

The New Deal

PRIMARY SOURCE READING

“Every Man a King”

For all his posing and bluster, Huey Long espoused a core American value—the idea that every person, rich or poor, should be given the chance to be successful. Unfortunately, Long’s plan for bringing about this success was rather haphazard. His belief in big government as opposed to big business called for federal sanctions on individual wealth. For example, Long felt that no private fortune should exceed \$50 million, no inheritance should exceed \$5 million, and no annual income should exceed \$1 million. Instead the extra funds would be put toward running the government and subsidizing poorer Americans. Needless to say, this philosophy was not popular with the many rich Americans whose goal was to make as much money as possible.

The Congressional Record— February 5, 1934

—Huey P. Long, U.S. Senator

People of America: In every community get together at once and organize a share-our-wealth society—Motto: every man a king

Principals and platform:

1. To limit poverty by providing that every deserving family shall share in the wealth of America for not less than one third of the average wealth, thereby to possess not less than \$5,000 free of debt.
2. To limit fortunes to such a few million dollars as will allow the balance of the American people to share in the wealth and profits of the land.
3. Old-age pensions of \$30 per month to persons over 60 years of age who do not earn as much as \$1,000 per year or who possess less than \$10,000 in cash or property, thereby to remove from the field of labor in times of unemployment those who have contributed their share to the public service.
4. To limit the hours of work to such an extent as to prevent overproduction and to give the workers of America some share in the recreations, conveniences, and luxuries of life.
5. To balance agricultural production with what can be sold and consumed according to the laws of God, which have never failed.
6. To care for the veterans of our wars.
7. Taxation to run the Government to be supported, first, by reducing big fortunes from the top, thereby to improve the country and provide employment in public works whenever agricultural surplus is such as to render unnecessary, in whole or in part, any particular crop.

Simple and Concrete—Not an Experiment

To share our wealth by providing for every deserving family to have one third of the average wealth would mean that, at the worst, such a family could have a fairly comfortable home, an automobile, and a radio, with other reasonable home conveniences, and a place to educate their children. Through sharing the work, that is, by limiting the hours of toil so that all would share in what is made and produced in the land, every family would have enough coming in every year to feed, clothe, and provide a fair share of the luxuries of life to its members. Such is the result to a family, at the worst.

From the worst to the best there would be no limit to opportunity. One might become a millionaire or more. There would be a chance for talent to make a man big, because enough would be floating in the land to give brains its chance to be used. As it is, no matter how smart a man may be, everything is tied up in so few

hands that no amount of energy or talent has a chance to gain any of it.

Would it break up big concerns? No, it would simply mean that, instead of one man getting all the one concern made, that there might be 1,000 or 10,000 persons sharing in

such excess fortune, any one of whom, or all of whom, might be millionaires and over.

From "Huey Long's Senate Speeches" from *The Congressional Record*, February 5, 1934.

UNDERSTANDING WHAT YOU READ After you have finished reading the selection, answer the following questions in the space provided.

1. How did Long explain his motto "Every Man a King"?

2. What did Long think the government should do for its elderly workers? Why?

3. What did he see as the benefits of reducing the amount of work done in the United States?

4. For what other major group did Long believe the government should provide care?

5. How did Long intend to stop the problem of overwork?

6. Do you agree with any of the ideas that Long mentions in his program? List the ideas and explain why you agree with them.

ACTIVITY

Imagine that you have to come up with a plan to improve the way society functions. Think of three government programs you would implement to ensure that all the citizens of your country were treated as fairly as possible. When you have completed your assignment, share your ideas with a classmate.

committed crimes; and were associated with “darkness, old houses, speaking in whispers, and trade unions on strike.”

2. because she was meeting someone in an old, unpainted house with no lights
3. Since the title “sir” often indicates a superior position, Jan might have wanted to indicate that he considered Bigger his equal.
4. Bigger was hesitant to shake hands with Jan and tried to pull his hand away immediately. He reacted this way because he was confused by Jan’s actions and could not understand Jan’s motivation for wanting to shake hands.
5. Bigger felt conscious of his “black skin,” which white people had taught him to regard as a “badge of shame,” and which made him “hate” himself. He questioned Jan and Mary’s motives, thinking they might be making fun of him. Their behavior even affected Bigger physically: “He stiffened;” “Bigger’s entire body tightened with suspense and dread;” “He flushed warm with anger;” “He felt he had no physical existence at all right then.”
6. Bigger felt that they were making fun of him and trying to make him feel self-conscious. He knew that many white people considered African Americans to be inferior, and their insistence on friendship made him more aware of prejudice.

ACTIVITY

Students’ scenarios will vary. Possible scenarios include a man opening a door for a woman, or a young girl giving up her seat on a crowded train for an older man.

PRIMARY SOURCE

1. His motto implied that every American could make plenty of money and live well.
2. He wanted to give every American over the age of 60 who did not earn at least \$1,000 per year a pension of \$30 per month. He felt that this would allow the elderly to live decently. At the same time, it would allow them to leave the workforce, which would in turn mean valuable

jobs for younger people in times of economic slowdown.

3. He believed that applying a limit on work hours would slow down overproduction and also give families time for recreation.
4. war veterans
5. by placing a legal limit on the number of work hours
6. Answers will vary, but many students will respond that Long had plenty of good ideas. They may cite old age pensions and veterans’ benefits as two programs that are in effect today, via government programs such as Social Security and the Veterans Administration.

ACTIVITY

Students’ ideas for government programs will vary.

BIOGRAPHY

1. because she thought it sounded more dignified
2. Perkins was first inspired after viewing the poor working conditions at textile and paper mills. Her reaction was that she joined the National Consumers League and lobbied for legislation to improve working conditions.
3. One possible answer might be that the number of deaths caused by the incident highlighted the need for better working conditions and safety standards.
4. She served the longest of any secretary of labor.

ACTIVITY

Students should describe how unclean and unsafe the mills were for workers and how the employees were overworked. They should say, as Perkins, how it angered her to see these working conditions and how she felt compelled to do something to improve their situation, such as work to change the laws.

CHAPTER 26

LITERATURE

1. The author is referring to actual wounds that bullets make. Bullets that enter the