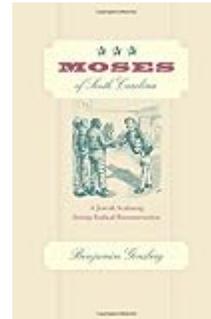




Benjamin Ginsberg. *Moses of South Carolina: A Jewish Scalawag during Radical Reconstruction.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010. xi + 219 pp. \$50.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8018-9464-0.



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Salvaging the Scalawag

Though Franklin Moses is often remembered as South Carolina's disgraced robber governor, Benjamin Ginsberg's recent study suggests that Moses may instead deserve a title lauding his commitment to racial and social equality (p. x). While Moses indeed "accepted bribes, skimmed money from South Carolina bond sales, and accepted kickbacks," the crimes Moses committed were far less offensive to white South Carolinians than his assault on their "sense of racial exclusivity" (pp. 2-3). Thus, Ginsberg contends that Moses was a complicated figure whose legacy should not be limited to his misconduct, but must also include his attention to social programs, integration, and racial equality for African Americans in Reconstruction-era South Carolina.

Ginsberg begins his work with a brief background on Moses's family and early life, but quickly devotes most of his attention to Moses's political rise after the Civil War, gubernatorial election, and downfall. He determines that while Moses came from what had been a prosperous family before the war and had served in the Confederate army, his political prospects did not appear

promising at the war's end. Diminished family wealth, a "mediocre" service record, and his Jewish heritage all indicated that Moses would not likely experience political opportunity. Despite these obstacles, Moses became editor of the *Sumter News* in 1866 and used a series of editorial columns to support Andrew Johnson against congressional Radical Republicans; to stress the need to industrialize in the South; and perhaps most of all, to disparage carpetbaggers.

Ginsberg relies heavily on these editorial columns, which immediately reveal the political lessons Moses learned from the carpetbaggers and the beginnings of his alliance with freedmen. Moses observed that the worst of the carpetbaggers were the "northern missionaries who had come to work with the freedmen ... to turn them against southern whites and to train them to engage in Radical politics" (p. 51). Though he detested carpetbagger politics, the usefulness of black political allies was not lost on Moses and he resolved to "beat the carpetbaggers at their own game" (p. 64). As he turned Republican, Moses regularly attended black church services, became

a welcomed speaker at black political rallies, and found a âpotent political forceâ among his new friends (p. 67). His political alliance with the freedmen helped Moses become a delegate to the stateâs Constitutional Convention in 1868, to gain a position in the state legislature, and eventually to become governor.

His alliance with freedmen may have offered political success, but it came at high costs. Moses had to give up his post as editor of the *Sumter News*, but, more important, he was no longer welcome in white society due to his new social and political leanings. Not only had Moses courted African Americans for their votes, but he had also openly socialized with them and even invited them into his home. After he gained his political clout, Moses then led efforts to secure âcivil rights, education, land distribution, and economic developmentâ to benefit African Americans (p. 109). Ginsberg determines that these were the actual crimes against white society that fueled Mosesâs political demise and not his alleged official misconduct. Supporting this conclusion, Ginsberg notes that reports of Mosesâs misconduct in office frequently included discussions on his Jewishness and his relationships with African Americans.

Ginsbergâs analysis stresses that Mosesâs commit-

ment to racial equality was more than a simple attempt to gather political strength through freedmen support, but that Moses truly believed in African American rights. Citing Mosesâs Jewish heritage, Ginsberg believes that Moses was able to sympathize with the hardships the freedmen faced and that he represented their interests in a genuine âalliance of the oppressedâ (p. 9). Still, Ginsberg relates that late in life Moses told a New York reporter, ââI wanted to be governor.... I saw there was but one wayâmake myself popular with the niggers.ââ Despite this remark, Ginsberg concludes that Moses did what other white politicians were unwilling to do in South Carolina and accepted African Americans âas friends and equalsâ (p. 191).

While it is difficult to determine just where Mosesâs political ambitions stopped and where his actual compassion began, Ginsberg insists that Moses walked the walk. Ginsberg may indeed overemphasize the âalliance of the oppressedâ between Moses and his African American constituents, while not giving enough credence to Mosesâs own claim that many of his relations were more political than genuine. Nonetheless, Ginsberg offers an important reevaluation of Mosesâs legacy while exploring the correlation between his commitment to racial equality and his political rise and fall.

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