

Populism, Fascism and *Caudillismo* in the United States: The Case of Huey P. Long¹

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abstract

Huey P. Long, who ruled Louisiana first as governor and then as senator from the late-twenties to the mid-thirties, until his assassination in 1935, was a flamboyant politician difficult to define. This article seeks to analyze Long a.k.a. the Kingfish in three different categories: as a populist, as a fascist, and as a Latin American *caudillo*. His policies and discourse aimed at the "common man" were populist with deep roots in the rhetoric of American populism of the late nineteenth century. Long has often been connected with European fascism and has even been misunderstood as the American version of Mussolini and Hitler. It will be argued that the politician only coincided with fascism chronologically, not otherwise. Finally, it will be suggested that the most interesting and innovative approach to the polemic figure is to compare him with Latin American politicians of the same time period, in order to break conceptual boundaries between "North" and "South" America.

key words

populism, fascism, *caudillismo*, Americanism, Huey Long, Louisiana, 1930s, Rafael Leónidas Trujillo

Populist, fascist, messiah, and buffoon, are some of the epithets given to Huey P. Long (1893-1935), a peculiar politician from the United States who inspired fear in some and admiration in others. The aim of this paper is to study him as a person who transcended his life and times and has become something close to a legend. First as governor of Louisiana and later as senator, the Kingfish, as he used to call himself, ushered in a series of policies that would have a dramatic and long-standing impact in the Pelican State, and indeed, the United States during the Depression Era. He did so in a rather brief period of time between 1928 and 1935, the year of his assassination.

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I was drawn to this subject by my interest in controversial political movements of the nineteen thirties. I arrived at Huey Long via fascism. From the little literature I had read, I had conceived the idea that he embodied an American version of fascism. Coming from Spain, a country with a long standing debate on what constitutes a fascist state, I decided to write my MA dissertation on this peculiar character, thinking it would provide new perspectives for discussions around the nature of fascism. But, as I got deeper into the readings, I realized that the adjective "fascist" had been used basically as an insult, rather than a description of Long's policies.

I became fascinated by the Kingfish, as many have before me. Moreover, I also noticed that, even in death, he has been thought of either as an angel or as a demon, as the man who delivered his state from the sludge of underdevelopment and economic ruin, or as the corrupt politician who plunged Louisiana into a quagmire of corruption and oppression. Huey Long has been completely ignored in European historiography, but I am convinced of the historical relevance of the study of his political career, as it may shed new light on topics that European academia has spent decades debating, such as the rise of populism and personalistic regimes. His ascendancy can be an interesting case study to analyze general concepts such as Americanity, populism, fascism, and *caudillismo*. My long-term goal is to go beyond the classic biography and develop a framework for the study of these political phenomena of the thirties across regional, cultural and national borders.

Huey Long was born in a small northern Louisiana town called Winnfield in 1893, into a time of profound economic crisis. When he was a teenager, he became salesman of Cottolene, a lard substitute made of cottonseed oil. During this time, he traveled around Louisiana, where he could experience the problems rural people had concerning education, sanitation, and roads, among others. As a salesman, he started developing a charismatic persona and learned how to develop a rhetorical style that would attract an audience. In 1913 he met Rose McConnell, whom he would marry a few years later. After graduating from law school, he entered into politics when he successfully ran for Railroad Commissioner, that is, the agency which managed motor carriers and public utilities, in 1918. During the nineteen twenties, he ran for governor of Louisiana twice, winning the second time, in 1928. His political campaigns were unusual: he drove around the state to the rural areas, distributed posters of himself, and used trucks to spread his words. His program, based on the improvement of sanitation and education and the construction of roads and bridges, among others, would start in 1928. He was the driving force of the construction of thousands of miles of new roads, improvement of hospitals, and the distribution of free textbooks to school children. The Kingfish also accomplished some feats of megalomania, as his tenure as governor also saw the building Huey Long Bridge that crosses the Mississippi, an enormous new capitol building in Baton Rouge and a new mansion for the governor. In 1932, Long won the election for the Senate, having to move to Washington, D.C. His ambition there was to grow on a national scale (some say he would even consider running for president in 1936). He helped Franklin Delano Roosevelt

win the presidential election in 1932, but they rapidly became bitter enemies. Long had developed an extravagant movement called "Share Our Wealth", and he believed Roosevelt's New Deal was not as radical as it needed to be. With his movement, Long's plan was to reduce the fortunes of multimillionaires to five million dollars, and guarantee an annual income of 2.500 dollars for every American family (Long 1933; Davis 1935; Dethloff 1967; Williams 1969; Jeansonne 1993).

Defining Huey Long's political program and persona is a hard task. In fact, he never intended to do so himself. When asked by a journalist whether he was a right-wing or a left-wing politician, he answered "Just say I'm *sui generis* and let it go like that" (Davis 1935, 21-22). Long drew power from this political ambiguity. However, understanding him as a completely new and extraordinary politician would be an exaggeration. Either consciously or unconsciously, he was in fact influenced both by political traditions and innovations of his time. Most of his enemies described him as "un-American" for the alleged lack of freedom during his mandate and the unprecedented concentration of power in his hands. His policies, his enemies believed, represented the opposite of the political tradition of the United States and, therefore, were a menace to the values and the system established by their Founding Fathers. As the journalist Carleton Beals asserted in 1935 in his biography of Long, "the actions of Huey Long merely announced the deplorable decay of American freedom, the decline of politically conscious manhood, which had already taken place and which bid fair to end all free government in this country" (Beals 1935, 375).

"Americanity" can be defined as "deification and reification of newness, itself a derivative of the faith in science which is a pillar of modernity" (Quijano and Wallerstein 1992, 29). If we take definition at face-value, Long could not be considered part of it. He was not American in the sense that his political program was against the adverse effects that the modernizing processes of society of the thirties had on the least wealthy. As historian Alan Brinkley put it, "it was not just the power of particular men and institutions that was at issue; it was the power of historical forces so complex that no one could easily describe them. It was, ultimately, modernization itself [...] that Long and Coughlin [the Catholic priest Charles E. Coughlin, who became very popular for his ideology about social justice] were indirectly challenging" (Brinkley 1982, 12). Hence, both politicians would be considered outsiders in a changing, industrialized, and educated society.

Nevertheless, Long presented himself as a pure American. Actually, he accused the wealthiest Americans of the United States, such as the Rockefellers or the Morgans, to be the real un-American for having concentrated all the country's wealth. Resorting to the policies and thought of former presidents like Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Jackson, and Theodore Roosevelt, and politicians such as Daniel Webster and William Jennings Bryan, his program was to revive the American Dream by redistributing the wealth of the US. In his biography of Huey Long written in the 1970s, reverend Gerald L. K. Smith, the leader of the Share Our Wealth movement and a devoted admirer of Long, clearly stated:

The fact was that nobody believed in the Constitution of the United States more than we [referring to Long and the rest of the supporters of his movement, including himself] did and we proclaimed to our followers that everything that was required for the American people to prosper and to thrive was covered by the Constitution of the United States, written by our great Founding Fathers. We refused to be anything but loyal Americans. (G.L.K. Smith 1975, 38)

Thus the Kingfish was a peculiar mixture of rebellion and classic American political tradition. He appealed to the values written in the Declaration of Independence but also frightened some conservatives with his bizarre Share Our Wealth movement. The political scientist Arthur Schlesinger stated that "Long and Coughlin seemed to represent Old America in resentful revolt against both contemporary politics and contemporary economics" (Schlesinger 1960, 69).

Huey Long, the populist

Long was a politician similar to Andrew Jackson in that they both directed their discourse to the poor and the disabled, that is, the "common man". President Jackson, who wore the alias King Mob, criticized the aristocracy of money and has been characterized as "a democratic autocrat; an urbane savage; an atrocious saint" (Sellers 1958, 615). Like Long after him, Jackson was a self-made, unconventional and popular leader, who appealed to the masses. In this sense, he can be taken as a precursor of American populism.

The nature of American populism is difficult to define, but for the purposes of this article it can be understood as the political tradition that started in the mid-to-late nineteenth century United States, which materialized with the founding of the Populist Party in 1891. The discourse of the populists was based on criticizing the concentration of wealth in few hands; to them, the "enemies" were bankers and members of Wall Street. Populists pursued localism rather than centralization, and sought to benefit small businesses rather than great corporations; also, the sense of community and family primed over the idea of individualism (Brinkley 1982).

Like Long, populists in general, and William Jennings Bryan (the main exponent of the Populist Party at the end of the nineteenth century) in particular, argued that they were not fighting against the capitalist system. Quite the opposite, they claimed their goal was to defend and improve it. Their program was aimed at the middle class who they said deserved to have the basic American rights. The famous 1896 "Cross of Gold" speech by Jennings Bryan had a rhetoric that resonated in Long's own speeches. Bryan demanded bimetallism, as the Kingfish would later do. Bryan based his speech on the Gospel, the same way that Long would turn to Scripture to captivate his audiences. Rather than seeking to destroy capitalism, the populists intended to improve and expand it in the same way they intended to expand the middle class. In short, the phenomenon of populism, although often considered un-American, has deep roots in the American political tradition (Cherny 1994).

Perhaps unconsciously, Long assimilated the general idea of populists, that is, the division of the population between “the People” and the oligarchy, which represented “the non-People”. He created a popular persona, and was the protagonist in numerous scandals that would make him more well known and loved. His extravagant character gained him much media coverage. One of his famous shenanigans was receiving a German consul wearing his green silk pajamas. The dignitary was appalled by this lack of decorum and left the premises. The Kingfish had to pay him an official visit, this time properly dressed, to try and fix this “Green Silk Pajamas Incident” (Long 1935a; Williams 1969; Jeansonne 1993).

Huey Long assumed a typical nostalgic narrative that evoked America as conceived by the Founding Fathers that had been, in his mind, somehow lost. Long was a classic populist in the sense that he yearned for an ideal past that had been stolen or forgotten. According to him, American society had lost its way and it was necessary to redirect it following its essential ideas and values. It is reasonable, then, to understand Huey Long as a neopopulist.

The populist leaders were masters of speech and their discourses were profoundly encouraging to the audience. Overshadowed by the Great Depression, the thirties was a decade in need of the kind of public heroes who promised a better, even utopian, society to their listeners. In this sense Long was not the only politician but one of many in a context of political effervescence and populist proliferation. In fact, the Kingfish would be something close to a *primum inter pares*, for he was the one with the most impact and popular support. As historians Amenta, Dunleavy and Bernstein affirm, “Share Our Wealth was the key organization in a larger neopopulist insurgency in the 1930s” (Amenta, Dunleavy and Bernstein 1994, 681).

Populism has often been seen as a foreign political philosophy in the US. Nonetheless, different mass movements throughout history show that it was, and still is, a typical form of political expression in America, most common during periods of economical crisis. Long is one of many examples, such as Jennings Bryan, Governor Theodore Bilbo from Mississippi, or even, although in a different manner, Harvey Milk and Ronald Reagan. As Taggart puts it, “its roots lie deeply embedded in a combination of anti-elitism and nineteenth-century ideas emanating from the Protestant reformation and the Enlightenment, specifically ‘pietism’ and rationalism, that came to be woven together into the fabric of the meaning that underlines ‘Americanism’” (Taggart 2000, 26).

Huey Long, the fascist

One of the most common political labeling of Long is “fascist”. Journalist Harnett Kane used terms such as *Anschluss* and *Reichstag* to characterize Long’s Louisiana (Kane 1971). The already mentioned journalist Carleton Beals also referred to the Kingfish as a fascist (Beals 1935, 235). The leftist reporter Raymond Gram Swing portrayed him as a menace when he described Long as “ruthless, ambitious, and indeed plausible enough to Hitlerize America” (Swing 1935, 107). The biographer Webster Smith also coincides with those

specialists when affirming "He intended to govern in the fullest sense of the word, as Mussolini governs Italy" (W. Smith 1933, 47).

During the Great Depression, a number of movements emerged as an alternative to the system that was blamed for the crisis. The US in the thirties was a place where mass leaders defending messianic ideologies spread. Several political movements based on European fascist ideologies, especially Nazism, appeared with anti-communist and anti-Semitic rhetoric. For instance, Fritz Kund founded the German American Bund, an organization that supported Hitler's regime and looked for an alliance between Germany and the US. In 1939, the Bund was gathered at a meeting in Madison Square Garden, New York City, to honor President Washington's birthday. During the celebration, swastikas and US flags were exhibited to symbolize the combination of American patriotism and Nazism. Another fascist group was William Dudley Pelley's Silver Legion of America or Silver Shirts, a paramilitary organization directly inspired by Himmler's *Schutzstaffel* (SS). Its ideology was a strange mixture of anti-Semitism, spiritualism, astrology, Nazism, and radiotherapy (Beekman 2005). Art J. Smith was the head of a third movement of the thirties in the US called the Khaki Shirts, founded after the Bonus March protest that took place in Washington, D.C in 1932, in which World War I veterans claimed for their bonuses. None of those fascist political organizations, though, were successful in the US, and with the arrival of World War II they all vanished. For example, Thomas Adam notes that Pelley "never became a genuinely important force in American politics" (Adam 2005, 33).

Fascism penetrated American culture not only through paramilitary organizations, but also by making inroads in the academia. Lawrence Dennis, who apparently was of Afro-American descent, organized his discourse against Wall Street and economic liberalism. In his 1932 work *Is Capitalism Doomed?* Dennis described capitalism as having expired and encouraged Americans to adopt the fascist model as an alternative. Editor Seward Collins also showed his admiration for Hitler and Mussolini and his fear of the communist menace. Although he never rejected capitalism, Collins conceived a plan for the redistribution of wealth that could be linked with Long's. He was the director of the most widespread fascist publication of the thirties, *The American Review*. The last example of intellectual fascism would be the poet Ezra Pound. Besides his career as a man of letters, he developed a fascination for fascism and wrote several articles for *Action* magazine, whose director was Sir Oswald Mosley, the head of the British Union of Fascists. Furthermore, he strongly criticized bankers as well as the increasing power of the Jewish community (Hutchins 1965; Horne 2006).

The first conclusion to which one can arrive regarding fascism is that, contrary to what some authors have stated, there was something close to fascism in the US. It was obviously inspired by both Italian fascism and Nazism, but with its American particularities. The difference with European fascism was that in the US it did not have nearly as much impact or popular support. All these movements were anti-Semitic and militaristic; Long's rhetoric was neither. This leads to the second conclusion of this issue: to attempt to establish a

parallelism between the Kingfish and Hitler is preposterous. To analyze this matter we can use the following definition of "fascism" by historian Robert O. Paxton:

Fascism may be defined as a form of political behavior marked by obsessive preoccupation with community decline, humiliation, or victimhood and by compensatory cults of unity, energy, purity, in which a mass-based party of committed nationalist militants, working in uneasy but effective collaboration with traditional elites, abandons democratic liberties and pursues with redemptive violence and without ethical or legal restraints goals of internal cleansing and external expansion. (Paxton 2004, 218)

Actually, the epithet "fascist" attributed to Long was simply an insult more than the result of a studied and rigorous comparison between his ideology and those of fascists. It is a similar case to the use of the adjective "communist". Both concepts were used to harm another politician's reputation. For example, while in office, President Franklin D. Roosevelt was accused of being both a communist and a fascist when, in fact, his government had few things in common with those ideologies. The Kingfish himself joined the ranks of the slanderers in a radio speech he gave on March 1935:

Now, since they sallied forth with General Johnson to start the war on me, let us take a look at this NRA that they opened up around here two years ago. They had parades and Fascist signs just as Hitler, and Mussolini. They started the dictatorship here to regiment business and labor much more than anyone did in Germany or Italy. The only difference was in the sign. Italy's sign of the Fascist was a black shirt. Germany's sign of the Fascist was a swastika. So in America they sidetracked the Stars and Stripes, and the sign of the Blue Eagle was used instead (Longb 1935).

But being a radical, Long was an easier target to be criticized and related to the two extreme forms of political organization during the thirties. Even so, he had clearly rejected the connections between himself and Hitler. When asked by a journalist if he thought whether he was comparable to the Führer, he ruthlessly answered "Don't linken [*sic.*] me to that sonofabitch [*sic.*]. Anybody that lets public policies be mixed up with religious prejudice is a plain God-damned fool!" (Brinkley 1982, 274).

Long never had any relation with the Führer nor with any of the fascist movements in the US. His program was not based on racial issues – in fact, he hardly ever mentioned race. Furthermore, even though his popularity is without doubt, the Kingfish did not have as much influence or leadership as the Führer. He never constituted a political party, and his movement was not as strictly and hierarchically structured as European fascisms. Although he did concentrate power in his hands, he never eliminated political freedom in Louisiana, nor did he proclaim a chauvinistic or expansionist agenda – in fact, economy, not nationalism, was the basis of his program. He did not favor international intervention, for he believed that the enemies of the US were within the US itself. Therefore, he defended American values in terms of isolationism. He did not care much about international affairs,

as he had clearly publicized – even before he became Railroad Commissioner – when rejecting the participation of the US in World War I. Long focused on internal strife. Neither did he have he any special connection with the Army nor was he himself a military man. Therefore, one can be sure that Long only coincided with fascism chronologically, not otherwise (Brinkley 1982).

Some specialists in the subject do not agree with the idea of conceiving Long as a fascist. As he had previously done in his outstanding biography of Long, historian T. Harry Williams concluded in his introduction to the 1996 edition of Long's autobiography "Long was not an American Hitler. Rather, he was an American boss, typical in many ways of the type, atypical in that he came to grasp for too much power" (Long 1933, XXIII). His colleague Arthur M. Schlesinger gives a more condescending and negative image of the Kingfish by asserting that he was not a fascist because he was incapable of devising an ideology by himself, for he was a man without a serious or defined goal. Schlesinger is visibly critical of the politician, as one can read: "Long's fantasies had no tensions, no conflicts, except of the most banal kind, no heroism or sacrifice, no compelling myths of class or race or nation" (Schlesinger 1960, 67). The political scientist V.O. Key does not categorize him as a fascist either, but rather a man of the South (Key 1949). He defines Long as a typical man of the South, exceptional in the exceptionality of the Deep South: "He is not to be dismissed as a mere rabble-rouser or as the leader of a gang of boodlers. Nor can he be described by convenient label: fascist, communist. He brought to his career a streak of genius, yet in his program and tactics he was as indigenous to Louisiana as pine trees and petroleum" (Key 1949, 157). As Schlesinger, Key doubts Long had a firm ideology besides being against the appalling concentration of wealth, just as Jennings Bryan did.

In the context of the Great Depression, it would be more accurate to compare Long's populist movement with other populist movements around the country, such as the ones started by Doctor Francis Townsend, and the Catholic preacher Charles E. Coughlin. Both cared about social justice, which was understood by them as policies that tended to aid the poor and the disabled. Townsend developed a pensions plan for the elderly in order to spur consumption and thus put an end to unemployment. Coughlin even created the National Union for Social Justice, the closest thing to a third party in the US during the thirties, which had a sixteen point program based on forcible distribution of the wealth held by bankers (Brinkley 1982).

Huey Long, the *caudillo*

It would be interesting to transcend the political boundaries of the US and try to find possible connections that may enrich the vision of Huey Long we have today. The last interesting and relevant connection of Long's would be the one he had with *caudillismo*, that is, the personalistic and/or populist political movements typical of Latin-America in the nineteenth century and further developed in the twentieth. An anecdote will be useful to introduce this subject. In 1949 the film *All the King's Men*, directed by Robert Rossen and

based upon the novel by Robert Penn Warren, was released. In Argentina it would not be released until 1956, after the regime of populist caudillo Juan Domingo Perón had fallen. The explanation for the delay is that some members of Perón's administration detected so many similarities between the protagonist of the movie and the Argentinean president that they thought it was inspired in him (Thevenet 1977).

Some specialists have often discussed the parallelism between Long and fascism. Comparing the Kingfish with *caudillismo* or conceiving him as a *caudillo* has not been deeply developed by any of the Long scholars. A thorough comparative analysis between Long's policies and persona and that of *caudillos* is currently missing. Some specialists mention a possible connection as a conclusion of their studies, such as the journalist Carleton Beals, who in 1935 compared the Kingfish with Gerardo Machado of Cuba, and historian Arthur Schlesinger, who in 1960 hinted that Perón resembled Long (Beals 1935; Schlesinger 1960). When approaching Long, one must understand that it is not so much his ideology that made him bizarre and colorful but the persona he created: it was his style that characterized him as a populist and made him more likely to be compared to Latin-American *caudillos*.

Before going any deeper in this brief analysis, one must be careful with the use of the term *caudillismo*, for it is commonly used simply to define any Latin-American authoritarian political leadership. This may result in an inadequate and overly generalized use of the word. It is better to circumscribe *caudillismo* to those political regimes led by military men that emerged in Latin America in the middle of the nineteenth century. Historian Hugh H. Hamill defines *caudillismo* and *caudillos* as the Spanish version of dictatorship and dictator, respectively, influenced by the particular history and culture of Latin America (Hamill 1995). Latin-Americanist Howard J. Wiarda came up with different items that he uses to define *caudillista* regimes (Wiarda 1968). Among others, they state that the leader known as *caudillo* is always a charismatic man to whom the nation shows respect and even adulation; also, *caudillos* uphold their power permanently (a concept called *continuismo*) and have the support of the military forces. The government develops in the form of an organic state, and habitually its relationship with the United States is positive and reciprocal (Wiarda 1968; Hamill 1995).

Four different cases of *caudillos* can be used as cases for a valid comparative analysis with Huey Long's Louisiana. Gerardo Machado of Cuba, who came to power in 1933, had the slogan "Educación y Carreteras" (Education and Roads). Like the Kingfish, he built a new state capitol building in Havana, built hundreds of miles of new roads, and improved public education. To do so he concentrated all the power and executed his program harshly. Beals captured the comparison with Long thusly: "Louisiana had sunk to the lower level of despicable despotism (except for actual torture and murder) of the hated tyranny of Machado in Cuba. The difference is that the mass of Louisianans liked it, while the Cubans [...] had the guts and wisdom to fight and overthrow Machado" (Beals 1935, 377). Another example that can be useful is Juan Vicente Gómez from Venezuela, who ruled the country from 1908 (after a coup d'état) until 1935. Gómez developed a series of public works as

well as a fierce persecution of his opposition. Augusto Leguía ruled Peru (between 1908 and 1912, and then again between 1919 and 1930) with a steady hand, also promoting public infrastructures and not allowing any resistance. Both Gómez and Leguía promoted the oil industry, permitting foreign private companies to exploit it, especially those coming from the US (Polanco Alcántara 1990).

But probably the most interesting case of *caudillo* is Rafael Leónidas Trujillo, who ruled the Dominican Republic intermittently from the thirties to the sixties, a period identified as “the era of Trujillo”. Known as “El Jefe” (The Boss) and “El Benefactor de la Patria” (The Benefactor of the Nation), he was a military man with a firm anti-Communist discourse who also became a mass leader that styled himself as the “father of his nation” and, like Long, would ultimately be assassinated. Although he improved the infrastructure in his native country, at the same time he became an absolute autocrat and, in the eyes of many people, a tyrant. As a warning to his enemies and a way of showing his power, he renamed the capital city of Dominican Republic as “Ciudad Trujillo” (the City of Trujillo). Like the Kingfish, Trujillo was born in a poor, rural town and he led a regime difficult to describe. As Wiarda states: “the Trujillo regime may thus most accurately be considered as a blend of traditional, nineteenth-century caudillo dictatorship, transitional authoritarianism [...], and modern, twentieth-century totalitarianism” (Wiarda 1968, 78). Even though there was a ruthless lack of freedom in his government, Trujillo developed some modernizing policies, such as the improvement of agriculture or the construction of infrastructures. This paradox breaks with the frequently assumed idea of democracy and modernization as an inseparable binomial.

His assassination in 1961 was understood to some as a transition to democracy and liberation of the Dominican Republic, as writer Mario Vargas Llosa wrote in his novel *La Fiesta del Chivo*:

Las noticias que se filtraban hasta las celdas de La Victoria, hablaban de mítines, de jóvenes que decapitaban las estatuas de Trujillo y arrancaban las placas con su nombre y los de su familia, del regreso de algunos exiliados. ¿No era el principio del fin de la Era de Trujillo? Nada de eso se habría conseguido si ellos no mataban a la Bestia (Vargas Llosa 2000, 189).

As stated before, a better analysis on Long as a caudillo is missing in current historiography. Nowadays there are only very few references to the connection or similarities between Long and *caudillos*. For instance, when talking about Long and other American politicians historian Williams would state, “These leaders were not politicians in the ordinary sense of the word. They were more like *caudillos* in a Latin country” (Williams 1969, 369). Schlesinger has made a similar observation when comparing Louisiana with a Latin-America country:

At bottom, Huey Long resembled, not a Hitler or a Mussolini, but a Latin American dictator, a Vargas or a Perón. Louisiana was in many respects a colonial region, an underdeveloped area; its Creole traditions gave it an almost Latin American character. Like Vargas and Perón, Long was in revolt against economic colonialism, against the oligarchy, against the smug and antiquated past; like them, he stood in a muddled way for [...] social justice; like them, he was most threatened by his own arrogance and cupidity, his weakness for soft living and his rage for personal power. (Schlesinger 1960, 68)

To support this new direction, it is also relevant to bear in mind that the connection of Long with Latin America is not only a matter of political similarities, but also geographical ones. Louisiana is a peculiar state; its Cajun population, its territorial division in parishes, and its abundant Catholic population make it, as V.O. Key, Jr. points out, an exceptional territory (Key 1949). During the 1930s, Louisiana was one of the poorest states in the US, with the lowest rate of alphabetization, coupled with very serious racial divisions. Those characteristics made Louisiana closer to Cuba than to some other states in the US. In Cuba, multiculturalism and the sugar-based economy, among other social and cultural factors, affected the dynamics of the area greatly. Accordingly, one should seek to transcend the political boundaries of Louisiana as merely a region in the US and understand it, instead, as a place on the margins of the Gulf of Mexico, sharing a common space with the insular Latin American nations.

Conclusion

This article has tried to analyze Long based on three different adjectives easily relatable to him. There is a general consensus among scholars, with which I agree, to interpret Long's policies and persona as populist. However, conceiving of the Kingfish as a fascist is a fallacy; merely a way to pettily demonize his regime. The adjective "fascist" is still today used as an insult in many political meetings and discussions to refer to all kinds of political tendencies and politicians. A new reading and use of the term, more careful and accurate, is still necessary. The erroneous use of the word started when Long was alive and is still being used today. Lastly, and this would be the most exciting and original perspective when studying the Kingfish, one could approach Long by understanding him as a *caudillo*. Respectable scholars have pointed out the similarities, but none have studied them profoundly. This scholarly neglect may be attributed to a tendency to conceive the United States as a closed, hermetic space, connected with Europe more than with any other continent. By contrast, the relations with Latin America and the Caribbean have only been analyzed in terms of an unequal relationship typified by the Monroe Doctrine. It would be interesting and necessary to find other possible approaches that favor continuity over fracture between "North" and "South" America.

Demagogue, dictator, messiah, or mass leader are some of the epithets attributed to Long. They show the clear and firm division in the two conceptions regarding the Kingfish based on his virtues or his deficiencies. This article has tried to escape moral judgment in order to focus on other more interesting dichotomies: Long was, at the same time, an American and

a man of the South, a traditionalist and a radical. He constituted a peculiar and colorful result of the so-called American Dream.

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