

## "Take Your Rightful Share!"

Posted by

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**Greg Palast** - As the waters rose, one politician finally said, roughly, "Screw this! They're lying! The President's lying! The rich fat cats that are drowning you will do it again and again and again. They lead you into imperialist wars for profit, they take away your schools and your hope and when you complain, they blame Blacks and Jews and immigrants. Then they push your kids under. I say, Kick'm in the ass and take your rightful share!" - [roughly] Huey Long, 1927

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### **Bush Strafes New Orleans**

[Where is our Huey Long?](#)

**by Greg Palast**

GregPalast.com

September 2, 2005

The National Public Radio news anchor was so excited I thought she'd piss on herself: the President of the United States had flown his plane down to 1700 feet to get a better look at the flood damage! And there was a photo of our Commander-in-Chief taken looking out the window. He looked very serious and concerned.

That was yesterday. Today he played golf. No kidding.

I'm sure the people of New Orleans would have liked to show their appreciation for the official Presidential photo-strafing, but their surface-to-air missiles were wet.

There is nothing new under the sun. In 1927, a Republican President had his photo taken as the Mississippi rolled over New Orleans. Calvin Coolidge, "a little fat man with a notebook in his hand," promised to rebuild the state. He didn't. Instead, he left to play golf with Ken Lay or the Ken Lay railroad baron equivalent of his day.

In 1927, the Democratic Party had died and was awaiting burial. As depression approached, the coma-Dems, like Franklin Roosevelt, called for balancing the budget.

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Then, as the waters rose, one politician finally said, roughly, "Screw this! They're lying! The President's lying! The rich fat cats that are drowning you will do it again and again and again. They lead you into imperialist wars for profit, they take away your schools and your hope and when you complain, they blame Blacks and Jews and immigrants. Then they push your kids under. I say, Kick'm in the ass and take your rightful share!"

Huey Long laid out a plan: a progressive income tax, real money for education, public works to rebuild Louisiana and America, an end to wars for empire, and an end to financial oligarchy. The waters receded, the anger did not, and Huey "Kingfish" Long was elected Governor of Louisiana in 1928.

At the time, Louisiana schools were free, but not the textbooks. Governor Long taxed Big Oil to pay for the books. Rockefeller's oil companies refused pay the textbook tax, so Long ordered the National Guard to seize Standard Oil's fields in the Delta.

Huey Long was called a "demagogue" and a "dictator." Of course. Because it was Huey Long who established the concept that a government of the people must protect the people, school, house, and feed them and give every man or woman a job who needs one.

Government, he said, "We The People," not plutocrats nor Halliburtons, must build bridges and levies to keep the waters from rising over our heads. All we had to do was share the nation's wealth we created as a nation. But that meant facing down what he called the "concentrations of monopoly power" to finance the needs of the public.

In other words, Huey Long founded the modern Democratic Party. Franklin Roosevelt and the party establishment, scared senseless of Long's ineluctable march to the White House, adopted his program, called it the New Deal, and later The New Frontier and the Great Society.

America and the party prospered.

America could use a Democratic Party again and there's a rumor it's alive -- somewhere.

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And now is the moment, as it was in '27. As the bodies float in the streets of New Orleans, now is not the time for the Democrats to shirk and slink away, bleating they can't "politicize" this avoidable disaster.

Seventy-six years ago this week, Huey Long was shot down, assassinated at the age of 43. But the legacy of his combat remains, from Social Security to veterans' mortgage loans.

There is no such thing as a "natural" disaster. Hurricanes happen, but death comes from official neglect, from tax cuts for the rich that cut the heart out of public protection. The corpses in the street are victims of a class war in which only one side has a general.

Where is our Huey Long? America needs just one Kingfish to stand up and say that our nation must rid itself of the scarecrow with the idiot chuckle, who has left America broken and in danger while he plays tinker-toy Napoleon on other continents.

I realize that the middle of a rising flood is a hell of a bad time to give Democrats swimming lessons; but it's act up now or we all go under.

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A pedagogical note: As I travel around the USA, I'm just horrified at America's stubborn historical amnesia. Americans, as Sam Cooke said, don't know squat about history. We don't learn the names of a nation's capitol until the 82d Airborne lands there. And it doesn't count if you've watched a Ken Burns documentary on PBS.

I suggest starting with this: read "Huey Long" by the late historian Harry T. Williams. If you want to ease into it, get the Randy Newman album inspired by it (Good Old Boys) with the song, "Louisiana 1927." Listen to part of the song here. Do NOT watch the crappy right-wing agit-prop film, "Huey Long," by Ken Burns.

Greg Palast is the author of the New York Times bestseller, The Best Democracy Money Can

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