

David R. Morgan, Robert E. England and George G. Humphreys, *Oklahoma Politics and Policies: Governing the Sooner State* (Lincoln: The University of Nebraska Press, 1991) pp. 263. \$15.95 ISBN 0-8032-8136-6

*Oklahoma Politics and Policies* is designed to provide a broad survey of Oklahoma political history and to provide an introduction to the government of our state. It is written by two veteran professors of political science, David R. Morgan from the University of Oklahoma and Robert E. England, a professor of political science at Oklahoma State University. A third author, George G. Humphreys, is the research director of the Oklahoma House of Representatives and is well recognized as a quality practitioner of state government. This book fills a void that has existed for a general public review of Oklahoma politics and governmental processes. As such, it will serve as entertaining reading for the general Oklahoma public and as a valuable reference for the expert. This book is particularly strong in providing a survey of the contradictions that have been built into our state. As one of the last places of major settlement of the frontier, Oklahoma brought together in one state elements that represented the whole diversity of America. The origins of early settlers can be transparently seen in ways as obvious as the names of Oklahoma counties: Republican counties in the northern part of the state that were named after Republican presidents favored by the northern settlers such as Grant and Garfield; and, Democratic counties in the southern part of the state named after presidents favored by the southern Democratic settlers such as Jefferson and Jackson. The names of Indian tribes resettled to Oklahoma from other places are also well reported, as well as the names of the economic interests of the settlers (Coal, Cotton, Alfalfa, etc.). Oklahoma was not only the product of a rapid assembling of disparate people but Oklahoma, as a state, experienced the strongest federal role in its early history. All of these factors combined with the economic ups and downs of our state provided an early history that was often tumultuous and almost always quite colorful.

For most of us *Oklahoma Politics and Policies* will be most enjoyable as it describes our early roots as a state and the fascinating experiences of these roots in agrarian radicalism and lively politics. Few Oklahomans today, who recognize their state to be Republican and conservative, can imagine that we were once a place that had a strong socialist movement. The socialist candidate for governor in 1914 received 20 percent of the vote, and socialists served in the state legislature and in local offices. In fact, Oklahoma had more registered socialist voters than the state of New York. But, while New York socialists were a product of the urban environment, the Oklahoma socialists were agrarian. It is difficult today to imagine that the same city that is now the home of the *Daily*

*Oklahoman* was once also the home of a prominent national socialist publication.

This book reminds Oklahomans that we do not have to look to our neighbor state south of the Red River to define an entertaining heritage of political color. As we are reminded of Jack Walton and other impeached governors, of Alfalfa "Bill" Murray and of the strong role of the Ku Klux Klan, we can see that our own state's history provides a truly Oklahoma contribution to the idiosyncratic episodes of American state government.

As Oklahoma emerged into the mainstream of the country following World War II, our politics settled down to a slower rate of change and we saw fewer excesses of political showmanship. Governor Robert Kerr, as the book reminds us, typified the transition to a more settled and more traditional pattern of development. In contemporary government *Oklahoma Politics and Policies* analyzes the legislative and executive roles of state government, as well as the organization of counties and municipal government in Oklahoma. As someone who was a participant at the capitol for much of recent political history and was a first-hand participant in many of the things described by this book, I regret that little academic attention (in this book or elsewhere) has been given to the dynamics of legislative – gubernatorial relationships. Oklahoma, it seems to me, has had very little of the kind of gubernatorial leadership that was envisioned under the form of government in contemporary history. This has not always been bad and is not intended as a criticism of any particular governor, but it has meant that the roles of the branches of government have had to perform differently than classic textbooks described. The legislative branch has more often in recent years been thrust into leadership responsibilities that were structurally difficult for a legislative body to perform. Management of the most interesting aspects of modern Oklahoma government and politics as they have shaped public policies, in my opinion, revolves around the effects of how actual legislative–gubernatorial roles have been played compared to the way in which the structure of our government envisions them. Perhaps this will be a good study for future political scientists.

This is an excellent book that I am comfortable recommending to the enjoyment of any Oklahoman. We are now old enough as a state to look back and find the lessons of our history. We are fortunate in Oklahoma to be inheritors of a wonderful history that is a worthy study in American development.

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