

The Scopes Trial is extensive enough that instructors can mine it for lecture materials, but also short and inexpensive so that teachers of either undergraduate or AP courses can assign it as a marvelous one-week unit on the birth of modern America. In sum, Jeffrey Moran has produced a thoughtfully organized, well written, and highly useful exploration of the Scopes trial. It is a book that teachers and students will find very beneficial.

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Christopher M. Finan. *Alfred E. Smith: The Happy Warrior.* New York: Hill & Wang, 2002. Pp. x, 396. Cloth, \$26.00; ISBN 0-8090-3033-0.

Recent years have seen a flurry of interest in Alfred E. Smith. First there was Robert A. Slayton's fine book, *Empire Statesman*, and now we have Christopher M. Finan's publication. Why this interest in Smith? To be sure, we have long needed a comprehensive scholarly biography, but the continuing interest in Smith stems in large part from his own qualities. In an era of plastic candidates, weak-kneed officeholders, and homogenous and pusillanimous politicians, Al Smith looks better and better. He had character. He was honest and frank. He was courageous. He was unpretentious—and *real*.

But there is more that intrigues us, for Al Smith is an enduring puzzle. How did a man raised in a machine environment become such a statesman-like governor, a leader in his state's progressive era? How did someone with Smith's baggage manage to be nominated in 1928 when his own party was deeply divided about the wisdom of such a step? Why did Smith come to oppose his former ally, Franklin D. Roosevelt? What was Smith anyway, a liberal or a conservative? It is the very elusiveness of Al Smith that brings us back to him. Challenged by his lack of reflection (and a scarcity of primary materials), we struggle to understand Smith and how he fit into his times.

For the most part, Finan rises to the challenge: His is a readable, accurate portrayal of Smith. It tells his life story well and convincingly places Smith into his world. Even if it does not break new ground or solve the mysteries of Smith's thinking and actions across the span of his career, Finan's book does provide good insights. Any student desiring a solid synthesis of Smith's life would do well to read this book, and any instructor could use it with confidence. It would be most appropriate as assigned or supplementary reading for upper-level and graduate courses in twentieth-century America, but an instructor teaching the American history survey or a course in biography could also include it as recommended reading.

I was most impressed with the sections on Smith's life before his election as governor in 1918 and during the 1930s. Finan turns the scraps of what we know about Smith's early years into a plausible story, and there is fresh information about Smith's activities during his last decade. Although Finan had a good grasp of New York

politics, his discussions of the 1924 Democratic National Convention, the 1928 presidential campaign, and the 1932 nomination contest are less satisfying. Nor is his writing about those "middle" sections of Smith's life as spirited as that for the early and later years.

Throughout, Finan's prose is clear, well-organized, and graceful. He weaves in well-chosen details and integrates Smith's personal life and political career in an adroit way. Finan is rarely critical of his subject, but there is little overt editorializing and only once did I observe him putting a favorable spin on the words of Smith that he had just quoted. There are few outright mistakes, typographical or otherwise. Finan also uses quotations skillfully; regrettably, with three exceptions the endnotes cite only the sources of those quotations—not the other sources he consulted. The bibliography is unimpressive: Finan includes some less valuable sources with questionable relevance while omitting several indispensable volumes (by Oscar Handlin, Paula Eldot, and Allan J. Lichtman, for instance) that he cites in endnotes.

There are other shortcomings. Finan's discussion of the New York Democrats' 1918 nominating process is unclear. He underplays the Triangle Fire and overplays Smith's attack on William Randolph Hearst as formative experiences in Smith's career. Finan does not say enough about Belle Moskowitz, Jouett Shouse, and others who were important influences on Smith. Despite the fact that the Democratic Party's two-thirds rule lay at the heart of the candidates' strategic considerations during 1924 and 1932, Finan mentions the rule only obliquely. Finan's description of the 1928 presidential campaign focuses almost entirely on the religious issue, with no detailed analysis of the voting returns. He sets forth the reasons why Smith and Roosevelt were moving apart after 1928 but then concludes that the split did not exist. In general, Finan often left me wondering where he himself stood on the controversial aspects of Smith's career.

Like everyone else who has tried, Finan is only partially successful in showing how Smith's political principles and actions developed over the years. Early on, he consistently paints Smith as a liberal who also believed in structural reforms that would strengthen the democratic process. Later, Finan concludes that Smith moved to the right ("without fully realizing it," he says), but his explanation for this movement is not convincing. The puzzle that is Al Smith remains, and in the end this fascinating leader continues to elude us—which is why he is in no danger of becoming a forgotten man.

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Robert Cohen, ed. *Dear Mrs. Roosevelt: Letters from Children of the Great Depression*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002. Pp. xi, 266. Cloth, \$29.95; ISBN 0-8078-2747-9. Paper, \$16.95; ISBN 0-8078-5413-1.

Robert Cohen, in *Dear Mrs. Roosevelt*, presents an edited collection of letters from youth (children and teenagers alike) written to Eleanor Roosevelt during the Great