

Al Smith

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Alfred Emanuel "Al" Smith (December 30, 1873 – October 4, 1944) was Governor of New York, and Democratic U.S. presidential candidate in 1928. He lost the election to Herbert Hoover. He was a prominent Irish-American and a leading Democrat.

Contents

- 1 Early life
 - 1.1 The 1928 election
 - 1.2 Voter realignment
 - 1.3 Opposition to Roosevelt
- 2 Civilian life
- 3 Namesake
- 4 Electoral history
- 5 References
- 6 Bibliography
 - 6.1 Primary sources
- 7 External links

Early life

Smith was born to Alfred Emanuel Smith and Catherine Mulvihill and initially grew up in the multiethnic Lower East Side of Manhattan, on Oliver Street, New York City, within sight of the Brooklyn Bridge which was then under construction. His four grandparents were Irish, German, Italian, and English, but Smith, a devout Catholic, identified with the Irish Catholic community and became its leading spokesman in the 1920s. He was thirteen when his father Alfred, a Civil War veteran who owned a small trucking firm, died; at fourteen he had to drop out of parochial school, St. James School, to help support the family. He never attended high school or college, and claimed that he learned about people by studying them at the Fulton Fish Market, a job for which he was paid \$12 per week to support his family. An accomplished amateur actor, he became a notable speaker. On May 6, 1900, Alfred Smith married Catherine A. Dunn, with whom he had five children.^[1]

In his political career, he emphasized his working-class beginnings, identified himself with immigrants, and campaigned as a man of the people. Although indebted to the Tammany Hall political machine, particularly to its boss, "Silent" Charlie Murphy, he remained untarnished by corruption and worked for the passage of progressive legislation.^[2]

Smith's first political job was as a clerk in the office of the *Commissioner of Jurors* in 1895. In 1903 he was elected to

Alfred Emmanuel Smith



45th Governor of New York

In office

1919 – 1920

Lieutenant(s) Harry C. Walker
Preceded by Charles S. Whitman
Succeeded by Nathan L. Miller

47th Governor of New York

In office

1923 – 1928

Lieutenant(s) George R. Lunn (1923-1924)
Seymour Lowman (1925-1926)
Edwin Corning (1926-1928)
Preceded by Nathan L. Miller
Succeeded by Franklin D. Roosevelt

Born December 30, 1873
New York City, New York
Died October 4, 1944
Political party Democratic

the New York State Assembly. He served as vice chairman of the commission appointed to investigate factory conditions after a hundred workers died in the disastrous Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in 1911. Smith crusaded against dangerous and unhealthy workplace conditions and championed corrective legislation. In 1911 the Democrats obtained a majority of seats in the state Assembly, and Smith became chairman of the powerful Ways and Means Committee. In 1912, following the loss of the majority, he became the minority leader. When the Democrats reclaimed the majority in the next election, he was elected as Speaker of the Assembly for the 1913 session. He became minority leader again in 1914 when the Republicans won the majority again, and remained in that position until his election as sheriff of New York County in 1915. By now he was a leader of the Progressive movement in New York City and state. His campaign manager and top aide was Belle Moskowitz, daughter of Prussian-Jewish immigrants.^[3]

After serving in the patronage-rich job of sheriff of New York County beginning in 1916, Smith was elected governor of New York in 1918. He was the first Irish-American to elected governor of a state. In 1919 he gave the famous speech, "A man as low and mean as I can picture," making an irreparable break with William Randolph Hearst. Newspaperman Hearst was the leader of the left-wing of the Democratic party in the city, and had combined with Tammany Hall in electing the local administration; he had been attacking Smith for "starving children" by not reducing the cost of milk.

Smith lost his bid for re-election in 1920, but was reelected as governor in 1922, 1924 and 1926. As governor he became known nationally as a progressive who sought to make government more efficient and more effective in meeting social needs. His young assistant, Robert Moses, constructed the nation's first state park system and reformed the civil service system; Smith later appointed him New York State Secretary of State. During his term New York strengthened laws governing workers' compensation, women's pensions, and child and women's labor with the help of Frances Perkins, soon to be FDR's Labor Secretary, and ahead of many states. In 1924 he unsuccessfully sought the Democratic nomination for president, advancing the cause of civil liberty by decrying lynching and racial violence. Roosevelt made the nominating speech in which he saluted Smith as "the Happy Warrior of the political battlefield."^[4]

The 1928 election

The Republican Party was riding high on the economic boom of the 1920s, which their presidential candidate Herbert Hoover pledged to continue. Historians agree that the prosperity along with anti-Catholic sentiment made Hoover's election inevitable, although he had never run for office. He defeated Smith by a landslide in the 1928 election.

Smith was the first Catholic to win a major-party presidential nomination.^[5] (See also John F. Kennedy, the first Catholic elected U.S. President.) A major controversial issue was the continuation of Prohibition. Smith was personally in favor of relaxation or repeal of Prohibition laws, despite its status as part of the nation's Constitution, but the Democratic Party split north and south on the issue. During the campaign Smith tried to duck the issue with noncommittal statements.^[6]

Smith was an articulate exponent of good government and efficiency, as was Hoover. But as Smith became known for saying in his campaign, "Let's look at the record." Smith swept the entire Catholic vote, which had been split in 1920 and 1924, and brought millions of Catholic ethnics to the polls for the first time, especially women. He lost important Democratic constituencies in the rural north and in southern cities and suburbs. He did carry the Deep South, thanks in part to his running mate, Senator Joseph Robinson of Arkansas, and he carried the ten most populous cities in the United States. Part of Smith's losses can be attributed to fear that as president, Smith would answer to the Pope rather than to the Constitution, to fears of the power of New York City, to distaste for the long history of corruption associated with Tammany Hall, and to Smith's own mediocre campaigning. Smith's campaign theme song, "The Sidewalks of New York", was not likely to appeal to rural folk, and his city accent on the "raddio" seemed a bit foreign. Although Smith lost New York state, his ticket-mate Roosevelt was elected to replace him as governor of New York.^[7]

Voter realignment

In long-term perspective Al Smith started a voter realignment. He helped launch the end of classless politics that ushered in the New Deal coalition of Franklin D. Roosevelt.^[8] As one political scientist explains, "...not until 1928, with the nomination of Al Smith, a northeastern reformer, did Democrats make gains among the urban, blue-collar, and Catholic voters who were later to become core components of the New Deal coalition and break the pattern of minimal class polarization that had characterized the Fourth Party System."^[9] Finan (2003) says Smith is an underestimated symbol of the changing nature of American politics in the first half of the century. He represented the rising ambitions of urban, industrial America at a time when the hegemony of rural, agrarian America was in decline. He was connected to the hopes and aspirations of immigrants, especially Catholics and Jews. Smith was a devout Catholic, but his struggles against religious bigotry were often misinterpreted when he fought the religiously inspired Protestant morality imposed by prohibitionists.

Opposition to Roosevelt

Smith felt slighted by Roosevelt during Roosevelt's governorship. They became rivals for the 1932 Democratic presidential nomination. After losing the nomination, Smith begrudgingly campaigned for Roosevelt in 1932. When President Roosevelt began pursuing the liberal policies of his New Deal, Smith began to work with the opposition. Smith believed the New Deal was a betrayal of good-government Progressive ideals, and ran counter to the goal of close cooperation with business. Along with other prominent conservative Democrats, in 1934 he became a leader of the American Liberty League, the focus of political opposition to Roosevelt's New Deal. Smith supported the Republican presidential candidates Alfred M. Landon in the 1936 election and Wendell Willkie in the 1940 election.^[10]

Although personal resentment was a motivating factor in Smith's break with Roosevelt and the New Deal, Smith was consistent in his beliefs and politics. Finan (2003) argues Smith always believed in social mobility, economic opportunity, religious tolerance, and individualism.

Civilian life

After the 1928 election, he became the president of Empire State, Inc., the corporation which built and operated the Empire State Building. Smith cut the ribbon when the world's tallest skyscraper opened in May 1931, built in only 13 months. As with the Brooklyn Bridge, which Smith witnessed being built from his Lower East Side boyhood home, the Empire State Building was a vision and an achievement constructed by combining the interests of all rather than being divided by interests of a few. Smith, like most New York City businessmen, enthusiastically supported World War Two, but was not asked by Roosevelt to play any role in the war effort.^[11]

Smith died on October 4, 1944, at the age of 70, broken-hearted over the death of his wife from cancer five months earlier. He is interred at Calvary Cemetery, Queens, New York.

Namesake

- Alfred E. Smith Building, a 1928 skyscraper in Albany, New York
- Governor Alfred E. Smith Houses, a public housing development in Lower Manhattan, near his birthplace
- Governor Alfred E. Smith Park, a playground in the Two Bridges neighborhood in Manhattan, near his birthplace
- Alfred E. Smith Recreation Center, a youth activity center in the Two Bridges neighborhood, Manhattan.
- Governor Alfred E. Smith Sunken Meadow State Park, a state park on Long Island
- PS 163 Alfred E. Smith School, a school on the Upper West Side of Manhattan
- PS 1 Alfred E. Smith School, a school in Manhattan's Chinatown.
- Al Smith Dinner, a fundraiser held for Catholic charities and a stop on the presidential campaign trail
- Smith Hall, a residence hall at Hinman College, SUNY Binghamton.
- Alfred E. Smith Vocational High School in the South Bronx.

Electoral history

1928 United States Presidential Election

Herbert Hoover (R) 58.2%

Al Smith (D) 40.8%

Norman Thomas (Socialist) 0.7%

William Zebulon Foster (Communist) 0.1%

References

- ↑ Slayton 2001
- ↑ Slayton 2001
- ↑ Slayton 2001
- ↑ Slayton 2001
- ↑ Hostetler, (1998).
- ↑ Lichtman (1979)
- ↑ Slayton 2001; Lichtman (1979)



Smith golfing with baseball great Babe Ruth in Coral Gables, Fla. (1930) – State Archive of Florida



Statue of Al Smith at Alfred E. Smith Park in the Two Bridges neighborhood of New York City

8. ^ Degler (1964)
9. ^ Lawrence (1996) p 34.
10. ^ Slayton 2001
11. ^ Slayton 2001

Bibliography

- Bornet, Vaughn Davis; *Labor Politics in a Democratic Republic: Moderation, Division, and Disruption in the Presidential Election of 1928* (1964) online edition (<http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=97604804>)
- Douglas B. Craig. *After Wilson: The Struggle for Control of the Democratic Party, 1920-1934* (1992)online edition (<http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=10806989>) see Chap. 6 "The Problem of Al Smith" and Chap. 8 "'Wall Street Likes Al Smith': The Election of 1928"
- Degler, Carl N. (1964). "American Political Parties and the Rise of the City: An Interpretation ([http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0021-8723\(196406\)51:1%3C41:APPATR%3E2.0.CO;2-%23&origin=historycoop](http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0021-8723(196406)51:1%3C41:APPATR%3E2.0.CO;2-%23&origin=historycoop))". *Journal of American History* **51** (1): 41-59. DOI:10.2307/1917933 (<http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/1917933>) .
- Eldot, Paula (1983). *Governor Alfred E. Smith: The Politician as Reformer*. Garland. ISBN 0824048555.
- Christopher M. Finan. *Alfred E. Smith: The Happy Warrior*. (2003)
- Hostetler, Michael J. (1998). "Gov. Al Smith Confronts the Catholic Question: The Rhetorical Legacy of the 1928 Campaign". *Communication Quarterly* **46**.
- Lawrence, David G. (1996). *The Collapse of the Democratic Presidential Majority: Realignment, Dealignment, and Electoral Change from Franklin Roosevelt to Bill Clinton*. Westview Press. ISBN 0813389844.
- Lichtman, Allan J. (1979). *Prejudice and the old politics: The Presidential election of 1928*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press. ISBN 0807813583. OCLC 4492475 (<http://worldcat.org/oclc/4492475>) .
 - Carter, Paul A. (1980). "Deja Vu; Or, Back to the Drawing Board with Alfred E. Smith". *Reviews in American History* **8** (2): 272-276. DOI:10.2307/2701129 (<http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2701129>) . ISSN 0048-7511 (<http://dispatch.opac.ddb.de/DB=1.1/LNG=EN/CMD?ACT=SRCHA&IKT=8&TRM=0048-7511>) . ; review of Lichtman
- Moore, Edmund A. (1956). *A Catholic Runs for President: The Campaign of 1928*. OCLC 475746 (<http://worldcat.org/oclc/475746>) . online edition (<http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=94966769>)
- Neal, Donn C. (1983). *The World beyond the Hudson: Alfred E. Smith and National Politics, 1918-1928*. New York: Garland, 308. ISBN 978-0824056582.
- Neal, Donn C. (1984). "What If Al Smith Had Been Elected?". *Presidential Studies Quarterly* **14** (2): 242-248. ISSN 0360-4918 (<http://dispatch.opac.ddb.de/DB=1.1/LNG=EN/CMD?ACT=SRCHA&IKT=8&TRM=0360-4918>) .
- Perry, Elisabeth Israels (1987). *Belle Moskowitz: Feminine Politics and the Exercise of Power in the Age of Alfred E. Smith*. Oxford University Press, 280. ISBN 0195044266.
- Daniel F. Rulli; "Campaigning in 1928: Chickens in Pots and Cars in Backyards," *Teaching History: A Journal of Methods*, Vol. 31#1 pp 42+ (2006) online version (<http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=5014694766>) with lesson plans for class
- Slayton, Robert A. (2001). *Empire Statesman: The Rise and Redemption of Al Smith*. Free Press, 480. ISBN 978-0684863023. , the standard scholarly biography
- Sweeney, James R. "Rum, Romanism, and Virginia Democrats: The Party Leaders and the Campaign of 1928." *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 90 (October 1982): 403–31.

Primary sources

- **Smith, Alfred, E.** (1929). *Campaign addresses of Governor Alfred E. Smith, Democratic Candidate for President 1928*. Washington, D.C.: Democratic National Committee. ISBN 0404061176. OCLC 300555 (<http://worldcat.org/oclc/300555>) .
- Alfred E. Smith. *Progressive Democracy: Addresses & State Papers*. (1928) online edition (<http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=62030394>)

External links

- "Alfred E. Smith Dies Here at 70; 4 Times Governor (http://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/bday/1230.html) ", The New York Times, October 4, 1944.
- Happy Warrior Playground (http://www.nycgovparks.org/sub_your_park/historical_signs/hs_historical_sign.php?id=10772) . *New York City Department of Parks and Recreation*.
- Governor Alfred E. Smith Park (http://www.nycgovparks.org/sub_your_park/historical_signs/hs_historical_sign.php?id=6453) . *New York City Department of Parks and Recreation*.
- Al Smith (http://www.nps.gov/elro/glossary/smith-al.htm) . *Eleanor Roosevelt National Historic Site*.
- Murphy, Kevin C.. Lost Warrior: Al Smith and the Fall of Tammany (http://www.kevincmurphy.com/alsmith.htm) .

<p>Preceded by Edwin A. Merritt</p>	<p>Speaker of the New York State Assembly 1913</p>	<p>Succeeded by Thaddeus C. Sweet</p>
<p>Preceded by Charles S. Whitman</p>	<p>Governor of New York 1919–1920</p>	<p>Succeeded by Nathan L. Miller</p>
<p>Preceded by Nathan L. Miller</p>	<p>Governor of New York 1923–1928</p>	<p>Succeeded by Franklin D. Roosevelt</p>
<p>Preceded by John W. Davis</p>	<p>Democratic Party presidential nominees 1928 (lost)</p>	<p>Succeeded by Franklin D. Roosevelt</p>

United States Democratic Party Presidential Nominees

[hide]

Jackson • Van Buren • Polk • Cass • Pierce • Buchanan • Douglas/Breckinridge (SD), McClellan • Seymour • Greeley • Tilden • Hancock • Cleveland • Bryan • Parker • Bryan • Wilson • Cox • Davis • **Smith** • Roosevelt • Truman • Stevenson • Kennedy • Johnson • Humphrey • McGovern • Carter • Mondale • Dukakis • Clinton • Gore • Kerry

Governors of New York

[hide]

G Clinton • Jay • G Clinton • Lewis • Tompkins • Tayler • D Clinton • Yates • D Clinton • Pitcher • Van Buren • Throop • Marcy • Seward • Bouck • Wright • Young • Fish • Hunt • Seymour • Clark • King • Morgan • Seymour • Fenton • Hoffman • JA Dix • Tilden • Robinson • Cornell • Cleveland • Hill • Flower • Morton • Black • T Roosevelt • Odell • Higgins • Hughes • White • J Dix • Sulzer • Glynn • Whitman • **Smith** • Miller • **Smith** • F Roosevelt • Lehman • Poletti • Dewey • Harriman • Rockefeller • Wilson • Carey • Cuomo • Pataki • Spitzer



Retrieved from "http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al_Smith"

Categories: Democratic Party (United States) presidential nominees | Governors of New York | Speakers of the New York Assembly | Irish-American politicians | Italian-American politicians | People from Manhattan | Roman Catholic politicians | Burials at Calvary Cemetery (Queens) | 1873 births | 1944 deaths

- This page was last modified 00:16, 13 June 2007.
- All text is available under the terms of the GNU Free Documentation License. (See **Copyrights** for details.) Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a US-registered 501(c)(3) tax-deductible nonprofit charity.