

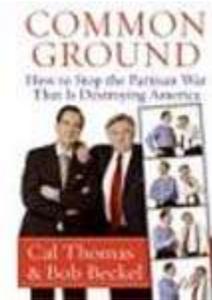
## Review of *Common Ground*

*Common Ground: How to Stop the Partisan War That is Destroying America*

by Cal Thomas and Bob Beckel

Reviewed by Shannon Roy, Continuing Education Coordinator

The natives are getting restless. More and more of them are saying, “We aren’t ciphers in red states and blue states. We are American citizens dealing with very big problems and we need help. We don’t care if you are Republicans or Democrats. We care about an effective federal government that can get things done.”



That trend, like all trends in American society, will show up on library bookshelves. It shows up to very good effect in *Common Ground: How to Stop the Partisan War That is Destroying America*. This book gets much of its credibility from the fact that it has co-authors. Cal Thomas is a conservative syndicated columnist. Bob Beckel is a liberal political analyst. These two men have tried to understand each other, modeling a skill that more of us should acquire. Together, they search for things that badly polarized politicians could work for, if they were even partially freed from a choking stranglehold.

Thomas and Beckel explain how the polarization in Washington became so extreme, building through multiple administrations that were both Democrat and Republican. They explain how those with extreme positions learned to mobilize, how the most flamboyant were tempted into extreme and uncivil rhetoric, often for fame and/or profit, and how the press found it rewarding to fan the flames of polarization.

A climate has gradually been created where even experienced statesmen believe that America is a divided nation. It has become so poisonous that genuine moderates cannot cross party lines without being punished by their own parties. At one point, both authors describe polarization as an extremely destructive addiction.

The reader is quite likely to reach the point of saying, “A plague on both your houses.” However, if we are honest, that is usually a step in the right direction.

The American people are going to have to bear major responsibility for fighting polarization, not because they created it, but because they are the only ones who *can* fight it. “...voters are going to have to tell their senators and representatives that they are “mad as hell and not going to take it anymore.” They will need to visibly support those who sincerely attempt to practice bipartisanship in a way that promotes the general welfare and the interests of their constituents.”

The authors admit that when people hold viewpoints that they consider to be moral imperatives, they

aren't likely to change their minds. Some issues will not be good candidates for common ground in the near future. Other things, such as health care, care for children, support for veterans, safe transportation and water planning are things that people of good will should be able to work on together.

Both conservative and liberal are too experienced to think that American politics will ever be peaceful. But they do want a return to a time "when bipartisanship was not a synonym for wishy-washiness, consensus made for good politics, and polarization was seen as bad manners."