


2015

Book Review: Paul V. McNutt and the Age of FDR by Dean Kotlowski

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Recommended Citation

Booth, Christopher (2015) "Book Review: Paul V. McNutt and the Age of FDR by Dean Kotlowski," *International Social Science Review*: Vol. 91: Iss. 2, Article 5.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.northgeorgia.edu/issr/vol91/iss2/5>

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Kotlowski, Dean J. *Paul V. McNutt and the Age of FDR*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015. xviii + 581 pages. Hardcover, \$45.00.

In renowned presidential historian Dean Kotlowski's latest book, *Paul V. McNutt and the Age of FDR*, the author brings from out of the shadows one of the most prominent American politicians of the 1930s. By utilizing numerous speeches, letters, archival records, newspaper articles, secondary sources and even first-hand research conducted in the Philippines, Kotlowski weaves together a superb biography of former Indiana Governor and democratic, presidential hopeful Paul Vories McNutt. Kotlowski, a professor of history at Salisbury University, contends that Paul McNutt was not merely a politician destined for obscurity, but instead was a complex man who possessed the requisite talent and skills to become president, yet never achieved that goal mostly due to the circumstances of the time period in which he lived.

Chronicling McNutt's life from birth to death, Kotlowski includes details about how the famous Hoosier's life and political career intersected at numerous, pivotal crossroads with that of American President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR). FDR's accession to the head of the Democratic Party in the 1930s allowed him to achieve the presidency of the United States at the exact time that McNutt had such similar aspirations. Kotlowski demonstrates throughout his book that FDR's presence at the head of the Democratic Party and his stature in the White House seemingly thwarted McNutt's goals during the prime of his political career. However, Kotlowski maintains an unbiased attitude and details the powerful negative aspects of McNutt's personality which also played a significant role in his eventual political decline.

Born on July 19, 1891, in rural Indiana, Paul McNutt's rise to a presidential hopeful was not preordained. Nevertheless, McNutt was successful climbing every rung of the ladder to the top. Graduating with high marks from Indiana University, McNutt matriculated at Harvard Law School. Following the United States' entrance into World War I, McNutt volunteered to join the Army where he was rapidly promoted through the ranks. Like a shooting star, McNutt entered the state government and, in 1933, quickly achieved the governorship of Indiana. Making both friends and enemies along the way, McNutt's gaze began to shift towards the White House. However, it was around this time that McNutt's orbit began to intersect with that of FDR's, an event that would eventually bring about the end of McNutt's political career.

President Roosevelt's reputation as a savvy politician is proven by his handling of Paul McNutt. Sensing a serious political rival, FDR bequeathed McNutt the position of High Commissioner to the Philippines. Remarkably, McNutt survived politically and upon his return to America in 1939 was poised to make a run for the White House. However, FDR's political skill at slowing down political rivals combined with McNutt's drawbacks, such as his vanity and dictatorial actions as governor, ensured that McNutt would never become president of the United States. FDR won the White House for an unprecedented third and fourth term. McNutt's shooting star finally died out during World War II when he unsuccessfully managed the War Manpower Commission. Following a second stint in the Philippines as High Commissioner/Ambassador, McNutt retired from public service and eventually faded from memory.

In the 1960s, one other book was written about Paul Vories McNutt. Through diligence and hard work, author Dean Kotlowksi has contributed a remarkable second book that will serve as a quality reminder of the service that Paul McNutt provided to the United States of America. Furthermore, in writing a detailed and unbiased biography of McNutt, Kotlowksi has demonstrated how his life and career was interwoven with one of America's greatest statesmen, and revealed to the historical community a new window in which to view Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Overall, Dean Kotlowksi's book *Paul V. McNutt and the Age of FDR* is a very well written and researched piece that will serve as a remembrance of one of Indiana's most effective Governors, who was – for a brief moment – a possible candidate for the highest office in American politics.

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