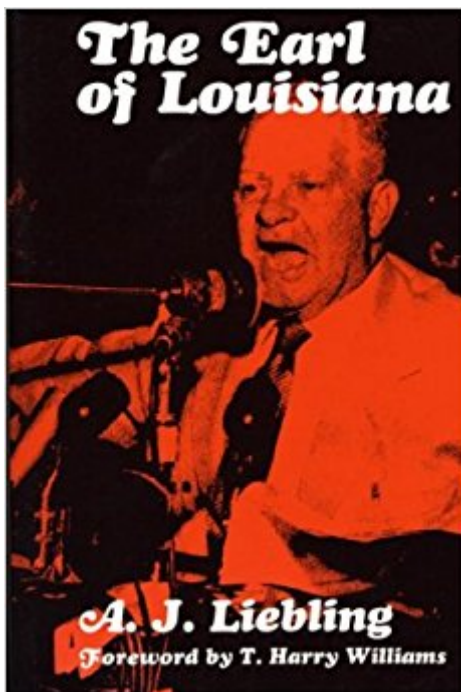


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# The Earl Of Louisiana



## Synopsis

In the summer of 1959, A. J. Liebling, veteran writer for the *New Yorker*, came to Louisiana to cover a series of bizarre events which began when Governor Earl K. Long was committed to a mental institution. Captivated by his subject, Liebling remained to write the fascinating yet tragic story of "Uncle Earl's" final year in politics. First published in 1961, *The Earl of Louisiana* recreates a stormy era of Louisiana politics and captures the style and personality of one of the most colorful and paradoxical figures in the state's history. This new edition of the work includes a foreword by T. Harry Williams, Pulitzer prize-winning author of *Huey Long: A Biography*.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A. J. Liebling was a staff writer for the *New Yorker* from 1935 until his death in 1963. During World War II, he served as a correspondent for the magazine in France, England, and North Africa. He wrote a number of books, including *The Honest Rainmaker*, *The Sweet Science*, and *Normandy Revisited*.

A.J. Liebling originally went to Louisiana to investigate the circumstances surrounding the forcible incarceration of its governor, Earl Long. Liebling considered him to be a "Peckerwood Caligula," a somewhat inglorious opinion considering he'd never met the man. Governor Earl Long, younger brother of the infamous Huey Long, was considered a talented politician. Far from being a hick, Long was an attorney who demonstrated considerable intelligence and skill in managing a complex

state government. Liebling soon found that Long had the gumption and scrappy disposition of a tomcat and the stubbornness of a southern mule. Long managed to con his way out of the state hospital, spending his recuperating time at race tracks and scheming for his old job in the state house. His lack of sophistication and seemingly yokel disposition were never a hurdle to his effectiveness as governor. The author's book *THE EARL OF LOUISIANA*, a compilation of articles written for the "New Yorker," recounts the trials and tribulations of a politician trying to fight his way through the tangled web of southern politics in an effort to attain and keep power. The manipulations necessary to get votes from the diverse population of Louisiana have always been daunting, but Uncle Earl swept aside the webs of entanglement for three prior non-consecutive terms and was confident that, once again, he could manipulate the confusing double-primary system into another gubernatorial nomination. It ended up killing him; a heart attack ended his bid. Liebling's book gets confusing as he tries to explain the politics Uncle Earl was involved in and I found the legal maneuvers hard to follow. One needs a scorecard to keep the players straight. Of more interest is the man with his eccentricities and the possibility he suffered from long-term bipolar disorder and, perhaps, a form of dementia. But he was always an effective speaker, playing on the down-home humor most southerners appreciate. He peppered his conversations and speeches with wit and sometimes crude humor. He was unpredictable and no one knew what he would do or say next. Those qualities, making him an interesting and colorful character and it never detracted from his skill as a politician. Long was always sympathetic to the poor and the black (mostly poor) citizens of Louisiana; he continually promoted civil and economic rights. He introduced legislation that would ban the purging of black voters from polling places, ensuring their votes would be counted. He managed the delicate act of balancing the view that blacks were a fringe society that deserved little recognition with his liberal social program of providing sustenance for the poor and did so without diluting his support base. Although he frequently sprinkled his conversations with vulgar references to his black constituents, he never seemed to provoke their hostility. I was looking for, but didn't find, any reference to Long's mistress, the infamous stripper Blaze Starr. There was actually a movie produced about their affair and many credit the indiscretion as the reason for Mrs. Long's commitment of her husband to the state hospital. I find it odd that the author failed to mention the incident. This is an interesting book filled with names, manipulations, back flips, salty expressions, and a revealing peek at southern folkways. I'd recommend it for a diversion and entertaining look at this complicated man and an infamous period in history.

Schuyler T Wallace  
Author of *TIN LIZARD TALES*

A.J. Liebling is a national treasure. He was a great New Yorker writer from the 1930s-1960s. Everything he wrote, as a war correspondent, a boxing writer, on food, was top notch. Read *The Honest Rainmaker*, *The Sweet Science*, or his other work.

A. J. Liebling is one of my favorite authors; I first encountered his writing in his classic "low life" portrait, "The Telephone Booth Indian," and followed up with "The Sweet Science" (boxing), "Chicago: The Second City," and excerpts from his pieces on Paris' gourmet delights and the non-society horse racing crowd. Liebling specializes in the foibles and small triumphs of those on the fringes, regular working class men and women (mostly men), and even the lumpen-proletariat (somewhere lower than the worker). He does it with an engaging mix of reportorial detail and bemused, ironic observation. However, Liebling's not entirely dispassionate or cloaked behind his dazzling narrative ability. He has opinions and uses his words with precision and potency. Given these talents and interests, the flamboyant, controversial Earl Long is a natural subject for Liebling. As a Northerner, Liebling tries to retain a certain acceptance, or at least empathy, towards the backroom deals, prejudices, personal attacks, and dishonesty in local politics. However, his overall tone is a grudging respect for Earl Long, even though his tactics and personality can be off-putting. Earl Long's melodramatics, his machinations and those of his opponents, are humorous and gut-level real, but at the same time we recognize the demagogery, and his divide and conquer fear-mongering and double-talk. He's clearly a master of being all things to most of the people, playing, for example, blacks against white and vice versa. At the conclusion, Liebling comes away with sympathy for Earl Long, trying to look at the results rather than his rhetoric. All of this sounds rather heady, but that's probably just a result of Liebling's thought-provoking presentation. The book reads easily, is enlightening as well as entertaining, and captures an immensely interesting place and time in politics and society. At times, Liebling's metaphors (Louisiana is the Levantine of American culture) seemed (to me, anyway) labored and a bit obscure, and sometimes his writing lacked his usual pith and punch. Still, Liebling is one of the great 20th-century masters of 20th-century literature, along with S. J. Perelman, H. L. Mencken, and P. G. Wodehouse. Although 'Telephone Booth Indian' remains my favorite Liebling book, those with a political bent and who enjoy cultural clashes (the veteran urbanite Liebling's encounter with Louisiana has the anachronistic flavor of "A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court") will enjoy this perceptive, humorous, and sometimes bittersweet story of Long and the political arena.

Colorful Louisiana governor desperately seeks re-election. His recent stay in a mental hospital is not

necessarily a drawback among voters. Interesting story about a time before politicians were bland and programmed. One quibble is that the author keeps mentioning his interest in boxing and horse racing.

The most colorful politician I ever heard of. The guy was also brilliant.

An engaging story of the final years of a colorful and irrepressible Louisiana populist, written by a Yankee journalist invited to go along for the ride.

Very well written history of Earl Long. Any fan of Louisiana history will know this is a piece of the big picture.

Liebling initially decided to write about Earl because he thought Long would be an excellent foil for his sense of humor. But after exposure, Liebling actually grew to appreciate this Louisiana original. A very funny, interesting and enjoyable book.

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