



America, the Owner's Manual: You Can Fight City Hall-and Win

Bob Graham, Chris Hand

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In 2016, Americans fed up with the political process vented that frustration with their votes. Republicans nominated for president a wealthy businessman and former reality show host best known on the campaign trail for his sharp rhetoric against immigration and foreign trade. Democrats nearly selected a self-described socialist who ran on a populist platform against the influence of big money in politics.

While it is not surprising that Americans would channel their frustrations into votes for contenders who pledge to end business as usual, the truth is that we don't have to pin our hopes for greater participation on any one candidate. All of us have a say—if we learn, master and practice the skills of effective citizenship.

One of the biggest roadblocks to participation in democracy is the perception that privileged citizens and special interests command the levers of power and that everyday Americans can't fight City Hall. That perception is undoubtedly why a 2015 Pew Charitable Trusts survey found that 74 percent of those Americans surveyed believed that most elected officials didn't care what people like them thought.

Graham and Hand intend to change that conventional wisdom by showing citizens how to flex their citizenship muscles. They describe effective citizenship skills and provide tips from civic experts. Even more importantly, they offer numerous examples of everyday Americans who have used their skills to make democracy respond. The reader will see themselves in these examples of citizens who chose to be victorious participants rather than tranquil spectators in the arena of democracy. By the end of the book, you will have new confidence that citizen participation is the lifeblood of America -- and will be ready to make governments work for you, not the other way around.

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