

Raskob, Gary E. (Ed.) with Gene Rainbolt, Sharon Neuwald, Shauna Lawyer Struby, and Marvin Smith. (2021). *Oklahoma Pride: Working Together for the Well-Being of All Oklahomans*. Oklahoma City, OK: Full Circle Press.

Oklahoma Pride is one of the most innovative policy projects ever conceived and implemented. It's a multi-front tour de force advocating for serious change in a state that so desperately needs it. The noted philanthropist and civic leader Gene Rainbolt gathered a team of Oklahoma's top leaders from education, health, business, media, and the arts to construct an excellent overview of Oklahoma's persistent public policy problems. They have produced a handy digest that can easily be read in one sitting. Its colorful illustrations and elegant prose belie the enormous amount of research that backs up this book's prognosis for the extreme challenges facing Oklahoma. Each chapter tackles a major social or health problem facing the state. Each chapter also has a corresponding reference list with numerous data points from recent, credible sources.

Although this book is quite serious in its assessments, it is far from being all doom and gloom. Workable remedies for these problems are revealed at almost every turn. The mission of this book is to build the political will to begin adopting these policy solutions. In short, it's a call to action for the state's policymakers to respond and respond quickly. In his foreword, Rainbolt compares the current situation in Oklahoma with the despair felt in this state during the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl years. That era represented a major turning point in policy innovations exemplified by the New Deal and related programs. Rainbolt and his team see that now "Oklahoma is at a similar crossroads" (p. v).

The book is divided into three main parts. The first takes a look at the major health indicators that unfortunately makes Oklahoma appear at the bottom of most rankings when compared to its peers: infant mortality rate, cancer deaths, suicide rate, and addictions.

The second part tackles the lifestyle risks including tobacco, obesity, incarceration, and teen births which often compound the other problems. The third part takes a look at the underlying conditions affecting the health of Oklahomans including the poverty rate, levels of education, and the number of uninsured citizens. The entire book revolves around public health as its predominant theme.

The contributors curate a wide variety of the forces that exacerbate the quality of life for Oklahomans. The book forces us to confront uncomfortable realities. And it does so in some very clever ways. It uses powerful anecdotes, notable quotes, poems, cartoons, photographs, and graphic illustrations to drive home its points. The Rainbolt team recruited students at the University of Oklahoma School of Visual Arts to create most of the book's graphic design elements. The layout is superb, but the imagery is often deliberately disturbing. For example, to portray the human toll taken by the state's high suicide rate, student artists offer a photograph of nooses hanging "silently from playground equipment" (p. 13). Other equally alarming examples include a stylized woman's frontal body ravaged by breast cancer, baby bassinets side by side with grave markers in a cemetery for infants (p. 3), and a gun loaded with cigarettes as ammunition (p. 27). The art is so interesting and captivating. I found myself drawn back to particular graphics to better absorb their full meaning. My one significant criticism for the book is that it sometimes over-explains the art instead of letting the graphics speak for themselves. The contributors obviously do not want to allow the possibility that readers might miss some of its points.

Oklahoma Pride repeats a pattern throughout which is to first depict in both words and images the dire circumstances faced by Oklahoma communities. It then turns those same concepts on their head and paints a much brighter future if only we would adopt certain policy initiatives. The strategy is quite persuasive. One of my absolute favorite illustrations draws from the official seal of the University of Oklahoma. Here, instead of seeds, the iconic Seed

Sower distributes colorful condoms (p. 74). While the book takes a hard look at the troubling array of problems facing the state, it is consistently mindful about how such problems strike at under-served communities in even more devastating ways.

Oklahoma Pride conveys the problems it highlights with deep human understanding. The contributors make enormous effort to not only frame problems accurately, but to provoke human empathy. Its fresh presentation style is a prototype that should be emulated in other states with chronic social ills. To underscore the importance of the book, the back cover contains an endorsement signed by the presidents of both of Oklahoma's flagship universities. From front to back, this volume relies on the active participation of community-minded Oklahomans, both young and old. The next time I teach *State and Local Government* course, I will assign this book as a supplementary text. It would also serve as a worthy addition to any public policy analysis class. *Oklahoma Pride* should also be required reading among the Oklahoma Academy for State Goals crowd and for each member of the state legislature!

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