



COVER STORY

*O they say he was a crook
But he gave us free school book
Now tell me why is it that they kill Huey
Long?
Now he's dead and in his grave
But we riding on his pave
Tell me why is it that they kill Huey Long?
— Cajun Ballad*

HUEY PIERCE LONG, a Dixie dictator who dreamed of the day he'd live in the White House, hurried from the chamber of the Louisiana House of Representatives. A squad of bodyguards hustled at his flying heels.

Long's dewlap jowls quivered as he strutted plump, plump, plump down the marble halls of his 34-story skyscraper capitol in Baton Rouge. He barged into the governor's office. "Get the boys out early tomorrow," Huey barked. Gov. O.K. Allen was on his feet in-

David Zinman, Newsday's medical writer, is the author of "The Day Huey Long Was Shot," a book challenging the "official" version of the Louisiana senator's assassination.

Who Killed The Kingfish?

The Enduring Controversy Over the Assassination of Huey Long

By David Zinman

stantly. Long said he wanted to air matters at a caucus the next morning and breezed out.

To this day, people in Louisiana argue about what happened next. It was 9:19 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 8, 1935 — 50 years ago next month. Huey Pierce Long had one minute until catastrophe.

A few minutes earlier and a few blocks away, Dr. Carl Austin Weiss picked up his medical bag, kissed his wife and 3-month-old son goodbye, and walked into the light of a quarter moon.

Weiss, wearing a white linen suit, black shoes and Panama hat, said he had to finish preparations for an operation the next morning. He drove away in his Buick. In the glove compartment was a small .32-cal. Belgian Browning automatic wrapped in a white flannel sock.

What Weiss did, or did not do, with that gun would spawn an enduring dispute. Controversy has always surrounded assassinations in this country. To the point of paranoia, the American psyche is poised to question the "official" version of a public figure's slaying. Over the years, dozens of theories have arisen

AP PHOTO



Long in a characteristic pose: He was the self-styled champion of the "pore folks."



to explain what really happened in the murders of Lincoln, John and Robert Kennedy, and Martin Luther King.

The Huey Long case, the first assassination of a U.S. senator, is a perfect example of this curious phenomenon. Many in Louisiana are convinced that mysteries still surround the shooting. The mysteries gave rise to legends. The legends persist a half century later. And, incredibly, the mysteries remain unsolved.

Weiss and Long. Perhaps no two men indelibly linked by history were so different.

Long, who inspired Robert Penn Warren's 1946 Pulitzer Prize-winning novel "All The King's Men" and the subsequent Oscar-winning movie, was the bayou state's flamboyant demagogue. He became governor at 34, senator at 39. With his "Share Our Wealth — Every Man a King" slogan, he crowned himself the champion of the "pore folks." He made war on millionaires and monopolies, Wall Street and the oct-TOE-pus Standard Oil, and on "thieves, scalawags, looters, moral lepers, bugs and lice, plundering high-binders and blackguards in full dress."

His homespun oratory tickled the great unwashed. Listen to Huey on the radio. He had his own way of getting an audience.

"This is Huey P. Long speakin', ladies and ge'men. Now, before I start my speech, I want each of you listenin' in to go to the telephone and ring up half a dozen of your friends. Tell 'em Huey Long is on the air. Tell 'em to tune in and stay tuned in. I'll wait till you get through phonin'. I'm going to tell you things those lyin' newspapers won't tell you. I'm going to tell you the God's truth, so help me. This is Huey P. Long speakin', ladies and ge'men. Go to your telephone now an' call all your friends . . ."

Washington was listening, too. But it wasn't laughing. A secret poll made for President Franklin D. Roosevelt showed that Long, then 42, commanded 4 million votes nationally. Not enough to win in 1936. But enough to be a factor as a third-party candidate. And a real contender in 1940.

That unforgettable night, Weiss drove through the dark streets of Baton Rouge, hard by the Mississippi River. He was a quiet, scholarly man. Friends said the 29-year-old physician was devoted to his family, his Catholic religion and his profession. He was the son-in-law of an anti-Long judge. But his family said he had no interest in politics — that he had never even taken the trouble to walk the two blocks from his house to go inside the capitol.

On that night, though, he parked in front of the great statehouse and started up its 48 granite steps, each with the name of a state etched into it. In a moment, he was through the heavy bronze doors, lost in the crowd that had come to see the special session.

Weiss and Long. As far as anyone knows,

they had never met. They met that night. And suddenly, violently, irrevocably, Huey's dreams of a White House bid vanished.

"*Judica me, Deus, et discerne causam meam de gente non sancta; ab homine iniquo et doloso erue me.*" ("Give judgment for me, O God, and decide my cause against an unholy people; deliver me from unjust and deceitful men.")

The Latin phrases of the Mass swirled through the nave of St. Joseph's Catholic Church in downtown Baton Rouge. Weiss, his knees pressed against a hard kneeling board, listened to the familiar words. It was the beginning of a pleasant Sabbath. "Sunday was one of the happiest days of our lives," his wife, Yvonne, would say later. "And Sunday night was the saddest."

After church, there was a big dinner at his parents' home. In the afternoon, they all escaped the sultry 95-degree heat by driving to the elder Weiss' cabin on the nearby Amite River.

Carl and Yvonne went for a swim while his father and mother played phonograph records for their baby grandson, Carl Jr. Later, they gathered on the shore. It was a classic family scene. The elder Weiss, a prominent eye, ear, nose and throat specialist and former president of the state medical society, discussed medicine with his son. The women played with the infant. Clouds drifted above. The river glided by. Death seemed far away.

RETURNING to town early in the evening, Carl Weiss dropped off his parents. He and his wife continued to their own home, a frame cottage two blocks from the capitol.

While his wife put the baby to bed, Weiss telephoned another doctor to be sure he knew that a tonsillectomy scheduled in the morning had been switched to Our Lady of the Lake Hospital. Then Weiss showered and dressed.

"About nine o'clock, he [Carl] said he had a call to make," his wife told me in an interview before her death in 1963. "There was nothing unusual in his manner. I even recall the last thing he said . . . I said, 'I believe I'll let the baby cry himself to sleep and not rock him.' Carl smiled as if he doubted me. He said, 'Well, I'll hurry back as quickly as I can, and we'll try it out together.'"

Lights of a Mississippi riverboat winked as Weiss drove through the shadows. None of his actions that day indicated he would use the foreign automatic in his glove compartment — a gun his brother would say he merely carried in the car to use for target practice at the family campsite. Nor, for that matter, did his past.

As a child, Weiss was precocious, inquisitive and fond of music. He was introverted



Weiss, the accused assassin: Did he really fire the shot that killed Long?

and had a scrawny build. But he was fearless. When the gang roughhoused, a boyhood pal says, his temper flashed if he thought a smaller boy was being bullied.

Weiss had blue-gray eyes, an olive complexion, a shock of dark hair and a long aquiline nose. He had a slight build. He was 5-foot-10 and weighed 132 pounds. Thick-lensed glasses sometimes gave him an owl-like look.

When he was only 15, Weiss was graduated from high school. He continued to do well in college. He went to Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge and Tulane in New Orleans. At 21, he was a doctor.

From 1928 to 1930, Weiss continued his studies abroad — in Vienna and Paris. Weiss did not talk much about his travels. But those who were close to him said it affected him profoundly. He saw a Europe on the brink of fascism. Hitler was rising to power in Germany. Mussolini was making the trains run on time in Italy.

Back in America, Weiss interned at Bellevue Hospital in New York. When he returned to Baton Rouge in 1932 to share his father's practice, doctors marveled at his talents.

Twelve years separated Weiss from his brother, Thomas. But they had deep feelings for each other. In the sole letter written by Weiss that remains today, he noticed his own introverted ways emerging in Thomas. Carl tried to make his brother aware of them. His-



torians would later cite this passage in discussing the hidden side of Weiss' personality.

"More and more, of late, I see evidence of traits that I have, traits I try hard to banish—excusing myself—not actually evil, but unfortunate, and productive of regrets, destructive of pleasures, and more, of highly valuable associations that would ripen through life. These traits will form a barrier, shutting you off from other people, making it ever more difficult to bring yourself to enjoy the interests of your fellows."

Now, as Weiss left his car and started up the steps of the great statehouse, the light that rushed out framed him in the entranceway. Somewhere in that building was Huey Long. Weiss must have been thinking about Long on that lonely drive.

About 10 days before, surgeons talked politics in a hospital amphitheatre. The conversation turned to Long. It became heated. Several doctors called Huey's regime oppressive. One of the surgeons glanced at Weiss. "He had said nothing. But great tears were rolling down his cheeks. He got up and walked out of the room."

Carlos G. Spaht, a former state

judge who had an office in the same building as the Weisses, remembers how bitterly many in Baton Rouge reacted to Huey's authoritarian regime. "It is difficult for people to appreciate the high degree of feelings here," Spaht said. "It was not unusual for someone to say Huey was wrecking the state and something had to be done to stop him. Carl was a serious young man who took things seriously. I remember him telling me, 'Long is a tyrant. Something has to be done about him.' What he meant I don't know."

As Weiss neared the top of the capitol steps, his thoughts might have turned to his wife and her family. Yvonne's father, Judge Benjamin Pavy, was on the verge of losing his judgeship. Huey's candidates couldn't lick Pavy at the polls. So, in a bill introduced just 24 hours earlier, Long was slicing up the judge's vote-heavy territory. It was gerrymandering, pure and simple.

No one has ever been able to verify this. But a story later made the rounds—and it is repeated today in Louisiana—that Long had been threatening to go on the radio and charge that there was "nigger blood" in the Pavy family. That was the supreme southern insult. The

unfounded assertion would have applied to Weiss' wife and to his newborn son.

Weiss walked through the entranceway below the two stone eagles protecting the great seal of Louisiana. Behind him, a stillness enveloped the night. A tug churning up the black Mississippi wailed its mournful cry. Somewhere in the past was a prophetic line under Weiss' portrait in his college yearbook. It read:

"With knowledge aplenty and friends galore, he is bound to go out and make the world take notice."

ANYONE who had been in the legislature that fateful night and passed Huey in the hall would have called him dumpy. He had a chubby face, a thick, upturned bulbous nose and a ruddy complexion. He had crisp, curly, ginger-colored hair with a forelock that tumbled wildly, a wide mouth and a habit of scratching his rear end.

A setup for a political cartoonist. But those who lump him with the run-of-the-mill, pea-patch demagogues plainly underestimate him.

An ambitious farm boy with a yen for the power of public office, Huey had an amazingly retentive mind.

He passed the bar exam only seven months after enrolling at Tulane Law School. That was in 1915. Politics became his life. "He was a tireless worker," said former judge Spaht. "He was completely dedicated to getting control. And he was ruthless. Whatever it took to gain his point, he did it."

In 1928, he became Louisiana's youngest governor. Huey was 34. He employed a mixture of hoopla, invective, unrelenting pressure on his enemies, and a spellbinder's appeal to the masses.

Listen to him as he campaigned in St. Martinville, the heart of South Louisiana's Cajun country. In his sweat-stained shirtsleeves, arms pumping in the scorching summer heat, he stood beneath the fabled Evangeline oak, the setting for Longfellow's classic poem. Evangeline, Long said, is not the only one who stood here in disappointment.

"Where are the schools that you have waited for your children to have, that have never come? Where are the roads and the highways that you send your money to build, that are no nearer now than ever before? Where are the institutions to care for the sick and the disabled? Evan-

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geline wept bitter tears in her disappointment. But it lasted through only one lifetime. Your tears in this country, around this oak, have lasted for generations."

Huey looked into the eyes of the lean, leather-faced, rawboned hun-

the people badly needed roads and bridges, charity hospitals, free school books, welfare and old-age payments. And he abolished the poll tax. He did more for the people than any other Louisiana governor.

But Huey's price was high — political servitude — and his methods dubious. When Huey proposed bond issues for roads, any lawmaker who opposed him found that "the road stopped at his parish [county]." No one seemed to mind if the legislature appropriated \$2 per cubic yard for the same gravel that cost private contractors 67 cents a yard. "The appropriations became kickbacks that contractors paid to state officials," said Cecil Morgan, a former dean of Tulane Law School.

In a Depression-poor state, Long won complete loyalty by getting the power to control every public job down to dogcatcher. "When the janitor at our high school had to go to Baton Rouge to get his job approved, we knew we had lost all local government," said Betty Carter, whose husband, Hodding, was editor of the Hammond newspaper.

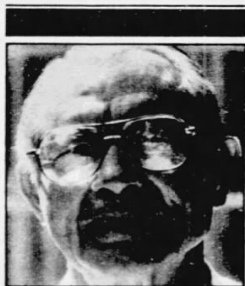
Long treated the legislature — some called it the "Longislature" — as an extension of his office.

Once, a state representative, enraged at Long's interference in a committee meeting, hurled a copy of the state constitution at Huey's head. "Maybe you've heard of this before," the lawmaker said.

Long picked it up, then tossed it aside. "I am the constitution just now," he replied.

Huey boasted that he bought legislators "like sacks of potatoes . . . shuffled and dealt them like a deck of cards." There might be smarter men, he conceded. "But they ain't in Louisiana."

He dubbed himself "Kingfish"



DAVID ZIMMAN

"Carl was a serious young man who took things seriously. I remember him telling me, 'Long is a tyrant. Something has to be done about him.'"

— Carlos G. Spaht
Former State Judge

dreds, the shrimp fishermen, the trappers and muskrat hunters and the gallused farmers from the canebrakes. He spoke again:

"Give me the chance to dry the eyes of those who still weep here."

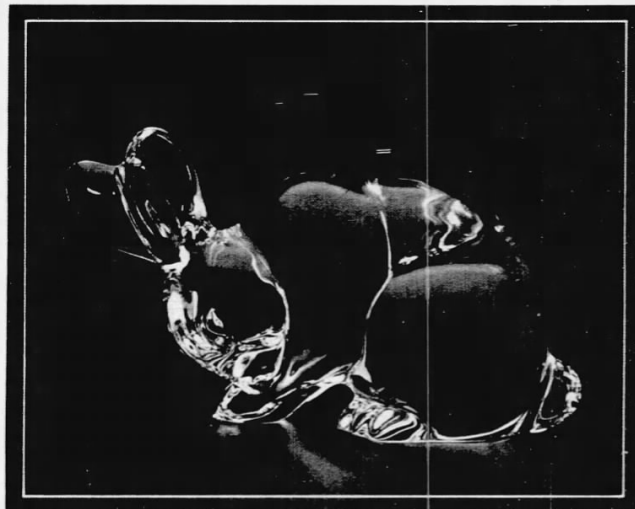
Long built a crack political machine. Louisiana became his empire. Much to Standard Oil's displeasure, he put a tax on oil and other natural resources, once they were removed from the earth. With the corporate money, he gave

On the Cover

Artist John McCrady's painting of Huey Long's assassination originally appeared in the June 26, 1939, issue of Life magazine. The late artist took some liberties with the facts of the assassination: He gave one of the bodyguards a sub-machine gun, instead of a hand gun, and inserted himself in the scene. He is the shocked, mustached witness behind Huey Long, who is clutching his wounded abdomen. The painting is owned by Keith Marshall, a New Orleans art dealer.



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after the shrewd Amos 'n Andy radio character. "This is the Kingfish speakin'," he bellowed into the phone.

His enemies got an impeachment charge against him in the legislature. But Huey worked fast. Summoning lawmakers from their beds, he got one more senator than the two-thirds needed to convict him to sign a pledge not to vote for impeachment "no matter what."



"Huey Long's idea was that what's wrong with the country is that too many people have too much and too many have too little."

— Sen. Russell Long
Huey Long's Son

Later, they were amply rewarded.

"I used to get things done by saying 'please,'" an angry Long said. "That didn't work. Now I'm a dynamiter. I dynamite them out of my path."

At 39, the Kingfish became a United States senator. Huey's son, Russell, who has held a U.S. Senate seat since 1949, is convinced his father's Populist ideas, hatched in the depths of the Depression, pushed FDR to the left. They could even have won him the presidency in 1940, Russell Long contends. "Huey Long's idea was that what's wrong with the country is that too many people have too much and too many have too little," said Russell, now 66 and a year away from retirement. Huey's Share-Our-Wealth program would have confiscated all personal fortunes greater than \$3 million. From that fund, every family was to be guaranteed

\$5,000 to buy a home, a car and a radio. "Huey Long was talking a language that made sense to the people," Russell said.

Historians feel that Long's program, although it sounded good, was too sketchy to have worked. "I don't think Huey planned it carefully or knew what he was up to," said David Culbert, professor of history at Louisiana State University. "His ideas were half-baked."

Nor do professors in Huey's own state feel that his influence on the national scene would have amounted to much — had he lived. Mark T. Carleton, associate professor of history at LSU, thinks Long would have had little impact on the 1936 or 1940 elections.

If Long's place in history is clouded, it is clear that he was *sui generis* — as Huey was fond of calling himself — one of a kind. Still, all his color couldn't hide his darker qualities. He was impudent and a braggart. He abounded in deeds of personal humiliation. He had nicknames for his political enemies. Mayor T. Semmes Walmsley of New Orleans, a man with a pronounced nose and a loose chin, was "Turkey Head Walmsley." Charles Rightor, a lawmaker who suffered from intestinal gas, was "Whistle Britches Rightor."

Huey's remarks did not always carry an edge of humor. Long was not beyond using the epithet "kinky" or "shinola" to ascribe "nigger blood" to a political foe. His tactics spawned legions of enemies. He was the first governor to have a bodyguard. Hoodlums clustered about him. Brutality was a source of his strength. Revenge was never far from his thoughts.

On that memorable September night, as Long walked through the halls of the legislature, he had the unmistakable air of a man who was convinced he was going places. Heads turned. Legislators pushed back. The Kingfish of the bayous was passing. Forgotten on that hot evening was a prophetic speech a lonely anti-Long legislator had made only a few months before.

"I am not gifted with second sight," said State Rep. Mason Spencer, shaking with emotion after yet another session in which Long steamrolled his bills through the legislature. "Nor did I see a spot of blood on the moon last night. But I can see blood on the polished floor of this capitol. For if you ride this thing through, you will travel with the white horse of death. White men have ever made poor slaves."

As the night session droned on in



Dr. Carl Weiss Jr., son of the accused assassin, in his Garden City office. He has always been convinced that his father was innocent.

A Long Island Postscript

Yvonne Pavy Weiss, widow of the accused assassin of Huey Long, moved to Long Island shortly after the slaying and settled in Garden City.

She remarried in 1949 and worked as a librarian at Farmingdale High School. She became a popular figure. When she died in 1963, the school named its library in her honor (the Yvonne P. Bourgeois Memorial Library).

Her son, Carl Austin Weiss Jr., who was 3 months old when Long was shot, learned

about the circumstances of his father's death some years later when, as a boy, he read an old issue of Life magazine that carried a story about the assassination. He had previously been told that his father had died in a "firearms mishap" and that he was in the wrong place at the wrong time.

The younger Weiss became a physician and runs an orthopedic practice today in Garden City. Weiss, 50, has always maintained his father's innocence.

— David Zinman

the Louisiana House, Long sat on the dais, chatting with Speaker Allen J. Ellender. As a U.S. senator, Huey had no right to be in the state legislature. But nobody there was going to try to stop him.

The Kingfish had Gov. Allen call the special session, the seventh in little more than a year, to introduce 39 bills to broaden Huey's ever-increasing power in the state. Everything was going like clockwork.

Then Long spotted the speaker's signal that he was about to adjourn the session. Huey bolted from the chamber toward the governor's office. His squad of bodyguards, led by Murphy Roden, stepped lively behind him, a clatter of heels on the polished floor. "Get the boys

out early," Huey said. "And have them all there." He whirled back into the corridor into a waiting knot of men at the center of the narrow hallway. What happened next can be told only by those who were there. They were all bodyguards or politicians who were part of the Long machine.

They said a man in a white suit walked into the group from a marble column set back against the corridor wall. Everyone who was there is now dead. But in the 1960s I interviewed most of them and asked them to describe what took place.

"Huey was coming toward me, and I noticed his eyes were popping like saucers," said John B. Fournet,



one of Huey's most loyal machine politicians, who would later become chief justice of the State Supreme Court. "I saw a man in a linen suit with dark glasses. And I saw that little black automatic.

"It was a hot night, and I perspire freely. I was holding my Panama hat in my right hand and wiping my brow with a handkerchief in my left. By reflex, I reached out and hit the man with my hat, a backhand swipe and then started pushing him." That swipe, Fournet claimed, knocked the gun down from chest level.

A muffled explosion echoed down the hallway. Blood stained Huey's white shirt about six inches above the belt line. He grabbed the right side of his abdomen. His eyes dilated. His knees sagged. But he did not fall.

"When Huey was shot, he spun around, made one outcry — 'Ohhhhhh!' — and ran down the hall," Fournet said. "He ran like a scared deer."

Bodyguard Roden sprang at Weiss. For an instant, they went down together. "I put my left hand over the gun," Roden said, "and we struggled and fell to the floor and came up again. At first, I thought it was a free-for-all, and I knew I had the man who shot the senator. I jerked loose, pulled my gun."

The other bodyguards moved forward, pistols drawn. Weiss staggered, trying to regain his balance.

He looked up. Death was staring him in the face.

"I shot ten times," Roden said. He had a .38-cal. Colt superautomatic. It fired as quickly as he could pull the trigger. At the same instant, or perhaps even before Roden could

act, the other bodyguards opened up.

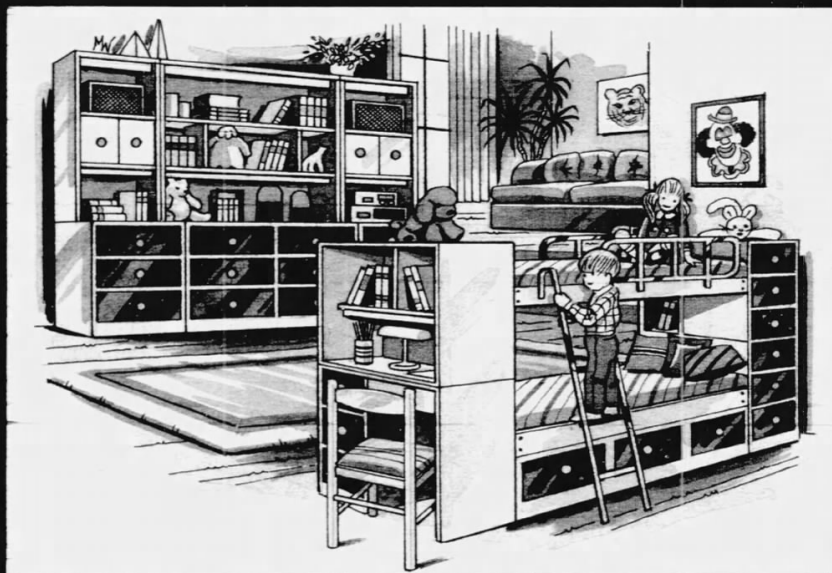
"After the second shot, there was no cessation in the shooting," Fournet said. It was one continuous movement. I was a machine gunner in World War I. The shooting sound-

ed as fast as a machine gun."

Steel-jacketed missiles whined through the air, ricocheted along the corridor, spattered against the polished marble wall. Gunsmoke drifted down the hall in stream-

Turn to page 20

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“When Huey was shot, he spun around, made one outcry — ‘Ohhhhhh!’ — and ran down the hall. He ran like a scared deer.”

— John B. Fournet
A Political Crony of Long's



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Who Killed the Kingfish? *Continued from page 13*

ers. Men fled. Women screamed.

"Fireworks," laughed House Speaker Ellender. More shots rang out. Legislators stampeded.

Weiss started to crumple slowly — like a puppet let go — sagging face forward. When his knees struck the floor, his right arm bent as if he were trying to ward off the lethal barrage. His head pillowed on the crook of his arm. Bullet after bullet pounded into his prone body, shuddering and stiffening under the withering fusillade. The young doctor groaned only once, the last sound of his life.

And still the guns thundered. The body bounced convulsively with each blast until there were no more bullets left. Blood flowed from 61 wounds. Later, when funeral-home workers would lift the body, they would say that so many bullets fell to the stone floor it sounded like a hailstorm on the capitol floor. Meanwhile, Long, clutching his side, ran down a four-level staircase to the basement. "Kingfish, what's the matter?" asked James P. O'Connor, a young member of his political machine who would later become a judge.

"Jimmy, my boy, I'm shot," Huey gasped.

"The blood came gushing out of his mouth," O'Connor said. "At first, I thought he had been shot in the mouth. Later, in the hospital, I saw a membrane had been cut inside his lower lip."

O'Connor helped Huey out a rear door, spotted a Ford sedan and ordered the driver to rush to Our Lady of the Lake Hospital, about a quarter-mile away.

"Only once did he [Long] say anything," O'Connor said. "And that was to ask, 'I wonder why he shot me?'"

The first radio bulletin said only that Long had been shot and a man in a white suit killed. It did not identify Weiss. In Hammond, Betty Carter said she ran downstairs to be sure that her husband, a staunch anti-Long editor, was home and that it was not he who was the Kingfish's assailant. People say Long had so many enemies

that scores of wives throughout Louisiana were making the same check.

In the emergency room, Dr. Arthur Vidrine, a small-town physician whom Huey had made head of the huge Charity Hospital in New Orleans, started cleaning the



"At first, I thought it was a free-for-all, and I knew I had the man who shot the senator. I jerked loose, pulled my gun."

— **Murphy Roden**
A Long Bodyguard

wound. Jewel O'Neal, a student nurse, was standing behind Vidrine preparing a hypodermic. She said she heard Vidrine ask, "How about this place on your lip?" "That's where he hit me," the nurse quoted Huey as saying.

Vidrine called two surgical specialists from New Orleans. They sped to Baton Rouge, but their car ran off the road in an area under construction and bogged down. Huey's blood pressure began dropping. It kept falling as the hours flew by. Finally, Vidrine, who had little recent experience doing surgery, realized he had no choice but to operate himself.

Vidrine said the bullet went through Long's body. It left a tiny wound the size of a fingertip. He said the slug flattened out in penetrating Long's torso because the hole in Huey's back was slightly larger than the one in front. The bullet entered just below the border of the front right rib cage, about on a vertical line with the nipple. It exited

from his back on the same side under the rear ribs.

At first, Vidrine was optimistic. He said the bullet miraculously missed any vital organs. Unless complications arose, Long had a "good chance" to recover. But as the hours wore on it became apparent that Huey was, in fact, sinking.

Dr. Edgar Hull, who was present, told a medical symposium in New Orleans in 1984 that there was no negligence in the operation. But Dr. Frank L. Loria, a New Orleans surgeon who was not at the operation, concluded otherwise in a study of the surgery. No autopsy was made because Long's wife would not give permission. But Loria believed that doctors had failed to discover an injury to the right kidney.

They operated from the front. But Loria felt the serious damage was in the back. The bullet had probably nicked a vessel leading into the kidney. In the excitement, a pre-operative urine examination — which could have disclosed kidney damage — apparently had not been made.

Long lingered through five blood transfusions, drifting in and out of consciousness. Unseen behind the rear abdominal wall, blood flowed unchecked from the damaged vessel.

"Just as fast as they were pouring the blood into his body, it was running out," Loria said.

As the end neared, a nurse agreed to blink the lights as a signal to relatives on a nearby porch. At 4:06 a.m. on Tuesday, Sept. 10, the lights in his room flickered. Huey did not see them. Death came 30 hours and 44 minutes after he was shot.

There remains a difference of opinion about Huey's last words. According to T. Harry Williams, Huey's biographer, some who stood at his bedside thought he said: "What will my poor boys [students] at LSU do without me?" Others remember him saying: "God, don't let me die. I have so much to do."

But Carleton, of LSU, said a retired nurse, who said she was in the room taking

Long's pulse, swears his final utterance was simply, "Shit."

"And," said Carleton, "if you think about it, it's probably the most logical of the three. Here he was, 42 years old. He's dying and he knows it. He was not going to be president or rightful ruler of the universe. He is not even going to be on this earth after a few more seconds. He is angry and extremely frustrated. He is running out of breath. And so he ended his life with a four-letter word. But, of course, the legend wouldn't tolerate that. We cannot have Huey say something as plainly human as that."

To the rest of the nation, Long's slaying was a closed case. But, in Louisiana, many became less and less persuaded by the story told by Fournet and the bodyguards.

Eyebrows started rising after the bodyguards and Fournet failed to show up at three scheduled coroner's in-



DAVID ZENK

"I would guess in those days, the guards would have probably ended up shooting . . . The one uncontroversial fact is Huey is dead."

— **Edwin Edwards**
Present Louisiana Governor

quests. Why wouldn't they appear for questioning by District Attorney John Fred Odom?

Stories began circulating that Huey, careless of those who got in his way, might even have provoked what happened with a word, a gesture or a shove. Whispers of



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"whitewash" began spreading through the capitol until finally, when the inquest was rescheduled for the fourth time, the Long forces showed up.

On Sept. 18 — 10 days after the shooting — 23 persons testified in a jammed, roasting Baton Rouge courthouse. All the witnesses were either Huey's bodyguards or his partisans. Their testimony followed the same pattern — Weiss was the aggressor; he approached Long without a word and fired the first shot. That became known as the "official" version of the slaying.

Doctors testified Long's lower lip had a fresh abrasion. But no one came up with a satisfactory explanation of how it got there. A Long official suggested Huey bumped into the wall. The inquest



DAVID ZENKAS

“[Long] is angry and extremely frustrated. He is running out of breath. And so he ended his life with a four-letter word. But, of course, the legend wouldn't tolerate that.”

— Mark T. Carleton
History Professor

shed no light on the motive for the assassination.

Many reporters became skeptics. Margaret Dixon of the Baton Rouge Morning Advocate wrote an anniversary story suggesting that Weiss, insulted by Huey, may have struck him, thus causing the cut lip. "Weiss' friends say that as Weiss hit Long, a bodyguard fired at the doctor," she wrote. "They believe Huey, turning away,



stepped into the path of the bullet."

Perhaps the most intriguing of all postmortem articles came from District Attorney Odom, an anti-Long figure. In 1944, he told columnist Drew Pearson that he felt all the facts surrounding the shooting had never been brought out. Even nine years after the slaying, Odom said he still was not prepared to say that Weiss was Huey's killer. Said Odom:

"Long was a very quick and active man on his feet, and I can visualize his frantic efforts to get away from the weapon of Dr. Weiss when he might have run into the fire of one of his guards. I am convinced, however, that even if Dr. Weiss killed Huey Long, it was not an assassination or a murder. I base this on the fact that Dr. Weiss led a normal life the entire day preceding the night of the shooting."

What do people think today? Russell Long has never doubted that it was Weiss who shot his father. The bodyguard theory, Long be-

lieves, was merely something cooked up by anti-Long opponents to "cast doubt on our candidates" in the forthcoming January primary.

Weiss' motive? "I think he was concerned about things he was reading in the newspaper that Long was anything but a good public servant. And also he was concerned that his father-in-law was in prospect of losing his judgeship."

LONG believes that Weiss may have been part of a reported plot to kill Huey. According to this story, a pro-Roosevelt faction met in New Orleans, agreed that it would take only "one man, one gun, one bullet" to kill Long, and drew straws to pick the one to do it. But most people give this conspiracy theory short shrift because there has never been any credible evidence presented to support it.

Gov. Edwin Edwards, too, feels that Weiss' bullet killed Long. But Edwards said he thought it was possible Weiss

just took the gun "as a protection." Weiss may have gotten in an argument with Long, Edwards said, and "just hit him in the face. I would guess if he did that, in those days, the guards would have probably ended up shooting . . . The one uncontrovertible fact is Huey is dead."

Edwards, the only governor to be elected three times, is considered the state's most powerful figure since Huey. He is almost as controversial. Edwards, 57, is facing a federal court trial on charges stemming from a purported scheme to sell state approvals of health-care projects.

Weiss' younger brother, Thomas, who became a physi-

cian, too, and recently retired from the staff of the famed Ochsner Clinic in New Orleans, never wavered from his belief that his brother was innocent.

"Possibly, Carl heard a racial slur against his wife and went to the capitol to demand an apology from Huey Long and the melee occurred," Thomas Weiss said. "Carl was capable of opening a discussion with anyone or throwing a blow to counter a personal insult. But he was incapable of killing for such an insult."

Thomas Weiss also feels that Carl may not have carried his gun inside the building. Instead, Thomas thinks

the bodyguards may have searched his brother's car afterward, found it, fired it and put it next to his body. Weiss also thinks his brother may have been taken to the capitol by force "and pushed into an encounter that resulted from overanxious bodyguards." But he admits these are pure theories.

Ed Reed, a Baton Rouge public-relations man who is writing a book on the case, says that even today, many in Louisiana think Weiss was innocent. "During the time I researched my manuscript, I failed to encounter a single individual, other than those with solid connections to the Long organization, who be-



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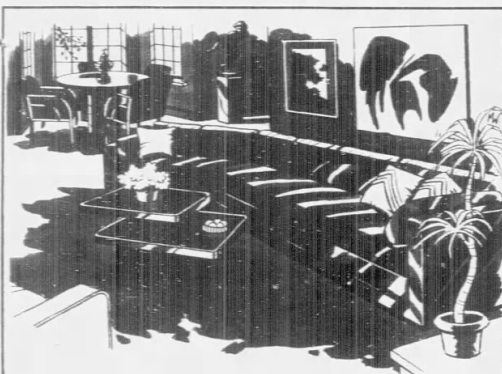
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believes that Carl Weiss actually killed Huey Long."

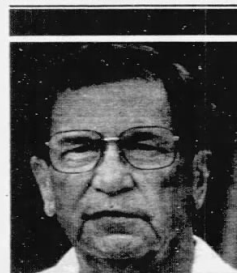
Reed, who was press secretary to Gov. Jimmie Davis in the 1960s, thinks the bullet holes in Long's front and back are actually entry wounds of two different bullets. He said Vidrine found one in surgery and a doctor who probed Huey's body in the funeral home extracted the other. Neither was a .32-cal. slug that would have come from Weiss' gun, Reed said. But the sources of this hypothesis are not the doctors, who are dead. They are people who were not at the scene and an 80-year-old mortician with a failing memory who chose not to tell his story for almost 50 years.

Culbert, the LSU history professor, says Weiss' letter to his brother shows a hidden side to his personality. "While he was being a loving husband, he was also capable of keeping things within his own mind. In the letter, he is indicating there are terrible tensions inside him . . . The letter is the self-analysis of a self-contained person who would be capable in his final day of spending a happy day with his family, then stepping out and doing something else."

Still, Culbert is not sure that Weiss actually ended up shooting Long. Perhaps the most equivocal position came from T. Harry Williams, Long's biographer. In his 1965 Pulitzer Prize-winning book, Williams says the notion that Weiss did not kill Long is a "myth." Yet, four years earlier, in reviewing two books taking opposite positions on the shooting, Williams declined to put forward a dogmatic claim. "On the basis of present knowledge," Williams said, "I would cast a vote for the [official] thesis — but with the qualification that it might have happened another way."

As Long and Weiss were different in life, so were they in death.

Long's body, dressed in evening clothes, lay in state for two days. More than 100,000 persons, the largest crowd ever assembled in the state up to that time, saw him



DAVID ZINMAN

"Possibly, Carl heard a racial slur . . . But he was incapable of killing for such an insult."

— Thomas Weiss
Carl's Brother

entombed in the capitol's sunken gardens.

Today, in his Louisiana stamping grounds, Huey remains a revered figure. Bridges bear his name. His birthday, Aug. 30, is still observed as a holiday in the state courts.

In Baton Rouge, a heroic bronze statue of Long rises on a 20-foot granite base above his tomb in front of the grandiose statehouse he himself built. A double-breasted jacket pulled tight over his bulging stomach, Huey's shoulders are thrown back. He stands with his hands open, pleading the cause of the poor amid the splendor of manicured gardens.

When the sun sets, a floodlight from the capitol's 24th story blazes down on the statue. Except for a period during an anti-Long administration, the Kingfish has never been in darkness.

Funeral services for Weiss were conducted in the parish church where he had celebrated Mass. The church permitted a religious burial because Weiss had been a practicing Catholic and because of the doubt surrounding the shooting.

Several hundred persons, including many local doctors, braved a driving rain to attend funeral services for Weiss. The coffin was closed.

Practically all who attended the service continued to the sodden turf of Roselawn Cemetery. There, a priest pronounced last rites while rain drummed a staccato accompaniment on hundreds of umbrellas.

Weiss lies buried about two miles east of the capitol. As he was obscure to the general public before the shooting, so he has remained in death.

I must confess a personal bias. In 1960, as a cub reporter for the Associated Press in New Orleans, I wrote about the Long case on its 25th anniversary. Intrigued, I then interviewed everyone I could who was connected with the shooting and wrote a book about the assassination.

On and off for the past quarter century, I have considered what happened in that hot, crowded corridor. My own theory is that:

• Weiss did not enter the capitol to shoot Long, though on impulse, he probably went to try to talk to him.

• Weiss had an intense and introverted personality. But nothing else in his character fits the mold of the driven, paranoid killer we have come to know from studies of Lee Harvey Oswald and other assassins. The salient facts of Weiss' life show he was a man steeped in domesticity — happily married, blessed with a newborn son, devoutly religious, launched on a brilliant career. The very night of the shooting, he called a colleague to confirm the site of an operation the next morning. His last words to his wife were to wait for him to come home so they could put the baby to bed together. The whole pattern of his actions on that last day indicate that when he left his house, he had every intention of returning.

• Witnesses failed to make a satisfactory explanation for Long's cut lip. That was still true 25 years later. When I interviewed Fournet and Roden, they both insisted it was only a "fever blister." Fournet got ruffled when I asked how a fever blister could gush blood. On the other hand, Jewel O'Neal, the student nurse on duty, confirmed



in 1961 that Long had pointed to his lip and said, "That's where he hit me."

• There was no autopsy. And the science of ballistics could not be used to identify the fatal bullet, since doctors said it passed through Long's body.

Weiss' guilt is established solely by the words of a judge loyal to the Long machine and bodyguards who failed in the most important assignment of their lives. If Weiss did not shoot Long, if Huey had been hit in the general gunplay, the bodyguards would have had an

of one of his own protectors.

Admittedly, this is only my opinion. In offering it, I realize I am joining the ranks of skeptics who have helped propagate myths by

raising doubts about the slaying of public figures.

All that is certain a half century after Huey's death is that, in the minds of many, the mystery of who

killed the Kingfish remains unsolved. The events of that fateful night will almost surely be forever part of the lore and legend of the bayou state.



DAVID CULBERT

"[Weiss'] letter is the self-analysis of a self-contained person who would be capable of spending a happy day with his family, then stepping out and doing something else."

— David Culbert
History Professor

obvious motive for confusing the facts.

I think it happened this way:

Weiss went to the capitol to talk to Long about the Pavy bill. When they met, Long's abrupt manner irritated Weiss. They exchanged words and Weiss, his temper flaring, socked Huey. The bodyguards, alarmed at seeing their boss assaulted, panicked.

In the melee that followed, the guards drew their guns. So did Weiss — but too late. The guards' barrage slammed into his body, mortally wounding him as he staggered back, his own pistol firing wildly. The bullet that killed Long was a slug that ricocheted off the marble walls from the gun

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