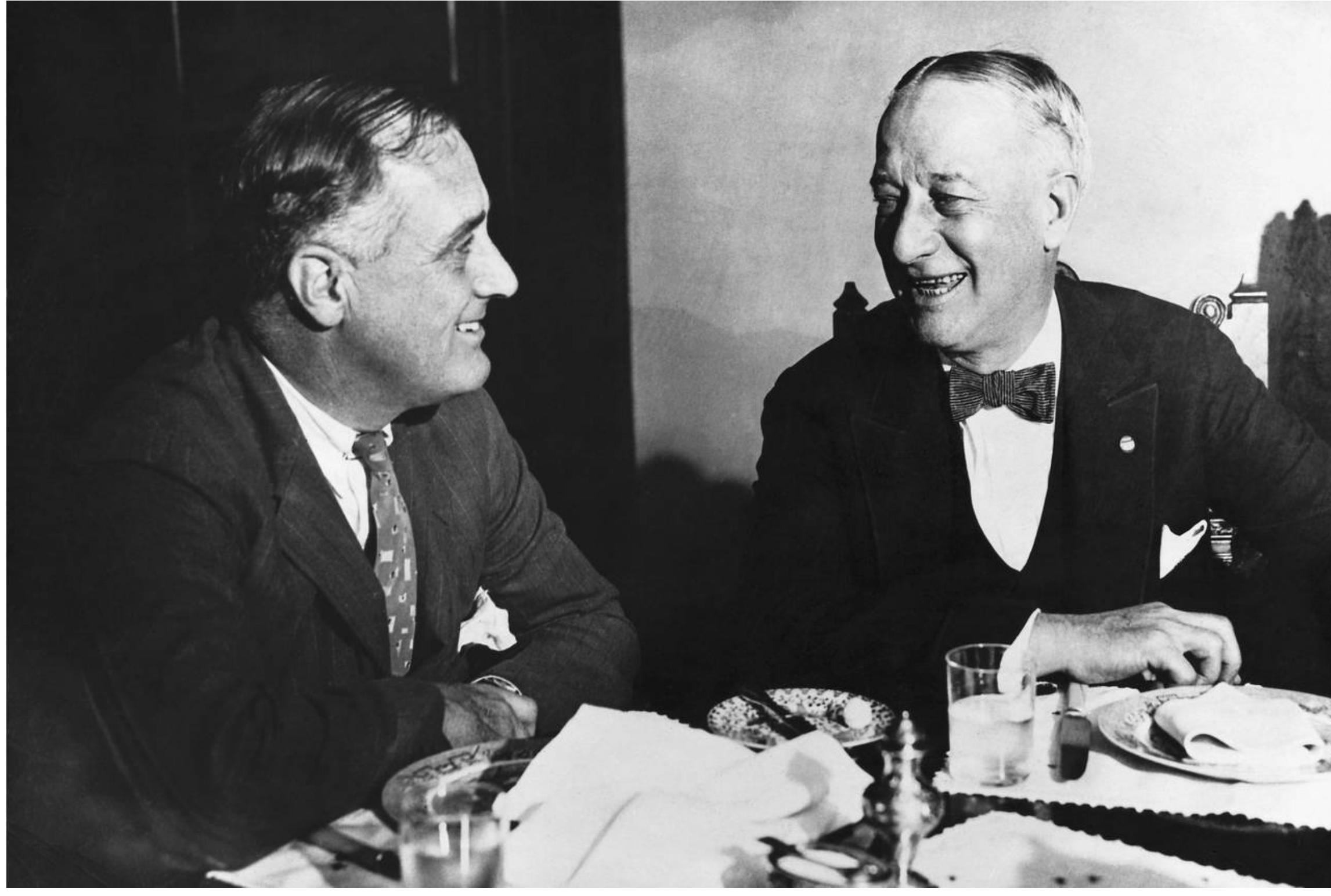


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'Frank and Al' Review: A Friendship Forged in Albany

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.



Franklin D. Roosevelt and Al Smith. PHOTO: GEORGE RINHART/CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES

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.

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.

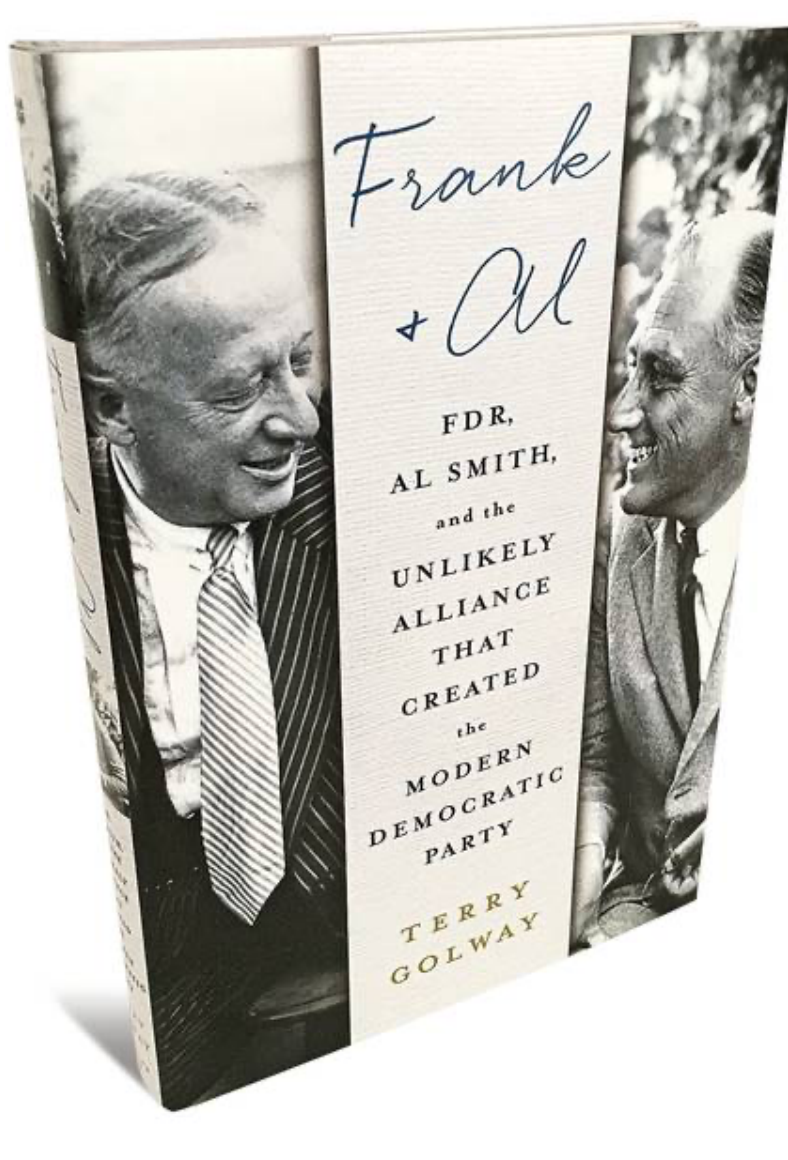


PHOTO: WSJ FRANK AND AL By Terry Golway St. Martin's, 322 pages, \$29.99

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"In making Al Smith's cause his own," Mr. Golway writes, "Roosevelt bridged a chasm 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 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."



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 took 40 states and 84% of the electoral vote.

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

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 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 News.

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