



Above: Governor Sam Houston Jones, who took office in 1940, established the civil service system for state workers.

Louisiana's Governors

As you read, look for:

- the policies of Louisiana's governors during this period, and
- vocabulary term **civil service system**.

Huey Long's death in 1935 did not end his control on Louisiana. State politics continued to be divided into pro-Long and anti-Long factions. The anti-Long faction included those who opposed Long's ideas of government programs and those who believed Huey Long and his followers were corrupt.

Some politicians just tried to pick the winning side. The struggles between the pro-Long and anti-Long factions continued throughout the 1940s. The anti-Longs won the 1940 election, when Sam Jones beat Earl Long in the governor's race. Jimmie Davis, another anti-Long candidate, was elected in 1944 to continue the reforms. The pro-Longs did not win back the governor's office until 1948.

Sam Jones

Sam Jones had served as an assistant district attorney in Calcasieu Parish. A veteran of World War I, he was an active member of the Louisiana American Legion. This organization for war veterans supported his campaign for governor. The voters liked Jones because he was not part of the "political crowd" in state government.

Jones's main campaign promise was to bring honesty to state government. After his election, he stopped Huey Long's "deduct" system. State workers were no longer expected to make political contributions. Jones also took steps to end voter fraud by making voter registration lists available to the public. This was done to remove the names of dead people from the voting lists.

Governor Jones's goal was an efficient state government. He reorganized state departments to operate in a more businesslike way. Companies who wished to work on state projects had to submit bids. A *bid* is an offer to complete the state project at a certain price. The lowest bidder is awarded the job.

Governor Jones provided job protection for state workers with a **civil service system**. Before civil service, state workers lost their jobs every time a new

Lagniappe

The “spoils system” got its name from Senator William Learned Macy, who said in 1831 “To the victor belong the spoils.”

increased the amount of old-age pensions and added more children to the free school-lunch program. Education received more funds, and capital improvements continued, which meant more roads, bridges, and hospitals for the state.

All this was possible because state revenue had increased with the economic prosperity brought on by World War II. The war helped the United States recover from the Great Depression, and Louisiana recovered along with the rest of the country. When Sam Jones’s term ended, he left the state a budget surplus.

Jimmie Davis

In 1944, the people of Louisiana elected James H. “Jimmie” Davis as governor. Davis had first been elected as a city official in Shreveport and then served on the Public Service Commission. Because this board helped consumers, most members of the board became very popular throughout the state.

The story of Jimmie Davis began in the hills of North Louisiana, in Jackson Parish. He was the son of a sharecropper, one of eleven children. He described his childhood as one of poverty and hard work in a loving country family. He put himself through college, becoming a history teacher. One of the ways he earned money for his education was to sing on the street corners in Alexandria. His voice and his guitar playing later provided him with a career in country music and the movies.

Davis had already made money as an entertainer when he ran for governor. Some people said that was a good reason to elect him; he didn’t need to steal from the state! Davis’s campaign slogan was “Peace and Harmony,” and his campaign style reflected that. He campaigned by giving short speeches and then singing with his band. The crowds liked the free entertainment.

As governor, Davis served Louisiana during World War II. Public attention was on the war and on the federal

governor was elected. That system, known as *patronage* or the *spoils system*, rewarded people with government jobs for helping a candidate win. Under the civil service system, workers take tests for government jobs and cannot be fired for their political views or party affiliations.

Jones was a reformer, but he did not try to limit the social programs Huey Long had established. In fact, he in-

Below: Governor Jimmie Davis was a well-known country music singer. Here he is seen performing at a governors’ conference dinner in Miami in 1946.



Lagniappe

Jimmie Davis wrote
"You Are My Sunshine"
in 1940.



Above: The four-poster bed of Governor Jimmie Davis is on display at the Old State Capitol. The quilt hanging over the end of the bed was made by Davis's mother from his old ties.

government in Washington, D.C. During the war years, the state government was not expected to do much. Even so, Davis was sometimes accused of being out of the state too much, taking care of his show business career.

The economy of the war years brought more money to the state. The charity hospital system added a new hospital in Shreveport. State workers were covered by a retirement system. Because he was a former teacher, Davis directed state money towards improving education. Many new buildings were constructed at the state colleges and universities.

Davis had promised the voters a balanced budget, and, with the economic war boom, he had no trouble keeping that promise. The budget surplus he inherited when he became governor was even larger when he left.

Earl Long

One member of the Long family had not given up his political ambitions. Earl Long had been blocked from power first by his brother and then by the disputes among his brother's followers. Earl Long's big chance came in 1948, when he was elected governor.

The relationship between Huey and Earl Long was as complex as the brothers themselves. When Earl stepped into Huey's sales position, Huey charged him a fee to take over the route. At times during Huey Long's career, Earl helped "save Huey's hide," as he would say. At other times, he opposed Huey. On one occasion, Earl even testified in Congress against his brother.

Many people who knew both Huey and Earl Long said they liked Earl more, and he was considered the better one-on-one politician. Huey Long used poli-

tics as a means to power. Earl Long loved politics and campaigning. He had a true concern for the poor, believing “the fortunate should assist the unfortunate, the strong should assist the weak, and the rich should assist the poor.”

Earl Long had been lieutenant governor under Richard Leche. When Leche resigned, Earl completed his term as governor. He intended to have the job again. Earl ran for governor in 1940 but was defeated by Sam Jones, losing in forty-one parishes. But in 1948, he beat Sam Jones in sixty-two of the sixty-four parishes. He was on his way to the Capitol that Huey built.

Earl Long’s campaign style was colorful. He sent sound trucks out ahead, telling the people he would soon arrive and give away hams and bacon before his speech. Some people came for the giveaways; others came to hear his funny but rough attacks on his opponents.

The Winn Parish farm Earl Long called his “pea patch” was his favorite place. He engaged in a little campaign trickery about his peas. He knew people liked the idea of getting peas grown at his farm. He would buy peas at one campaign stop and give them out at the next, saying they were from the pea patch. He proudly called himself a country boy and proved it by wearing overalls on the farm. This love for his rural roots was not a campaign tactic, as Huey’s had been.

As governor, Earl Long pushed for more spending on social programs (government programs intended to improve the quality of life for its citizens). The good economy provided revenues for the state. Long used those revenues to increase spending on health, welfare, education, and highways. African American teachers



Above: This photograph shows Earl Long being sworn in as governor for the first time, following the resignation of Governor Leche.

had filed a lawsuit to require equal pay for white and African American teachers, and it was during Long’s term as governor that the pay for black teachers was raised. The state even gave the veterans of World War II a bonus of \$1,000.

Soon, however, more money was needed to continue the programs

Lagniappe

Earl Long made the cover of *Time* magazine on August 30, 1948.



Above: Governor Earl Long on a shopping spree in New Mexico. He bought twelve of these western saddles.

Long wanted. He convinced the legislature to increase the sales tax, the gasoline tax, and the severance tax.

Earl Long intended to reward his friends and punish his enemies, in the Long political style. He persuaded the legislature to end the civil service system started by Jones. State jobs could again be rewards for supporters. Long carefully controlled membership on state boards, and he used the power of the governor's office to interfere with local government. For example, he pushed the legislature to pass laws that changed New Orleans city government. The people of New Orleans had no vote on these changes.

Robert Kennon

The governor elected in 1952 to follow Earl Long was his opposite in political style. Robert Kennon had been elected mayor of his hometown of Minden in Webster Parish. At twenty-three years of age, he was the youngest mayor in the United States. He later served as a district attorney and a judge before he ran for governor.

Governor Kennon described his style of government as the "civics book approach." He meant he would follow the rules for good government. Reform and efficiency were his goals. To eliminate voter fraud, Kennon introduced voting machines. The machines were intended to count votes accurately and fairly.

Kennon convinced the legislature to restore the civil service system to protect government workers from political firings. Governor Kennon also got rid of "deadhead jobs," jobs filled by people who did little or no work but who had received the jobs as a reward.

One of the major changes during the Kennon years was a constitutional amendment making it harder to raise taxes. The amendment required a two-thirds vote of the legislature for approval of taxes. To see that state agencies operated fairly, without politics, the governor appointed special committees. These committees were called *blue ribbon boards* because of their highly qualified members.

The governor also fought illegal gambling in the state. Gambling in South Louisiana was wide open, with slot machines in many restaurants. Congressional hearings headed by Tennessee Senator Estes Kefauver revealed the influence of organized crime in Louisiana. Kennon pushed for an investigation. The state police raided gambling places and seized gambling equipment.

During Kennon's term, the harsh conditions and brutal treatment of prisoners at the state penitentiary at Angola received national coverage. The governor

ordered an investigation and changes. Guidelines for the prison were established, and the pay for guards was increased to attract more qualified people.

New Orleans benefited from Governor Kennon's reform program. The city government had been under the control of the Longs. When Huey Long decided the city government was too powerful, he used the state government to take away much of the city's authority. Earl Long had continued this control. Governor Kennon extended home rule to the city government of New Orleans, protecting the city government from state interference.

The Return of Earl Long

In the 1956 governor's race, the voters turned away from the reform movement and back to Earl Long. His opponent was the popular reform mayor of New Orleans, deLesseps Morrison. Long campaigned by ridiculing his opponent's name and his expensive suits. Long said he would stick to his country roots and not wear those fancy tailored clothes. He said "on ole' Earl, those clothes would look like socks on a rooster."

Earl Long had enjoyed his first term as governor. His second term was not as easy. He could not add more government programs without increasing taxes. The new law required a two-thirds vote in the legislature to raise taxes, and he could not get that much support. He was able to increase spending on the programs already in place because state revenues were increasing.

Governor Long stayed fairly low key for the first part of the term, but in 1959, he lost control in a very public setting—during a speech to the legislature. For two hours he yelled and screamed at the legislature, naming names as he issued his insults. His behavior was so extreme that no one heard his message.

The governor was angry because the segregationists (those who believe in keeping the races separate) were removing black voters from the registration list.

The Democratic Party in the South had only allowed whites to vote in the party primary elections. In a 1944 Texas case, *Smith v. Allright*, the U.S. Supreme Court said this restriction was unconstitutional. Now that blacks could

not be excluded from these primary elections, they had begun to register to vote.

Earl Long had encouraged blacks to vote. In fact, the number of black voters had increased from under 10,000 to more than 100,000 during his second term. Long's social programs helped the poor blacks in Louisiana, and he wanted their votes.



Top: Governor Robert Kennon introduced many reforms during his term in office.

Above: deLesseps Morrison, Earl Long's opponent in the 1956 gubernatorial election, was mayor of New Orleans four times. He ran for governor unsuccessfully three times.

Lagniappe

The Louisiana Political Museum is in Winnfield, birthplace of Huey and Earl Long.



Above: This photograph was taken in El Paso during Governor Earl Long's "wild" trip across country. The man on the right is David Bell, Louisiana Commissioner for Veterans Affairs, who arrived in El Paso ahead of Long.

The segregationists did not approve of his actions. The legislature passed a law stating that any two people could challenge a person's voter registration. The segregationists used the law to remove blacks from the voting rolls. It was this activity that so angered Earl Long.

His behavior continued to be so erratic that his family sent him to a mental hospital in Galveston, Texas. A few weeks later, he was confined in a state mental hospital. Once there, he fired the director, saying he could do that because he was governor. He then appointed a new director, who released him.

There have been several suggested explanations for Long's behavior. He appeared to have both physical and mental health problems.

The interesting relationship between the Longs and the voters of Louisiana is illustrated by what happened after Earl Long's crisis period. He could not run for governor again in 1960, because at that time a governor could not serve two consecutive terms. He decided to run for Congress in his home district. On the day of the election, he had a heart attack. He refused to go to the hospital because he said the people would not vote for him if they knew

he was sick. After the polls closed, he went to the hospital. He died a few days later knowing he had won his last election.

Check for Understanding

1. What was the goal of Governor Jones?
2. Why was it possible for Governor Davis to have a balanced budget?
3. What are some areas where Governor Earl Long increased spending in his first term?
4. Why did Governor Kennon introduce voting machines?
5. Why was it harder for Governor Earl Long to get tax increases in his second term?
6. Why was Earl Long angry at the segregationists in the legislature?