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Southern Politics in The Great Depression: Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men*

Robert Penn Warren's *All the King's Men* is a novel which follows the career of Willie Stark, a southern Politician during the great depression. The novel is told through the eyes of Jack Burden; a wealthy man who acts as Willie's right-hand man. While following the story of Willie Stark the novel also follows the personal evolution of Jack, particularly in regard to his struggle with the concept of personal responsibility. The novel is entertaining and well worth the time necessary to read it.

The novel follows Willie Stark starting after he has risen to power. There are then a number of flashbacks leaving the exact time at some points somewhat unclear. As the novel develops more it also increasingly follows the life, of Jack Burden; including information about his past. The novel begins to become a study of self responsibility, a subject which Jack is obsessed with. Throughout the novel, the reader gets insight into Southern politics during the 1930's. As time goes on conflicts begin to appear between Jack's position as Willie's right hand man and his past growing up in a wealthy area.

The characters within the novel are for the most part well developed. The way that Warren shows the pasts of some of the characters gives an immense amount of insight into those characters. The main protagonist is Jack Burden who is struggling against his own morality and sense of responsibility. The other major character is Willie Stark who is referred to as "The Boss" which fits the method in which he runs his government and shows the level of reverence he is given. He bears a number of similarities to the real life governor of Louisiana during the time period (Huey P Long);

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Stark is self educated and highly motivated. He starts out being the good guy being politically nice, never touching alcohol; he however evolves to where he is strong-arming and blackmailing everyone around him and maintaining total control. Both of these main characters grow and evolve a large amount throughout the novel; and although they willingly work together are polar opposites of each other.

All the Kings Men is a wonderfully entertaining read which engrosses the reader; it is detailed yet attention grabbing, any attempt to skim through the book will always end in failure. However Robert Penn Warren does occasionally go off on random subjects which have little if anything to do with the plot, however even these rants are entertaining. Overall the novel is a must read.