



Belle Moskowitz: Feminine Politics and the Exercise of Power in the Age of Alfred E. Smith

Elisabeth Israels Perry

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Most people believe that women's entry into political life is a recent phenomenon. This book shatters that myth. It restores to history the career of one remarkable woman and reveals the vital role that women in the early part of the twentieth century played in American politics--despite their absence from elective or appointive office.

Belle Moskowitz was Alfred E. Smith's closest political adviser during his four terms as Governor of New York, and, as a result, the most powerful woman in American political life during his ascendancy in the Democratic Party throughout the 1920s. She served as Smith's political strategist and campaign manager and was a major force in shaping the social welfare programs for which his administration is best known today; many of these programs were precursors of programs later developed on the national level by Franklin D. Roosevelt under the New Deal.

Moskowitz achieved her prominence without benefit of either family connections or social position resulting from birth or marriage. This book explains how she managed this astonishing feat.

Her role as Governor Smith's adviser followed a career of almost twenty years in settlement work, social reform, and industrial and labor relations. When Smith first ran for governor in 1918, Moskowitz organized the women's vote for him. She later masterminded his nomination for President at the Democratic convention in 1928. Throughout Smith's years in office, Moskowitz worked as his public relations counsellor, a new profession in which she was a pioneer.

Moskowitz's career has not received close attention until now. Since she worked at a secondary level of politics in which her own career never seemed as important as that of the man she served, she discarded many of her private papers; others were lost. Elisabeth Perry, who is Moskowitz's granddaughter, has dug deeply into the public record and the records of Moskowitz's associates, as well as drawing on the reminiscences of Moskowitz's daughter, Perry's own aunt. The result is this riveting portrait--truly a labor of love.

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