

DRAFT

PART I -

~~Chapter~~ Long and Kennedy

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In part one of this article we will focus on two connections between Senator Huey Pierce Long and President John F. Kennedy. Long and Kennedy had very similar ideas about the uses of government and they also had very similar enemies, even in some cases identical enemies. Part one will end with a brief discussion of a man who knew Huey Long well and was acquainted with Jim Garrison. He played an important role in events just prior to Long's assassination and he played a significant role in relation to the Garrison investigation of the Kennedy assassination. That will set the stage for an examination of flesh-and-blood links between the Louisiana of Huey Long and of Clay Shaw.

Long and Kennedy: Government Activists

Huey Long and John Kennedy, like earlier leaders such as Lincoln and Alexander Hamilton, viewed the government as one of the nation's most useful instruments to achieve economic and social progress. In this view the state is not to be celebrated, romanticized, or exaggerated in its importance, but it is also not to be forgotten that government is the only available form of organization to accomplish many necessary and worthwhile goals. In the late twentieth century it is also the only organized force that can counter the vast influence of international banks and corporations, of banking and raw materials cartels, and of the many other private organizations which attempt to influence almost all aspects of life.

The Long-Kennedy view of government rejects the idea that the state should own and manage all or nearly all elements of the economy. It is opposed to communism. It also rejects the other extreme which is variously known as English liberalism, economic conservatism, or "free enterprise." The free enterprise idea of government in practice means that government submits to or cooperates with powerful private interests even if those interests are destroying the economy. The Long-Kennedy approach recognizes that economies can be undermined or destroyed by the forces of the market itself and by combinations of interests which exploit or abuse less powerful sectors of the economy. It is also recognizes that class interests and political and social objectives have an impact on the economy. Both Kennedy and Long believed that there were things the government had to do and things only it could do, and they believed that the government had to use its powers to maintain or create a generally positive direction for the economy.

Elsewhere I have thoroughly documented Kennedy's economic program. Kennedy used the tax system to reward companies for making useful investments in the domestic economy, the investment tax credit. He proposed many changes in the tax code, most of which never received enough support in congress. For example, he proposed changes in the tax policy to discourage speculation and to prevent the use of foreign tax havens to avoid taxes. He proposed changes that would have discouraged corporations from moving production and investments to Canada and Europe. These and other tax measures were meant to stimulate useful investments in the

production of real wealth in the U. S. and in poorer nations. In education, Kennedy's proposals led to the growth of enrollments in community colleges and four year schools through grants and loans. His policies stimulated interest in and education in the natural sciences and he was responsible, of course, for a vast expansion of the space program. Kennedy made constant efforts to ensure that interest rates did not go up and that there was credit available for investment, production and consumption. He sought expanded powers for the President so that action could be taken to soften or prevent economic downturns. Kennedy initiated the Alliance for Progress and other changes in foreign policy which were intended to move the United States away from neo-colonial or imperialist policies. He circumvented existing international institutions such as the World Bank and attempted to deal directly with leaders of foreign nations on matters of aid and trade. He resisted the use of U.S. military power for the protection of private economic interests. In these and in other ways, Kennedy began, with considerable success, to move the country forward, making it more prosperous and capable and giving it worthwhile purposes in the reduction of poverty, the exploration of space, and doing many other things. In the process he incurred the anger of Rockefellers, of the Morgan interests, and of other leaders of the aristo-finance elite.¹

Long, of course, was never president. Certain powers were never available to him. However, his policies as governor along with his record as a senator, and his statements as a potential

presidential candidate give us three sources on this thinking and intentions with respect to the nation's direction.

Huey Long was for seven years, 1928 to 1935, the dominant political figure of the state of Louisiana. He was governor and then senator and unofficial governor; the man replacing Long as governor in 1932, O. K. Allen, was handpicked by Long. Over two-thirds of the voters supported the candidate for governor in 1936 who claimed to be Long's successor, indicating that not only the vast majority of the poor, but other people from all social circumstances supported Long. It was the judgment of Louisiana's people on the almost eight years of Long's leadership. Why that positive judgment? Because Long got things done for people and he was willing to publicly oppose the most powerful interests in Louisiana and the country.

Huey Long may be better known for what he proposed than for what he did and only one of his proposals has received a great deal of attention. That is his share-the-wealth program. That program actually evolved over time and never became a clear and detailed set of proposals.² The general idea was to limit annual income to a few million a year and to limit the size of accumulated fortunes. All amounts above the limits would be taken through taxation or other measures. While in the Senate, Long said that the money taken from the rich would be spent for education, infrastructure, veterans, and other programs.³ Aspects of the program were left unexplained or were unworkable as presented (e.g., Long never explained how non-monetary assets taken from the wealthy would be

disposed of or used by the federal government).

If one focuses on Long's simplistic statements about the redistribution of wealth and treats them as if they represent Long's thinking on the economy, it is easy to portray Long as a fool and a liar.⁴ A more objective evaluation of Long's ideas, however, shows that the redistribution of wealth was one element in a much broader economic program and that the simplistic statements were polemical devices.

Long thought the concentration of wealth was a longstanding problem⁵ which was related to questions of economic policy, social justice, and power, and he thought about it in relation to the depression. Beside his oft repeated opinion that it was wrong for a few people to have more money than they could ever use while many had little or nothing, Long also argued that the great fortunes had been accumulated "from manipulated finance, control of government, rigging of markets, the spider webs that have grabbed all businesses."⁶ Long's view, backed up by people such as Matthew Josephson, Gustavus Meyers, and Ida Tarbell,⁷ was far more accurate than either the mythology of meritocracy or the myth that these titans were in any positive way the fittest. Once these huge fortunes were passed on to the next generation, these flimsy myths were completely irrelevant. Huey Long was addressing real issues of social justice and he was pointing out the obvious, that is, in some segments of the society there was (and is) no connection between work and rewards.

Long thought, with good reason, that the accumulation of

massive private wealth led to a concentration of power.⁸ The huge fortunes were allowing a very small group of people to dominate the affairs of the nation. Long thought that these interests were preventing the adoption of policies to end the depression. The redistribution of wealth was a way to break this concentrated power.

Long's idea of taxing wealth to pay for government programs or to directly transfer money to low income people was also part of his assessment of the causes of the continuation of the depression. Long argued that the lack of mass purchasing power was a major cause of that continuation.⁹ Long had already used deficit spending in Louisiana during the 1929 to 1933 period to raise purchasing power in order to counter the impact of the depression.¹⁰ The tools available to the federal government would have given a President Long much greater flexibility. Long's focus on the lack of consumption as a primary problem put him ahead of most public figures of his time.

It is apparent to this reader that Long was using the share-the-wealth issue also as a polemical tool or symbolic issue. He thought it was a major issue and he intended to do things about it. He also emphasized it because it had instant appeal to a fairly large number of people. The polemics got people involved in a way that lent direct support to Long's challenge to the interests, to big wealth.

Long was frequently a leader in efforts to make changes that were beneficial to the nation. Long was a defender of labor, small

business, and the person of average or less than average means. Long's voting record as a Senator was consistently pro-labor.¹¹ He was one of the first Senators to publicly support federal government guarantees on bank deposits and he got the smaller banks included in legislation that otherwise would have benefitted only big banks. Also, Long successfully opposed an effort to give big banks greater freedom in establishing branch operations, thus protecting local banking.¹² Long was one of the Roosevelt administration's leading supporters in the effort to provide regulation of utility holding companies. Long went so far as to suggest in 1935 that public ownership might be necessary.¹³ Long played an important role in the passage of a law which helped many indebted farmers hold on to their land by allowing them to declare bankruptcy and then pay the assessed value of the land to the creditors over a five year period.¹⁴

In the area of tax policy Long favored, of course, a steeply graduated federal income tax rate and increases in the inheritance tax,¹⁵ ideas embraced by FDR. Long proposed that a tax be imposed on transactions of the stock exchange and the cotton exchange.¹⁶ This tax, a type of transfer tax, was apparently aimed at raising revenue while it simultaneously lowered the profits on speculative activity. In Louisiana, Long had reduced property taxes and abolished the poll tax.¹⁷ He had used taxes as part of a carrot-and-stick strategy in his conflicts with Standard Oil. He succeeded over Standard's opposition in getting a tax enacted on each barrel of oil refined in Louisiana and then suspended eighty

percent of the tax in return for Standard's agreement to expand its production and refining operations in Louisiana.¹⁸

Given the depressed economy, Long was more interested in spending than in taxing, except with the super-rich of course. In Louisiana that spending had been partly on infrastructure. Long's program added about 2,500 miles of paved roads and 6,000 miles of gravel roads and built over 40 bridges, at a time when most states drastically reduced such investments.¹⁹

In Louisiana that kind of spending required borrowing. It is not clear whether Huey intended to finance his proposed federal program differently, but it is clear that he was planning something big. In February of 1935 Senator Long proposed that the Federal government spend 2.5 billion dollars on highway construction. The year that Long suggested this, the total budget of the government was 6.5 billion dollars. Long argued that this would stimulate the economy and at the same time improve the country's transportation system. Long criticized FDR for increasing the federal debt while failing to bring the country out of depression. Long also thought that road construction was more meaningful work than the make-work projects that had been implemented.²⁰

When Long talked of what he would do as President, he said he would spend over ten billion dollars on big projects such as flood control, irrigation, and water power. Long noted that such projects provide employment and increase the country's ability to produce wealth.²¹ In principle this is how the country was finally pulled out of the depression. Unfortunately, the great project was

World War Two. What Long was suggesting was competent and thoughtful economic policy. Had something like this been done in 1931 or 1933 the depression might have ended for the U.S. much earlier. A return to prosperity for the U.S. would have affected the whole world, perhaps making the rantings of Adolph Hitler appear to everyone for what they were.

Long had come to believe that the growing debt was unpayable. He proposed in Louisiana and considered for the country a debt moratorium, arguing that this had been done before (which it had) and that this had support in the Bible.²²

As indicated above, Long was very interested in banking, playing a prominent role in the reforms enacted by FDR. He had bigger changes in mind. Long indicated in 1934 that he wanted to do something about the problem of centralized economic and political power and that one way to attack this problem was to do something about control over credit.²³ One of the things he had in mind was the creation of a new central bank, an idea that posed a direct threat to the private banking power exercised through bank cartels and the privately dominated Federal Reserve. Long was open to ideas about how to structure the proposed bank. Tentatively, he thought it should be administered by directors elected in general elections. Long thought that if each presidential administration appointed the directors, the policies would change too easily. He criticized private systems because they were prone to restrict credit too much and also because the control over credit gave too much power to private bankers.²⁴

Long often proposed reforms or policies which would at once improve the economy and reduce the power of big money interests. Political and economic objectives were intertwined. This is apparent above in the central bank proposal and it is obvious in his redistribution ideas. Years earlier, when he was Chairman of Louisiana's Public Services Commission, he had initiated a rule to reduce the cost of transporting oil by rail. While intended to lower prices, it also aimed at breaking up the control over the movement of oil held by oil pipeline companies.²⁵ Long tried to use reform measures to reduce the power of Standard Oil in Louisiana and he publicly attacked the Morgan and Rockefeller interests in order to gain support for reforms at the national level.²⁶

Long did or tried to do many other things. Even if he had not, his initiatives in the areas of infrastructure, redistribution of wealth, and banking and credit would make him a significant figure, nothing remotely like the buffoon or fascist he has been portrayed as by some.

Long was opposed to the use of military force except in defense of the country. Senator Norris, the man Huey was closest to in the Senate, was one of only six Senators to represent the majority of Americans and vote against entry into World War One.²⁷ Huey's apparent respect for the anti-imperialist views of General Smedley Butler and his opposition to the deployment of U.S. forces to protect the foreign holdings of companies such as United Fruit²⁸ indicate that Long did have a developed viewpoint on these issues.

One account has it that Long had people in Central America trying to organize boycotts against United Fruit and Standard Oil.²⁹

Long held other views which were inconsistent with the increasingly internationalist aims of interests such as United Fruit, J.P. Morgan & Co., and Standard Oil. For example, he favored the use of government measures such as tariffs³⁰ to promote the national economy while his opposition on Wall Street was thinking more and more in terms of global "free trade."

At both the state and national level, Long was very interested in educational policy. In Louisiana Long was responsible, solely or in part, for the following: providing over 500,000 free textbooks; establishing free night schools at which over 100,000 adults learned to read and write; a general increase in spending on schools; increase in public school enrollment by 20 percent; the development of the Louisiana State University school of medicine; expansion of LSU from 1500 to 5000 students.³¹ Long proposed building thousands of colleges throughout the country and he suggested that college and vocational education be publicly financed.³² Nothing close to this would happen until the 1945 to 1970 period, when the G.I. Bill, rising income, and measures like the ones taken by Kennedy at least made such education more attainable.

In Louisiana Long expanded hospitals and increased services for the poor (i.e., majority of people in Louisiana) and achieved some improvements in the mental hospitals.³³ Long had a new state capitol built.³⁴ In 1935, he launched an attack on gambling

interests in New Orleans.³⁵ Long publicly denounced the Ku Klux Klan and he rejected the policy of making all civil servants, teachers, and professors sign loyalty oaths.³⁶

Long was one of the earlier and most vocal supporters of the creation of an old age pension system.³⁷ He discussed the possibility of new legislation to reduce the work week.³⁸ Long argued in 1935, revising an earlier view, that the problem in agriculture was not, as some said at the time, one of overproduction, but was instead a problem of underproduction and underconsumption. Long argued, based on expert recommendations for a good diet, that even before the depression the country was not producing enough food.³⁹

In all probability, Long achieved some other important things that were less tangible than schoolbooks, roads, and hospital beds. In the view of some, it was Huey Long who forced the Roosevelt administration to expand the scope of the New Deal and to seek change faster than they otherwise would have.⁴⁰

According to T. Harry Williams, "the new, significant issues that Long introduced aroused popular interest in politics to a degree unmatched in any other southern state."⁴¹ In that context, Williams went on to say that Long "inspired thousands of poor white people all over the South to a vision of a better life" and "introduced into all of Southern politics, which had been pervasively romantic, a saving element of economic realism."⁴²

It might be added that Long brought to Southern and national politics an element of political sophistication. In the following

description of a meeting in Shreveport Long displays a high level of awareness of the differences between ordinary businessmen, the the small oil companies or "independent group," and the representatives of cartels and high finance, the "Standard Oil group."

The faces of the Standard Oil group bore expressions of self-content. About these men there was that undefinable something that betokens freedom from money cares and anxiety as to the future. But the faces of the men in the independent group told a different story. Care, and in some cases, desperation, was written in every line.⁴³

Long understood that the men of Standard Oil represented a business and finance aristocracy, men whose economic power and political connections placed them in a different category than the businessmen subject to the forces of the market and to the force of that concentrated power.

Long offered an extensive program of change and reform, much of it major. To say that Long had no practical program, as has Jeansonne in a recent Long biography,⁴⁴ is ludicrous. Also ridiculous is the claim that Long merely exploited issues and had no commitment to anything but himself.⁴⁵ Long offered a coherent program of change, going furthur in some areas than the program offered by President Kennedy, but very similar in its purposes and similar in the means to be used. Kennedy's economic program was opposed by powerful private interests; Long had similar enemies.

Long and His Opposition

Many of Long's enemies were in state and local politics or they were part of the Louisiana economic and social elite. There were a number of factions in the state and Long sometimes aligned himself with one of those factions. In order to win elections or to get things done, Long sometimes embraced people that he had earlier been against and Long and those allies often split after a common goal had been achieved.⁴⁶

When these alliances ended, Long frequently absorbed some of his former ally's people into his organization.⁴⁷ Some of those people probably were not committed to Long. Also, Long's rise in Louisiana politics was extremely rapid and his need for people to fill government or political positions also increased rapidly. By necessity, Long had to bring large numbers of people into his political organization and his administration that he had no time to evaluate. This created a situation wherein some of Long's enemies may have been inside his organization.

Long's political organization was itself factionalized. For example, there was a group of businessmen and politicians led by Seymour Weiss that backed Long on some issues but not others. This group did not support Long's goal of reducing the size of big fortunes. There was a country politician group. One of its leaders, Allen Ellender, would end up helping Long's enemies within the Roosevelt administration. There was also the share-the-wealth group led by Gerald K. Smith.⁴⁸ These groups were held together by Long and unity did not last long following Huey's death.

Long's opposition within the state was also factionalized.

One faction was known as the Old Regulars, Old Ring, or the Choctaws, and in Long's time was led by New Orleans Mayor T. Semmes Walmsley. A distinct faction within the Old Regulars was led by Louisiana politician Jared Y. Sanders, Jr. The Old Regulars were tied to the New Orleans business elite and to outside corporate and financial interests. Another faction, the New Regulars, was led by John P. Sullivan and had connections to vice and gambling. A third group, the Square Dealers, was linked to Standard Oil and the Ku Klux Klan.⁴⁹ A number of significant political figures shifted their positions over time, usually ending up in the anti-Long camp. Two major figures in the state followed this path; Senators Joseph E. Ransdell and Edwin S. Broussard, both at one time supported by Long, went over to Long's opposition after 1931.⁵⁰

Most of Long's important enemies in Louisiana had connections to interests operating at the national and international levels. Some of these were the same as the interests Kennedy would clash with thirty years later. Long's strength in fact was based partly on his ability to mobilize and weld together all of the groups in Louisiana that had grievances against the state's elitist power structure and the New York and Boston economic interests that operated in the state. Long brought together the poor, city workers, farm and lumber workers, and elements of the middle class and local business community who were tired of the backward policies of the big out-of-state interests and their aristocratic Louisiana allies.⁵¹

Some of Long's Louisiana opponents, such as Sanders and

Sullivan, were close to Standard Oil.⁵² Others, such as Senator Joseph Ransdell and his nephew Joseph Montgomery, had connections to Sam Zemurray, first the head of Cuyamel Fruit Company and then an executive of United Fruit. When Long ran against Ransdell for the U.S. Senate, he attacked Ransdell as a "Wall Street tool." He criticized Ransdell for supporting the deployment of troops to Central America, charging that this was to protect interests such as United Fruit and not the interests of the United States. Long accused Zemurray of financing revolutions in Central America and of using mercenaries such as General Lee Christmas and Guy Maloney to protect private interests.⁵³

One of Long's primary local opponents was the New Orleans lawyer Esmond Phelps. Long charged that Phelps and a group of New York bankers controlled the Times-Picayune company and that it was they who were behind the newspaper's efforts to have Long impeached in 1929. Phelps was also attorney for the Western Union Telegraph Company, later Clay Shaw's employer, and for the Texas and Pacific Railroad. In addition, Phelps was head of the Board of Supervisors of Tulane University, where he worked with the Rockefeller Foundation, a source of financial support for the University.⁵⁴ Finally, Phelps was the President of the very elitist Boston Club. This New Orleans club will be discussed in part two. Many of Long's most bitter enemies were members of this exclusive club, including ex-Governor John Parker and Norris C. Williamson, both officers of the anti-Long Constitutional League of Louisiana.⁵⁵

Long's opponents at the national and international level

included Standard Oil, the Morgan financial group, the Boston Brahmin dominated United Fruit company, and the Time-Life company. This is very much the same interests with which Kennedy was in conflict in the early-1960s.

Long charged that 90 percent of America's wealth was owned or controlled by 600 families, led by the Morgans, Rockefellers, Mellons, Baruchs, Bakers, Astors, and Vanderbilts.⁵⁶ Long's conflicts with Standard Oil interests is probably the one that is best known and most often mentioned by both Long and his biographers.⁵⁷ Long mentions Standard Oil repeatedly in his 1933 book Every Man A King and he also mentions that the biggest financial backer of the generally hostile Tulane University was the Rockefeller Foundation.⁵⁸

In that book Long also identified J. P. Morgan & Co. and Morgan partner Thomas W. Lamont as important antagonists. At the 1932 Democratic convention Long played a major role in breaking the Morgan group's influence.⁵⁹ There is some evidence that the Morgan interests launched a national press attack on Long in 1933.⁶⁰ Long claimed in 1933 that the Morgan interests and financier Eugene Meyer, Katherine Meyer Graham's father, had infiltrated and coopted the Roosevelt administration.⁶¹

In 1930 Long charged that Senator Ransdell was attempting to have American troops sent to Central America to protect the property and interest of Sam Zemurray,⁶² a major United Fruit stockholder from 1929 onward and Managing Director of the company in 1935. According to Long, Zemurray was financing anti-Long

political activity in the early-30s⁶³. Williams says that in 1934 Guy Malony was a leading anti-Long activist and that Malony had been an agent of Zemurray in Central America.

All of these interests were interconnected with the local power structure in numerous ways. The Rockefeller-Standard Oil, Morgan, and United Fruit interests were Long's most powerful enemies. These interests tried a variety of strategies to defeat Long in Louisiana and at the national level. They financed his political opponents, backed the effort to impeach him, and assaulted him in the press. This attack on Long also received support from a few high level people within the Roosevelt administration.

After having aggressively supported Roosevelt for President in 1932, Long became frustrated quickly with what he perceived as too much passivity and too much subservience to the big interests. Relations between the administration and Long turned sour. There were several people within FDR's government who were energetic in their efforts to get Long, particularly Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau and Postmaster General James A. Farley. The exact role played in all of this by FDR is unclear.

At the beginning of 1934, Morgenthau, who had just been appointed Secretary of the Treasury, resurrected a revenue department investigation of Long that had been started under President Hoover and suspended around the end of 1932.⁶⁴ Arthur Schlesinger indicates that Morgenthau himself pushed this investigation.⁶⁵ In 1934 several low level Long people were

indicted and in December of that year Seymour Weiss, a significant figure in the Long camp, was indicted for income tax evasion. In March of 1935 Joe Fisher became the first Long supporter to be sentenced to prison.⁶⁶ Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes was channeling federal money into New Orleans so as to give support to the anti-Long Walmsley group and Farley was engaged in similar activities.⁶⁷

Long's conflict with Standard Oil and the indictment of Seymour Weiss may be important elements in the last year of Long's life.

Assassination

In January of 1935 Long charged that Standard Oil and an assortment of local officials (four sheriffs, a district attorney, and a judge) were involved in a plot to kill him. An anti-Long politician that Huey had long charged with being a Standard Oil agent, J. Y. Sanders, Jr., accused Huey of fabricating the story.

In December, 1934, Long had gotten a five cent per barrel tax put on oil refined in Louisiana. Standard Oil laid off some of its workers claiming that this was necessitated by the new tax. A group of mostly white-collar Standard employees met to discuss the situation. Ernest Bourgeois, an alleged Standard Oil strike breaker, emerged as a leader of the group, which called itself the Square Deal Association. In January, 1935, the Association briefly seized the East Baton Rouge courthouse in response to a rumor that one of their own had been arrested and was being forced to talk. Long, acting through Governor Allen, put Baton Rouge and East Baton

Rouge under martial law and he called out the national guard. Long said the plot was instigated by Standard Oil and he scheduled a hearing on his charges.

At the hearing, Sidney Songy, a Long spy infiltrated into the Association, testified that a group in the Association was planning to kill Long. Shortly after this, January 22, 1935, Long and Standard Oil came secretly to a compromise. Huey promised to reduce the tax and Standard agreed to use mostly Louisiana oil in its refineries in Louisiana and to fire certain Square Dealers. Huey apparently fooled Standard Oil. They expected a change in the tax law; what he gave them was temporary suspension of 80 percent of the tax. It could be brought back at any time by executive action.⁶⁸ Talk of a Standard Oil plot subsided after this deal was struck. The informant Songy would have a most difficult life, more of this later.

In April of 1935 Time magazine made its contribution to the atmosphere of violence that surrounded Huey Long. On the April 1 cover, under a picture of Long, Time printed the following: "Candidate Long: Give him honor or give him death!" If we stretch things, we can view this as sort of a play on a question allegedly asked of Long by an unidentified reporter about whether Huey would live up to his own statement that the next man in the White House should commit suicide if he fails to carry out his promises. That is a stretch. The reason for the cover story appears to have been Time's perception that Long was gearing up for a run at the presidency.⁶⁹ Life, Time's sister publication, would later, in

1946, liken Long to Hitler, to a hardened criminal, and to Lucifer. Life said that Long became "the most powerful antagonist of democracy this country has ever produced."⁷⁰ These statements are made about a politician who acquired his positions only through popular elections, a man whose popularity rose almost continuously throughout his political career. These comments are made in a publication associated with some of the most powerful private interests in the world, including Morgan and Rockefeller interests.⁷¹ The comments are absurd, obviously propagandistic. This is the same media corporation that would describe President Kennedy as a cultist and a reactionary, and discuss his conflict with the Morgan-dominated U.S. Steel in a Fortune magazine article entitled "Steel: The Ides of April."⁷²

In August, 1935, a new plot to kill Long was alleged. On August 9, 1935, Long announced to other Senators that a plot to kill him was hatched at a meeting at the DeSoto Hotel in New Orleans. The story told by Long indicated that pro-Roosevelt people were involved. This story has been retold many times. There are strange things about this story that have not been examined.

The story implicating pro-Roosevelt people in an assassination plot came from three allegedly pro-Long men. They somehow had learned that a very unusual attack on Long was to be proposed at a meeting to be held in July during the DeSoto Hotel Conference of anti-Long Democrats. One of the three, John De Armond, somehow then secured a job as desk clerk at the DeSoto Hotel and he gave a

room adjoining the room of the alleged meeting to the other two allegedly pro-Long men, Herbert Christenberry and B. W. Cason. Cason was secretary of the Louisiana Senate. Herbert Christenberry was an attorney and the brother of Huey Long's secretary, Earle Christenberry. The day after Long was assassinated, Earle would announce that Long's assassin, Carl Weiss, had been at this meeting.⁷³

Herbert Christenberry claimed that with the use of a dictograph he was able to overhear the July 22 meeting in the adjoining hotel room and that he took it down in shorthand. A typed version was given to Seymour Weiss, then under federal indictment, who gave it to Long, who then went public with it.⁷⁴ Arthur Schlesinger has asserted that this story was true, supporting Christenberry, but that the incident is not significant because there is no evidence of a conspiracy. I am going to suggest here that the story is either untrue or irrelevant to the assassination but the telling of the story is itself important and is evidence of a conspiracy.

One month after Long had passed on the Christenberry story, he was back in Louisiana to promote some new legislation, including one item that would likely lead to an election defeat for a Judge Pavy, the father-in-law of Dr. Carl Weiss. On the evening of Sunday, September 8, 1935, the 42 year old Long was shot once while in the hallway of the capitol building; he died early on September 10. The generally accepted account is that Dr. Carl Weiss shot Long once and was then killed by Long's bodyguards. It is alleged

that Long could have been saved but for an oversight, i.e., the unrepaired kidney damage that killed Long could have been detected with pre-operative examination, but the exam was not done. Long was operated on by a team of doctors led by Dr. Arthur Vidrine, a Rhodes Scholar appointed by Long to be the first dean of the new LSU medical school. Vidrine was not an experienced surgeon. It was apparently Vadrine's fault that the kidney damage was not discovered.⁷⁵

Following the assassination the only thing that was completely clear was Long's popularity. Those campaigning under his name scored huge victories in the 1936 Louisiana elections. Everything else related to his death seemed murky or was made to seem that way. Some speculation focused on the bodyguards, either as assassins or in killing Weiss as part of a cover-up. It seems possible and logical that if the second were true, it would have been part of a double-cross, i.e., Weiss was told that the bodyguards were involved and would protect him. The bodyguards had come from various places, such as the Highway Patrol and the Bureau of Criminal Identification (BCI).⁷⁶ The BCI had been created by anti-Long legislators in 1928 and was expanded in the early-30s.⁷⁷ These were not, for the most part, men who had close ties to Long. The man who reportedly was the first to grab Carl Weiss after Weiss shot Long had been with Long for only nine months and had been assigned to Long by General Guerre, head of BCI.⁷⁸ One of Long's earlier bodyguards, Harry "Battling" Bozeman had contributed to the impeachment effort against Long by claiming that Long had hired him

to assassinate Jared Y. Sanders.⁷⁹ There certainly is no reason to rule out the possibility that one or more of the bodyguards played a role in the assassination.

Dr. Carl Weiss was in some ways an unlikely assassin. He was young, succesful, and he had a nice family and many friends. He reportedly liked his work. On the other hand, he was friends with two of Long's important enemies in Lousiana, John M. Parker and Jared Sanders. He did not like Long. Weiss's wife's sister and uncle and a ffriend all lost jobs as a result of Long's political house cleaning. Carl Weiss's wife's father lost his judgeship due to Long, although he reportedly did not care about this. Weiss's father, Dr. Carl Weiss, Sr., hated Long. One person claimed that Weiss had a connection to the far-right Minute Men and that it was actually a meeting of these men that Weiss attended at the DeSoto Conference, not the meeting Christenberry surveilled.⁸⁰ Was there enough motive for Weiss to commit murder? Was there enough motive for him to throw away his life? The latter may not be relevant if he had assurances that the situation would be controlled and that the case could later be fixed in some way.

Investigations were not aggressively carried out and then most of the case material and records disappeared. The bodyguards were not made to give accounts right away, leaving time for their stories to be rehearsed and cordinated. Some of the investigation was carried out by Long's enemies.⁸¹ The district attorney in charge of the investigation had been accused by Long of involvement in the Standard Oil plot to kill Long.⁸² When a resolution was

passed in the Louisiana House in 1936 to investigate the assassination, then Governor Leche prevented it.⁸³ According to Williams, Leche was a corporate lawyer who was bought by Long.⁸⁴ Perhaps Leche had put himself up for sale again around the time of the assassination. Almost all of the records disappeared for almost sixty years. In 1991 the gun allegedly used to kill Long and a 600 page police report turned up. They had wound up in the private possession of retired Brigadier General Louis Guerre, who headed the state police investigation of Long's death.⁸⁵

A complete reconstruction of the events of the night of the assassination is now impossible. It seems unlikely that Weiss was framed. It also seems unlikely that he acted alone. As we will see, there are indications of conspiracy and there are a variety of connections to the assassination of President Kennedy. There are things about both assassinations we will never know. It makes sense to concentrate on those things we do know or can know.

We know, or can know, that Long's policies and goals were almost identical to Kennedy's. We know that Long's enemies were similar to or identical to Kennedy's. These two things are important, they help us to understand the history of our country, and they are relevant to today's debates over the future of our country. Those two things would be important even if both men had died of natural causes, rather than at the hands of real or alleged assassins who were then shot and killed. The ideas and actions of the two men are what is most important. The nature of their enemies is a close second. Who killed them is third. The three

things together are of more significance than any one separately.

Although he never discussed it in public, JFK probably was aware of the similarities between his policies and opposition and those of Long. Kennedy read a great deal of U.S. history and he probably picked up some idea that way of what Long was doing and of who opposed him. In his book Profiles In Courage, Kennedy gave separate chapters to eight men, one of whom was Republican Senator George Norris of Nebraska. Norris was the Senator that Huey Long respected above all others; Long and Norris were very close friends.⁸⁶ The Democrat that Long was closest to was Burton Wheeler.⁸⁷ JFK's father was very close to Wheeler.⁸⁸ These associations make sense. The ideas of John Kennedy and Long were similar. In fact, if one looks at Joseph Kennedy's 1936 book, I'm for Roosevelt,⁸⁹ it is obvious that Joe Kennedy and Long would have agreed on some things. Long's policies were more dramatic and thorough going, but the direction was similar. That is why they both initially supported Roosevelt. There are also direct links between the two assassinations. One of those was through the person of attorney and later federal judge Herbert Christenberry.

As noted above, it was Herbert Christenberry who provided the July 1935 account of the pro-Roosevelt Democrats plotting at the DeSoto Hotel to kill Long. He gave that account to Seymour Weiss who passed it on Long. Weiss (no relation to Carl Weiss) is always portrayed as a friend and close confidant of Long.⁹⁰ There seems to be no reason to doubt that. However, Weiss was in a very vulnerable position in 1935 and he could have been pressured to play

the limited role of lending credence to Christenberry's DeSoto Conference story. Grounds for that suspicion are as follows. In the Spring of 1935 Weiss was distraught because he was the target of the aforementioned investigation directed by Secretary of the Treasury Morgenthau.⁹¹ Weiss was under indictment and was looking for a way to repair his relations with people in the Roosevelt administration.⁹²

After Long was killed, the charges against Weiss were dropped. Weiss then went to the Democratic National Convention as a fully rehabilitated committeeman.⁹³ Later he would be on the board of the International Trade Mart. We have already seen that Governor Leche prevented an investigation of the assassination in 1936. These kinds of events lend credence to the rumors that deals were made between people in the two camps.⁹⁴ It is likely that the dealmakers were only nominally pro-Long and pro-Roosevelt.

Seymour Weiss shared control of Long's political money with Earle Christenberry, Herbert's brother and Long's secretary. That money disappeared and the only account of it is Weiss's claim that Huey had hidden it.⁹⁵ Was that money part of a payoff to Weiss or Christenberry or both? There is also a charge that Weiss and Christenberry were using their positions to make money together from buying and selling oil leases.⁹⁶ It was Earle Christenberry who claimed the day after the assassination that the name "Doctor Wise" appeared on his brother's transcript of the DeSoto meeting, thus implicating pro-FDR Louisiana Democrats. In the late-1960s, Weiss told T. Harry Williams that he had the transcript but nobody

would ever see it. Weiss told someone else that the name Weiss or Wise was not in the transcript.⁹⁷ This is strange behavior for a Long loyalist.

Seymour Weiss was much better off after the assassination. What of the Christenberry brothers? These two men appeared to be Long men. They have certainly been identified this way for over sixty years. As Long men they worked for and supported the man who was viewed within the Roosevelt administration by Morgenthau and Farley as an opponent, even as an enemy to be destroyed. If they were what they appeared to be, one would expect that such men would get no help from the Roosevelt administration. Surprising things happened following the assassination. After a brief time serving Huey's wife, who was interim Senator, Earle was given a state government job as liaison with the Roosevelt administration.⁹⁸ An unusual post for someone who had played a role in implicating supporters of the Roosevelt administration in a political murder.

And what of the man who originated the charge that Louisiana Democrats loyal to Roosevelt were planning to kill Long, the man who tried, with Weiss's complicity, to blame the assassination on Roosevelt people? As an enemy of the Roosevelt Democrats, Herbert Christenberry should have had no chance in the short term for career with the federal government. He should have been discriminated against. The opposite happened. In 1937 he became U.S. attorney for the Eastern District of Louisiana. In 1942 he was nominated by someone in the administration to be U.S. attorney at New Orleans and he was confirmed by the Senate in January of

1942. Apparently, no one asked him to explain his role in blaming Roosevelt supporters for murder. In 1947 he was elevated to the position of U.S. District Judge. Not bad for a supporter of alleged extremist. The man who had been a source for the story about Standard Oil earlier in the year did not do so well. Sidney Songy was prosecuted by the Federal Government for bootlegging and for impersonating a federal officer. He was almost beaten to death while he was in prison.⁹⁹

One explanation for Christenberry's good fortune is obvious. Christenberry and his brother, who was with Long only for a few years, were never seriously pro-Long, or perhaps at all pro-Long. What is quite likely is that Herbert was an agent of Long's enemies and that Earle also was or at some point became an agent. Herbert Christenberry's story of the pro-Roosevelt plotters served several purposes. First, it presented a false lead to anyone who did think there was a conspiracy. The false lead would interfere with finding the truth about the assassination itself and, more importantly, would prevent people from understanding the reasons for the assassination. Second, it made pro-Roosevelt forces rather than Standard Oil or other private interests the subject of conspiracy rumors. Third, it would split some Long people from some Roosevelt people, perhaps people who might agree on policies were it not for suspicions about the assassination. Fourth, it had the potential of hurting Roosevelt's popularity. The purpose of the assassination itself, of course, was to eliminate Huey Long and to eliminate the discussion of the policies that Long presented.

In the 1960s Herbert Christenberry was the senior judge of the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Louisiana. In March of 1969 Jim Garrison was preparing to prosecute Clay Shaw for perjury. Shaw had been found not guilty in the murder of President Kennedy, but he had testified falsely that he did not know David Ferrie. The United States District Court prevented Garrison from prosecuting Shaw. It did so by giving an extremely broad interpretation to a law which allowed federal interference in a state court.⁹ This situation did not fit the criteria specified for such interference but the District Court intervened anyway. The order to stop Garrison was signed by Christenberry;¹⁰⁰ this probably saved Shaw from a perjury conviction.¹⁰¹

Four years later, 1973, the U.S. Justice Department prosecuted Jim Garrison on trumped up corruption charges related to pinball gambling. The senior judge of the District Court set aside a number of more important and complex cases and gave six weeks to Garrison's trial. The judge, of course, was Herbert Christenberry. Fortunately for Garrison, the prosecution had not done a very good job in fabricating a case against him and he was acquitted.¹⁰² The trial probably did cost him re-election as district attorney.¹⁰³

The judge who protected Clay Shaw and then oversaw the trial of Garrison had as a young lawyer played a key role in events just prior to the assassination of Long. In his books Garrison did not say that he was aware of Christenberry's connection to Huey Long. Garrison was a friend of Huey's son, Senator Russell Long. Long got Garrison started on his investigation of President Kennedy's

assassination when he told Garrison that he had no confidence in the Warren Commission's report. Perhaps Russell Long and Garrison talked about these connections.

As we shall see in part two of this article, the Christenberry connection is not the only flesh-and-blood link between the Clay Shaw episode in New Orleans and the events surrounding the assassination of Huey Long. That story will bring us to the International House in New Orleans and the affiliated International Trade Mart. It will also bring us to the elitist Boston Club and the upper class interests who opposed Long and Kennedy.

1. Gibson, 1994.
2. Williams, 1969, pp. 663-4, 726, 729.
3. Williams, 1969, pp. 663-4.
4. For example, see Hair, 1991, p. 271; Jeansonne, 1993, pp. 123-4.
5. Long, 1985, pp. 103-4.
6. Long, 1985, p. 125.
7. Josephson, 1934; Myers, 1917; Tarbell, 1925.
8. Long, 1985, pp. 126-7.
9. Long, 1985, p. 106.
10. Williams, 1969, pp. 580, 586.
11. Williams, 1969, p. 669.
12. Williams, 1969, pp. 654, 659-60.
13. Williams, 1969, p. 879.
14. Long, 1985, p. 50.
15. Long, 1985, pp. 5, 20-21, 65.
16. Long, 1985, p. 7.
17. Howard, 1957, p. 130; Williams, 1969, p. 899.

18. Sindler, 1956, pp. 94-5; Williams, 1969, pp. 782-3.
19. Howard, 1957, p. 130; Williams in Long, 1935, p. xvii.
20. New York Times, 1935, p. 2.
21. Long, 1935, pp. 26, 31-2.
22. Long, 1985, p. 37; Williams, 1969, p. 776.
23. Long, 1985, pp. 44-5.
24. Long, 1935, pp. 35-37.
25. Long, 1933, p. 85.
26. Long, 1933, p. 61; 1985, pp. 7, 10.
27. Karp, 1979, pp. 262, 270, 308, 322-3.
28. Beals, 1935/1971; Williams 1969, p. 747.
29. Williams, 1969, pp. 747.
30. Williams, 1969, p. 747.
31. Christman in Long, 1985, pp. vii-viii; Howard, 1957, p. 130; Williams in Long, 1933, p. xvii; Williams, 1969, pp. 551, 899.
32. Long, 1985, p. 52.
33. Howard, 1957, p. 130; Williams, 1969, p. 899.
34. Howard, 1957, 130.
35. Beals, 1935/1971, p. 320.
36. Christman in Long, 1985, p. xiii.
37. Long, 1985, pp. 32, 53, 109.
38. Howard, 1957, p. 129; Long, 1985, p. 32.
39. Long, 1985, pp. 122-3.
40. Christman in Long, 1985, p. xiii.
41. Williams in Long, 1933, p. xviii.
42. Williams in Long, 1933, p. xxiii.
43. Long, 1933, p. 42.

44. Jeansonne, 1993, p. 189.
45. For example, Sindler, 1956, pp. 60-61.
46. Beals, 1935/1971, pp. 94, 200.
47. Beals, 1935/1971, p. 367.
48. Beals, 1935/1971, p. 413.
49. Beals, 1935/1971, p. 412; Swindler, 1956, pp. 22-6.
50. Long, 1933, pp. 211, 253.
51. Howard, 1957, pp. 123-30.
52. Beals, 1935/1971, p. 375; Long, 1933, p. 157; Sindler, 1956, pp. 60-61.
53. Beals, 1935/1971, p. 191; Long, 1933, pp. 213-19.
54. Beals, 1935/1971, pp. 165-6, 203; Williams, 1969, p. 215.
55. Long, 1933, P. 183.
56. Long, 1985, p. 90.
57. Liebling, 1960, p. 42; Sindler, 1956; Zinman, 1993, pp. 35-7.
58. Long, 1933, pp. 39-49, 61, 63, 124, 140, 153, 157-9, 181, 186, 335.
59. Beals, 1935/1971, p. 11; Williams, 1969, pp. 608-10.
60. Williams, 1969, pp. 672-3, 684-6.
61. Schlesinger, 1960, pp. 54-5.
62. Williams, 1969, p. 490.
63. Long, 1933, 213-6, 335-6.
64. Williams, 1969, pp. 836-7.
65. Schlesinger, 1960, p. 57.
66. Williams, 1969, pp. 838, 860.
67. Beals, 1935/1971, p. 328; Schlesinger, 1960, p. 242.
68. Williams, 1969, pp. 820-32.

69. Time, 1935, pp. 15-17.
70. Basso, 1946, pp. 106-21.
71. Gibson, 1994, pp. 68-70.
72. Gibson, 1994, pp. 16, 57-60.
73. Williams, 1969, pp. 675, 881-2; Zinman, 1993, 231-3.
74. Williams, 1969, 882-3.
75. Williams, 1969, pp. 904-9, 917-20; Zinman, 1993, pp. 146, 150, 170, 175.
76. Williams, 1969, p. 339.
77. Beals, 1935/1971, pp. 71, 371.
78. Zinman, 1993, pp. 202, 212.
79. Beals, 1935/1971, pp. 146, 151; Williams, 1969, pp. 338, 373-4, 399.
80. Sindler, 1956, pp. 96-7; Williams, p. 915; Zinman, 1993, pp. 58-9, 86, 155.
81. Zinman, 1993, p. 195.
82. Daniell, 1935, pp. 1, 18.
83. Zinman, 1993, p. 243.
84. Williams, 1969, pp. 596-7.
85. Zinman, 1993, pp. 258-9, 305.
86. Christman in Long, 1985, p. ix; Williams, 1969, pp. 588, 602.
87. Williams, 1969, 589, 602.
88. Whalen, 1964, pp. 73, 121, 296, 335, 346.
89. Kennedy, 1936.
90. Beals, 1935/1971, pp. 146-7; Williams, 1969, pp. 393-4; Zinman, 1993, p. 141.
91. Kane, 1941, 181-2; Williams, 1969, p. 838.
92. Sindler, 1956, p. 118.

93. Kane, 1941, pp. 182, 185.
94. Sindler, 1956, p. 126.
95. Williams, 1969, pp. 795-6, 904.
96. Kane, 1941, p. 160.
97. Williams, 1969, pp. 883, 912-5.
98. Kane, 1941, pp. 192, 201.
99. Zinman, 1993, pp. 230-1.
100. Garrison, 1988, pp. 253, 261.
101. DiEugenio, 1992, pp. 207, 374.
102. Garrison, 1988, pp. 261-5, 271.
103. DiEugenio, 1992, 269.