



United We Fall: Ending America's Love Affair with the Political Center

Phil Neisser

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United We Fall argues that today's harmful levels of polarization in American politics can be ratcheted down only by giving up the twin notions that the center is the sweet spot for political efficiency and that all differences deserve equal weight in the democratic balance. The American people need instead to embrace a political credo of civic engagement, confrontation with open ears, and spirited debate. The commonplace United We Stand must be supplanted by the insight that democracy is strongest where it acknowledges and formalizes real division. But surely bipartisan rancor in America and extremist violence around the world are symptoms of too much disagreement?not too little? No, asserts the author: The root cause of political violence of all stripes is the failure of opposing camps to engage each other openly and persuasively on their genuine and irreconcilable differences.

In making the case for principled disagreement, *United We Fall* reviews the history of good and bad disagreement practices in American politics, analyzes our mass media through a pro-disagreement lens, and draws on studies of conformist group behavior to expose the manipulative dynamics of contemporary dialog initiatives. Neisser assesses best practices for conducting public debate at all civic levels on the most vexed issues in America today: terrorism, multiculturalism, religion in politics, social and family values, race, the media, education, and the environment.

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