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America is the world leader in innovation, but many of the innovative ideas that are hatched in American start-ups, labs, and companies end up going abroad to reach commercial scale. Apple, the superstar of innovation, locates its production in China (yet still reaps most of its profits in the United States). When innovation does not find the capital, skills, and expertise it needs to come to market in the United States, what does it mean for economic growth and job creation? Inspired by the MIT Made in America project of the 1980s, Making in America brings experts from across MIT to focus on a critical problem for the country.

MIT scientists, engineers, social scientists, and management experts visited more than 250 firms in the United States, Germany, and China. In companies across America--from big defense contractors to small machine shops and new technology startups--these experts tried to learn how we can rebuild the industrial landscape to sustain an innovative economy. At each stop, they asked this basic question: "When you have a new idea, how do you get it into the market?" They found gaping holes and missing pieces in the industrial ecosystem. Critical strengths and capabilities that once helped bring new enterprises to life have disappeared: production capacity; small and medium-size suppliers; spillovers of research, training, and new technology from big corporations. (Production in the Innovation Economy, also published by the MIT Press in 2013, describes this research.)

Even in an Internet-connected world, proximity to innovation and users matters for industry. Making in America describes ways to strengthen this connection, including public-private collaborations, new government-initiated manufacturing innovation institutes, and industry-community college projects. If we can learn from these ongoing experiments in linking innovation to production, American manufacturing could have a renaissance.