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Political Science

Handmaking America: A Back-to-Basics Pathway to a Revitalized American Democracy
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Counterpoint
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A bleak postrecession landscape has diverted attention from the possibilities inherent in progressivism. Not merely a simplistic manifesto but a clarion call for democratic engagement, Ivey's *Handmaking America* provides ample encouragement for progressives not to cede to the increased polarization and faction wars that have beset America's political landscape. In his own words, the book is about "what has gone wrong and what we must do." In it, he clearly documents the series of mishaps, muddled thinking, and think-tank-driven agenda-making that have led us to our current sorry state. Term limits, the electoral system, and lobbying are all tackled with vigor in a valiant quest to reinvigorate public awareness.

Ivey challenges us to consider what unites Americans as a people apart from geographic happenstance. What initiatives, beliefs, and that much-overused "V-word" (values in this instance) unite Americans of all political stripes? He feels strongly that most Americans still believe in America, and possess a willingness to work hard and take risks—and also appreciate a straight-talking desire not to take any situation as inevitable or unchangeable. Insights and explorations lead the reader to consider what is at the core of the "happiness" whose quest was considered so central by the Founding Fathers. What's more, apart from apple pie and the vague hope of a better future, what does (or should) the much-vaunted "good life" consist of? Ivey offers provocative thoughts and some interesting assertions on what today's consumers—and voters—are faced with. He laments the downgrading of our educational system to mere vocational preparation—after all, without well-developed minds and a broadly engaged consciousness that rises above simple formulae and simplistic sloganeering, how can we appreciate what choices we really have?

Ivey also considers the central roles of rapidly advancing technology, an all-pervasive media diet crammed full of celebutards and caviling commentators whose shrill and incessant ranting muffles any attempt at objective factual analysis or prioritizing of principles.

Debunking the notion that a purely hands-off free-market approach can solve all our woes, this is no pie-in-the sky rhetoric for a utopian future but a pragmatic and workable appeal. Ivey believes first and foremost that an awareness of precisely what has happened holds the key to unlocking popular interest, engagement, and control over the country's political, social, economic, and—dare we say it—spiritual future. Ivey is unafraid to tackle serious issues seriously and is a deft hand at painting the bigger picture with engaging bluster that also contains solid reasoning.

Seamus Mullarkey