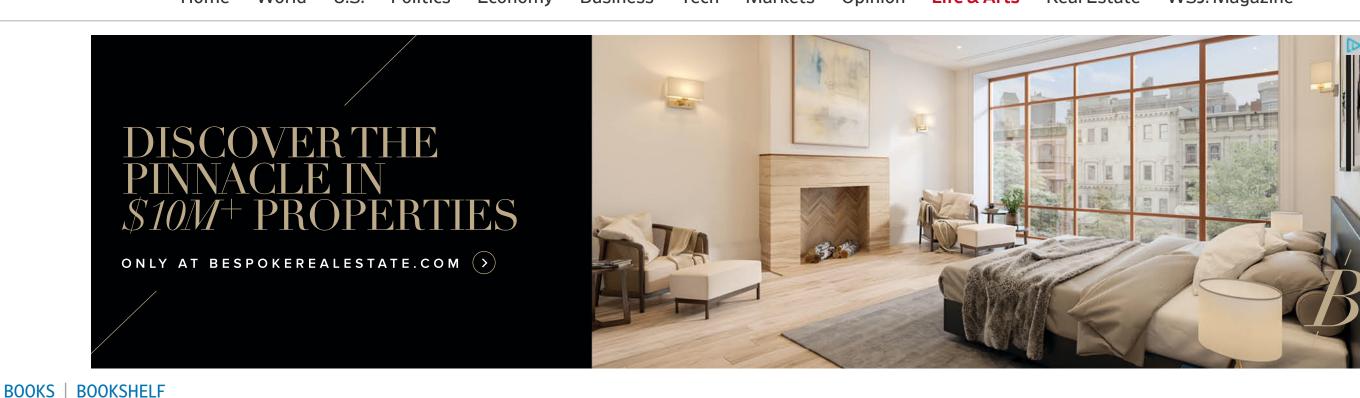
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'Frank and Al' Review: A Friendship Forged in Albany The collaboration and rivalry between Franklin Roosevelt and Al Smith shaped the Democratic Party and helped pave the way for the New

Deal. Edward Kosner reviews "Frank and Al" by Terry Golway. AdChoices D (intel) WSJ COUSTOM



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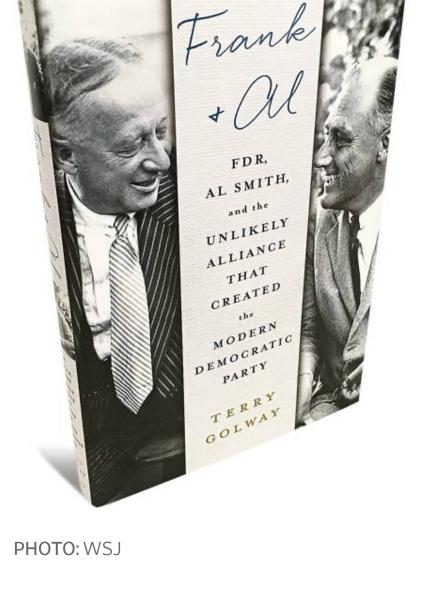
By Edward Kosner Sept. 25, 2018 6:48 pm ET

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There they stood at the gusty pinnacle—an odd couple of Democratic politicians surveying

their domain. It was May 1, 1931, 18 months after the Wall Street crash, and Al Smith and Franklin D. Roosevelt were on the observation deck on opening day of the Empire State Building. Smith, the bantam Irish stalwart from the Lower East Side, with his fragrant cigar and jaunty brown derby, had been a four-term governor of New York. The first Roman Catholic to run for president, he had been crushed by Herbert Hoover in the 1928 landslide. Roosevelt, the Hudson Valley patrician, had succeeded him in Albany and soon would be the nation's unlikely savior in the Great Depression. American politics has turned so rancid that it is often easy to forget that there were figures in even our recent history with brains, flair and convictions that transcended the scuffle for

personal glorification and self-enrichment. They were not born legends but grew into their greatness. Franklin Roosevelt—Teddy's unpromising fifth cousin—was written off as a rich, foppish lightweight with little more than an aristocratic accent and rich parents. Smith, an eighth-grade dropout who went to work at 15 to support his widowed mother, was deemed by most a coarse ward heeler beholden to the Tammany Hall satraps who anointed him. Yet the collaboration between this mismatched team of ambitious pols in the first decades of the 20th century transformed the Democratic Party and paved the way for the New Deal that remade America. Terry Golway, a prolific chronicler of the Irish in America, recounts their story in "Frank and Al." This is history told the old-fashioned way. The



FRANK AND AL

By Terry Golway St. Martin's, 322 pages, \$29.99

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president at the tumultuous 1924 Democratic convention.

book is only as long as it needs to be, the adroit narrative full of heroes (Smith, Roosevelt, bigcity Democratic bosses) and villains (William Randolph Hearst, William Jennings Bryan, the Ku Klux Klan). The scenes are vivid and the anecdotes plentiful. In an author's note, Mr. Golway confides that he has used his informed imagination at times to add texture to his tale, but all the crucial elements are endnoted, and his improvisations seem benign enough. At the start, Smith was the senior hand. Boosted by Charles Francis Murphy, the saloon keeper who ruled Tammany, he was an established

member of the New York State Assembly. The Albany pols thought of state Sen. Roosevelt as a Dutchess County dilettante, and Smith was dismissive. "Franklin," he told a pal, "just isn't the sort of man you can take into the pissroom and talk intimately with." Smith rose to be speaker of the Assembly and, with state (and later U.S.) Sen. Robert F. Wagner, pushed through innovative laws that prefigured today's social safety net. Roosevelt soon left Albany to join Woodrow Wilson's administration as assistant secretary

watch on politics back home and dreamed of high office. He was a contender for the next gubernatorial nomination in 1918, but Boss Murphy awarded it to Smith. FDR dutifully pledged his support—the first of many services he would render over the years. Six years later, Roosevelt put Smith's name in nomination for "In making Al Smith's cause his own," Mr. Golway writes, "Roosevelt bridged a chasm

of the Navy—Teddy's old job—but he kept close

improper to spend public money on a statue in New York Harbor, and the party of Al Smith, whose life story might as well have been written on the statue's pedestal." As governor, Smith filled his staff with names wsjbooks 5,540 followers **View Profile** that would become famous in Roosevelt's later New Deal, including Frances Perkins, the labor

between the party's elite progressives and its working-class liberals, between Hyde Park

and the Lower East Side . . . and between the party of Grover Cleveland, who thought it



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took 40 states and 84% of the electoral vote.

Rosenman, who wrote many of Roosevelt's most memorable speeches. The bills Smith enacted became models for Roosevelt's response to the Depression, including pensions for widows with children, the germ of the Social Security legislation signed by FDR in 1935. By the time Smith sought the 1924 presidential nomination, Roosevelt was crippled by polio. His legs locked in 10-pound braces, he exercised in secret for months so he could "walk" to the

podium to nominate Smith with a speech that christened him forever the "Happy Warrior." Smith lost after 104 ballots but prevailed four years later. Anti-Catholic bigotry engulfed the 1928 campaign, one of the ugliest in history. Whitesheeted Klansmen burned huge crosses across

successfully for governor of New York in a failed stab at winning the state's big bloc of electoral votes for the Democratic ticket. Smith's zeal for the repeal of Prohibition, still popular in the heartland, didn't help either, and Hoover

big money as head of the Empire State Building and a bank, Smith moved to Fifth Avenue and swapped his brown derby for a silk hat. He began denouncing FDR's "alphabet soup" of New Deal agencies and soon joined the virulently anti-Roosevelt American Liberty League, inveighing against "the foul breath of communistic Russia" that he sniffed everywhere. In 1936 he campaigned for Alf Landon against Roosevelt. Roosevelt never held Smith's apostasy against him, and FDR's wartime leadership reconciled the two men. They always understood each other. In 1944, when both had only months to live, Smith mused about his old protégé, rival, antagonist and comrade. "He was

Smith thought he himself deserved, and went on to trounce the hapless Hoover even worse

than Hoover had beaten Smith. Then the trouble started, as Mr. Golway recounts. Making

News. Appeared in the September 26, 2018, print edition as 'A Friendship Forged in Albany.'

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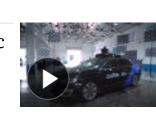
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champion; Jim Farley, FDR's political maestro; Ed Flynn, the Bronx boss; and Samuel

the country as Smith campaigned. FDR ran

In the wreckage of the Depression, Roosevelt got the 1932 presidential nomination that

the kindest man who ever lived," said Smith, "but don't ever get in his way."

Mr. Kosner is the former editor of Newsweek, New York, Esquire and the New York Daily

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