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Review of *Kansas Politics and Government: The Clash
of Political Cultures*. By H. Edward Flentje and
Joseph A. Aistrup.

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Flentje and Joe Aistrup (disclaimer: I write a column for Kansas papers in rotation with them and two other political scientists) have done more than cover the breadth of the state's politics. In their emphasis on political cultures, they provide an effective way to think about Kansas politics and government over almost 150 years of statehood.

The initial chapter lays out a theoretical approach that emphasizes the competing threads of liberty, order, and equality as central to the Kansas experience. Flentje and Aistrup note the various facets of these elements, which often pop up in unexpected, but complementary, ways. Thus, populists and progressives desire certain kinds of order, including governmental reform and prohibition, while the members of the business community seek predictability for investment and entrepreneurial activities. The authors make a real contribution in their consideration of contemporary conservatives, mostly within the Republican Party, as "bipolar" in their simultaneous embrace of economic liberty and of order on social issues such as abortion.

Books in this series face the difficult task of covering the whole of state government, while placing it within a fifty-state context. The authors do a good job here, all the while providing a real sense of what's singular about the state. For example, Republicans have always dominated Kansas politics; given that dominance, however, parsing the nature of the party's strength over time is crucial. Indeed, Democrats have occupied the governor's office for more years than Republicans since 1957, while never capturing a U.S. Senate seat in that period.

The authors bring to their enterprise more than enough academic literature for the book to be useful for all students of state politics; for history buffs, it offers a start and a host of suggestions for further reading.

There are some curious omissions, which are hard to avoid in such a work. No mention is made of the 2005 creation of a new independent agency, the Kansas Health Policy Administration, which was a partisan political response to Governor Kathleen Sebelius's executive reorganization proposal for Medicare/Medicaid. More surprisingly, Flentje and Aistrup do not address the issues raised by Thomas Frank's *What's the Matter with Kansas?* (2005), the most famous recent book dealing with the state. They clearly diverge from Frank's economic determinism, but Frank does generate some useful data and well-done interviews, which might have informed the arguments here.

In the end, this is an impressive performance, and *Kansas Politics and Government* ranks as one of the best in the Nebraska series. For understanding Kansas and the

Kansas Politics and Government: The Clash of Political Cultures. By H. Edward Flentje and Joseph A. Aistrup. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010. xxiv + 263 pp. Illustrations, maps, tables, appendices, notes, index. \$70.00 cloth, \$30.00 paper.

Prior to the publication of *Kansas Politics and Government*, there was no essential book on Kansas politics, policy-making, and institutions. Now there is. It's as simple as that. Anyone who wants to understand the Sunflower State's politics should start here.

Most prosaically, this is one more in the Nebraska Press's ambitious series of single-state studies. But Ed

politics of the Plains more generally, it should be required reading. **Burdett A. Loomis**, *Department of Political Science, University of Kansas*.