The Long and the Stark of It

*Huey Long and Willie Stark*

*Politics and Power: Fact and Fiction*
All the King’s Men

By Robert Penn Warren
Life of Warren

- Born in Guthrie, Kentucky
- Graduated from Clarksville High School
- Roomed with Jesse Wills at Vanderbilt
- Joined the Fugitives group
Warren is fascinated with Long as Jack Burden is with Cass Mastern. While Cass is quite different from Long, Burden seems to be looking for answers for big questions in Cass’s story as Warren looks for answers in Huey Long.
THE PULITZER PRIZE WINNING NOVEL BECOMES A VITAL, VERY GREAT MOTION PICTURE

ALL THE KING'S MEN
Talking with
ROBERT PENN WARREN
EDITED BY
Hood C. Warkins, John T. Hilt, and Mary Louise Weeks
Warren’s home in Guthrie, Kentucky
The Fugitives

Literary Group at Vanderbilt
A group of “poets and arguers”

The name of the group was derived from their journal *The Fugitive*, which they used as an medium for their new approach to literature and literary criticism:

NEW CRITICISM has had a deep impact on the study and interpretation of literature since the 1920s.
Teaching Career

- Southwestern at Memphis (now Rhodes)
- Vanderbilt University
- Louisiana State University
- University of Minnesota
- Yale University
Honors

Rhodes Scholar

America’s first poet laureate 1986

Only writer ever to receive both the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and for Poetry

American novelist, poet, critic, teacher

Warren's best-known novel, *All the King’s Men* (1946), was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1947. His poetic style was, at the beginning, tightly controlled in form. He was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for poetry twice, in 1957 for *Promises*, and 1979 for *Now and Then*.
Important publications
College texts with Cleanth Brooks

Understanding Poetry
Understanding Fiction
An Approach to Literature

Other works

* A Place to Come To (novel)
* Night Rider (novel)
* Brother to Dragons (verse drama)
* Now and Then (poems)
* World Enough and Time (novel)
* Rumor Verified (poems)
“Proud Flesh”

Original Title for play about a corrupt politician
Warren’s social concerns

Reflected in the novel

Corrupting effects of power

Fascism

Willie’s philosophy about “good”

Modern society and what Jack calls the “Twitch”
Long’s Political Influence

- Completely reshaped Louisiana politics with an unprecedented political machine
- Completely reshaped the landscape with modern university, hospital, other state services
- Became a national grassroots political force
- Pushed FDR to move to the left and
  - Enact the Social Security Act
  - Establish the power of organized labor
  - Challenge the power of big business
Huey Long
Louisiana Politician

“Share the Wealth”
“Every man a king but no man wears a crown!”

Slogan originally used by William Jennings Bryan

Long updated the concept with this phrase:
Everyone deserves a house, an automobile, and a radio.
Components of Long’s Plan

- To limit poverty
- To limit fortunes
- To provide old-age pensions
- To limit the hours of work
- To balance agricultural production with consumption
- To care for the veterans of our wars
- To tax the wealthiest
“What Louisiana and Sen. Long gave me was a line of thinking that did eventuate in the novel.”
Madison Smartt Bell, novelist and MBA alumnus:

“If *All The King’s Men* is a political novel, then it’s the first I ever read, over and over on an annual basis between the ages of 14 and 25. It is not a book with a political case to make but rather a presentation of what politics is like in the United States---and certainly a great, if not the greatest, masterpiece of that genre.”