

Liking ike: eisenhower, advertising, and the rise of celebrity politics

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Abstrak

Liking Ike examines the prominent role that celebrities and advertising agencies played in Dwight Eisenhower's presidency. Guided by Madison Avenue executives and television pioneers, Eisenhower cultivated famous supporters as a way of building the kind of broad-based support that had eluded the Republican Party for twenty years. It is customary to see the charismatic John F. Kennedy and his Rat Pack entourage as the beginning of presidential glamour in the United States, but from Kate Smith and Irving Berlin to Jimmy Stewart and Helen Hayes, celebrities regularly appeared in the general campaigns. Ike's political career was so saturated with celebrity that opponents from the right and left accused him of being a glamour candidate. Liking Ike tells the story of how Madison Avenue executives strategically brought celebrities into the political process. Based on original interviews and long-neglected archival materials, the book explores the changing dynamics of celebrity politics as Americans adjusted to the television age. By the mid-1920s, entertainers were routinely drawing publicity to their favorite candidates. But with the rise of television and mass advertising, political advisers began to professionalize the attention Hollywood and Broadway stars could bring to presidential campaigns. In meetings, memos, and television scripts, they charted a strategy for leavening political programming with celebrity interviews, musical performances, and elaborate television spectacles that would surround their candidates with beautiful sets and popular personalities. Ike's legacy would inform the subsequent careers of John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan.