louisiana)

The Ascent

Claiming that the Cottolene cottonseed oil he peddled was ordained by the Bible, Huey as a salesman was poetically inspired. His biographer, T. Harry Williams, would later reveal that on those rare occasions when all of Huey's selling tactics failed, "he would as a last resort go into the kitchen and bake a cake or cook supper for the whole family."¹



(Courtesy the New York Fairbanks Company)



(Courtesy the Library of Louisiana)

Although the money Huey made as a salesman was good and quickly spent, the job's real significance for his future was the chance it gave him one day to meet Rose McConnell, who entered a cake in a cooking contest sponsored by Cottolene. After briefly talking with Rose, and diplomatically awarding both her and her mother prizes for their entries, Huey confided to a friend that he had just found "the girl he was going to marry."²

Just three years later, she and Huey were wed—with Rose paying the eleven-dollar fee for the minister. Their marriage would be marked by Huey's frequent absences, her loyalty, and their shared interests in his career, which began in earnest with his election to the railroad commission in 1918 when he was twenty-five years old.

On that commission, Huey's distrust of and distaste for large corporations was greatly in evidence. He badgered corporate heads, reminding them that they operated in one of the poorest states in the nation, and convinced his fellow commission members to vote for utility rate decreases that resulted in thousands of rebate checks being sent to consumers.

It was the kind of publicity that most politicians could only dream of. Always energetic, when Huey announced his upstart campaign for the governorship in 1924, he also unveiled an effort that would match his fire and youth: virtually every corner of the state was graced with a personal visit. "He went into districts that have been hibernating and laying dormant for over 30 years," a reporter for the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* noted. "He aroused them and opened their eyes—we may just as well try and change Hades with a bucket of water as to try and stop Huey P. Long."³

Longtime political observers were impressed by Huey's third-place 1924 showing (an election-day deluge kept many upstate farmers—his political base—at home, dampening his overall state percentage). Reporters predicted he would be back, and in the fall of 1927, Huey surprised no one when he announced his second bid for the statehouse.

With a traveling jazz band, boxes of posters, and the fire of his convictions, Huey, as a northern Louisianian, broke with tradition by repeatedly stumping in southern Catholic Acadiana, the first prominent Protestant to do so.

But he gained an additional edge over his opponents with his skilled use of a new medium—radio. In 1928 more than twenty thousand homes in just New Orleans alone had a radio, and Huey’s comforting, deep, honeyed voice soon became a familiar sound.

“This is Huey P. Long speaking, ladies and gentlemen,” he would begin. “Before I start my speech I want each of you to go to the telephone and ring up half a dozen of your friends. Tell ’em Huey Long is on the air.”⁴

James Fitzmorris, a young New Orleans boy who would grow up to be a political force in the next generation, recalled of a typical Huey show: “The music would start, and sure enough, Mother and Daddy would commence to call their friends.”⁵

Throughout his career, Huey effectively used his image—in photos, drawings, and even cartoons—as a campaign tool.

This drawing, showing a dignified and uncharacteristically restrained Huey, was distributed by the thousands to Huey supporters after his 1928 election. It was eventually reprinted as well in the *Louisiana Progress*, the newspaper Huey founded not long after his election to promote his views in a state dominated by anti-Long big-city newspapers.

As Huey emerged as a statewide public figure, he and Rose went to great lengths to protect their three children, Palmer, Russell, and Rose, from the glare of publicity. Although his children would sometimes accompany their father to staged political events, reporters—even those who disliked Huey—respected his wishes and for the most part left his offspring alone.



(Courtesy the Library of Louisiana)

HEAR

Huey P. Long

United States Senator

On All Issues of the Day

Persons desiring questions answered on any State, National or International questions requested to write out the same and hand to chairman of meetings:---

Wednesday, November 8

Oakgrove	. . . . .	10:30 a. m.
Winnsboro	. . . . .	3:00 p. m.
Monroe, New City School	. . . . .	7:00 p. m.

Thursday, November 9

Ruston	. . . . .	10:30 a. m.
Gibland	. . . . .	3:00 p. m.
Minden	. . . . .	7:00 p. m.

Friday, November 10

Natchitoches	. . . . .	10:30 a. m.
Leesville	2:00 p. m.
Alexandria	7:00 p. m.

Saturday, November 11

Marksville	10:30 a. m.
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Two posters from Huey's winning 1928 campaign. (Courtesy Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Louisiana State University Libraries, Baton Rouge, Louisiana)

Rally! Rally! Rally!

**DEMOCRATIC
MASS MEETING**

**Saturday, January 14th
Eight o'Clock**

Lafayette Theatre

**Corner Baronne and
Lafayette Streets**

HUEY P. LONG
For Governor

DR. PAUL N. CYR
For Lieutenant-Governor

**WCBE Will Broadcast
the Meeting**

*All Democrats and Especially the Ladies
Are Cordially Invited to Attend*

Music! Fireworks! Music!

(Courtesy the National Guard Military Library)



(Courtesy the Library of Louisiana)



The Long family enjoys a breather on the porch of their Shreveport home during the first year of Huey's governorship. (Courtesy the Library of Louisiana)

Two cartoons from the *Louisiana Progress* during Huey's first years as governor reflect his pride in two of his most important programs—the effort to build roads and to distribute free school textbooks.

The popularity of Huey's school textbooks program in particular was obvious: thousands of people wired him their thanks. This appreciation was easily seen during a 1930 visit to Bogalusa, Louisiana.

But as governor, Huey's greatest enthusiasms were reserved for Louisiana State University, the college he was



The popularity of Huey's schoolbooks program is on display during this 1930 visit to Bogalusa, Louisiana. (Courtesy the Library of Louisiana)

determined to make the finest public institution of its kind in the nation. In just five years, state appropriations to LSU jumped from under \$1 million a year to more than \$3 million. Buildings sprang up across the campus, including a new music and dramatic arts building, complete with eighty baby grand pianos. Students watched with excitement the construction of a new student center, field house, and, at 180 feet by 48, the largest college swimming pool in the country.

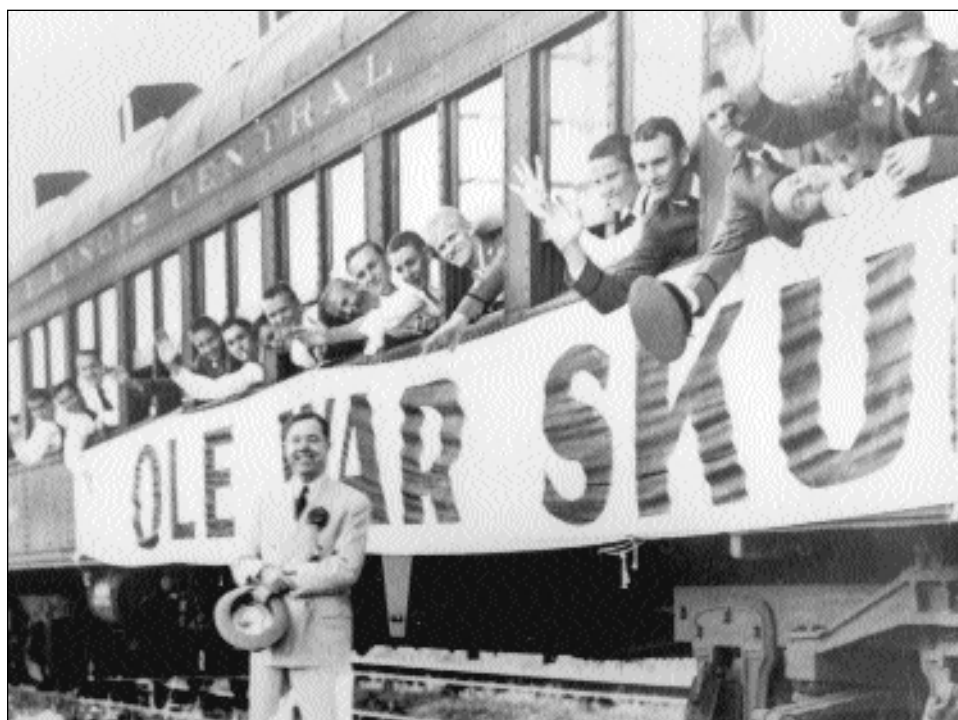
At the center of Huey's LSU devotion were the school's football team and marching band, which he frequently led during rousing rallies through downtown Baton Rouge.



(Courtesy the Library of Louisiana)



(Courtesy the Library of Louisiana)



Huey with fellow LSU fans about to depart on a downtown train for an away game. (Courtesy the Library of Louisiana)



Whether they liked his voice or not, LSU officials were forced to endure the singing of the man who paid their salaries. (Courtesy the Library of Louisiana)

But only one year into his governorship, Huey suddenly faced a grave threat when his opponents, enraged by what they said were his belligerent tactics, attempted to remove him from office by impeachment.

This photo, perhaps taken just as Plaquemines Parish boss Leander H. Perez launched into a spirited defense of his friend, shows a pensive governor on the Senate floor, just hours before he and Perez revealed their masterstroke: a



(Courtesy the Library of Louisiana)

round robin signed by enough senators to prevent the two-thirds vote needed to convict Huey and remove him from office.

Front-page news across the country, Huey's impeachment battle was a "fight to the death between gorillas and baboons,"⁶ said H. L. Mencken, perhaps the most important social critic of the day.

The *New Orleans Item*, meanwhile, had already emerged as one of Huey's most persistent critics, prompting him to remark, "There is about as much honor in the *New Orleans Item* as there is in the heel of a flea."⁷

During Huey's impeachment ordeal, the paper's young and gifted cartoonist, John Chase, invariably portrayed Huey as a bulbous-nosed clown. Chase's rendition of the ultimate impeachment hearing is sweeping, showing a gnomish Leander Perez happily contemplating his elevated political fortunes in Plaquemines Parish after Huey's triumph.

As Louisiana—and now the nation as well—followed the travails of Huey Long, New Orleans remained a hotbed of stubborn Long resistance, electing for mayor in January of 1930 a man whose name would soon be forever connected to Huey: T. Semmes Walmsley, an Uptown blueblood who very much saw Huey as his social inferior.

But at his lavish swearing-in ceremony at Gallier Hall, Walmsley—like other big-city mayors in the nation who were grappling with the effects of the Great Depression—unveiled a massive public-works program that seemed oddly inspired by Huey.

The Great Depression savagely reordered the nation's political sentiments, elevating certain political figures while discarding others. A man who suddenly seemed out of touch and favor was former president Calvin Coolidge, who wisely had declined to run for reelection in 1928, just one year before the stock market crash.



Walmsley and his wife, Julia. (Courtesy the Walmsley family)



Coolidge and Long. (Courtesy the Library of Louisiana)

Coolidge's reduced status, however, made him no less important to Huey, who wanted to meet the former president when he visited the Roosevelt Hotel—Huey's unofficial headquarters in New Orleans. Beckoning photographers to snap a group shot, Huey cracked: "It's a picture of past and future presidents."⁸

Coolidge, known to millions as "Silent Cal," remained silent.

In July of 1930 Huey stunned Louisiana's political establishment when he announced his candidacy for the U.S. Senate, opposing the aging incumbent Joseph E. Ransdell. Quiet and unobtrusive in the Senate, Ransdell would be immortalized after Huey took note of his thick white goatee and began to call him "Ol' Feather Duster."

THE FIRST TREE SITTER.



(Courtesy Louisiana Collection, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, New Orleans, Louisiana)

Louisiana Progress cartoonist Trist Wood, who used to make fun of Huey when he drew for the *New Orleans Item*, now went to work on Ransdell, nearly always portraying him as a doddering irrelevance.

Ransdell's supporters, the big-city newspapers and the Old Ring Regular political machine of New Orleans, hardly fared better.

Meanwhile, everywhere Huey went that summer and fall he was greeted by large and enthusiastic crowds. In a world of Herbert Hoovers, Calvin Coolidges, big-city bosses, and Southern aristocratic planters, Huey, to an increasing number of Louisianians, seemed to be one of the few political leaders who cared.



(Courtesy Louisiana Collection, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, New Orleans, Louisiana)

CLEARING THE PATH



(Courtesy Louisiana Collection, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, New Orleans, Louisiana)



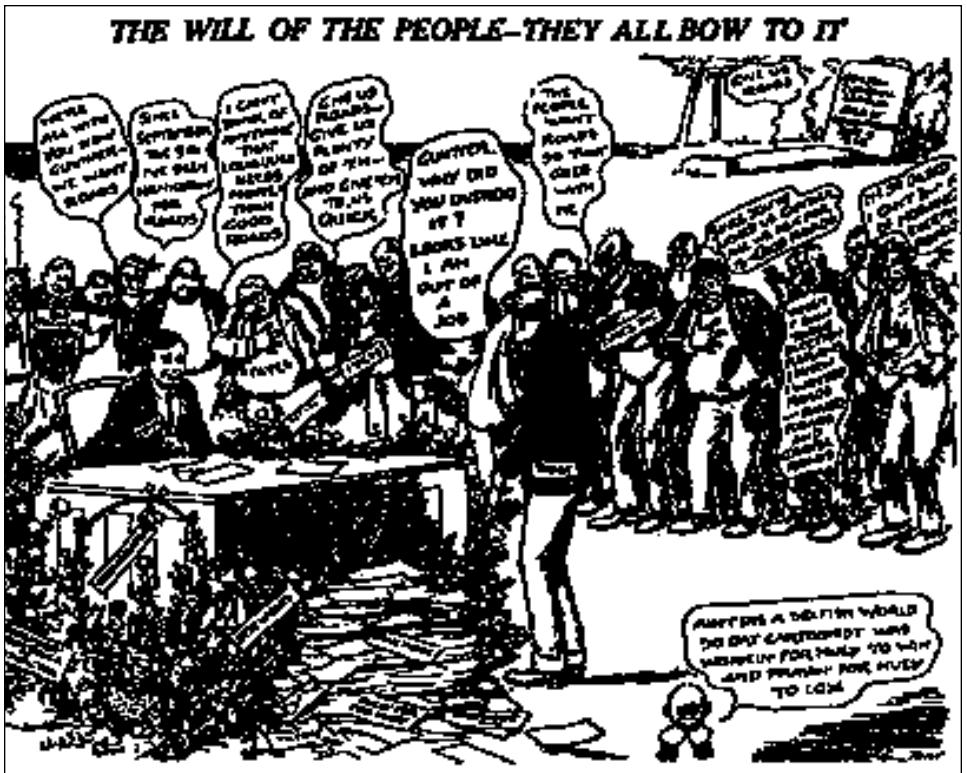
(Courtesy the Library of Louisiana)



(Courtesy the Library of Louisiana)

The result of the 1930 Senate race was perhaps preordained. Huey not only held on to his upcountry and Cajun South vote from 1928. He also made alarming inroads in New Orleans, the home of the Old Regulars, where thousands of voters casually disregarded the clear instructions of the machine—which continued to oppose him—and went over to Huey.

Predictably, cartoonist Wood glorified Huey's victory. But another Wood cartoon is more telling. It portrays all of Huey's principal opponents in the wake of his 1930 victory suddenly converted to his cause, while Wood himself (portrayed at the bottom right of the cartoon) worried about the fate of the *Louisiana Progress* after Huey moved to Washington.



(Courtesy Louisiana Collection, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, New Orleans, Louisiana)

WITH CONFIDENCE LOUISIANA NOW LOOKS TO
THE FUTURE



(Courtesy Louisiana Collection, Howard-Tilton
Memorial Library, New Orleans, Louisiana)

Just months after the 1930 victory, Huey was embroiled in a new controversy when Loyola University in New Orleans announced it would grant him an honorary law degree. Huey was naturally delighted, but his critics wondered if he actually wrote the thesis the university said it was honoring him for.

Subsequently it was revealed that someone else had written the work, which was an examination of the various constitutions in Louisiana history. But that did not stop Huey from appearing at Loyola in cap and gown to proudly accept his degree. He soon thereafter added to his signature on letters: “LL.D., Governor, and Senator-Elect.”

By the fall of 1930, the rest of the country was completing the first year of the kind of economic despair that had been Louisiana’s lot for most of the previous decades. One of the first comments to appear in Huey’s *Louisiana Progress*—undoubtedly with his approval—was a cartoon of an alarmed President Hoover contemplating the thunderous Democratic midterm congressional victories of that year.

As the depression worsened, millions of Americans sought ways to reduce their food expenses. Some resorted to a concoction commonly known to farm families as “potlikker,” which was essentially nothing more than the remains of boiled greens and other vegetables.

Huey loudly proclaimed his devotion to potlikker, prompting columnist Julian Harris of the *Atlanta Constitution* to wonder if he really knew how to eat it, the question of whether one should dunk or crumble in one’s bread being essential to the meal’s enjoyment.

New York governor Franklin D. Roosevelt, in the spring of 1931 already emerging as the frontrunner for the 1932 Democratic presidential nomination, officially declared he was a confirmed crumbler. Huey quickly issued his own response. At a crowded press conference in the Roosevelt Hotel, Huey attempted to demonstrate why dunking was the preferred method.



(Courtesy the Library of Louisiana)



(Courtesy Louisiana Collection, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, New Orleans, Louisiana)



(Courtesy the Library of Louisiana)

A story essentially designed to bring a laugh to the nation's worried readers, the potlikker controversy nevertheless confirmed once again Huey's growing status as a countrywide figure.