

# The New York Times

## ***Dr. Carl Weiss Jr., 84, Dies; His Father, He Said, Didn't Kill Huey Long***

By [Sam Roberts](#), Aug. 13, 2019



Dr. Carl A. Weiss Jr. in an undated photo. He waged a campaign to have his father exonerated in the killing of Senator Huey P. Long. He died before that mission could be completed.

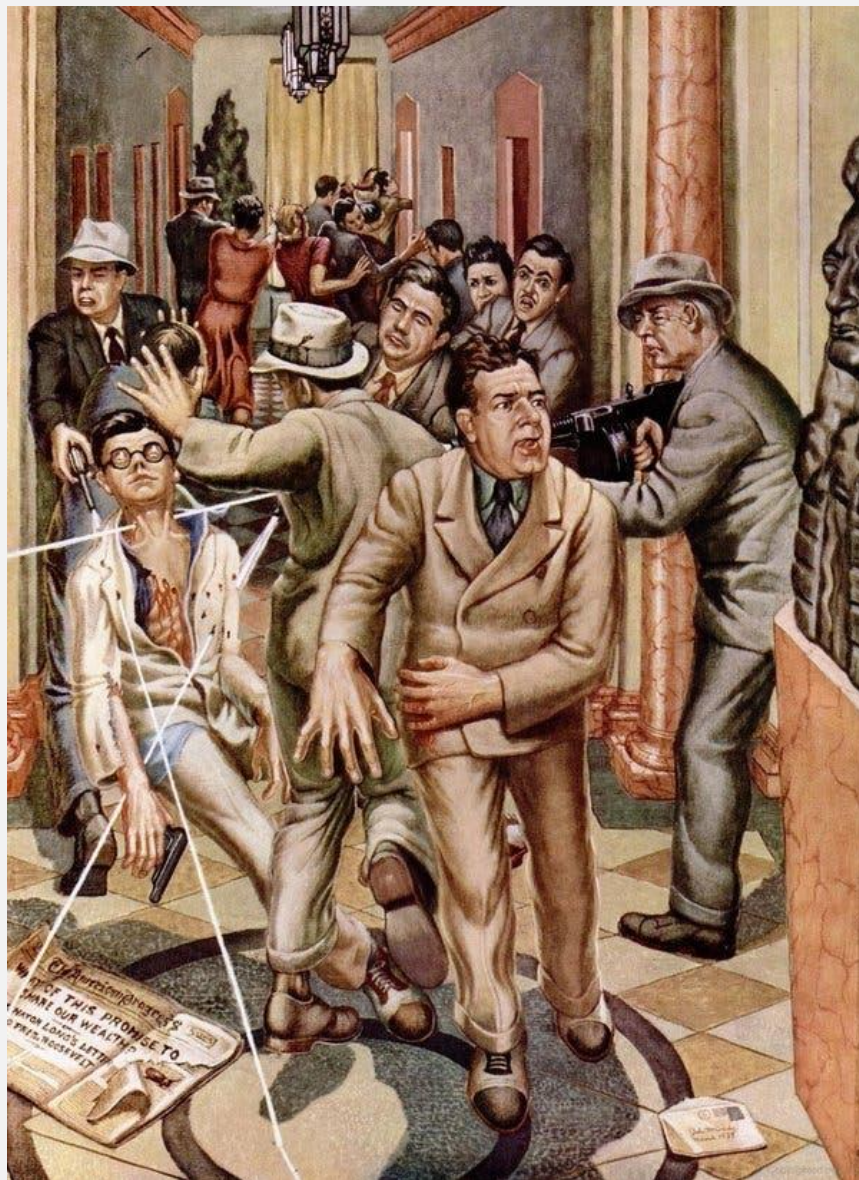
Carl A. Weiss Jr. was 3 months old when his father died in Baton Rouge, La. The cause, his mother would later tell him cryptically, was a fatal firearms accident. He was not to know the truth. Indeed, by then, a son of a prosperous family, he had been whisked far away to France to shield him from what had really happened to his father on the night of Sept. 8, 1935.

The boy would not remain clueless for long, though. When he was 10, Carl Jr. stumbled across a full-page painting by John McCrady in *Life* magazine, one in a series of dramatic scenes from 20th-century American history.

In graphic detail, the painting depicted a wounded Huey P. Long, Louisiana's United States senator and former governor, clutching his stomach with his bloodied left hand moments after his bodyguards had machine-gunned his purported assassin, a slight, bespectacled, white-coated 28-year-old man whose bullet-riddled body had slumped to the marble floor.

Studying the painting and reading the accompanying text, young Carl was stunned to discover that the man portrayed as the killer was identified as his father, [Dr. Carl A. Weiss](#).

Carl Jr. would go on to learn a great deal about the senator and his father: that Long — who had seized near-dictatorial power to become what President Franklin D. Roosevelt branded as the most dangerous man in America — lingered 31 hours before he died of a single bullet wound, a victim, some said, of botched medical care by a patronage appointee at a Baton Rouge hospital; that his father — whose Tulane University yearbook had proclaimed that he was “bound to go out and make the world take notice” — died instantly, his body perforated with 61 bullet holes; and that his father — an antagonist of the Long regime but by most accounts an unlikely murderer — was just as rapidly convicted in the court of public opinion as the assassin.



When Dr. Weiss Jr. was 10, he stumbled across this full-page painting of the assassination of Long, by John McCrady, in Life magazine and was stunned to discover that his father, shown being pierced by bodyguards' bullets, was identified as the killer.

Dr. Weiss Jr.'s surprise encounter with the past also proved to be a turning point in his own life.

Skeptical of the official account of the assassination, he would wage a tireless campaign to prove it wrong — to work with private investigators in the hope of exonerating his father. Propelled by revelations in several books, the effort led to the exhumation of his father's body and a state police examination of what little physical evidence had survived.

But Dr. Weiss Jr.'s mission was never completed. He [died of congestive heart failure on Aug. 1](#) in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla., his son, Dr. Carl A. Weiss III, said. He was 84.

At his death, the questions he had raised about his father's notorious place in history remained unresolved.

Carl Austin Weiss Jr. was born on June 7, 1935, in Baton Rouge to Dr. Carl and Yvonne (Pavy) Weiss. (His father, too, was the son of a doctor.) After moving to Paris, where Carl Sr. had once briefly worked at the American Hospital, Carl Jr. grew up there, until the Nazi invasion in 1940, when he and his mother left on the last liner to New York. She later remarried, earned a doctorate and became head librarian at Farmingdale High School on Long Island.

In Baton Rouge in the early 1930s, the Weiss and Pavy families had been known as antagonists of Long, who by 1935 was viewed as a potential challenger to President Roosevelt for the 1936 Democratic nomination and as a possible third-party candidate in the coming general election.

The Kingfish, as Long proudly called himself (after a scheming character in the radio comedy show "Amos 'n' Andy"), advocated a "share the wealth" agenda that some historians believe nudged Roosevelt to support Social Security and other New Deal programs to meet the challenges posed by the Depression. (Long was often short on specific remedies, however; during one Senate filibuster he famously said, "I am beginning to be convinced by the logic of my own argument.")



Dr. Carl A. Weiss Sr., who was shot 61 times by Long's bodyguards at the state Capitol in Baton Rouge, La., on the night of Sept. 8, 1935. His son believed that the guards had accidentally shot Long.

Carl Jr. was only 15 when he enrolled at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Mass. He graduated in 1954 and earned his medical degree from Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons. He performed his residency at St. Vincent's Hospital in New York and trained as an orthopedist at Bellevue Hospital, where his father had been a resident in the 1920s. After becoming an orthopedic surgeon, Dr. Weiss ran a practice in Garden City, on Long Island.

Carl Jr. served as an Air Force captain in Louisiana. He was also an amateur pilot, and once made a crash landing in 1970 to avoid cattle that strayed onto a runway.

After he retired, he and his wife, Mary Jane (LaCorte) Weiss, lived in Westhampton, N.Y., and Palm Beach Gardens. After Ms. Weiss died in 2015, Dr. Weiss lived in Florida full-time. In addition to their son, he is survived by two daughters, Christina Weiss Terranova and Gretchen Weiss Dubit; and eight grandchildren.

Dr. Weiss was not the first to seek to clear his family's name in the Long assassination; his uncle Thomas had made the effort earlier. But Dr. Weiss had been reluctant to join him.

"I stayed out of it, because nothing new was uncovered, and my uncle did not seem to be getting very far," he told *The New York Times* in 1993. "I didn't want to be driven by emotion rather than facts."

The official version of events on that night in 1935 has it that one man, Dr. Weiss's father, shot Long with one bullet from one gun after confronting Long at the Capitol, incensed that a bill before the Legislature would gerrymander his father-in-law, Benjamin Henry Pavy, out of a judgeship.



Huey P. Long giving a speech in 1934. He seized near-dictatorial power in Louisiana, leading President Franklin D. Roosevelt to call him the most dangerous man in America.

This account was supported by T. Harry Williams in his largely sympathetic Pulitzer Prize-winning biography “Huey Long” (1969). In the book, Mr. Williams was unequivocal in identifying the assassin as Weiss, portraying him as a sincere and idealistic young man who was willing to martyr himself after agonizing “over the evils that he believed Huey Long was inflicting on his class and his state.” Long had promoted an income-redistribution agenda.

But Dr. Weiss Jr.’s doubts were stirred by several subsequent books on the Long assassination, beginning with “Requiem for a Kingfish” (1986), by Ed Reed. Another was “Accident and Deception” (1999), by Donald A. Pavy, a nephew of Judge Pavy’s and a first cousin of Carl Weiss Jr.’s wife. (Donald Pavy died on July 15 in Louisiana at 88.)

The counternarrative asserts that the doctor had only punched Long, that the bodyguards had overreacted and that Long was actually killed in the fusillade of their bullets. The guards were said to have then covered up their reckless response by pinning the death on Weiss.

“In his heart he knew the allegations weren’t true,” Carl III said of his father in a telephone interview. “The one-man, one-gun, one-bullet is not what occurred.”

Professor Richard D. White Jr., dean of the E. J. Ourso College of Business at Louisiana State University and the author of a more recent biography, [“Kingfish: The Reign of Huey P. Long”](#) (2006), shares those doubts.

“As a historian I cannot say either way, but deep in my heart I do not believe Carl shot Huey, but instead a stray bodyguard bullet hit him,” Professor White, who had met with Dr. Weiss Jr., said in an email this week.



The coffin holding the remains of Dr. Carl A. Weiss Sr. was exhumed from a Baton Rouge cemetery in 1991. After an examination, a forensic scientist said he had “grave and persuasive doubts” that Weiss was Huey Long’s assassin.

He added, “It just doesn’t add up that he was an assassin. I believe he punched Huey and that the bodyguards went berserk.”

Dr. Weiss ultimately cooperated with James E. Starrs, a forensic scientist at George Washington University, who tracked down Carl Sr.’s pistol (it was not unusual for Baton Rouge doctors making late-night house calls to be armed) and a single spent bullet.

They were found in a safe deposit box belonging to the daughter of Louisiana’s former top police official. Dr. Weiss joined the State Police in successfully suing to review the records and test fire the gun.

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Long’s clothes were also examined, and here the tearing of the material and the residue left on it indicated that Long had been shot at point-blank range. That undercut at least one theory — that Long was killed by a ricocheting bullet fired by a bodyguard.

Dr. Weiss Jr. granted Professor Starrs permission to [exhume his father’s remains](#) from a Baton Rouge cemetery in 1991 in the hope that tissue residue or evidence of the bullets’ trajectory might shed some light on the case. Professor Starrs concluded that there were “grave and persuasive doubts” that the doctor was the assassin.

But no official investigation ever included an autopsy on Long himself, who is buried on the grounds of the state capitol. Such an examination might have confirmed the source of the bullet or bullets that killed him.

“They exhumed the wrong body,” Dr. Carl A. Weiss III said.

*(Source: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/13/obituaries/dr-carl-weiss-jr-dead.html>)*