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Volunteer Organization of the Year
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suggests, the Lost Cause's days may be numbered. And with that, perhaps, there is common ground ahead."

This is an excellent book for those who wish to study the tumultuous periods of race relations in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, as well as those who seek to understand current political controversies and why Confederate monuments, and the veneration of that tragic period, plays such a prominent role in political conversation in these polarized and unprecedented times.

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Fall of Kentucky's Rock: Western Kentucky Democratic Politics From the New Deal. By George G. Humphreys. (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2022).

With the skill of a seasoned pundit, George G. Humphreys blends the flavors that make up the Jackson Purchase region. From the banks of the mighty rivers and the long rows of the tobacco patch to the depths of the coalfields, Humphreys' narrative reveals the complex heritage upon which the Gibraltar of Democracy was built.

A native of the Jackson Purchase, Humphreys' interest centers upon the turn of events in Kentucky politics occurring since the 1930s. Before retiring from his 20 + years career as staff director in the Oklahoma House of Representatives, Humphreys became interested in Kentucky politics. His new publication, *The Fall of Kentucky's Rock: Western Kentucky Democratic Politics From the New Deal*, focuses on how the often-ignored region of western Kentucky was a key player in statewide political affairs.

Western Kentucky has provided seven Democratic governors for Kentucky and a majority leader for the United States Senate who later served the nation as vice-president. These political feats earned the region the moniker, Gibraltar of Kentucky Democracy.

In describing the geographic and legislative landscapes, Humphreys wisely acknowledges the difficulty in defining the boundaries of "western" Kentucky. The land and abundant water were what drew people to this part of the state. The latter asset, specifically the rivers, were what kept them separated from the rest of the commonwealth. These early settlement people were

farmers and miners, busy raising their crops or digging for coal. They transported their products mostly to southern markets. Even with their isolation from others, they eagerly kept abreast of Kentucky politics as they knew their very lives depended upon what happened in Frankfort and Washington.

Humphreys' book provides an excellent cultural review of the western region, from its southern sympathies during the Civil War, followed by the brutality of reconstruction and the activities of the Night Riders, on to the Suffrage movement and both World Wars. He shares a thorough understanding of the social characteristics that defined the region – farming, coal mining, religion, slavery, education, women's work – each of which played a role in setting the political stage that gave the region its nickname.

Along with river and later rail developments, the advent of the telephone and municipal utilities were other milestones that shaped the region. Humphreys explains how local leaders across the area worked together to improve transportation. With these advancements, the western lands were more connected to other locales in Kentucky and across state lines. New jobs brought in laborers moving in from other locations. Moving people and goods has always been a priority as well as political hot buttons for western Kentucky.

In addition to those with personal political ambition, Humphreys acknowledges that the media also played a significant role in politics. The Democratic stronghold in the west was supported by several newspaper publishers who shunned elected positions even as they embraced their roles as Democratic devotees. Even with their influences, there were also strong Republican factions that held their ground for decades.

Humphreys explains how the advancements made in the west with investment and construction of public facilities such as Western State Hospital, the Kentucky State Penitentiary, and training schools for teachers, changed the region. His account also provides an often-overlooked aspect of western Kentucky history by providing details about the plight of Blacks as the state and the region moved from the days of Jim Crow into the Civil Rights era.

From there, the author sheds light on how the economy evolved after WW2 and the Korean War. An interesting read particularly as this was during the time the first and to date, the only, U.S. vice-president was from the Jackson Purchase. From the uranium-enrichment plant at Paducah drawing in laborer's from afar and manufacturing plants like Curlee and Merit clothing

factories, there were many jobs available for men and women all throughout the region. While many of the jobs offered low wages, politics had certainly played a mighty hand in terms of generating economic growth.

The book also covers the legislation around the integration of local schools in the Purchase with the ruling of *Brown v. Board of Education*. That difficult and controversial change was soon followed by more frustration and political maneuvering as each county struggled with school consolidation.

The region's cash crop of tobacco has always played a prominent role in the realm of politics as well as the production of coal. As no smoking signs popped up across the country and clean coal technology was being sought, western Kentucky farmers and miners worked with their legislators to protect these economic engines that had been their livelihood for generations. As the story moves into more recent history, Humphreys relays how the Gibraltar of Democracy eventually came to its demise. He sees it as a chain of events that began in 1994 when the Democratic losses experienced in the congressional races ended the party's uninterrupted control of western Kentucky.

In recent years, the Jackson Purchase has become a fairly dependable vote for the Grand Old Party. Even so, says Humphreys, that loyalty has yet to be as rewarded economically as in the days of the New Deal.

Political enthusiasts will appreciate the chronological approach the author uses in sharing the western region's political role as it played out in statewide politics. Perhaps even more importantly, followers of history will gain insight as to how western Kentucky influenced the region's economy through political decisions at both the state and national levels. Those who enjoy learning more about far western Kentucky will delight in Humphreys' well-researched cultural and social heritage of the Jackson Purchase region.

The Fall of Kentucky's Rock lays out the rich traditions and customs of a fervent voting populace that created a legacy rooted in partisan politics, and how that heritage evolved over time.

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