

Pataki at the ruins of the World Trade Center on September 14, 2001, the book offers at least a glimpse of the “action” part of government—something practical at last. Unfortunately, *The Politics of Crisis Management* is more devoted to a summary of what we know about why crisis management is difficult and to an effort to categorize or model the crises modern societies experience. Much of what the authors tell us is somewhat obvious. We learn that leaders “generally fail to see crises coming,” for example (p. 19). Crises are virtually impossible to predict, they remind us—though it is often possible to “grasp the dynamics of a crisis once it is underway” (p. 19). Crises are also “rare” (p. 25), so there are few leaders experienced at handling them at any given moment. (This latter observation is not even a truism: If a hurricane can be considered a crisis, Gulf Coast public officials get yearly seminars—although some are better learners than others, as Katrina made clear.) We learn also that some leaders are naturally decisive, while others are not, and that leaders are not always in control of events (p. 51).

Chapter 4 presents an interesting discussion of how contentious “meaning making” has become in the midst of crises. The media now competes with public officials to define the meaning of crises even as they are happening, which may undermine the “permissive consensus” necessary to take effective action (p. 70). Much of this chapter is devoted to the difficult business of “framing” a crisis in one way or another, and we are reminded, once again, of how damaging the polarization of the media has become, and how difficult it is to govern when every event, from a terrorist attack to a storm, is “spun” on a daily basis. The authors wonder what the consequences for crisis control will be if “impression management really becomes the most important game in town” (p. 100). Whatever its shortcomings, this book is a timely warning about what happens when citizens believe that everything bad can be prevented, and that every misfortune is therefore the result of “deficient political choices” (p. 138) or grist for political scandal.

Scandal mongering flourishes in an atmosphere of public misunderstanding of what governments do, what they are capable of, and why they fail. In particular, the public is often deeply confused about the separation of powers and federalism, political realities unique to the United States, and the source of both strengths and weaknesses in the American regime—as 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina demonstrated very effectively. Therefore, no approach to public administration will prove helpful that does not take seriously the challenges posed by these two aspects of American politics. Students hunger for books that can help them make sense of their own government, leading them to a prudential understanding of what the government does well and what it does badly and why. Unfortunately, neither of these books is up to the challenge of this particular kind of political education.

**Mayors and Schools: Minority Voices and Democratic Tensions in Urban Education.** By Stefanie Chambers. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006. 240p. \$64.50 cloth, \$21.95 paper.

**Schools In: Federalism and the National Education Agenda.** By Paul Manna. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2006. 222p. \$26.95.  
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— Scott E. Robinson, *University of Texas at Dallas*

Interest in the politics of American cities and states has been steadily increasing in recent years, as scholars have rediscovered the importance of studying issues of governance at subnational levels. Recent research has illustrated that the American federal system is both more interconnected than many Washington-centric accounts would lead one to believe and more complicated insofar as the politics of states and local governments do not perfectly reflect national political processes. These two books represent efforts by emerging scholars to leverage the advantages of studying state and local politics in order to address major questions about political institutions in the United States and to make the case for greater incorporation of state and local elements into mainstream accounts of political change.

In *Mayors and Schools*, Stefanie Chambers addresses issues of minority empowerment and political conflict within the context of urban school reform. Using a comparative case study design, Chambers recounts the tumultuous politics of school reform in Chicago and Cleveland, with particular attention to the role of racial politics and centralization of authority in mayors’ offices. She argues that predominant accounts of school reform underemphasize the role of race, class, and state dynamics in the historical development of local education systems (p. 9). The book is an attempt to establish the importance of these three factors in understanding urban school reform.

Chambers finds contrasting reactions to the centralization of education policymaking in the mayors’ offices in Chicago and Cleveland. She argues that the different history of education reform in the two cities, as well as the different political strategies of the mayors’ centralizing authority, produced these different reactions. Chicago experimented with decentralization, site-based management, and community control in 1988, creating public expectations of broad participation in education policy. The reversal of this reform in the mid-1990s left many community members feeling alienated and abandoned, particularly the minority citizens of Chicago. The author focuses attention on the use of race as an organizing force in Chicago’s local elections, from the machine politics of Mayor Richard J. Daley (pp. 47–51) through the recent administration of Richard M. Daley (pp. 56–59). She presents convincing evidence that race played a significant role in the politics of education reform in Chicago.

Chambers finds a different historical path in Cleveland, but one that also supports the conclusion that race has played an important role in education reform. Cleveland experimented with decentralization, this time based on the efforts of a powerful mayor (pp. 70–72). The decentralization attempt was hampered, and eventually reversed, due largely to a series of fiscal crises in the public school system that a decentralized system was poorly adapted to solve (pp. 75–76). Throughout this period, the mayor sought to engage the community through a series of popular education summits (pp. 70–74). Race influenced this process through its consistent impact on the mayoral and bond elections (p. 82). The end result of the process was a centralized system, much like that in Chicago, but a broadly popular system that stood up to the scrutiny of a direct vote of the citizens in 2002 (pp. 85–86). Chambers argues that the principle source of variation between Cleveland and Chicago was the history of citizen engagement by Cleveland’s mayor.

These fascinating comparative histories of urban education reform are hampered by their lack of analysis of important processes happening outside the city limits. For example, the grant of control over the education system to the mayor of Cleveland came from the Ohio state legislature (p. 78). Chambers offers little discussion of how the local politics of Cleveland was, or was not, reflected in the state legislature. Acknowledgment of the connections between local and state politics would have enhanced her case studies.

In *School’s In*, Paul Manna engages the issue of connectivity in his study of national education reform and the influence of state politics on change in national policy. Manna builds a theory of “borrowing strength” (p. 5) to explain how policy entrepreneurs utilize the connections between state and federal institutions to bolster the position of their policy proposals. Policy entrepreneurs require two components to force their proposals onto policy agendas: justification and capabilities. A level of government (federal or state) will only pursue a policy option if it has the justification to act in a policy area and the capability to carry out the policy. Manna illustrates how policy entrepreneurs use the connections between state and federal institutions to borrow justifications or capabilities from each other. A policy option that lacks a justification at the federal level can borrow that justification from state-level actors through a policy proposal that borrows states’ interests in the plan. This borrowing can occur in either direction (federal borrowing state capacities or states borrowing national capacities, for example), thus defying simple top-down or bottom-up models of policy change.

Manna uses the development of federal education policy over the past half century to illustrate the process of borrowing strength. The episode to which he rightly pays the most attention is the recent No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (pp. 117–36). He notes that the federal government did not possess the capability to restructure public educa-

tion. While there was justification for federal education policymaking dating back to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, the federal government still had little structural capacity to influence educational practices in the various Kindergarten–12 campuses across the country. The only way to generate the support needed to pass the sweeping legislation was to borrow strength—in this case, capacity—from the state education institutions themselves. No Child Left Behind then relies on federal fiscal and regulatory capacities built over previous decades, while drawing on state education organizations to carry out key tasks like designing and implementing standardized testing. In what may be the most interesting part of the author’s account of federal education policy, he recounts how the state capacity in education was itself the product of borrowing strength from federal education initiatives in the past. The interactivity of state and federal capacity strongly supports his central claim that the evolution of policy change cannot be accounted for in simple top-down or bottom-up models. Instead, our understanding of policy change must incorporate explanations for how different levels of government rely on and reinforce each other as policy entrepreneurs shop for venues receptive to their arguments.

The chief limitation of *School’s In* is also one of its strengths. It is a short study that leaves many questions unanswered. What distinguishes successful attempts at borrowing strength from unsuccessful attempts? What induces political institutions to invest in borrowing strength, rather than in developing their own capacities? The book presents a coherent and appealing theory of interinstitutional dynamics, but only scratches the surface of the questions raised. The model begs for further development of the microdynamics of policy entrepreneurs that can explain the use of borrowing-strength strategies and the incorporation of interstate cooperation and state–local interactions (like that discussed in Chambers’s *Mayors and Schools*).

Together these books represent a promising trend. Both authors have looked to the states and localities and found political processes often ignored in the discipline’s focus on national-level politics. The survey of state and local politics represented in just these two volumes suggests that much of what we think to be true, based on our understanding of national-level politics, may be of limited use in understanding local and state politics. The compound nature of our constitution can only be ignored at the peril of policy researchers.

#### **After Brown: The Rise and Retreat of School**

**Desegregation.** By Charles T. Clotfelter. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006. 216p. \$55.00 cloth, \$17.95 paper. DOI: 10.1017/S1537592707070338

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Those who live or have lived in metropolitan areas that faced court-ordered desegregation of the schools in the