

TEXAS VS LOUISIANA

Strong, interesting personalities have often dominated the governor's office in Texas. Sam Houston, Ma and Pa Ferguson, Pappy O'Daniel, and Ann Richards all left their mark on Texas politics. A neighbor to the east, Louisiana, is not without its own brand of larger-than-life politicians. Louisiana's first governor, William C. C. Claiborne (1812–1816), was known for his attempts to arrest the notorious pirate Jean Lafitte, a popular figure who attained Robin Hood status in the state. Claiborne went so far as to offer his own money as a bounty for Lafitte's capture, an act which allegedly prompted Lafitte to place a bounty on the governor's head. The twentieth century also saw its share of colorful figures who dominated the Louisiana state capitol building in Baton Rouge. Jimmy Davis ran for governor in the 1940s and again in the 1960s. He was known for taking out his guitar at campaign stops and singing the song "You Are My Sunshine," which he is credited with having written. Edwin Edwards, who served several terms in the 1970s through the early 1990s, was noted for piling up various indictments in federal court on racketeering charges, some related to his frequent visits to Las Vegas and other world-famous gambling locations. Probably the best-known Louisiana politician is Huey Long, the Populist governor and "share the wealth" advocate who was assassinated in the state capitol building in 1935.

Lesser known both inside and outside Louisiana is Oscar K. Allen, also known as "O. K. Allen." Allen was a schoolteacher from rural Winn Parish who served in several local elected offices and the Louisiana Senate. In the Senate, Governor Huey Long picked Allen to be the Democratic Party floor leader. Long also appointed Allen chair of the State Highway Commission. In these capacities, Allen served in both the executive and legislative branches of government simultaneously. When Long was elected to the U.S. Senate, he handpicked Allen as his successor. The subsequent election of Allen as governor surprised no one in Louisiana. More startling was Allen's own willingness to acknowledge Long as the source of his power. Long openly

directed Allen's agenda as governor, making almost daily telephone calls to instruct Allen on what to do.ⁱ Even the special session of the Louisiana Legislature in 1935 that Long was observing when he was assassinated was formally called by Governor Allen per Long's instructions.

Why does Louisiana produce personality-driven politics in the same way as Texas? While the outcome may be the same, the sources are actually different. Texas's geography and weak party system contribute to its personality-driven style of governance. Noted scholar V. O. Key suggested that Louisiana's brand of governance is based upon the tight control of elites over the political system, which serves to produce populist backlash.ⁱⁱ Key suggested that Louisiana voters have long been faced with a choice of "outsiders" who use charismatic appeals to the masses to court their votes and then amass political power versus "insiders" who offer a reform agenda to undo the agenda of the populists.

THINKING Critically

- ★ Why are Texas governors often larger-than-life figures?
- ★ Are Louisiana's governors similar to Texas's governors? Why or why not?
- ★ How does this type of candidate affect how you vote?
- ★ Do you feel more connected to interesting personalities? Or are you more interested in campaign issues?

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- i. Office of the Secretary of the State, "Louisiana Governors: 1877–Present: Oscar K. Allen," www.sos.la.gov/HistoricalResources/AboutLouisiana/LouisianaGovernors1877-Present/Pages/OscarKAllen.aspx (accessed August 30, 2014).
 - ii. V. O. Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (New York: Knopf, 1949), 156–182.