



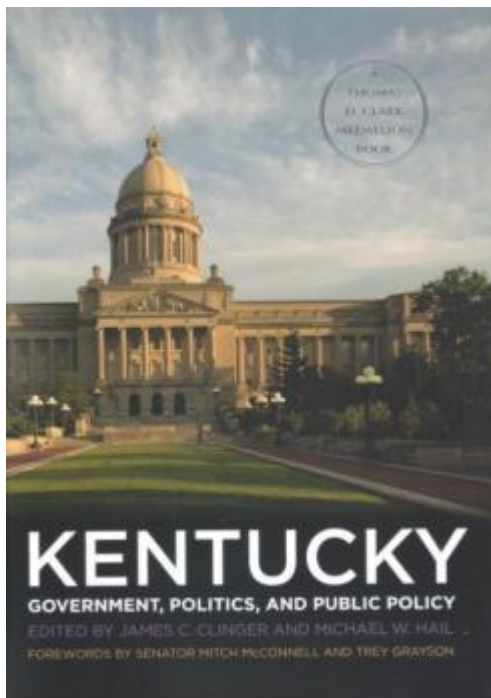
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Book explains Kentucky politics in great detail

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"Kentucky Government, Politics, and Public Policy," edited by James C. Clinger and Michael W. Hail. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2013. 532 pages, \$40.00 (hardcover).



"The past four decades have seen an evolution in partisan competition across Kentucky," Joel Turner and Scott Lasley assert in their contribution to "Kentucky Government, Politics, and Public Policy," the new book edited by James C. Clinger and Michael W. Hail.

"Although national politics in the state has trended sharply to the right, Democrats have generally managed to win in the state and local elections," they write. "Once considered to be one of several bellwether states for national politics, Kentucky has emerged as solidly red in the past several presidential elections."

Turner and Lasley then proceed to explain why this is the case, what its implications are both locally and nationally, and where the state seems to be headed in coming decades. Moreover, they make a compelling argument for their analysis and conclusions – as do all of the authors who contributed to this meticulous and exhaustive volume.

"Kentucky Government, Politics, and Public Policy" is written in three major sections. After a brief foreword by Sen. Mitch McConnell and Trey Grayson and an introduction by the co-editors, the book begins with "Part 1: State and Local Institutions," which encompasses the first nine chapters of the book.

Within this section, the book provides a brief but surprisingly comprehensive overview of all of the major legislative institutions germane to how the state functions as a legal entity. This is followed by the 20 chapters that make up "Part 2: Politics and Public Policy Issues." In this section, the reader is introduced to a wide range of issues – from campaign finance to education reform to economic and community development. Taken collectively, the first two sections of the book paint a detailed picture of the contemporary political scene in Kentucky, combined with an intriguing explanation of how we arrived here. Much of the content is also right out of the current headlines.

"Assessing the impact of the Affordable Care Act on Kentuckians' health will involve determinations of how well the legislation is able to increase access, efficiency, effectiveness and quality of the medical-care system, as well as improve healthy behaviors and outcomes for Kentuckians over time," Ann Beck explains in chapter 18. "The most significant changes for

Kentucky that will result from the passage and implementation of the ACA are the extension of insurance coverage and greater use of medical services by Kentuckians. Assessing the economic, societal or individual value of the benefits of health improvements, regardless of the measurements used, can be difficult and politically hazardous.”

I found the first 20 chapters of the book informative and enlightening, but I was especially fascinated by “Part 3: Kentucky Politics: Past, Present and Future.” This section consists of only one chapter, “Future Political Developments in the Commonwealth,” co-authored by the primary editors of the tome. In this highly engaging and provocative synthesis of everything presented previously, Clinger and Hail lay out a concise yet remarkably detailed (potential) road map for Kentucky’s future.

The book concludes with a number of relevant appendices, all designed to illuminate the various concepts, principles and ideas presented throughout the main text. These reference documents include a listing and explanation of key players in Kentucky’s past, the Kentucky Constitution and several important speeches such as Henry Clay’s 1850 Compromise Speech, Abraham Lincoln’s Eulogy of Clay and Jefferson Davis’ Inaugural Address. In many respects, these historical documents help shed light on Kentucky’s history in a way that would not have been possible otherwise. Certainly, they helped place what the authors of the different chapters had to say within an appropriate and coherent context.

It is obvious the 24 contributors who worked on “Kentucky Government, Politics, and Public Policy” took the project very seriously. Conceptually, the book flows seamlessly from one chapter to the next in a logical manner not always on display in similar works of this scope and variety. Although distinct literary styles were readily apparent, I was not distracted by these differences. It was evident the editors had spent considerable time making sure the book was consistently true to its intended purpose. By the way, Clinger is a professor and program director at Murray State University. Hail is a professor and assistant dean at Morehead State University.

It is noteworthy that “Kentucky Government, Politics, and Public Policy” is the latest winner of the Thomas D. Clark Medallion, an award presented each year to “the one book that meets the standards set by state historian-laureate-for-life Dr. Thomas D. Clark for research and writing about Kentucky’s history and culture.”

Although there will be inevitable differences of opinion regarding some of the interpretations made and conclusions reached by the various contributors, there is little doubt the book is a historical and cultural exploration of the first order. Perhaps McConnell summed it up best when he surmised that Clinger and Hail have produced “the most in-depth and comprehensive study of political science in Kentucky” that he has ever had occasion to read.

After spending the last couple of weeks digesting this important treatise on our collective history and possible future, I am inclined to agree with him. If you could only read one book that explains politics in Kentucky, this would probably be a good choice. I recommend it highly.

— *Reviewed by Aaron W. Hughey, Department of Counseling and Student Affairs, Western Kentucky University.*