

Favorable National Environment of American Democracy Has Disappeared

Editor's Note: This is the third article in an eight-part series on American Democracy written by JSU Prof. Glen Browder in conjunction with his public lecture series, "Is America Dying?" Today's column highlights a portion of lecture number three, which is scheduled for Wednesday, September 29 in Room 101 Merrill Bldg., entitled "Political Observation Number One: The Favorable National Environment of American Democracy Has Disappeared."

By Dr. Glen Browder
Jacksonville State University

In the preceding lecture, I laid the theoretic foundation -- systems analysis for my "dying" proposition. Over the next few lectures, I will present four central political observations (based on my own direct examination and assessments by others) about the "why" and "how" of dysfunctioning America.

My thesis of American democracy begins with the truism that a political regime reflects, to a great extent, the environment within which it operates. More pertinent to our discussion, American democracy--as we have known it for most of our national history--has reflected the favorable conditions under which our country was founded and developed; and the erosion of these conditions in recent decades helps explain our systemic degeneration.

It is indisputable that American democracy was established and prospered in a setting of propitiousness unknown to any previous society. Their course was tough, but early Americans encountered a world of unlimited resources; most importantly, they had room to breathe, to grow, to experiment, to exercise freedom, individualism, and independence.

As that natural environment waned, America turned to a political environment, toward public authority, to protect and continue the benefits of its progressive experiment. Americans moved from declining geographic conditions to a propitious public forum. The depleted wilderness gave to a governmental cornucopia of progressive development.

(More)

Thus we might say that we have experienced two timely "frontiers" central to our Great Experiment--the original existence of an open natural environment and the subsequent popular expansion of public authority. These natural and political frontiers--working together as a continuous, favorable national environment--began and sustained a "democratic boom" throughout our national history.

Over time, however, this "democratic boom" has busted. The favorable national environment of American democracy has disappeared; and, partly as a result, broad, sweeping, unsettling developments are buffeting our country and democratic process.

Dr. Glen Browder is Professor and Eminent Scholar in American Democracy at Jacksonville State University. For information about his free public lectures, call 256-782-5828.