

Roosevelt's Purge: How FDR Fought to Change the Democratic Party

Susan Dunn, Harvard/Belknap, \$27.95 (340p) ISBN 9780674057173

Dunn's examination of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's summer of '38, when he attempted to rid his party of conservative elements, couldn't be more relevant. The author colorfully and thoroughly chronicles the strategies that a once-popular president, who had helped America rise from a debilitating depression, employed when critics within his own party threatened his New Deal legislation. "Roosevelt would fight back – impulsively haphazardly, emotionally, boldly... it was a highly risky venture that had danger signs written all over it." Roosevelt helped manipulate the outcome of democratic primaries and supported liberals who challenged the seats of conservative incumbents. "Reporters branded his tactic a 'purge' – and the inflammatory label stuck." Even though FDR's efforts ultimately failed, costing him political capital and bringing a beating upon Democrats in the midterm elections, the purge was "the precursor of a historic transformation of American political parties" that "colors American Politics to this day." As the past prepares to repeat itself once more, FDR in '38 is a perfect lens through which to view our current climate. (Oct.) October 18. 2010 Nonfiction. Web Exclusive Review.