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Peer reviewed

American Populist: Huey Long of Louisiana. By Thomas E. Patterson. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2025. Pp. 720. Photographs, charts, map, notes, bibliography, index.)

Historiography on Huey Long has come full circle. T. Harry Williams's *Huey Long* (Knopf, 1969) was a bold defense of the controversial politico's career. Alan Brinkley's *Voices of Protest* (Knopf, 1982) was more ambivalent, while William Ivy Hair's *The Kingfish and His Realm* (LSU Press, 1991) and Glen Jeansonne's *Messiah of the Masses* (Longman, 1993) were outright hostile. Richard White's *Kingfish* (Random House, 2006) aims for a more neutral tone, but Patterson's *American Populist* marks a full return to the Williams interpretation.

After an exhaustive review of Long's career, Patterson concludes that "it is time to retire the historical caricature of Huey as a menace" (537). Drawing on novel sources, most notably Long's legal papers, *American Populist* brings new details to light and corrects several mistakes by prior historians. Like Williams, Patterson concedes some excesses on Long's part, but he points out that other political machines and the Roosevelt administration were guilty of many of the same sins, often with fewer accomplishments to show for it. Patterson's account of Senate debates from 1933 to 1935 offer substantial evidence for his claim that Long was "more progressive" than Roosevelt (6).

Oddly, the book concludes by suggesting that "Huey and the forces that made him helped usher in" the "fear and rage" of modern politics, both on "the left and the right" (541). This ending seems incongruous with Patterson's broader effort to rehabilitate Long as a progressive, but Long's right-wing associations are also worth considering. As much as he outflanked the New

Deal from the left, Long was often labeled a potential fascist in his own time, and the idea still persists in public memory. *American Populist* quickly dismisses the charge by pointing out surface-level differences from Hitler and Mussolini, which seem unlikely to persuade skeptics (505). Patterson himself notes the support Long received from Ezra Pound and Philip Johnson, but he neglects to mention that both men were fascists (503). Unlike Williams, Patterson does not end his account abruptly at Long's death, but he only vaguely alludes to the later career of Long protégé Gerald L. K. Smith as one of the country's most notorious antisemites (395). These connections, of course, do not necessarily make Long guilty by association. But to put the question of Long's alleged fascism to rest, one would need to engage with this body of evidence more thoroughly.

Still, *American Populist* is a major achievement. It is the only other Long biography comparable to Williams's in length and detail. Readers no longer have to choose between an account of Long's career that is comprehensive or one that is up-to-date. Historians will be forever indebted to Williams's research, particularly the hundreds of interviews he conducted with Long's now-deceased associates. But after over half a century, his biography of Long has finally been superannuated. Scholars will continue to debate how Long's career should be interpreted, but for the facts of his life, *American Populist* will likely remain the definitive source for decades to come.