pages provide a manifesto for action, complete with charts and graphs, timetables and ten-point plans.

Instead what I offer is something more modest: personal reflections on those values and ideals that have led me to public life, some thoughts on the ways that our current political discourse unnecessarily divides us, and my own best assessmentâ€”based on my experience as a senator and lawyer, husband and father, Christian and skepticâ€”of the ways we can ground our politics in the notion of a common good.

Let me be more specific about how the book is organized. Chapter One takes stock of our recent political history and tries to explain some of the sources for todayâ€™s bitter partisanship. In Chapter Two, I discuss those common values that might serve as the foundation for a new political consensus. Chapter Three explores the Constitution not just as a source of individual rights, but also as a means of organizing a democratic conversation around our collective future. In Chapter Four, I try to convey some of the institutional forcesâ€”money, media, interest groups, and the legislative processâ€”that stifle even the best-intentioned politician. And in the remaining five chapters, I suggest how we might move beyond our divisions to effectively tackle concrete problems: the growing economic insecurity of many American families, the racial and religious tensions within the body politic, and the transnational threatsâ€”from terrorism to pandemicâ€”that gather beyond our shores.

I suspect that some readers may find my presentation of these issues to be insufficiently balanced. To this accusation, I stand guilty as charged. I am a Democrat, after all; my views on most topics correspond more closely to the editorial pages of the New York Times than those of the Wall Street Journal. I am angry about policies that consistently favor the wealthy and powerful over average Americans, and insist that government has an important role in opening up opportunity to all. I believe in evolution, scientific inquiry, and global warming; I believe in free speech, whether politically correct or politically incorrect, and I am suspicious of using government to impose anybodyâ€™s religious beliefsâ€”including my ownâ€”on nonbelievers. Furthermore, I am a prisoner of my own biography: I canâ€™t help but view the American experience through the lens of a black man of mixed heritage, forever mindful of how generations of people who looked like me were subjugated and stigmatized, and the subtle and not so subtle ways that race and class continue to shape our lives.

But that is not all that I am. I also think my party can be smug, detached, and dogmatic at times. I believe in the free market, competition, and entrepreneurship, and think no small number of government programs donâ€™t work as advertised. I wish the country had

fewer lawyers and more engineers. I think America has more often been a force for good than for ill in the world; I carry few illusions about our enemies, and revere the courage and competence of our military. I reject a politics that is based solely on racial identity, gender identity, sexual orientation, or victimhood generally. I think much of what ails the inner city involves a breakdown in culture that will not be cured by money alone, and that our values and spiritual life matter at least as much as our GDP. Undoubtedly, some of these views will get me in trouble. I am new enough on the national political scene that I serve as a blank screen on which people of vastly different political stripes project their own views. As such, I am bound to disappoint some, if not all, of them. Which perhaps indicates a second, more intimate theme to this bookâ€”