

to encourage saving over borrowing, improving retirement savings plans, and establishing savings accounts for all children would be good steps toward regaining fiscal sanity.

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Importing Democracy: Ideas from Around the World to Reform and Revitalize American Politics and Government by Raymond A. Smith. Westport, CT, Praeger Publishers, 2010. 244 pp. \$44.95.

Raymond A. Smith hopes to initiate classroom conversation about the shortcomings of and possible improvements to the democratic performance of the American political system. To inspire such an inquiry, Smith asks whether a number of democracy-enhancing institutional changes that have been enacted in other countries could benefit U.S. politics. Smith also assesses these possible innovations according to their practicality and plausibility in an effort to inspire students' capacity to evaluate the institutional environments in which political changes occur. This is a highly welcome interdisciplinary endeavor that, if assigned, will not only expand students' understanding of the possibilities and variations of democratic institutions, but will also familiarize them with comparative methodologies that could aid them in further study within political science.

Smith divides his text into three main sections that cover parties and elections, Congress and the Presidency, and finally the courts and Constitution. Each section is animated by the question: how might the democratic performance of U.S. institutions be improved if they adopted innovations from other countries? For example, in the first section, Smith discusses reforms such as adopting proportional representation, abolishing the electoral college, and introducing compulsory voting. In other sections, he examines the possibility and plausibility of innovations such as adopting nonpartisan formation of electoral districts and streamlining the process of initiating a constitutional convention.

All of the individual inquiries are followed by a brief analysis section where they are given a five-point score on the criteria of desirability, practicability, and possibility. Smith assesses according to whether the innovations enhance Smith's understanding of democracy. He judges practicability as "the difficulty of achieving a goal given the existing constraints of American politics" and possibility in terms of how likely actors are to adopt the change and "how possible it would be to build public awareness of the issues and generate sustained public pressure for the change" (xvii).

The assessment of these individual innovations constitutes an important part of this book. Smith places such emphasis upon it that he concludes by ranking all of the innovations by comparing their cumulative scores. The book would be useful in itself if it simply presented the critiques of American institutions and the discussions of other countries, but the rankings add a further pedagogical layer that encourages students to assess the value and plausibility of these innovations. These evaluations, presented by Smith with his provocative rankings, encourage students to take positions and make choices, valuable exercises for their roles as citizens and scholars.

Of course, not all will agree with Smith's specific rankings. A larger question raised by the book remains Smith's choice of cases. While the individual innovations address real deficits in the practice of American democracy, some of the individual examples seem inappropriate in comparative terms for application to the United States. For example, chapter 19 asks whether the United States should add social and economic protections to its Constitution as was recently done in South Africa. While this innovation might be normatively desirable, the wildly different social contexts and histories of comparisons such as the United States and South Africa require a longer discussion than the format of this book allows.

But because the book is meant as a text that will inspire discussion, a lack of thorough analysis concerning some of the questions it raises does not render the book useless. In fact, provocative inquiry into the possibilities of institutional innovation constitutes the substance of the best classroom discussions, and this book will act as an important tool in inspiring such discussion.

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“At This Defining Moment”: Barack Obama's Presidential Candidacy and the New Politics of Race by Enid Logan. New York, New York University Press, 2011. 229 pp. \$23.00.

There is not a great deal of literature on presidential campaigns of black candidates and, of course, none on successful black candidates until the election of Barack Obama. This absence has forced political scientists to turn to the campaigns and elections of black mayors as a reference point. The first generation of black mayors, beginning in 1967, typically ran “civil rights”-oriented or “insurgent” campaigns in cities that were close to or majority black. The next generation of black mayors, generally seen as beginning in 1989, often ran “deracialized” campaigns, avoiding issues that might be labeled racial in cities where blacks were a relatively small percent of the population. In the