



Review

Reviewed Work(s): Eleanor Roosevelt and the Media: A Public Quest for Self-Fulfillment
by Maurine H. Beasley

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sional delegation remained more liberal than that of any other southern state. Hill's liberalism, however, had its limits. Although he became identified with TVA and federal support for health care, Hill opposed both public power and Medicare when they were first proposed in Congress.

Second, Hamilton contends that appeals to racial prejudice were consistently used by Alabama's economic elites—the so-called big mules of Alabama politics—as a “smokescreen” to gain popular support for candidates whose real concern was defending established economic interests. Hamilton presents a detailed chronology of Alabama politics to show that such racist appeals were generally ineffective during the 1930s and 1940s when the Great Depression was uppermost in people's minds. When the civil rights movement emerged in the 1950s, however, Alabama's vested economic interests were once again cynically able to make effective use of the race issue. This thesis is quite plausible, but because Hamilton's primary research focuses narrowly on Hill and his fellow liberals, she cannot demonstrate conclusively what motives actually guided those conservatives who attempted to ride the race issue into office.

Third, Hamilton argues that at least since the days of Populism, the South's racial climate made it necessary for economic liberals like Hill to compromise their egalitarian principles on the race issue in order to be in a position to advance the cause of economic reform. While never condoning Hill's opposition to civil rights, Hamilton clearly sympathizes with Hill as he faced the dilemma created by his desire to “get something done” in politics. It is troubling, though, that Hamilton cites no evidence to indicate that Hill ever privately questioned the racial mores he defended so steadfastly in public.

Hamilton's fine book is based on extensive research in Hill's papers (to which she had exclusive access). She also makes good use of contemporary newspapers and numerous interviews. It will be of interest to a general audience, as well as to scholars, though some of the latter may be disappointed that she does not attempt to comment more fully on the historiography dealing with southern politics.

Larry G. Gerber
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Eleanor Roosevelt and the Media: A Public Quest for Self-Fulfillment. By Maurine H. Beasley. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987. xi + 240 pp. \$24.95.)

In proving that Eleanor Roosevelt used the press to make herself the most influential woman of her day, Maurine H. Beasley makes two significant contributions to women's history. Her presentation of the symbiotic relationship between Mrs. Roosevelt and a handpicked coterie of women journalists depicts a historically important step in the process by which women journalists began to shake off the constraints of “society” reporting and to move into the mainstream of their profession. At least as interesting is the light Beasley's interpretation of Eleanor Roosevelt's relationship with the media throws on the character of a woman whose complex personality still intrigues scholars, historians, and biographers—as well as gossip mongers.

Beginning with her decision to become the first president's wife to hold press conferences, Roosevelt carved out an increasingly sophisticated career that combined journalism with image-making for herself and the presidency. In time she became the first White House wife to write a syndicated newspaper column, sell magazine articles, and earn money as a lecturer, radio commentator, and book author.

Beasley argues convincingly that Eleanor Roosevelt's journalism career served both her need to help her husband and her need for a high-profile identity of her own. The dual motives are depicted as crucial to the survival of both the marriage and her own self-esteem—fractured as both were by her discovery in 1918 of Franklin Roosevelt's love affair with Lucy Mercer. Ultimately, it seems to have taken both the wounded ego and the career that assuaged it to make Eleanor Roosevelt the woman she was.

Soon after FDR's first presidential victory, Associated Press reporter Lorena A. Hickok began teaching Eleanor Roosevelt how to use the media. Hickok soon became the First Lady's public relations adviser, writing coach, and intimate friend. Historians and biographers still argue over the extent to which Roosevelt's relationship with the masculine-looking reporter was a sexual one. Beasley skirts the question in a way that seems a little disingenuous since the

Roosevelt-Hickok relationship is central to the book, and it is only on this issue that Beasley hesitates to use evidence from the voluminous Roosevelt-Hickok correspondence and the Hickok papers. In any case, Roosevelt apprenticed herself to Hickok until the late 1930s, when she seems to have outgrown both Hickok's tutelage and the relationship.

It was Hickok who suggested the regular all-woman press conferences that became a public relations gold mine for the First Lady and gave a handful of women journalists their first opportunity to cover national politics. Furthermore, as Beasley puts it, "Hickok's inspiration would make Mrs. Roosevelt the focal point for a group of women journalists who would provide a lifelong network of support and friendship. They would help to make Eleanor Roosevelt into a symbol of womanly achievement that transcended partisan politics."

Beasley resists the temptation to romanticize or exaggerate Eleanor Roosevelt's journalistic accomplishments, presenting instead a realistic portrait of a woman who managed to make a respectable career as a working journalist under the most extraordinary circumstances.

This book spins a provocative tale out of sound historical research. Everyone interested in either Eleanor Roosevelt or the history of women in journalism will want to read it.

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Partner and I: Molly Dewson, Feminism, and New Deal Politics. By Susan Ware. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987. xix + 327 pp. \$25.00.)

Once again Susan Ware has demonstrated her superb knowledge of American women's history between 1900 and 1940. Her latest book is a biography of Mary (Molly) Williams Dewson (1874–1962), the central figure in Ware's earlier *Beyond Suffrage* (1981). As she follows Dewson from the warmth and security of her New England home through her education at Wellesley College and into and out of a variety of Progressive Era suffrage and voluntary associations, Ware explores the interaction among northeastern women social workers and work-

ing-class women. Ware's description of Dewson's "progressive apprenticeship" with agencies devoted to improving the conditions of working women and increasing the minimum wage of all workers makes evident how valuable mentors, such as Elizabeth Glendower Evans of Boston's Women's Educational and Industrial Union, were to Dewson's development. In the 1920s other women became crucial to Dewson's emergence as the essential woman Democrat of the New Deal era, particularly Florence Kelley of the National Consumers' League, for which Dewson worked from 1919 to 1924, and Frances Perkins, whose cabinet appointment in 1933 Dewson championed. Above all, Eleanor Roosevelt's friendship, nurtured while Dewson was civic secretary of the Women's City Club of New York, became the *sine qua non* of Dewson's political life after 1928, the year that Roosevelt converted her to the Democratic party.

Drawn to Franklin D. Roosevelt because of his positive approach to social welfare issues, Dewson mobilized women for the Democratic party in 1932 and became the director of its Women's Division in 1933. Until 1940 she directed the division's affairs in one capacity or another and wielded patronage power strong enough to place a number of women in New Deal offices and to name her own successors in the Women's Division and on the Social Security Board. But, despite her remarkable success in forging a measure of equity for women in party circles, Dewson always insisted that "education and issues, not patronage and power, were women's real concerns." Ware presents Dewson's somewhat peripatetic career as a consequence of a "goal-oriented personality [that] would not allow her to be confined for long to a government bureaucracy or indeed to any single organization."

But Ware explains fully that it was the demands of what would become a fifty-two-year "partnership" with Mary (Polly) G. Porter that led Dewson periodically to set aside a job and return to their home in New York City or in Castine, Maine. Some readers may be surprised at Ware's description of their strong attachment for one another as a lesbian relationship; others may question her acceptance of definitions of lesbianism so broad as to apply to certain female friendships of other women leaders contemporary to Dewson. No one, however, will