“THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY”

(Is America Dying?)

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“THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY” (OUTLINE)

PREFACE: BROWDER’S THESIS OF AMERICAN HISTORY.

I. THE CONTEMPORARY DISTEMPER OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY.
(A rhetorical inquiry: “Is America Dying?”)

A. America is developing a fundamental civic illness.

B. It is time for a Tocquevillian checkup of American democracy.

II. THE PASSIONATE PERSPECTIVE OF A VETERAN POLITICIAN, POLITICAL SCIENTIST, AND “AMERICAN DREAMER”.
(How dare I ask such an outrageous question about America?)

A. The discomforting venture of my rhetorical inquiry

B. My political career.

C. My academic background.

D. My “American dream”.

III. A SYSTEMS THEORY OF DYSFUNCTIONAL AMERICA.
(What do I mean by “America”, “American Democracy”, and “Dying”?)

A. “America”: A national experiment in democratic ideals.

B. “American Democracy”: The magical mix of people, politics, and government through which we pursue democratic ideals.

C. “Dying”: American democracy no longer works the way it used to, and we seem to be tiring of the Great Experiment itself.

D. A systemic model of dying America.

IV. POLITICAL OBSERVATIONS OF DYSFUNCTIONING AMERICA.
(Why and how is America dying?)

A. Proposition Number One:
“The favorable national environment of American democracy has disappeared.”

1. Our original, open natural environment closed long ago.

2. The popular expansion of public authority has reached its limits.

3. America's historic democratic boom has busted.

B. Proposition Number Two:
"We have entrapped American democracy within a philosophical civil war."

1. We are experiencing a national struggle to define America's cultural values.

2. Ultimate democratization is threatening our traditional system of limited, representative governance.

3. This is a very different and ominous challenge to American democracy.

C. Proposition Number Three:
"American democracy no longer works the way it has in the past."

1. The American people are losing their civic spirit.

2. The political organs of American democracy are malfunctioning.

3. American government is headed toward stroke, paralysis, or something worse.

D. Proposition Observation Number Four:
"America seems to be tiring of the Great Experiment."

1. Increasingly and incrementally, we are retreating from our national experiment in democratic ideals.

2. Demographic, economic, and technological trends are exacerbating our civic decline.

3. The magical mix is losing its magic, and America may be dying!

V. THE CONTEMPORARY REALITIES OF OUR GREAT EXPERIMENT.
(Is America really going to die?—and some alternative scenarios for our uncertain future.)

A. America's Great Experiment may simply have run its course.

B. Alternative Scenario No. 1: Dissolution ("Death of America")?

C. Alternative Scenario No. 2: Deformation ("Amerika" or "USSA")?

D. Alternative Scenario No. 3: Restoration ("New America")?

VI. "NEW AMERICA" IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM?
(How can we restore America?)

A. A Speculative Projection: "The American Federation".

1. What will "The American Federation" look like?

2. How will "The American Federation" work?

3. Is "The American Federation" the best that we can do?

B. An Alternative Challenge: "American Democratic Renaissance".

1. We must rediscover—theoretically, politically, and personally—the essence of our American nation.

2. We also must rework our Great Experiment for today's world.

3. We then can proceed with comprehensive restoration of American democracy.

C. The Future of American Democracy?

PREFACE

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BROWDER'S THESIS OF AMERICAN HISTORY.

The original existence of an open natural environment and the subsequent popular expansion of public authority, working together, have been central to American history. The open frontier of the New World established an indelible character of freedom, individualism, and independence; and the popular growth of public authority created a supportive political environment for equality, justice, and security in our young nation. These central forces have shaped America's Great Experiment—our progressive pursuit of democratic ideals through limited, representative governance—for two centuries. Combined, they provided a favorable national environment for American democracy—our magical mix of people, politics, and government—to pursue progressive ideals (such as freedom and equality) while balancing the somewhat contradictory strains of those ideals for a diverse society. However, inevitable limitations of that natural environment and public authority—and growing philosophical tensions over democratic ideals, cultural values, and principles of governance—have stalled our progressive march. With the two central forces of American democracy—a favorable natural environment and expanding government—gone awry, an increasingly divergent populace seems to be retreating from the national experiment in democratic ideals. Our civic mix of people, politics, and government no longer works the way it has in the past; and we appear to be tiring of the experiment itself. In short, America may be dying! It is time for a serious national dialogue about America—including some alternative scenarios and the possibility of a restored "New America"—for our future.

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LECTURE # l: "THE CONTEMPORARY DISTEMPER OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY."

(A rhetorical inquiry: "Is America Dying?")

From most of what we read and hear and see, these are not the best of times for American democracy

Despite America's obvious prosperity and power, tell-tale signs of democratic distemper have been charted as we enter the New Millennium: The national environment of American democracy is in serious decline. The American people are losing their civic spirit. The political organs of American democracy are malfunctioning. American government is headed toward stroke, paralysis, or something worse. Most importantly, we seem to be tiring of our national democratic experiment.

Two centuries of irresistible democratic nationalization now clash head-on with the equally powerful forces of democratic decentrifugation; and we may be witnessing the demise of an America that so proudly proclaims itself "one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all".

How do we make sense of such unhealthy civic disarray? How do we deal with the daunting realities of a changing America? How do we keep from becoming "the Disunited States of America—one nation...ungovernable"?

The possible demise of America is an unpleasant thought; but that is my compelling "what if" question after three decades in public life—as a political scientist and public official—including most of the past decade as a Member of the United States Congress. I have come to the disturbing suspicion that, as we enter the Twenty-First Century, we are drifting perilously away from the Great Experiment of American history. American democracy no longer works the way that it is supposed to work; and our grand and glorious America seems to be disintegrating, grinding to a halt—sometimes noisily, sometimes unconsciously, and often by popular decree!

Therefore, it is worthwhile to ask some serious questions, despite the pain of their articulation, about the civic health of the American system. In this lecture series on "The Future of American Democracy", I am posing the issue as an outrageous rhetorical question—"Is America Dying?"—to help encourage a national dialogue about the civic health of America. Without a serious national discussion now, the dysfunctions of American democracy will only worsen; perhaps stating our condition as a terminal affliction will enhance our willingness and ability to engage in this dialogue.

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<u>AMERICA IS DEVELOPING A FUNDAMENTAL CIVIC ILLNESS</u>.

Americans historically have subscribed to an American dream, the notion that life will always get better...that somewhere, over the rainbow...tomorrow, tomorrow, just a day away...anybody can become rich, and happy, and maybe even President of the United States. Waves of immigrants and settlers pursued their destinies here, despite hardship and possible death, with dreams of unlimited opportunity.

James Truslow Adams defined America (ironically during the Great Depression) as "a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man, with opportunity for each according to his ability or achievement" (<u>The Epic of America</u>, 1931). I define America more analytically as an inspired but uncertain civic exercise—"a national experiment in democratic ideals"—and I hitch our national dream inextricably to the political process of American democracy. Despite its fuzzy and varying articulation, America has enjoyed unprecedented greatness by all standards; and the American dream, ably assisted by the seemingly endless capacities of American democracy, has sustained generation after generation over the years.

During the past few years, however, there has been a rush of commentary about America's deteriorating civic condition at the close of the Twentieth Century. Academicians and journalists have been articulating bluntly what many inside politicians suspect but can not say publicly—that America is developing a fundamental civic illness of body and spirit. We seem afflicted with serious democratic distemper, coughing and wheezing and limping through the motions of disoriented democracy. Our historic national experiment in democratic ideals—which has made America great for two centuries—no longer works the way it used to work, procedurally or substantively; and we seem to be losing our commitment to that experiment.

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How can I say such things when the American economy is booming and the United States stands alone as the world's reigning super power?

The answer is that America means more than economic prosperity and international power. History abounds with regimes and empires possessing material riches and military might, but America is special because here also are found ever-expanding freedom and equality. We have indeed been a wealthy and strong nation, and those qualities have facilitated the workings of our civil society, politics, and government. But the essential, definitive character of America has been its national experiment in democratic ideals—this is a place where, first and foremost, we have enjoyed the progressive political blessings of democracy for many generations.

All of us—rich and not-so-rich—cheer our good fortune of the 1990s; however, it would be a major mistake for temporarily giddy America to postpone or cancel serious debate about

basic political weaknesses in American democracy—the cumulating impact of our deteriorated national environment, the divisive debate about values and governance, and the evolving conflict between freedom and equality.

Sooner or later (and more likely sooner) in the new century, America will encounter economic downturn from the high times of the l990s; and inevitably we will find ourselves enmeshed in serious military conflict. Eventually, then, domestic and international crises will test our national character and our Great Experiment. Issues of liberty, equality, and justice will assume more than rhetorical interest; and questions of cultural values and governance may prove systemically disruptive. In other words, the door of opportunity is open, and we would do a terrible disservice to ourselves and to future generations if we were to allow our current good fortune to keep us from addressing, now, the essential challenges of contemporary American democracy.

The central truth, then, is that the historic essence of America is democratic ideals—freedom, equality, and justice—not economic prosperity or military power. A correlative truth is that fundamental faults underlie the surface calm of our national experiment in democratic ideals; and these faults will only worsen without corrective treatment.

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I will let some book titles of this century's closing decade make my point about America's civic debility: Freedom in Chains: The Rise of the State and the Demise of the Citizen (l999); The End of Democracy II: A Crisis of Legitimacy (l999); The Corruption of American Politics: What Went Wrong and Why (l999); The Disuniting of America (1998); Disunited States (1997); Civil War II: The Coming Breakup of America (l997); The Decline of Representative Democracy (1997); The End of Democracy? (l997); The Age of Extremism: The Enemies of Compromise in American Politics, Culture, and Race Relations (1997); Why People Hate Government (l997); The Triumph of Meanness: America's War Against Its Better Self (1997); Poison Politics: Are Negative Campaigns Destroying Democracy? (l997); The Death of Common Sense: How Law Is Suffocating America (l996); The Angry American: How Voter Rage Is Changing the Nation (1996); Americans No More: The Death of Citizenship (1996); The System: The American Way of Politics at the Breaking Point (1996); The Coming Race War in America: A Wakeup Call (1996); The Frozen Republic: How the Constitution Is Paralyzing Democracy (1996); Breaking the News: How the Media Undermine American Democracy (1996); The Twilight of Democracy (1995); Democracy On Trial (1995); Revolt of the Elites: And the Betrayal of Democracy (1995); Lost Rights: The Destruction of American Liberty (l995); Demosclerosis: The Silent Killer of American Government (1994); America: What Went Wrong? (1992); and The Democracy Trap (1991).

America's newspapers and periodicals have been equally gloomy: "The Can't Do Government"; "The End of Government"; "Is Government Dead?"; "Americans Losing Trust in Each Other and Institutions"; "Is Democracy Losing its Romance?"; "Loss of Faith: As Cynicism Becomes an Industry, Distrust of Washington Grows"; "Fading American Dream Haunts WWII Generation"; "America: Who Stole the Dream?"; "Does America Have a Future?"

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Of course, anybody can say or write anything—and will. Political prognosticators throughout time have warned that the sky is falling. But, obviously, there is something happening here at the turn of the century that is different and troubling; and we need to pay attention.

The important question is whether our current problems represent a natural process of acceptable change or a serious threat to America. Are we simply experiencing the necessary molting of democratic regeneration? Are we entering middle-aged democratic malaise? Or is America dying?

Seasoned analysts Haynes Johnson and David Broder—who have documented America's journey up-close, hands-on, and optimistically for several decades—express our all-too-common fear about the seriousness of our civic affliction in The System: The American Way of Politics at the Breaking Point (l996). After a year-long study of the Clinton Administration's healthcare debacle, they write:

> "The failure of The System on health care reform might not loom so large if other great challenges facing the society were being met. They are not. Personal safety, economic opportunity, international peace, and health care are the four great security questions by which the American people judge the quality of their lives. On all but one of these, international peace, the last quarter of the twentieth century has witnessed the failure of The System to meet the legitimate expectations of the people it is supposed to be serving (p. 604)...Founders of The System, as we have noted several times, made it difficult for major changes to occur. But they surely did not foresee the self-destructiveness and distrust that now hobble American government and politics (p. 638)...at no point, we believe, has the cumulative assault on the idea of responsible government been so destructive of the very faith in the democratic system as now. A thoroughly cynical society, deeply distrustful of its institutions, leaders and the reliability of information it receives, is a society in peril of breaking apart." (p. 639)

University of Chicago ethics professor Jean Bethke Elshtain, in her anxious essay Democracy On Trial (l995), expresses an increasing nervousness among scholars about the ultimate outcome of our civic debilitation. Her concern is that the problem goes beyond the failure of institutional politics; and she questions whether American democracy can rise to the challenge:

> "In America today, fearful people rush to arm themselves, believing safety to be a matter of aggressive self-help. Angry people want all the politicians to be kicked out of office, but they believe new ones will be no better. Anxious people fear that their neighbors' children may get some unfair advantage over their own.

Despairing people destroy their own lives and lives of those around them. Careless people ignore their children and then blast the teachers and social workers who must tend to the mess they have made, screaming all the while that folks ought to 'mind their own business.' Many human ills cannot be cured of course. All human lives are lived on the edge of quiet desperation. We must all be rescued from time to time from fear and sorrow. But I read the palpable despair and cynicism and violence as dark signs of the times, as warnings that democracy may not be up to the task of satisfying the yearnings it unleashes for freedom and fairness and
equality." (pp. 20-2l)

America seems to be in serious trouble as we begin the Twenty-First Century!

....

IT IS TIME FOR A TOCQUEVILLIAN CHECKUP OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY.

Thus it is time, as we begin the New Millennium, for a serious national dialogue about America—and it is time for a full checkup of American democracy. We need to pay attention, not only to the dark signs of our time, but also to the nature, the essence, the cause, and the cure for our civic illness. We must engage in a broad, constructive discussion about our past, our present, and how we can restore our democratic health. In sum, we now must attempt to make sense—normatively and comprehensively—of our democratic distemper.

Our examination of America must be guided by more than academic curiosity, by more than pride, and by more than cynicism. We would be wise to follow the lead of Alexis de Tocqueville, a young Frenchman who came to America early in our country's history—during the l830s—in search of the future of democracy:

"I confess that ... I sought there the image of democracy itself, with its inclinations, its character, its prejudices, and its passions, in order to learn what we have to fear or to hope from its progress."

(Democracy in America)

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EDITORIAL NOTE:

When I first envisioned this series of lectures, I pledged to myself that I would not, under any circumstances, invoke Alexis de Tocqueville and Democracy in America (1835). The plain truth is that Tocqueville and Democracy have become trite. The Frenchman's work has been quoted

and cited to numbing excess, and it has come to mean anything and everything. Democracy is exhaustive, vague, and inconsistent in general (for example its discussions of equality and democracy), and wrong in some particulars (for example, its prediction of the declining future of centralized government). However, over the course of time and dealing with the travails of America, I have come to the realization that Tocqueville and Democracy are essential. The reality is that Democracy is the benchmark discussion of American democracy. Its historic timing (capturing the character of upstart America, a half-century into its development, for a waiting and watching world) and methodology (a comprehensive, empirical, and geographical tour of the young nation) established it as the basic source for all following commentary. But most important is the power of Tocqueville's message. For all its weaknesses, Democracy in America is a strong and original explanation of the nature and future of America's Great Experiment. So I swallowed my "trite" objections—and, in retrospect, I'm glad I did so.

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Learning what we have to fear or hope from today's America means more than simply complaining about our problems. We have had enough whining from disgruntled citizens, politicians, and the media. I am reminded of a conversation with an older gentleman a few years ago when I visited Ross Perot's national convention in Dallas. As a long-time reform analyst and politician, I wanted to find out what United We Stand stood for. "Why are you here?" I queried as many "Perotistas" as I could find at the convention center and in the hotels and streets. My favorite conventioneer laughed and said, "I'm here to participate in our great American national past-time, and it's not baseball, sex, or even politics. It's bitching!"

Rather than just fussing about America, I want to help develop a coherent "big picture" of what's troubling us; and I want to frame that big picture within analysis that is theoretically and practically sound. I will try to incorporate classic interpretations of American history and my own ideas into a broad, fairly original thesis of American democracy. I will try to sort out the clatter and clutter of contemporary public discourse, to pull together the confusing deluge of research, commentary, and daily news reports about the problems of American democracy. More importantly, I want to offer some constructive projections about where we are heading and how we might restore America.

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Admittedly, there are other political scientists of greater academic standing who could provide theoretical analysis of the American system; and there are other politicians with greater prominence who might share interesting real-world experiences. However, I bring to this discussion a unique and especially pertinent combination of theoretical, political, and personal experience. I bring the passionate perspective of a veteran political scientist, politician, and "American Dreamer".

While my background as a U.S. Congressman and political science professor may not qualify me to dictate national policy, it certainly has broadened my perspective, enriched

my insight, and spurred my interest in offering this assessment of American democracy. Just as importantly, I am living the American dream—and I have strong emotional commitment to American democracy. This inquiry, then, is a personal as well as professional endeavor.

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My plan is ambitiously similar to Tocqueville's inquiry of almost two centuries ago—exploring our national democratic experiment boldly and comprehensively, with a combination of approaches and methodologies, and with broad political and literary license, "in order to learn what we have to fear or hope from its progress." My idea is to subject America to a Tocquevillian checkup—a normative and empirical examination of America's civic condition during these critical, volatile, transitional times. I have not retraced Tocqueville's geographic journey, but I have lived, worked, and taught American democracy for several decades on the East Coast, West Coast, and Gulf Coast. Furthermore, for the past few years I have vigorously re-examined America abroad, in structured sessions with academicians, public officials, and military leaders throughout Europe, Asia, Africa, and South America. All in all, I have studied and experienced first hand—academically, politically, and personally—America's inclinations, its character, its prejudices, and its passions.

"The Future of American Democracy" is a brash, unsettling, but constructive examination of our historic national experiment in democratic ideals. My examination will pose a provocative question to the American people as we face the New Millennium:

> **"Can our nation—a people of growing cultural diversity, with increasingly divergent ideals, values, and principles of governance, in an environment of constricted political blessings and benefits—continue our collective pursuit of freedom, equality, and justice within the traditional framework of limited, representative government?"**

I will attempt to address this unpleasant question about America's future with my own theoretical-political-personal analysis of contemporary American democracy. I do not claim the neutrality or methodology or thoroughness of scientific research; my analysis—while based on substantial study and experience—is more normative and provocative. My contention is that our end-of-century troubles constitute a fundamental civic illness; and my hope is that examining America rhetorically, as a dying entity, will help us figure out how to restore the Great Experiment of American democracy in the coming century.

Before beginning my examination, however, it is important to make a couple of things very clear here at the outset. Initially, I want to state that my definition of America as "a national experiment in democratic ideals" does not represent any policy agenda other than my commitment to America's historic Great Experiment as an ingenuous accommodation of democratic dream with democratic reality. Also, I want to emphasize that my "dying" terminology is not based on the soap opera drama—presidential impeachment, partisan bickering, institutional gridlock, budgetary fights, public scandal, personal failings, morality

debates, political incivility, or other such media preoccupations—of contemporary American politics. I plan to sprinkle policy, political, and personal commentary throughout the following pages, but our national dialogue must focus primarily and fixedly on more basic, fundamental, structural developments—unhealthy systemic changes—in American democracy.

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As the sub-title of this lecture series suggests, I am treating America's democratic distemper as a fundamental—perhaps fatal—civic illness. Thus, the following discussion will proceed as a physiological analysis, with systemic theory, clinical observations, alternative prognoses, and curative recommendations.

The general objective of my Tocquevillian checkup is to determine the present and future health of our national experiment in democratic ideals. How healthy—or how sick—is America? Is American democracy working for America? Does American democracy still produce—as it has in the past—blessings and benefits of sufficient nature to sustain public support for our collective experiment? Can American democracy continue its historic "magical mix" indefinitely into the future? Is there anything that can be done to strengthen American democracy and America in the New Millennium? The test of this Tocquevillian checkup, of course, will be the validity of my analysis and its contribution to our national dialogue.

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I want to interject here a clear qualifying footnote to my blunt language about "dying" America. Speaking personally, politically, and theoretically, I do not really believe that America is going to die! Let me repeat that statement—I do not really believe that America is going to die! My question is rhetorical. There is no serious question about the survival of America—the real mystery is "What kind of America will survive?" My challenge is for us to think seriously and critically about who we are, where we came from, and where we are going. My dying analogy in actuality is an attempt to strengthen America's Great Experiment in democratic ideals; I hope that the audience will leave this discussion with a healthier appreciation for America and American democracy.

This rhetorical challenge is important and timely because the entire world is now experiencing a revolutionary movement—the massive, irresistible force of democratization—similar in its historic implications to the sweeping egalitarianism of Tocqueville's time. Virtually no one anticipated the changes wrought during the l990s; and it would be ridiculous to think that these transitions are over. The contemporary democracy movement is a development of indefinable and unpredictable nature that represents volatile possibilities for our American republic.

There's no clearer statement of the monumental issue facing the American people—and the central question posed in this lecture series—than the eerily contemporaneous and final words of Democracy in America (l835):

"The nations of our time cannot prevent the conditions of men from becoming equal; but it depends upon themselves whether the principle of equality is to lead them to servitude or freedom, to knowledge or barbarism, to prosperity or wretchedness." (Volume II, p. 352)

We clearly are undergoing a democratic metamorphosis that, for better or worse, is reshaping our nation and world history. It is time to address the future of America.

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In the following lectures, I plan to assess the civic health of America as an ailing organic system subject to diagnostic analysis and treatment.

In Lecture #2, I will define America as "a national experiment in democratic ideals" and propose that we may have pushed our experiment to its limits. I will explain that American democracy—"a magical mix of people, politics, and government that allows us to pursue democratic ideals"—is not working the way that it is supposed to work (or the way that it has worked for the past two centuries); and, as a result, we seem to be giving up on the Great Experiment itself. Systems theory will provide the general framework for a more structured examination of declining American democracy, thereby laying a clear analytic foundation for the rest of this series.

Lectures #3, 4, 5, and 6 will present several political propositions—the possible "whys" and "hows"—of struggling America as follow-up to the preceding systems theory. These observations—based on my own experience and expertise and the scholarship of many others—deal with our deteriorated national environment, our philosophical civil war, our dysfunctioning people, politics, and government, and our declining commitment to the Great Experiment.

Lecture #7 will raise the question of whether America is really going to die and speculate about some of the wild things—such as "the United State of Amerika" (the nazification of our nation), "the Union of Socialist States of America" (the triumph of left-wing sentiments), or maybe even "death" (dissolution of America)—that might occur if we continue to push our Great Experiment beyond its limits.

In Lecture #8, I will suggest how we might begin restoring America in the New Millennium.

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EDITORIAL NOTE:

The following material on the lecturer's background is available to the public and assigned reading for enrolled students at the JSU library; there is no formal public lecture related to this material.

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"THE PASSIONATE PERSPECTIVE OF A VETERAN POLITICAL SCIENTIST, POLITICIAN, AND 'AMERICAN DREAMER'."

(How dare I ask such an outrageous question about America?)

THE DISCOMFORTING VENTURE OF MY RHETORICAL INQUIRY.

Speculating about the "dying " of America is a personally discomforting venture. It seems almost unpatriotic to raise such a chilling idea amid the comfortable warmth of post-cold war democratic celebration (and a frenzy of stock market euphoria). My associates in the political world and academic community often react with incredulity and indignation when I first bring up my rhetorical inquiry.

I can appreciate their reaction to the notion that American may be dying. Legions of loonies, morality mongers, and partisan hacks regularly predict national doom; and such off-base attacks constrain productive discussion; they keep us from making sense of things, identifying what's wrong, sorting out basic problems from what is symptomatic, trivial, or just objectionable. Thus, only after many years of experience and reflection do I offer my rhetorical inquiry for public discussion.

Once I explain what I mean by the terms "America", "American democracy", and "dying"—then my colleagues usually and eagerly enter into lengthy philosophical discussions.

Many disagree strongly with my ominous, rhetorical pronouncement about America's possible demise; but many more acknowledge similar discomforts about the health of contemporary American democracy. And most acknowledge the need for a national discussion about the uncertain future of our national democratic experiment.

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"The Future of American Democracy" is my purposefully entwined theoretical, political, and personal analysis of troubled America. Therefore, I want to introduce myself—political scientist, public official, and "American Dreamer"—as prelude to that analysis.

First, I should clarify my current situation. I have just begun an interesting assignment as Eminent Scholar in American Democracy at Jacksonville State University (August, l999-present). This Eminent Scholar appointment is a unique opportunity to combine teaching, research, and public service in the area where I worked as a political scientist before entering Congress. My specific assignment is translating my academic and political experience into public lectures and seminars about "The Future of American Democracy".

Also, since leaving Congress in l996, I have served as Distinguished Visiting Professor of National Security Affairs at the Naval Postgraduate School (l997-present) in California. I teach democratic civil-military relations to young officers of all branches of the U.S. defense team and military students from foreign countries. I also have the privilege and honor of participating, through our Center for Civil-Military Relations, in the worldwide democratization movement. In the recent past, I have helped conduct seminars on democratic civil-military relations on five continents. I also have participated in similar programs for parliamentarians from Russia, the new republics of the old Soviet Union, and other aspiring democracies around the globe.

These appointments have given me an opportunity to review my congressional experience and pull together the notes that I've been compiling about American democracy for the past decade. I am certain, furthermore, that jogging in North Alabama's Appalachian foothills and along the beautiful Central California coast has helped clear my thinking about the outrageous notion that America may be dying.

Now, back—in reverse chronological order—to my political, academic, and personal background.

....

MY POLITICAL CAREER.

For much of the past two decades, I have served in elective public office, most recently as a Member of the United States House of Representatives. I like to think of myself as a practical, public-spirited, reform-oriented, "big-D" Democrat and "little-r"

republican—working for congressional, budgetary, and political reform in Washington (l989-96); for election reform as Alabama's Secretary of State (l987-89); and on education reform as an Alabama State Legislator (l982-86). I have struggled—with Bill Clinton, George Bush, Newt Gingrich, Dick Gephardt, Tom Foley, Jim Wright, George Wallace, numerous other big-name and countless no-name politicians, the news media, lobbyists, everyday citizens, and my own conscience—to make American democracy work.

In retrospect, my political career gave me a full appreciation of the positives and negatives of public service, a realization of my own civic strengths and weaknesses, and a better understanding of American democracy.

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I entered public service originally, as did many others, with an ambitious, arrogant, burning urge to help make American democracy work better than it was working in the l970s and l980s. But my flame of ambition and arrogance—fueled by a combination of philosophical motives, political savvy, and textbook knowledge—probably burned stronger and hotter and more self-reflectively than most. I wanted, from the beginning, to be different from run-of-the-mill public officials. I wanted to do something special. I had no delusions about being America's "Philosopher-King"—but I did aspire to be a "philosopher-politician", a visionary leader with the practical ability to achieve as much civic progress as is politically possible. In short, I wanted to do it right—and to make it work!

It had become obvious to me, during my political science days, that civic vision—the inclination to think in "Big Ideas" about America and American democracy—is a very powerful and positive force in politics. Civic vision is critically important because it endows political leadership with the personal drive, public aura, and popular support for achievements of enduring significance.

So I embarked on a journey of civic vision—from Jacksonville, Alabama, to the state capitol in Montgomery, and then on to the United States Congress in Washington—trying to implement the ideals of American democracy while conducting myself in such a way that the people of Alabama—particularly young people—might regain trust in their leaders and government.

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Early in that journey—while campaigning for the state legislature—I experienced a personal revelation about my future in politics. I realized that, with guts and luck, I just might become Alabama's "philosopher-politician"—because nobody else wanted the job. I was struck by the lack of interest in civic issues among both aspiring candidates and established public officials; very few professional politicians seemed really interested in such things as clean elections, political ethics, and constitutional reform. I could indeed exercise leadership on

important matters of public policy in Alabama and possibly beyond—in great part because normal politicians generally do not care for the civic responsibilities and heavy lifting of American democracy.

Much of the explanation is that a Peter Principle of vision applies in politics just as in other endeavors. Most politicians enter the political arena with some vision, but their capabilities and inclinations toward visionary leadership seem to stagnate as they get elected and climb the political ladder. Over time, they tend to focus their attention toward more practical concerns—waging partisan and special interest warfare, dividing the goodies of public largess, and securing their re-election. Upon reaching their maximum level of power, many public officials tend to function with the limited perspectives and concerns of their previous political and personal lives. Too often, for example, state and federal officials still think in terms of petty politics, paving roads, and school board appointments. They sit in our chambers of power and are happy just to be there, performing functional functions, somewhat like the furniture and potted plants. They do not think about our historic experiment in democratic ideals; and they are not about to bite into anything tough, hot, or dangerous to their political health. Therein, in a collective environment of vision deficiency, lies an immediate opening and continuous opportunity for sharp, ambitious young leaders.

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There are many fine people and some outstanding leaders in Alabama. But history has inflicted certain complicating conditions that make our politics very different from and more difficult than that of the rest of the country.

As V.O. Key noted a half century ago in Southern Politics in State and Nation (l949), the South has been slow in developing a political leadership and party system for dealing realistically with its problems; and race and poverty still constrain us much more than we like to admit. Alabama, especially, clings to a way of life characterized by such terms as "traditional values", "stubborn independence" and "conservative politics". A progressive politician who had just lost a rough election campaign in the l980s described it more bitingly as "a militantly ignorant mindset". Without question, the state continues to struggle with an intransigence of personalities, special interests, and culture that works against significant progress.

But I found that boldly stepping forward with vision and a plan of action worked wonders in such an environment. I was relatively new, I was not a charismatic politician, and I had no power base; but I became a point man on education reform by aggressively pushing ahead with real ideas (which I originally communicated in a personal memo to Governor George Wallace). Governor Wallace and I formed a good relationship on this issue although I had never supported him in any of his campaigns. I think that he really wanted to "do good" in his last term, and I got his full support. He simply asked me to do what was right and directed his people to help me.

Over time, it became clear to me—a second revelation—that, in addition to the lack of vision among run-of-the-mill politicians, there was a major "vacuum of leadership" on certain critical issues at the top of state government in Alabama. Governor Wallace's

physical condition (the result of the assassination attempt a decade earlier) limited his personal direction of the education reform initiative; I also found that the Governor's directives died about as quickly as he issued them. Different aides in the Wallace administration interpreted his directions in different ways; and his team in the legislature had ideas of their own—and education reform was not among those ideas. Furthermore, many leaders in education and the business community simply opted out. As our vision and leadership problems mounted and the politics of education reform (at least our endeavor) unraveled, I kept muttering to myself that "this is a heck of a way to run a railroad". My railroad metaphor would prove ironically and repetitively appropriate.

My revelational experience continued when I got involved in efforts to change the way we conducted political campaigns in Alabama. Election reform was an idea whose time had come and gone many, many times in our state. The public and good government groups had long complained about dirty campaigns and the hazy, questionable role of money in our elections. The news media editorialized often and indignantly on the issue. Our savvy Secretary of State, Don Siegelman, constantly championed reform initiatives; and State Senator Jim Bennett and State Representative Jack Venable had promoted reform for years in the legislature. I had pushed the issue as a political scientist, party activist, and political candidate, so I joined the reform team immediately upon receiving my oath of office in l982. We introduced bill after bill and held news conference after news conference. Nobody opposed us, at least not openly. But nothing ever happened. We came close sometimes, but election reform always fell short.

I realized finally the full interconnectivity of vision, leadership, and the political railroad. The fact was that, despite all our visionary hoopla, no powerful political leaders or any powerful interest groups—within the system—were willing to flex their muscle for our reform agenda. The absence of vision and leadership on election reform was no accident—that's how those in control keep things from happening that they do not want to happen. That is how they run the railroad. In order to win on such a tough issue, those of us with vision had to get control of the leadership and drive that train.

So I ran for Secretary of State and enlisted the assistance of virtually every newspaper in the state for my reform agenda. It was a miraculous campaign. I narrowly won the Democratic nomination and general election; and I embarked as the state's chief elections officer on a reform crusade that eventually changed campaign finance disclosure and, to an appreciable degree, politics in Alabama.

But, in reality, the foundation of success had been laid back when I was making plans to run for Secretary of State. At that time I enlisted the help of a friend and fellow House Member—Rep. Jim Campbell of Anniston—in campaign reform. Jim Campbell was a remarkable fellow—intelligent, honest, and bluntly straight-forward—who aspired to be Speaker Pro Tempore in the next session of the legislature. He and I formed a pact in l986—if I were elected Secretary and he were selected Pro Tem, he would see that my proposal passed the House and Senate. I will never forget his words:

> "I'll just sit down with the rest of the leadership and anybody else that's interested and tell them that nothing is going to pass if we don't pass campaign finance

reform. Talk with Browder and try to work out the best that you can live with because it is going to become law."

Campbell's commitment came not as a deal for my support of his Speaker campaign; regardless of whether I were to win my long-shot bid for Secretary of State, I would not be able to work for or cast a vote for him in the state legislature. His commitment was an expression of his personal philosophy, political courage, and our friendship.

In l987, I was inaugurated as Secretary of State, and Jim Campbell was selected House Speaker Pro Tem. Former Secretary of State Don Seigelman became State Attorney General (he's now our Governor), Jim Bennett was appointed Chairman of the Senate Committee on Elections (and now he's Secretary of State), and Jack Venable continued as Chairman of the House Constitution and Elections Committee (where he continues to serve his constituents very honorably). We became the leadership on this contentious issue and we began running the railroad.

The Alabama Fair Campaign Practices Act became law in l988. It did not lead to an Age of Enlightenment in our state, but it did shine the glare of public disclosure and media scrutiny on Goat Hill (as our governmental community is known). At least now we know something about "who's buying" and "who's selling" in Alabama politics.

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Upon arriving in Washington in l989, I saw some of the very same problems—the "vision thing", a leadership vacuum, and an anti-reform railroad running between Congress and the White House.

Important people talk often about election reform in our nation's capital—President Clinton and Speaker Gingrich even shook hands on changing the system in front of a national television audience. But the strategy of America's national political leadership seems to be one of posing for "holy pictures" and then making sure that nothing jeopardizes the rules-of-the-game that keep them in power.

Inevitably, every session of Congress opens with a small army of reform-oriented Representatives, Senators, and do-gooder groups charging off, individually and in packs, in a multiplicity of directions. They all are endowed with the experience of past campaigns, and each relies on individualistic ideas, energies, and resources. Unfortunately, the reform army soon degenerates into a stumbling, bumbling, rancorous mob.

These good guys, though bursting with vision, are severely unprepared for a legislative system stacked against election reform. The anti-reform forces—including our national political leaders and the entrenched special interest community—deftly game the reform issue, exploit the disparate reform factions, and manipulate the legislative process to kill campaign reform with minimal accountability. The establishment's strategy ("Ten Steps to Campaign Reform Failure") is predictable and effective:

Step l. Proclaim publicly that election reform is an important legislative priority this session.

Step 2. Establish a variety of special task forces to work for an indefinite period of time on the reform priority.

Step 3. Debate, define, and complicate the reform issue in terms of contradictory ideals.

Step 4. Splinter the reformers into different cliques and proposals so that nothing achieves majority support.

Step 5. Load serious reform legislation down with poison pill provisions and amendments during the committee process.

Step 6. Put the reform bill on the legislative calendar in such a position that it doesn't make it to an actual or final vote.

Step 7. Pass a reform bill in one house but not the other.

Step 8. Pass different versions of reform in the two houses and never complete the conference process.

Step 9. Pass a reform act that the President will surely veto.

Step l0. Finally, once the reform bill dies, posture self-righteously against the opposition party and the special interests; and swear by everything holy that we'll implement campaign finance reform next year.

It has been very frustrating watching Democrats and Republicans "game" campaign reform to death since I first arrived in Washington in l989. They killed it with a Democratic Congress and Bush White House for the first few years. The Democrats kicked the issue around ad nauseam when they controlled both Congress and the White House. Then it was the Congressional Republicans versus President Clinton. They'll probably jawbone the issue far into the new century.

I know that my sermon blames politicians, when in fact much of the problem lies in the inherent difficulty of the reform issue itself and with an unreasonable and anarchic reform community outside the halls of power. In fact, I am not sure that election reform—as we have defined it thus far—is possible. The system (and that includes us voters) requires candidates to raise and spend tremendous amounts of special interest money while restricting their access to "clean" resources; and we shudder at the thought of public financing.

However, I've played this game with the best of the anti-reformers in Alabama and Washington; and, all things considered, I am convinced that our elected national leaders—

both Democrats and Republicans, both the White House and Congress—either do not want to change or lack sufficient courage to change the campaign politics of American democracy. I also am convinced that continuous reform is an inextricable element of our Great Experiment and is vital to the future of American democracy.

....

I'll talk further about my life in the political world in the following lectures; but for now I'll just explain how I got into (and out of) public service.

I decided to enter politics, in 1980, as a natural extension of my academic experience as a political science professor at Jacksonville State University in Alabama. For the previous decade I had taught the "political" stuff—leadership, elections, political parties, public opinion—becoming, in that process, immersed in local and state government. I had developed relationships with many public officials, and my former students were becoming a force in Alabama politics. Thus, after years of teaching American government (and helping get other people elected to public office), I determined to try "public service" myself. I was never driven by any hard political issue or partisan motive or ideological commitment—I simply believed in American democracy and thought that I could help make it work better than it was working.

So in 1980 I developed a "1-2-3 gameplan" that would allow me to be a player—a philosopher-politician—in American democracy. My gameplan included what I thought needed to be done—both substantively and procedurally—and how to do it. The result was immediately positive, and the plan unfolded in phases almost as if pre-ordained, with timely steps up the political ladder from Jacksonville to Washington:

- **Phase One: Party Activism (1980-82).**

  First I established a political presence within the Democratic Party. I gained immediate appointment to the State Democratic Executive Committee (our local committeeman decided to step down in my favor when I told him I was interested in getting into politics). I was selected as part of the Alabama delegation to the 1980 Democratic National Convention; and for the next two years I worked in the partisan vineyards of local and state politics.

- **Phase Two: Electoral Politics (1982-89).**

  Next, I stepped into the electoral arena. I approached our state representative about his plans for the 1982 election, and he told me that he was not running for re-election to that position. I led a five-man primary race and won the runoff for the Alabama State Legislature (1982) where I worked on, among other things, education and election reform.

Toward the end of that term, our Secretary of State announced that he was running for another position; and in l986 I jumped into an uphill campaign for that open office against a seemingly unbeatable, old-time George Wallace ally (who was also Alabama's two-term state treasurer). We went to sleep on election night (Tuesday) neck-and-neck with 90 percent of the ballots counted, and the official results trickled in for days. On Friday, I took my family to the beach and read in the paper that weekend that I had been declared Secretary of State with 5l percent of the vote.

As chief elections officer, I championed successful passage of the Alabama Fair Campaign Practices Act. Two years later, my very respected and long-time Congressman passed away in office, setting up a special election among thirteen hopeful replacements (nine Democrats and four Republicans). I survived three elections (primary, runoff, and general election) in three months, taking my seat in the U.S. Congress in l989.

- **Phase Three: American Democracy (l989-96).**

My l980 "gameplan" had become reality by l989, and for most of the past decade I have done what I got into politics for—trying to make American democracy work better. I plunged into the Washington game—Democratic Leadership Council, Democratic Mainstream Forum, Democratic Study Group, Democratic Campaign Reform Working Group, Democratic Budget Study Group, and eventually a rebellious but effective rump group known as the "Blue Dog Coalition". As a relatively junior legislator, I worked on, even championed—with mixed success—congressional, budgetary, and political reform. I am especially proud that our annual budget deficit—which I considered the greatest immediate danger to our national destiny—was pretty much eliminated during my tenure in Congress. I won several re-election campaigns fairly easily with minimum expenditure, a fact I like to think was due to the quality of my leadership, service, and political skills.

....

The above chronology explains how I got into politics. Now, why did I get out of public service? Since ex-politicians can always use a handy litany of acceptable reasons why they are ex-politicians—here's my "Top l0 Excuses For Getting Out Of Politics":

Excuse No. l. "Because I got sick of politics-period!"
Excuse No. 2. "Because of the nastiness and lies!"
Excuse No. 3. "Because of the constant campaigning!"
Excuse No. 4. "Because of having to raise so much money!"
Excuse No. 5. "Because of unreasonable constituents!"
Excuse No. 6. "Because of the special interests!"
Excuse No. 7. "Because of negative attacks!"
Excuse No. 8. "Because of the news media!"
Excuse No. 9. "Because of the hectic schedule and travel!"
Excuse No. l0. "Because of the demands on my private life and family!"

But the simple fact is that I got out of politics because I lost an election! I would love to be a U.S. Senator; but, unfortunately for me, Alabama's Democratic primary voters decided that they preferred somebody else as their Senator (eventually, the Democratic nominee lost to the Republicans in the general election). I enjoyed being a Member of Congress for eight years, Alabama Secretary of State for three years, and Alabama State Representative for four years; and I would still be in public office if I had won that election in l996. But I lost, and that's why I got out of politics.

Actually, when Senator Howell Heflin announced that he would not seek re-election in l996, I debated back and forth for months whether to run for that open seat. I wanted a productive life after Congress, and I thought that about ten years in the House of Representatives would be enough for me. I also knew that I faced an uphill fight (although the polls looked good and I would end up with primary endorsements from all sixteen daily newspapers). I prided myself, to a fault, on being an independent and unconventional leader, challenging the special interests of both the left and right. I also despised fundraising and avoided asking or taking money from numerous deep-pocketed interests. I can tell you from experience that this is not the ideal plan for trying to move from the House to the Senate. As a general rule, core constituencies of the left and right don't respond very positively to being challenged; and the Alabama Democratic Party doesn't build many monuments to bipartisan budget balancers. I correctly figured I would have just as tough a time winning my own party primary in the summer as beating the surging Republicans in November's general election.

But everything had worked marvelously for me thus far, and I entered that Senate race with an attitude of "I'll try it my way—if it works, OK, if it doesn't work, OK!" As the record shows, it did not work.

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In retrospect, what can I say about the overall experience? What happens between getting in and getting out? What occurs over time as a politician runs the course from rookie to veteran to ex? Is there any difference, attitudinally or behaviorally, upon exiting the political arena?

I said earlier that I got into politics with ambitions toward being a philosopher-politician, that I wanted to do it right. My "do it right" statement may strike some as overly self-indulgent rationalization; but my sense of responsibility was genuine—I sincerely wanted to do everything within my power to strengthen our national experiment in democratic ideals within its historic framework of limited, representative government.

From the beginning, I took my job in public service seriously. I enjoyed doing it. Every day in Montgomery and Washington was a seminar in American democracy, and I would have paid for those privileges and experiences.

I was good at it because I took on the burdens of public office conscientiously—maybe too conscientiously. I engaged virtually every aspect of public service as a personal civic responsibility. I agonized over most issues and even constituent cases. I felt that I should reach the "right" decision among public policy options where there were no clearly right or easy options. For example, I truly believed that restoring control of our fiscal destiny (meaning balancing the budget) was a critical national objective for our children and posterity. But I also pushed for economic help for our local business community, medical treatment for our sick veterans, and social security benefits for our elderly citizens.

I considered it my obligation to show up for work wherever, whenever, and however my constituents asked. Weekends, nights, holidays, even special personal and family occasions. I found it impossible to say "no" if anybody or anything in my district wanted or needed me there.

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"Doing it right" proved to be a frenetic, consuming, euphoric addiction. I led three lives—public official, political scientist, and concerned citizen—and I constantly juggled and balanced the demands of those three lives.

- **First, as a public official, I struggled to merge my civic vision with the unpleasant but practical demands of political survival.**

It is no easy task accommodating the broad, general interests of America, the particularistic and parochial interests of your constituents, and the demanding, demeaning requirements of today's electoral politics.

To be more specific, I can say without question that the toughest part of public service is money—begging people with special interests for campaign contributions today knowing that tomorrow you are going to have to make critical decisions and votes weighing their interests against those of other special interests (or the general interest). I found it very distasteful asking people for money when I probably was going to vote in their favor; I found it equally impossible to ask someone for money when I disagreed with them and most likely was going to vote against their position. Not only was campaign fundraising personally demeaning, it also conveyed impropriety to the public. One of my close political friends once said he had no problem with this endeavor—"I simply take money from everybody so nobody can claim that I'm bought by one side or the other."

- **Second, I complicated my mission by incorporating a serious theoretical and analytical component to my idea of public service.**

In keeping with my ideas about being a philosopher-politician, political science—my pre-electoral profession—thoroughly impacted my performance as a

public official. I developed (in advance of and in concert with political events and issues) theoretical frameworks—covering all sides of every question and issue—to guide my political behavior. As the reader may have already discerned, I enjoyed constructing conceptual models, schematic diagrams, and just plain lists. I really worked hard to develop rational explanations for practical politics, anything that might help organize and elucidate the political world—or at least the political world as viewed from my perspective.

Overall, my political science background proved very pertinent and helpful to my political career. Unfortunately, this systematic approach consumed valuable time and attention; it also presented nagging dilemmas that could never be resolved expeditiously or philosophically. My political career probably would have been more enjoyable if I had junked some of my academic inclinations and followed the wisdom of the sports commercial—"just do it".

- **Finally, I had to deal with my own personally conflicted feelings, as a citizen, about America and the American dream.**

I now enjoy the material benefits of American democracy; and as a public official I appreciate the macro-economic system that has served us well nationally and internationally. But, as the upcoming section of my personal story will show, I grew up poor, outside the charmed circles of American society. Images of poverty and questions of opportunity and fairness figured prominently into the endless choices of public service. How best could I weigh the interests of a free market economy and mainstream society (to which I now belong) while doing right by the "little people"—especially the poor, the powerless, and the disadvantaged—back home? The answers never came fully or easily.

I sometimes envied those elected officials who went to Montgomery and Washington on moral or ideological or partisan or special interest crusades, to save the world "for" or "from" such things as abortion, homosexuality, gun control, education, agriculture, business, labor, national defense, liberalism, and conservatism. I often resented my colleagues who represented "pure" Democratic or "pure" Republican districts, totally white or totally minority constituencies, "safe" areas in terms of people, interests, and issues. I would have liked, furthermore, to be like some of my fellow politicians whose personal lives mirrored their communities. My idea of political heaven was to be absolutely committed to an ideological philosophy, to be completely free from partisan electoral competition, and to be well grounded socio-economically with your constituency. But I never had those luxuries.

Of course, conflicted assignment is nothing new in politics or life in general; but being a white Democrat in a changing South thoroughly complicated my work as a philosopher-politician. In state politics, I pushed change, reform, and progress, while carefully attending the sensitivities and forces of tradition. As a U.S. Congressman, I had to stand my ground in Alabama (where Lee Atwater had attacked me as "the most liberal politician in the state") and Washington (where I often angered my party by siding with the Republicans)—all the while struggling with my own very strong ideas about America and American democracy.

All in all, I had an idea from the beginning that I couldn't last forever in politics because my political life was built primarily on my civics commitment rather than real political terra firma. The viability of that career depended, to a great extent, on my own personal civic drive; and it couldn't last forever.

....

My years in electoral office were intensely exhilarating. But over the course of my electoral career I simply enjoyed about as much of politics as I could stand. It was not a case of political idealism-turned-into-cynicism (my background had prepared me well for the realities of a public career). I was not physically fatigued (although it was a grinding schedule, especially during the l994 Republican "Contract with America" session). I wasn't moved by personal economics (money has never been that important to me). By all accounts, I could have held my seat indefinitely.

I think that I just experienced too much of a good thing—and I burned out!

The best way to describe my "change of life" experience is to say that, over time, I became less willing to do things that did not fit my notion of public service. I had always understood that policy and politics inevitably go hand in hand; and I was pretty successful at both, pursuing as much "good" policy as was politically possible. In the beginning, I actually enjoyed the game of politics as much or more than governing. But I probably reached the point where I tried to separate policy—to an unrealistic and unreasonable extent—from politics.

The most important change was my idea of representation. I moved away from defining my representational responsibility as a "delegate" (doing what the constituents direct you to do) toward being a "trustee" (relying upon your judgement about what should be done). I still emphasized hard work, constituency service, and trying to do what the 600,000 citizens in east Alabama elected me to do. But increasingly I found myself thinking and acting more independently, becoming more concerned with what I thought was right for America and less attentive to immediate electoral and special interest demands.

I have to admit that those years in politics affected my political patience. One of the guiding principles of my leadership style was a conscious attempt to apply my professional background as an educator to my work as a politician. As much as possible, I tried to engage my constituents in "seminars" about local and national issues. I announced to town meetings that I could not solve their problems for them but that I would work with them to address our national interests. I conducted programs ("Citizen Congress") whereby groups of Alabamians would deliberate the national situation and attempt to pass their own budget. I visited civic groups, classrooms, and editorial boards to talk in deliberative manner about the future of our country.

Of course, the key to success as a political educator is how to keep these "seminars" from turning into "lectures". Throughout my career, I have challenged constituents to accept collective responsibility for America. As a neophyte politico eager to make the democratic

system work, I would listen deferentially to constituents—even when I thought they were being rude or irresponsible. I would explain to them the other side of the issue and to try to work them through their own needs and interests to an appreciation for the common good. Over the years, I got to the point where, if someone were persistently unreasonable or confrontational, I might politely tell that person that we were not going to agree and that we would just have to let the voters of Alabama decide whose vision of leadership they preferred. Obviously, not everybody shared my political style or vision of America; and these interactions sometimes became less than educational.

I also became pickier about what I was willing to do for my political career. When you're young and burning with political ambition, you are more likely to do certain things—such as couching your thoughts in acceptable terminology, courting special interest groups for their endorsement, taking campaign contributions from anybody, putting political activities ahead of family time. These actions do not necessarily mean compromising or corrupting your integrity; but they do require you to be very personally solicitous. Toward the end of my years in Congress, I became less inclined to be so solicitous.

I then became increasingly turned off by constant partisan politics. Being a member of Congress (or virtually any high public office) puts you in a war zone, forcing you to engage in never-ending combat if you want to maintain your voice and influence in serious discussion. The Washington environment (driven in great part by the parties, media, and money) encourages you to attack or defend an entire partisan agenda of issues, institutions, and people far beyond the substantive reality and reasonableness of the situation. It doesn't take long for new public officials to learn that they—just as athletes and other celebrities—enhance their stature and power most effectively and efficiently through emotional posturing, outrageous antics, and shameless personalization; and the most ready, common, and rewarding forum for this enhancement is partisan politics.

The recent House Judiciary Committee hearing regarding the possible impeachment of President Clinton illustrates my point. This committee generally attracts loyal Democratic and Republican Members of Congress; but what has happened with this impeachment business is a bipartisan disgrace. Cox Newspapers columnist Tom Teepen's analysis ("Cultural Battle Rages in House over Clinton and United States") is on target:

> "Both groups misrepresent the nation. You'd be hard pressed to find an outfit as monolithic as the GOP's even in a Moose hall these days. The Democrats look like a parody of diversity...these two Americas sit in judgement of an errant president and of one another...Power will end this business, of course. Will it be power giddy with opportunity and driven by its own indignation: or power, informed by wisdom instead, that seeks a resolution in political compromise that can be, as well, socially reconciling?"

As we all have seen, the partisan struggle has not been socially reconciling. I guess there's an argument for such partisanship. But I never had a partisan mentality, and I got my fill of partisan warfare.

....

Ultimately, I had too much pride in myself—and too much respect for American democracy—to hang around too long. I had seen too many friends go out politically frustrated and personally bitter. I saw life-long public servants consumed by politics and power and perks. Some even went to jail. Others had to be carried out feet first.

I also recall the personally pivotal comment of a relatively young, successful, untainted Congressman during the intense national ugliness of the early l990s. He had decided not to run for re-election, and in a private moment he explained that "I woke up one day and realized that I no longer liked the people I worked for". In all honesty, I too realized that, after a total of fourteen years in politics, it was time for me to consider something different—either move to the Senate (where service as a "trustee" is more appropriate) or get out of politics.

So I ran for the Senate and I lost and I'm out of politics. And several years later I can attest that all of my "Top l0 Excuses For Getting Out Of Politics" have some degree of truth to them—or, to put it another way, there are many things that I do not miss about politics. I am happy to be a former Congressman-with a life of my own. Now I can call my wife at 4 p.m. and ask, "Becky, what would you like to do tonight?" Or I can spend family occasions and national holidays—such as birthdays and the Fourth of July—wherever and however I want, with my wife and daughter, rather than going to "must attend" political events with large crowds, influential power-brokers, financial contributors, and total strangers who for some reason want to spend their time with a politician. I can visit my former colleagues in Washington and my friends and neighbors in Alabama without having to bear all the awesome (as well as trivial) burdens and trappings of public service.

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It is not easy acknowledging these things about myself and my political career; and in no way should my remarks be taken as a negative judgement of politics (or as a cynical basis for my rhetorical speculation about dying America). As I have already acknowledged, I would still be in politics, happily serving in the United States Senate, if I had won my last election. I make these candid and personalized observations simply to introduce myself and to convey something of the dynamics of American democracy.

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MY ACADEMIC BACKGROUND.

Other than politics, I have lived, studied, and taught in the world of academe for most of my life. Since earning my B.A. degree in History from Presbyterian College in South Carolina (l965) and Ph.D. in Political Science from Emory University in Atlanta (l97l), I have taught as Professor of Political Science at Jacksonville State University in Alabama (l97l-86), as Distinguished Visiting Professor of National Security Affairs at the Naval Postgraduate School in California (l997-present), and as Eminent Scholar in American Democracy at JSU (l999-present).

Over the years I have benefited not only from my own research and analysis but also from the keen minds and critical observations of my colleagues and predecessors in political science, history and other scholarly disciplines. I have also benefited enormously from teaching first generation college students in Alabama, interacting with our emerging defense leadership in California, and engaging numerous other academic audiences throughout the country and around the globe.

I have found, from the beginning of my academic career, that certain themes and ideas recurringly shaped my developing analysis of American democracy—Alexis de Tocqueville's fascination with "equality", Frederick J. Turner's "frontier thesis". Of course I've been influenced greatly by twentieth century writers such as David Easton ("systems theory"), Robert Dahl ("democratic pluralism"), and Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba ("civic culture"). Three thinkers in particular—Thomas Jefferson, V.O. Key, Jr., and John Naisbitt—have shaped both my academic and political careers. Jefferson convinced me that real leadership quite often consists of educating the people so that they can make good decisions democratically; V. O. Key, Jr., helped me comprehend the twin problems (race and poverty) and the critical, insufficient ingredient (leadership) of southern politics; and John Naisbitt impressed me with his statement of the dominating systemic changes, or "megatrends", of contemporary American life.

The insights gained from my academic experience have been invaluable in my understanding of the noble possibilities of American democracy; and the "lessons learned" as a professional consultant have made me aware of the realities—the good, the bad, and the ugly—of the world of politics.

....

Being from South Carolina, I didn't know much about Alabama when I took a job there right out of graduate school in l97l; and I did not plan to stick around permanently.

I was very well aware that Alabama's history had been a fascinating, contentious, maddening political drama with dominant, troubling themes of race and poverty; and as an ex-sportswriter for the Atlanta Journal, I recognized Alabama football as an historic phenomenon of mythical proportions. I guess everybody in America back then had heard of George Wallace and Paul "Bear" Bryant.

Politically, this Heart of Dixie theater had seen a string of histrionic performances, including the birth of the Confederacy, the Scottsboro trials, the Montgomery bus boycott, the

Selma to Montgomery march, "Bloody Sunday", the stand in the schoolhouse door, and the inaugural manifesto of "Segregation today, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever". In the decade prior to my arrival, George Wallace had shared the white-hot spotlight and dark shadows of Alabama's historic stage with Big Jim Folsom, Martin Luther King, Bull Conner, Rosa Parks, Frank Johnson, and casts of thousands amid universal media attention.

But politics was not the only "big show" in the Heart of Dixie. The other drama of Alabama life was football. "ROOOOOLLL TIDE!" and "WAAAAARRR EAGLE!" had long been semi-religious chants of fall weekends; and living legends stalked the fields and memories and souls of this section of the country—names like "Bear" Bryant, "Shug" Jordan, Don Hutson, Harlon Hill, Bart Starr, Joe Namath, and Kenny Stabler (and I soon would get to see Heisman Trophy winners Pat Sullivan and Bo Jackson in action).

I quickly began to appreciate that Alabama was much, much more than raucous racial drama and football fanaticism. Many distinguished and creative Alabamians had graced the stage of American history and enriched our nation with their lives and achievements. Booker T. Washington, George Washington Carver, Helen Keller, Hugo Black, Lister Hill, John Sparkman, John Bankhead (and his daughter Tallulah), Harper Lee (and her visiting cousin Truman Capote), Zelda (and her husband F. Scott) Fitzgerald, William Bradford Huie, Johnny Mack Brown (the movie cowboy), W.C. Handy, Jimmie Rodgers, Nat (the King) Cole, Hank Williams, and Werner Von Braun (direct from Germany to head up America's space program in North Alabama). Furthermore, in the sports arena, Alabama had been more than football—Jesse Owens (of Olympic track stardom in Hitler's backyard), Joe Louis (the great heavyweight boxing champ), Hank Aaron, Willie Mays, and Satchel Paige (three of the greatest baseball players ever), and the Allison family of stockcar racing fame—to name just a few.

I also saw that, slowly and haltingly, the state was attempting to deal with its troubling historic problems. The more progressive elements were preaching "new south" ideas like racial accommodation, educational progress, and economic development. They touted the state's rich cultural history, geographic diversity, and recreational opportunities—with frequent references to the international space program (in Huntsville), the Alabama Shakespeare Festival (in Montgomery), and the National Junior Miss Pageant (in Mobile)—as the real face of Alabama.

Incidentally, I would learn, in time and through my dealings with him, that George Wallace was more than a classic stereotype of demagoguery, political opportunism, and social sins. He was, in many ways, a breakthrough populist in a state long run by the "Big Mules" and Black Belt bosses; and he and his wife Lurleen did much for the poor, the uneducated, and the disadvantaged. Toward the end, he lived through his own mortal Hell of self-realization about his role in state, national, and world history; and he successfully sought forgiveness from black Alabamians for his segregationist past. After extreme physical and emotional suffering, he realized at least partially the grace and power of redemption before his death.

I observed during those years, both personally and through my own systematic research, that Alabama is an interesting society of endearing ways and enduring problems. Like most places on earth, it is inhabited by people of all shapes, sizes, and colors—some good, some bad—and like Americans everywhere, their cultural character reflects their

heritage. But Alabamians—both white and black—also are born with something extra, a compulsive sense of place and history that exaggerates cultural affinities with nagging legacies of wounded pride, social deprivation, and racial prejudice. Perhaps this regional sensitivity explains why, no matter where we go and what we do, Alabamians (and most southerners) invariably interject into chance encounters and casual conversations some probing version of "Where y'all from?" These compulsions also may explain why we have always maintained and projected a stark, distinct, "deep south" mentality, a difficult, painful balancing of white and black, independence and community, pride and arrogance, civility and violence, grandeur and tragedy.

....

After several years of hectic Atlanta, my wife Becky and I eagerly drove the winding two hours through Waco, Villa Rica, Carrolton, and Bremen into rural North Alabama on that muggy August day in l97l. I had a fresh Ph.D. in hand and my first academic appointment (as Associate Professor of Political Science) awaiting me in Jacksonville. Upon arriving in town, I rolled down the window of our car to ask directions from a pleasant young student-type walking along the city's main street. "How do we get to Jacksonville State University?" I asked. He smiled broadly, pointed straight ahead, and chirped "Just follow your nose!" We knew that we were going to like this place. Alabama became our home.

Several things struck me right away about Jacksonville State University. First, it was a pleasant little college in a pleasant little college town. They advertised themselves as "the friendliest campus in the south", and it was. Our initial encounter with the happy chirper was typical of the community ambience then and now. Second, they paid me well (probably as much or more than some of my Emory professors made). Third, they had an outstanding football team and overall sports program (the "Gamecocks" were among the top-ranked small college programs in the country), a great band ("the Marching Southerners"), accompanied by a dazzling team of beautiful precision female performers ("the Marching Ballerinas"); I always have liked such traditional fixtures and activities of small college life. Fourth, I saw something there that I had never seen before—"redneck hippies" (long-haired bubbas who were "cool"). Finally, something happened in this small Alabama school that amazed me even more—JSU's overwhelmingly white student body (demographically reflective of the Northeast Alabama population) elected a black SGA president while Governor Wallace was running for President.

Jacksonville State University is no Ivy League school. Nor is it an Auburn or Alabama. JSU is, today as back then, a regional state university with a competent faculty and about eight thousand mostly white, first generation college kids who for some reason or the other (probably local attachments, family economics, or grades) do not go to one of the major state universities. The institution boasts no pretensions of academic exclusivity; but it consistently ranks as one of the "best buys" in America, taking young people "where they are"—educationally and economically—and helping prepare them for productive and successful lives. Its students come from big cities like Birmingham and Atlanta and Chattanooga, from small towns with strange Indian names like Sylacauga, Wedowee, and Wetumpka, and from interesting subcultures like

Sand Mountain, the Tennessee Valley, the Wiregrass, and the Black Belt. Many tend to go back to those areas after graduating from college.

My students at Jacksonville have always reminded me in many ways of myself—working class kids who don't have any idea what they are going to do in life but who know that they don't want to relive their parents' lives in the mills and fields and coal mines. Many of our students have to work their way through school; and many struggle academically. About a fifth of them are black—adding another obstacle to their struggle. Too often they have to drop out after an unsuccessful semester or two. But many of them also have dreams and grit—something that can't be taught anywhere, not even at our most prestigious universities. I remember the part-time undertaker who overcame a terrible upbringing in Alabama-Georgia moonshine country and today is one of the most successful businessmen (a mortician) in the area. I remember the young deaf lady from Dothan who danced her way to "Miss America" stardom. I remember the struggling boy from Fort Payne who organized and became lead singer of the super-successful band "Alabama". I remember the rough-edged kid from nearby Possum Trot Road who dropped out after a few classes to chase his writing dreams and who, within the past three or four years, has won a reporting Pulitzer with the New York Times and written a No.l national best-selling account of his Alabama upbringing. On the other hand, I also remember the young man from Atlanta, who once told me he aspired to become, one day, Georgia's U.S. Senator—but instead he was gunned down and died outside a local gas station as the terminal conclusion of his series of armed robberies.

I enjoyed teaching at Jacksonville State University during the l970s and l980s; and I can pick up the phone and call countless of my former students who went on to state and national prominence. I've run into them in the Governor's office, the Congress, the White House, the Pentagon, among corporate, legal, medical, academic, creative, and entertainment elites; I also see them on the playing fields of major league sports. But I'm just as proud of those everyday people who walk up and re-introduce themselves to me in Alabama and elsewhere—business people, teachers, law enforcement personnel, housewives—whose lives are better due to their schooling at this relatively uncelebrated but special institution.

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My substantive teaching interests throughout my political science career have focused on American government and politics; and I have been allowed to structure undergraduate and graduate courses designed to explore the nature of American democracy—United States Government, State and Local Government, Political Parties, Public Opinion, Elections, and Leadership (in addition to the vitally useful Scope and Methods of Political Science).

One of my most memorable (and favorite) experiences was the course in "Southern Politics" at Jacksonville State University. This regularly scheduled course attracted overflow enrollments-undergraduates, graduates, good students, less-than-good students, aspiring politicos, varsity athletes, black, white, male, female, and of course my personal following—all

of whom understood that most of us would get to know Alabama politics and each other personally and that it was a fairly interesting and loose class. If memory serves me, that course produced a State Public Service Commissioner/Lt. Governor/Governor, an Alabama Ethics Commission Chairman/U.S. judge, several State Senators and Representatives, a handful of U.S. Senate and House staffers, numerous local public officials and civic leaders, and Lord knows what else. I hope that they learned as much from me as I learned—about Southern politics, American democracy, and people—from them.

Fortunately, I also was able to conduct relatively unsophisticated but empirically instructive research on the workings of the American political system. For example, one of my best learning experiences was a small survey research project and case study of the public, influential leaders, and city council members in Anniston, Alabama; I discovered that political policy linkage between the people and their representatives is just as likely to occur through shared community culture—thus almost by accident—as by the purposeful design of the players in the local political system. My research also has convinced me that race is still the strongest dynamic in Alabama politics, and such is probably the case in the rest of the south and perhaps throughout the nation. I have concluded, furthermore, that American public officials have much more discretion and opportunity for bold, positive leadership than they think they have or are willing to exercise.

The diversity of my academic endeavors (and a tipoff to my future political interests) is reflected in a chronological sampling of my professional participation in a variety of forums during those years in Alabama:

- Author, "Southern Party Workers and the Development of Two-Party Politics" (South Carolina Journal of Political Science; l972).

- Presenter, "Public Opinion and Grassroots Politics" (Southern Political Science Association; Atlanta, GA, l972).

- Author, "The Suburban Party Activist" (Social Science Quarterly; l972).

- Author, "Motives and Grassroots Party Activism" (International Review of History and Political Science; l972).

- Presenter, "Citizen Impact on City Policy" (Southwestern Social Science Association; Dallas, TX, l973).

- Presenter, "The Reform Experience" (Southern Political Science Association, Atlanta, GA; l973).

- Presenter, "Representation at the Community Level"(Alabama Academy of Science; Huntsville, AL, l973).

- Presenter, "Use of the Newsmedia for Political Communication" (Southern Regional Popular Culture Association; Atlanta, GA, l973).

- Presenter, "Teaching Democracy in the College Classroom" (Alabama Academy of Science; Birmingham, AL, l974).

- Author, "Race and Representation in a Southern Community" (Trends in Southern Politics; l974).

- Presenter, "Voting Behavior in the United States" (Taft Institute of Government Program; Birmingham, Al, l976).

- Director, "Quality of Life in Alabama—Are We Really That Bad and Where Do We Go From Here?" (National Endowment for the Humanities Conference; Jacksonville, AL, l977).

- Chairman, "Politics of the Contemporary South" (Alabama Political Science Association; Montgomery, AL, l979).

- Presenter, "The Political Scientist as Professional Consultant" (Southern Political Science Association; Gatlinburg, TN, l979).

- Presenter, "Surveying as a Political Instrument" (Alabama Chapter of the American Planning Association; Point Aquarius, AL, l980).

- Discussant, "The Voting Rights Act of l965" (The Citadel Symposium on Southern Politics; Charleston, SC, l980).

- Author, "Political Scientists as Delegates and Alternates" (PS; l98l).

- Discussant, "Dynamics of Political Participation" (Southern Political Science Association; Memphis, TN, l98l).

- Discussant, "Decision Makers and Decision-Making in the South" (Southern Political Science Association; Birmingham, AL, l983).

- Panelist, "Mass Media in Public Affairs" (Public Affairs for Future Leaders Conference; Huntsville, AL, l984).

....

I also began applying my academic theory and methodological training (particularly survey research) to real-world problems during those years at Jacksonville State University. I worked as a professional consultant with countless candidates, officials, and agencies at the local, state, and federal levels; and I am indebted to many brave souls for giving me an opportunity to apply my ideas about polling, media, and strategy development on their behalf. I'm biased, of course, but I always felt that my advice was pretty close to reality; as a

matter of fact, my success as a consultant over several years helped convince me eventually to put my own name on the ballot.

My consulting experience was both intellectually and politically rewarding. It also was fun—especially the political campaigns. Very few things in academia and life are as challenging as electoral politics; and there's always a clear, timely, and consequential outcome. Just as in sports, when the time-clock runs out, you look at the scoreboard—and you win or lose.

I worked for some very good candidates and people (and some of the other kind too); and my best consulting work was sometimes in losing campaigns. Among the most memorable experiences (other than my own electoral wins) was the first campaign I worked on; my polling hit the bulls-eye and helped a good man enter the state senate. Another was an unprecedented write-in campaign that got a friend back into the state senate after he had been dumped by his party and wasn't even on the ballot (we really didn't know what we were doing but it worked). Another interesting challenge was helping a mayor win re-election in a runoff after he had been pronounced politically dead because of his poor performance in the first election; I didn't even know him—but he came calling with some friends of mine and it looked like an interesting experiment. The worst experiences (besides losing) were having to choose between friends running against each other and having to tell certain candidates some pretty candid and rough things about their personal reputations and political standing (based on my polling).

....

Without violating any client confidences, I'll share some of my generalizations-or "lessons learned"—about political campaigns and consulting. The following "Ten Commandments of Campaign Consulting" were pulled from an actual "lessons learned" file that I kept during those years. These generalizations are instructive; however they do not paint a very positive picture of campaign consultants, politicians, or the public:

Commandment No. l. "Campaigning is both a science and an art—and it helps if you are smart, work hard, and get lucky."

Commandment No. 2. "Money is what separates 'doers' from 'dreamers'—and winners from losers."

Commandment No. 3. "Name recognition wins most elections—thus gimmicks are effective when the voter doesn't have anything better to go on."

Commandment No. 4. "It's easier to get people to vote 'against' than 'for'—that's why negative campaigning works."

Commandment No. 5. "Don't accept what the candidate tells you—check it out yourself."

Commandment No. 6. "Don't fight with the press—except when you have to."

Commandment No. 7. “Don’t believe everything the public tells you in public opinion polls—sometimes people fudge, sometimes, they don’t know what they’re talking about, and sometimes they just change their minds.”

Commandment No. 8. “Don’t ever lie to the candidate or the press or the public—you’ve got to live with them and yourself after this election.”

Commandment No. 9. “Don’t allow yourself to become an issue in the campaign—you may like your name in print but eventually it will hurt your candidate.”

Commandment No. l0. “The key to successful campaign consulting is to work for winners.”

....

Are the lessons of academia applicable to the real world of politics? Did I learn anything from political science and consulting that helped me in my political career? It is fashionable to disparage “book learning” and “ivory tower” academicians; and my political colleagues seem to enjoy poking me in the ribs with the barb that “I bet you didn’t learn that from your civics book”. However, the fact is that the principles and concepts of political science have proven very useful to me in the political arena.

In general, as I have already noted, the insights gained from my academic experiences have been invaluable in my understanding of the noble possibilities of American democracy; and the “lessons learned” from consulting opened my eyes to what really goes on—the good, the bad, and the ugly—in the political world. In particular, political science gave me advance understanding of such things as pluralism, leadership, and southern politics which I otherwise would have had to develop through experience—bad experience that unfortunately would have entailed significant battle scars and lost opportunities. I carried many of these insights and lessons into my life as a philosopher-politician.

....

MY “AMERICAN DREAM”.

My academic background and political career, combined, have given me a unique perspective for analyzing American democracy. However, perhaps the most important contribution I bring to our national dialogue is personal. It will sound overly dramatic, but I am living the American dream—I have risen from poverty and tragedy to enjoy the full

blessings of American life. Along the way I've learned some things—as a human being—about America and American democracy, and I think that I can contribute personally to our discussion about the future of our national experiment in democratic ideals.

Rest assured, I do not plan to make my personal life the maudlin framework of this analysis. "Is America Dying?" is primarily a theoretical and political analysis—based on my perspectives as a political scientist and public official. But my life story inevitably colors that analysis in such a way that I think I should explain my version of the American dream.

....

My dream began dismally and tragically, about a half century ago, on the wrong side of the tracks in a small southern town—a world of what was known back then as "poor white trash".

My birth certificate shows that Johnnie Glenn Browder was born on January l5, l943, in Sumter, South Carolina, the third child of Archie Calvin Browder, a 29-year-old house painter, and his 2l-year-old wife Ila; and an official South Carolina death shows that Archie Browder died a year later of "smoke asphyxiation" due to an "accident" in a "public jail". As with most public documents, those official accounts cannot begin to tell the personal drama of our flawed family and social desperation.

I never asked much about my father while I was growing up—mainly because I figured that this was an awkward and painful subject for my family. But in recent years, my mother (and other relatives) have shared their memories in response to my questions about how he lived and died. What I've learned is what I'd always suspected—my father was no Atticus Finch.

Archie Browder probably would have been right at home as a minor character in a William Faulkner novel. The son of an alcoholic father and a straight-laced mother, Archie dropped out of school in the ninth grade and became a sometimes house painter with wavy red hair, a charming personality, a bad drinking habit, and a destructively irresponsible lifestyle.

Toward the end of the l930s Great Depression, twenty-four-year-old Archie took a fifteen-year-old bride. Ila Frierson came from even purer Faulknerian origins. She was born and reared in the Carolina backwoods in a Snopes-like family—a bad-tempered, moonshine-making, sharecropper father, a mother who died young, two stepmothers, and a swarm of twenty children if you count whole and half, living and dead, siblings. ("There were so many of us; and we weren't a real close family because of my mean daddy, three mamas, and the age differences between all the children.") She had virtually no education. ("All of us had to help at home and work in the fields, so I missed more days than I went to school; I finally quit school in the third grade.") She still harbors bad memories of her father. ("Daddy was a mean, mean man. He'd get drunk and beat us if we did anything he didn't like.") She married to get away from the hard-scrabble existence of farm life. ("We didn't have anything; we were like those people you see in old movies about the depression. I got out as soon as I could.") Unfortunately, her life wasn't going to get much better for a long time.

The Browder family (Archie, Ila, Billy, A.C., and Glen) lived in a shabby one-room house that they rented from a black woman-owner who lived next door in a bad section of Sumter. My father never worked regularly; so my mother sometimes clerked at a fruitstand down the street in order to help pay our family bills. I was too young to remember my father or any of this; but according to all accounts, ours was a seriously troubled household.

One weekend in mid-January of l944, Ila and the boys took off unexpectedly to visit relatives in nearby Manning. Archie came to Manning in a bad mood and quickly wound up in jail for a mixture of minor transgressions—maybe public drinking, maybe domestic problems, maybe his reputation. Whatever the reasons, he appeared to be smoking in his cell-bed when the fire broke out, filling his lungs with scorching heat and smoke. A family friend came to Ila with the message that Archie had been injured in the fire, took my mother to the jail to get her husband, and transported them all in his pickup truck back to the hospital in Sumter. After a week of semi-conscious suffering, my father was dead. He left behind a twenty-two year old widow and three small boys (ages five, three, and one)—all of us dependent on the charity of relatives, friends, and public welfare.

Thus began, in classic manner, my American dream.

....

I grew up in Sumter, a regional Black Belt town of about 25,000 population, between Columbia and Charleston. Although I left South Carolina thirty years ago, I still consider that area as “home”—my family and old friends still live there; the father that I never knew is buried there; and I find myself going back about once a year to renew relationships and just to ride around and see what used to be.

Sumter was like many southern towns of the l940s, l950s, and l960s, projecting gentility and progress despite burgeoning problems of poverty and race. It had a military installation (Shaw Air Force Base) with a sizeable contingent of “outsiders”, a progressive city government (supposedly one of the first city manager systems in the country), a respectable daily newspaper (the Sumter Daily Item), several radio stations (including a “good music” station), an active business community, many civic-professional-social organizations, the “world famous Iris Gardens”, a beautiful country club, an active community playhouse, and several movie houses. We had a decent public education system (at least for whites); and there was even a small black church school (Morris College) supported in great part by the local white community.

....

Our troubled family was poor by all standards, so we never experienced Southern gentility and progress.

After Archie Browder's death, my mother refused a social worker's suggestion that the three Browder kids be put in a local orphanage. America was fully engaged in World War II, and she took a job as a laborer in a machinery shop making metal parts for battleships. With that work and the help of family and Social Security, she moved us into a small rental house near a furniture factory. After the war, she waitressed in a local café, where she met and married another, steadier man, Charlton McLeod—just returned home from combat in far off Europe—with a similarly rural background and even less formal education. Three more children swelled the family to eight people living in poverty and cramped quarters on the wrong side of town.

My stepfather and my mother both worked hard—he as a machine-worker in furniture mills and she as a seamstress in various operations such as furniture upholstering, dress-making, even sewing the silk interior of burial caskets. We moved frequently, wherever we could find cheap rent, mainly near the mills, along with the other "have-nots" of southern life. The only way that things could have been worse would have been if we were black, or mixed, like the people we called "turks" (I don't know if we had any basis for calling them that other than the fact that they were too dark to call "white" and too light to call "colored").

My parents lived simply and honestly. They went to church off-and-on; they took care of their kids; and they paid their bills. They steered away from the drinking, gambling, and carousing so often associated with impoverished southerners, and they generally conducted themselves with a dignity that I could only appreciate as I matured into adulthood.

Ours was a 2-in-l family—the McLeods and the Browders. Charlton McLeod (my stepfather) and Ila Browder McLeod (my mother), the three older Browder brothers (Billy, A.C., and Glen), the three younger McLeod kids (Janice, Larry, and Stanley) all lived fairly happily if not wealthily. But the Browders were, in a way, apart. The Browder boys called Charlton "Charlton" (unlike the McLeod kids who called him "Daddy"); and we spent much of our time outside the family-fishing, hunting, playing ball, getting into devilment—without a lot of supervision. We were "steps" or "halfs"; and although we never said so, we felt that we were different and to an extent on our own.

This independence was not all fun and games. It sounds like Huckleberry Finn, but it felt more like Oliver Twist. With no disrespect to my parents, I knew that I had to hustle if I were going to have anything extra. Selling peanuts and fish bait, rounding up soft drink bottles and scrap iron, even picking cotton, I did it all. The worst job I ever had was delivering newspapers—getting up at five in the morning, seven days a week, 365 days a year, in the freezing cold and rain, before going to school. I started out at four dollars a week. A three dollar weekly payment—for 25 weeks—on the bicycle that I had to buy in order to deliver the papers didn't leave much spending money, but it was more than I would have had otherwise.

I have to confess that I sometimes resembled Artful Dodger more than Oliver Twist. I stole things—not for the thrill but because I had so little and couldn't afford anything. Things like candy and apples, belts, gloves, a hat, even shotgun shells. I am sorry that I did so and I am grateful that I did not get caught.

For most of my childhood, I felt the continuous sting of self-consciousness and shame about who I was and where I lived and not having what others had. School was a special disaster. Although we lived on the bad side of town, I walked with my brothers to the city elementary school attended by kids from all over Sumter. On rare occasions I went home with uptown friends for short visits after school, to their houses in good neighborhoods, with lawns and doorbells; but they never came home with me to my side of town.

Everyday was an ego-buster in some way. Getting reduced or free lunch, not having the right notebooks or pencils or whatever was needed for class, getting stuff from the Salvation Army, and never having your parents participating in PTA and school events. My appearance and self-perception didn't help either—a red-haired, freckle-faced, scruffy kid from over near the mill. On top of all of this, I was especially shy. I went through the entire first grade being called "Johnnie" (the first name on my birth certificate) rather than "Glen" because I was too shy and self-conscious to straighten it out. I felt completely uncomfortable and out of place. As a result, I often played hooky—even in the first, second, and third grades—which only made things worse when I would show up and embarrass myself by not having done my homework or not knowing what the class was doing.

....

Then something happened that began to turn my entire life around. We moved to another part of Sumter (still on the wrong side of the tracks) and I started going to Wilder Elementary School. Wilder was a wonderful place for poor kids—located on our own side of town, run by kind and sensitive teachers, and bossed by a big, loud, white-haired, heart-of-gold woman principal—Miss Ruby Gallman. Every young person at Wilder was in the same socio-economic fix—mill children, farm children, white trash—but no rich kids. I blossomed. I quit playing hooky and started making good grades. Pretty much straight "A"s through the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades. I even became a school leader—class president, captain of the safety patrol, president of 4-H, and so on.

I also discovered that teachers and administrators, people who lived on the right side of town, people I didn't even know, were interested in helping me. Miss Frances Pendarvis treated me like a first-class citizen and inspired me academically. Miss Mary E. Johnson—a beautiful person who held my ten-year-old mind and heart in her hand—got her roommate (Miss Margaret Wolfe, whom I had never met) to pay for me to take music lessons. Mrs. James (I don't remember her first name) tactfully loaned me a pair of her son's dress pants to wear to an "uptown" May Day event. The most memorable "good deed" was when Sumter sent selected safety patrol leaders from all its elementary schools to Washington, DC, for a long weekend. Miss Gallman called me into her office and gave me a motherly talk—and she put three dollars in my hand. That may not sound like much money; but without Miss Gallman and her three dollars, I would have gone a thousand miles roundtrip and spent three days in our national capital without a cent in my pocket. As it worked out, I was able to enjoy myself and buy gifts for everyone in my family.

In fact, I can think of teachers throughout my school days—beyond Wilder—who helped prepare me for a better life through personal kindness and inspiration as well as book-learning. The aforementioned Miss Wolfe later became my high school homeroom teacher, with a pretty, beaming face and encouraging words. (I also developed a schoolboy crush on her although she was Mrs. Margaret Edens by that time.) Miss Cassie Nichols (a sweet little lady) introduced me to journalism and mentored me as editor of the high school newspaper. I never played any varsity sport in high school, but Mr. Sandy Hershey, our football coach (who also taught my psychology class), forever imprinted in my consciousness the principle that, whatever you do or want to do, "you gotta pay the price!" Miss Catherine Bass (who taught me Latin) and Miss Ethel Burnett (a school administrator) took a personal interest in my well-being and helped me get a college scholarship. At Presbyterian College, Mr. Ben Hay Hammett (whom I worked for in the Public Relations Department) and his wife Jane virtually adopted me into their family.

Most of these good people have gone on to their heavenly rewards. But I want to say something to them and countless others anyway. "Thank you! You taught me that even poor kids from the wrong side of the tracks can enjoy the blessings of American life."

....

Overall, my childhood memories, while stark, are wrapped in a positive retrospective fuzz, partly because of nostalgia and partly because those experiences made all of us stronger and better. The fact is that the Browders and McLeods did pretty well under the circumstances. We survived. And our family realizes that "we had to go there to get here".

Somewhat surprisingly considering my later public career, I never thought about government and politics as a child. My family was totally non-political. I do not recall my parents ever voting or even talking about public affairs—except for the Supreme Court's l954 desegregation ruling. I guess I picked up some academic interest in government through school; and I developed a fascination with public affairs when I started delivering newspapers. I would sit there on the curb and read, while selling or folding <u>The State</u> (out of Columbia, South Carolina) every day; and somehow I got hooked.

But I did a lot of thinking as a child—I don't know why—about inherently philosophical things such as family, religion, ethics, even such abstracts as time, space, and relationships. I recall playing hooky from school and climbing up a tall tree, sitting there all day—no books, no toys, no food, just looking across my neighborhood world and thinking about things. I probably am one of the few people in America who would play hooky from school and spend the day in the nearby public library.

Sometimes, that philosophical thinking and dreaming led to inner-conflict and frustration. I had a sense of doing something good and special with my life, but I felt mired in the muck of my immediate environment. I was just a kid yearning to be somebody, knowing that there was something more somewhere out there in America; but I also faced everyday realities. And I was tempted by self-limiting options—pursuing the attractions and vices of our working class world,

perhaps quitting school, perhaps getting a no-future job so that I could do and have the things that my brothers and friends were enjoying.

I went through an especially troubled stage during those early adolescent years. My self-confidence took a beating as I moved from Wilder elementary school to the more upscale and pressurized environment of Sumter's junior high school. Fortunately, at this critical time, I plunged into my paper route career—adding a little structure and cash to my existence; and an older friend (Jimmy Mathis) provided some direction and friendship that bolstered my confidence. That structure and friendship, along with the help of caring teachers and revived academic performance, put me firmly back on the road to the blessings and benefits of American life.

Sumter will always be special to me, but I decided early on that life was more than working in the mill on the wrong side of town. I did not know how or when, but I figured that, eventually, I would move far beyond those railroad tracks.

....

Like most southern communities of that time, Sumter was a white town (despite the fact that about forty percent of the county was black). Especially in the Black Belt (named such because of the rich black earth and large black slave population of Old South plantation days), society was highly structured by class (rich and poor) and caste (white and black). Poor whites were around, but they stayed in their place socially; and blacks were still pretty much invisible, hidden in rural and out-of-the-way areas.

There was no physical wall or river separating poor whites and blacks from Sumter proper; but there were the railroad tracks. The tracks ran east and west. North of the tracks was OK; all the good areas and aforementioned institutions of progressive Sumter (such as the air force base, the newspaper, etc.) were on that side of town. To the south were the mills and millworkers and black community. On Saturday mornings, Main Street was a bustling white business area; southward across the bridge and over the railroad tracks, Main Street turned into Manning Avenue, a similarly busy stretch of working class white and black grocery stores, car lots, and funeral homes.

Despite the thoroughness of segregation, it is one of the ironies of Sumter and southern life that many whites and blacks, especially poor whites and blacks, knew each other, in a limited and demeaning way, personally and sometimes warmly. The two races and mixed people lived relatively together, albeit in patches, mainly on our side of the tracks. We saw each other daily, passing along the street on our way to school or work, working side-by-side in the mill, sometimes even playing baseball together in the fields. Furthermore, even among poor whites, black domestics worked in many of our homes, helping with the washing, ironing, cooking, and child-tending. In a strange way, these limited and demeaning relationships of the past have helped today's southerners of both races come to terms with their troubled history.

As far back as I can remember, my family lived on the same streets and in the same neighborhoods as did blacks. We had a string of black domestic help—"Mammy", "Emma", and "Pat"—with the personal bonds that inevitably develop under such circumstances. Later on, when I took a newspaper route, I worked and played, on a limited basis, with my black friends "Brother", "Wash", and "Burrell"; and I delivered papers and collected payments throughout parts of the black community.

As a broad generalization, however, whites and blacks in the south did not socialize together (except for furtive and unmentionable liaisons). We went to different schools, different churches, different restaurants, different movies (although blacks could sit in the balcony of the white theaters)—different everything. The following anecdote conveys the nature of the caste system of that time in southern society:

> "It seems that two boys, similar in age, grew up during the l940s and l950s in the same small town. They went through the public school system and graduated from high school at about the same time in that town. Interestingly, both eventually would run for statewide public office—Secretary of State—in the same year; and one would win narrowly while the other would lose narrowly. More interestingly, eventually both would run for, get elected to, and serve together—as members of the same party—in the United States House of Representatives. Incredibly, they met and introduced themselves to each other, for the first time in their lives, on the floor of Congress."

That is a true story. James E. Clyburn, who is black, and I both grew up in Sumter, but we never knew each other there. He attended all-black Lincoln High School and I went to all-white Edmunds High School . He stayed in South Carolina while I moved on to Alabama (the respective states of our electoral careers), and we ended up serving together as congressmen in our nation's capitol.

Beyond this strange anecdote about our common backgrounds, I see striking parallels between Jim Clyburn and myself as public officials. Most obviously, we both overcame the handicap of our backgrounds to launch successful political careers. We started our public lives in state government before going to Congress; and we worked for reform at both levels. Neither of us has been extreme in philosophy or behavior; and we worked successfully within the system. I'm a relatively conservative Democrat and he's from the relatively liberal side of our party; but we both reached across party, racial, and philosophical chasms on important issues.

Most interesting to me is that, although Jim and I never met until that day on the floor of Congress, we were able to bridge our historic racial divide rather effortlessly; and we worked together on several important political problems in Washington—such as bringing the Blue Dogs (mainly white southerners) and Black Caucus (mainly black southerners) together on the church burning issue.

The fact that white southerners and black southerners can come together on political issues should not be surprising—consider the relationships between Bill Clinton, Jimmy Carter, and even George Wallace with black politicians and constituencies. But

what I saw and felt with Jim Clyburn was more than a political opportunity—I sensed in him a special kindred spirit. Perhaps it helped that we grew up—together and apart—back in Sumter!

Jim Clyburn and I will never know where that special relationship might have led, since I'm no longer in Congress and our lives are separated by different careers and thousands of miles. However, we still talk about Sumter, American democracy, and the American dream.

....

In retrospect, perhaps the most interesting, intriguing, puzzling aspect of my young life is the fact that I grew up in a time and place and environment of intense national significance—the civil rights revolution—without any apparent passion or personal involvement. I sometimes ask myself—with all my thinking about things as a young person—"Why?" How could anybody grow up in the south of that time without any active engagement, any life-altering experiences, or at least some dramatic memories from the civil rights movement?

Of course, I recognized the tragic and changing history of black-white relations in the South. I felt sorry for black people, individually and collectively, and I treated them kindly in our limited relationships. For example, I had chosen fairly early to substitute the term "colored" for our societal reference to "niggers"; and I recall once being reprimanded as a teenager for addressing a black woman as "Mrs." and for saying "yes ma'am" to her. But I accepted, without overtly or emotionally or actively racist motives, that whites and blacks lived different lives and that we and our lives were "better" than them and their lives. The bottom line is that I never actively challenged the system.

I guess part of the "why" is that our town was not a high profile battleground of black-white tension or activity as were some neighboring areas and hotspots throughout the South. Adjacent Clarendon County was one of the original parties of the landmark l954 school desegregation case; and we had some sit-in demonstrations involving students from the local black college and some rumblings by the Klan. But Sumter never made the headlines as did places like Orangeburg, Selma, and Birmingham.

Thus the civil rights revolution minimally impacted our community consciousness while I was growing up. Most people—white and black—in our area went about their segregated lives relatively quietly. I was in elementary school in l954 when the Supreme Court declared school integration the law of the land; and I graduated from a still totally segregated public school system in l96l. Sumter continued to be a "white town" for years to come.

Moreover, my part of society—the world of "poor white trash"—was particularly isolated from such activities and movements. The civil rights struggle basically was a fight between black activists and prominent white political, business, and religious leaders; and the fight generally was waged on the good side of town. Somewhat like the outcast black "non-citizens"

of that time, poor whites weren't asked and didn't participate in public affairs (except when the issue exploded into mob actions and-or Klan gatherings). In fact, I cannot recall a single civil rights incident involving anyone or anything or any place in my neighborhood; apparently nobody wanted to integrate with us.

Besides, on a more personal level, I had enough problems of my own. I was too engaged in my own struggle against adversity to worry about racial segregation (or what was happening in far-off Vietnam).

The truth, then, is that I was an acquiescent product of my Deep South culture. I proceeded, as did many otherwise decent people, through the civil rights revolution with insensate accommodation to the southern way of life. I busied myself with my own personal struggle fairly oblivious to perhaps the most consequential movement of modern American history. That's not something to brag about or agonize over—it's just what happened, and it is part of my story.

....

So, how did these early factors—my family, poverty, segregation, school, work—affect my personal, political, and philosophical outlook as an adult?

I'm sure that psycho-historians can spin an entertaining tale about my family background (just as they have done with Bill Clinton); and they probably would be right. I never really appreciated while I was growing up the influence of my father's life and death on my life and personality; but now I realize that the ghost of Archie Calvin Browder drove me—sometimes consciously but most of the time unconsciously—to rise above my origins, to be something special, to do something positive with my life.

Very simply, my early experiences made me sensitive to social, economic, racial, and other disadvantages; but they also gave me hope, ambition, and drive. Interestingly, they did not make me very bitter or cynical; nor did I become overly emotional, partisan or ideological. Instead, over the course of many years, I developed a strong sense of personal and civic responsibility and an independent, methodical approach to things. I knew that I had a long, tough road to travel; but I also figured that, with perseverance and patience, I might get to the top of the hill, where I could "do good" for myself and others. This outlook has been, in many but not all ways, an asset throughout my life and especially in my academic and political careers.

Clearly, then, my family background and developing outlook pointed me toward the American dream, and I followed that dream. As a young adult, I was a consuming dreamer, taking full advantage of my opportunities-a solid education, a good job, decent pay—all in all, a pretty good life. Later, as a thirty-something professor with a wife, young daughter, and a new home and ten acres on a wooded mountain in Alabama, I began developing a more structured understanding of the essential nature of "America". It would be another decade before I engaged, fully, as a contributing civic partner in the American system. Throughout all these

stages, however, I never forgot my origins—and the lessons I learned—on the wrong side of the tracks.

....

Thus, I have lived and continue to live the American dream; and I have almost mystical confidence in American democracy. But after decades of experience and introspection, I am concerned about whether America is working for today's young people—and future Americans—the way that it worked for me.

I do not pretend that my "poor boy" story entitles me to impose my own personalized interpretation of "America" on our nation. Nor do I think that the essence of the American dream is a massive public or governmental program to cater to the needs and interests of the "National Association of Poor Boys of America". My work as a public official and political scientist taught me long ago the realities and limitations of American government and politics. In short, I do not subscribe to the knee-jerk, bleeding-heart, big-government political philosophy.

However, my personal experience has kept me sensitive to "America" as a national experiment in democratic ideals; and it has attuned me to "American democracy" as the process that allows all of us to pursue those ideals. My personal background has added a special perspective—from the heart—to go along with my political and theoretical thinking about the nature and workings of the American system. In other words, I see historic America and American democracy as synonymously integral to an "equal opportunity American dream".

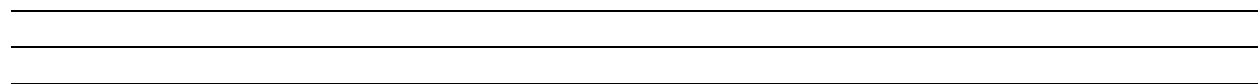
But now I wonder: Is America still alive and well? Does American democracy still allow poor little boys—and poor little girls, and old people, and sick people, and blacks, browns, yellows, reds, and all other colors and creeds and ideas—to pursue those ideals? Do the American people still accept sufficient individual and collective responsibility for helping everybody and anybody chase the American dream? Is America still a national experiment in democratic ideals?

Or is America just a giant pyramid scheme? Is America nothing more than a successful political game that has worked very well for two centuries—because of its favorable environment and good management—but which now is playing itself out? Is America just an attractive racket whose winners are the many generations of Americans who got in-and-out (with disproportionate blessings and benefits of American democracy) in timely fashion? Has America become a winning proposition just for privileged people who are positioned to take advantage of the game? Is America now a failing political operation for too many citizens? What about the growing number of Americans, especially younger citizens, who simply have lost interest in the old political order? Why are so many Americans talking about investing in new and different political schemes?

In short, has my American dream turned into a nightmare for today's generation?

I will try to resist excessive psycho-babbling; this lecture series is, essentially, about American democracy—not my American dream. My rhetorical proclamation about "dying" America is more than nostalgic pining for the good old days. My central purpose is a theoretical and political analysis, a proposition that serious social, technological, and political developments have changed—and will continue to change—American democracy and America in important and unhealthy ways.

But the reader should be forewarned of the lingering question, somewhere in the back of my mind, throughout this analysis: "How does this systemic development or that particular proposal—or even my own paradigm for 'New America'—affect the ability of today's little Johnnie Glenn Browders to cross those tracks to the American dream?"



LECTURE # 2: "A SYSTEMS THEORY OF DYSFUNCTIONAL AMERICA."

(What do I mean by "America", "American Democracy", and "Dying"?)

The outrageous assertion that America may be dying carries an obligation to conduct a thorough examination, with sound theoretical analysis, of our national health. In this lecture, I want to explain first what I mean by the terms "America", "American democracy", and "dying". Then, I will develop a conceptual framework—systems theory and a diagrammatic model—incorporating the dynamics of my "dying" proposition.

....

"AMERICA":

A NATIONAL EXPERIMENT IN DEMOCRATIC IDEALS.

My conception of "America" does not fit any simple geographic, legalistic, or jurisdictional definition. It does not mean "the government". Nor is it a shorthand reference to the United States of America. I use the term "America", as did Tocqueville, connotatively, to express the subjective character as well as the objective parameters of the system within which "we, the people of the United States" conduct our public affairs.

My connotational definition is based on the notion that America has always been an idea as much as a thing. America is not just the United States, or the President, or the Capitol, or the 260 million people in far-flung territory over which our flag flies. These are only representative parts of our corporeal body. In addition to this corporeal body, I am talking about something different, something bigger, something special—an almost spiritual America.

....

My America is what Tocqueville billed as "the great experiment ... a spectacle for which the world has not been prepared by the history of the past" (Chapter I of Vol. 11). My America is the unprecedented pursuit of civic freedom, equality, and justice through a precarious framework of popular self-government. My America is a national experiment in democratic ideals.

At the risk of being boringly repetitive, I want to emphasize the essential elements of our Great Experiment. First, and perhaps of most historic importance, America represents a unique case of inspired nationhood; a hodge-podge of New World people rejected the Old World and voluntarily joined together as a nation. They even put it in writing—in effect, "We the people...are all in this together". Second, to a great extent, America was based primarily on enlightened theoretical principles—democratic ideals—rather than monarchical, religious, or class considerations. Third, the new American nation attempted to implement these democratic ideals through a strange, new experiment with limited, representative governance. These essential elements of our national democratic experiment have withstood challenging tests of war and peace and time, finding expression in the definitive struggles and documents of American history.

Perhaps no nobler expression of America's generalized democratic ideals exists than the opening, universal principle of our Declaration of Independence:

> "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

Substantively instructive is our collective national commitment as expressed in the Preamble to the Constitution:

> "We the people of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquillity, provide for the common defence,

promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America."

Personally meaningful for each of us is that special feeling we experience at some time or another when we recite the Pledge of Allegiance to our flag and our republic:

"I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and to the republic for which it stands, one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

I could go on forever—Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, FDR's fireside chats, Martin Luther King's "I have a dream..."; Kennedy's "Ask not what your country can do for you..."-our experiment certainly sparkles with familiar words of inspirational national purpose.

Of course, those familiar words are fuzzy philosophical inspirations; in practice they present complexities and contradictions. Inevitably, "freedom" and "equality" defy easy conceptualization and operationalization; and quite often they clash. For example, is our self-evident truth one of opportunity or one of fairness? Is our society one of freedom, individualism, and independence or one of egalitarian security? How do we balance our democratic ideals when freedom of speech conflicts with freedom of religion? What do we do when the news media insist upon disseminating information that damages an accused citizen's ability to get a fair trial? Is it possible to resolve these legitimate democratic contradictions without endangering our treasured ideals and principles of governance? How do we deal with the fact that implementing these democratic ideals and principles sometimes leads us toward undemocratic and anti-democratic outcomes? Can we make the Great Experiment work despite its fuzziness and our own self-destructive inclinations?

In truth, our Great Experiment has been a spectacular national march, for more than two centuries, by a diverse people, toward universally positive principles of democratic society—such as liberty, equality, and justice. In the process, our experiment also has secured the material benefits of democracy for generation after generation of American citizens. This unprecedented, often circuitous march has led us through war, constitutional crisis, executive-legislative-judicial struggle, economic depression, social unrest, and much public soul-searching. It has been, and always will be, a fitful journey of competing visions and real political danger.

....

America's Great Experiment, then, as I see it, is a philosophical and practical exercise in national, democratic self-government, a procedural and substantive exercise designed to answer an important sequential question: (1) Can..., (2) How can..., and (3) How far can we pursue democratic ideals through limited, representative government without succumbing to the inherent, destructive tendencies of democracy? How far can an increasingly diverse, divergent, and demanding people push a restrained-but-popular process of governance toward fuzzy and contradictory democratic ideals without damaging

that process or those ideals. In other words, how far can we carry our national democratic experiment without going too far? This simple question conveys the noble quest and potential danger of America's historic spectacle.

....

"**AMERICAN DEMOCRACY":**

THE MAGICAL MIX OF PEOPLE, POLITICS, AND GOVERNMENT THROUGH WHICH WE PURSUE DEMOCRATIC IDEALS.

If, as I have proposed, America is a "national experiment in democratic ideals", then "American democracy" is the practical political chemistry—a sort of civic laboratory—for translating our community of ideals into progressive public policy. More normatively, I use the term "American democracy" to refer to the magical mix of people, politics, and government through which our progressive experiment has worked effectively for the past two centuries. Each of these elements has provided critical contributions to the democratic process; and collectively, they have represented extraordinary civic chemistry. For most of our history, that civic chemistry has encouraged democratic ideals, even when those ideals represented abstractions, uncertainties, and contradictions within our polity.

Indeed, our people, politics, and government have fashioned a remarkable record in dealing with the sequential questions of our Great Experiment—"Can...", "How can...", and "How far can we pursue democratic ideals through limited, representative government without succumbing to the inherent, destructive tendencies of democracy?". American democracy is acknowledged universally for its seemingly endless and progressive realization of substantive democratic ideals.

....

I should acknowledge at this point the difficulty of talking about America and American democracy as though there were a singular national democratic community or personality at play in this discussion. Too often, analysts attempt to explain our national history and politics with the implication that we speak in one voice with clearly identifiable meaning, when in fact there is a diversity of messages and messengers underlying our actions. For example, too much has been made of the national mood change in 1992 when Bill Clinton was elected president, ending the reign of Ronald Reagan and George Bush, or when the Republicans took over congress in 1994 after decades of Democratic dominance. The reality is that the American electorates of 1992 and 1994 were more similar than different from previous years; we were split into roughly equal camps, with only very small margins changing control of government. While it is possible to talk about very consequential differences in those "swing" elections, it is inaccurate to characterize them as expressions of a singular mindset or a total

mood change. The unclear mandates of the 1996 and l998 elections more accurately reflect the multiplicity of our national community and its political personality.

Equally central to my analysis is the fact that there is no formal, official American ideology of democratic ideals. We hold self-evident truths, we ordain the Constitution, and we pledge allegiance; but we have never really defined or committed ourselves to any systematic set of concepts that could serve as a clear statement of what America means philosophically or politically. This historic indefiniteness is critical to understanding my definition of America as "a national experiment in democratic ideals" and my analysis of the challenges facing our country,

I should admit too that, despite my sentiments, America, as I have defined it, has always been something of a myth. Our national experiment in democratic ideals has never worked very smoothly. Slavery, injustice, violence, even civil war—these are only a few of the many unpleasant elements of the American experience.

The important bottom line, however, is that our progressive democratic experiment has been sufficiently real and powerful throughout our country's history to suffice as the defining and distinguishing character of America. The interesting thing, furthermore, is that Americans historically have subscribed to this positive notion of America regardless of whether that notion fit their own personal experiences and lives. The vast majority of Americans—including most women, minorities, the poor, and the powerless—have stood erect, placed their right hands across their hearts, and loyally pledged their allegiance with a closing litany of "with liberty and justice for all". This phenomenal allegiance was a positive aspect of their civic development and a great service to the American experiment.

Fortunately, furthermore, our experiment has transcended partisan politics. Democrats preach "fairness" (equality) and Republicans push "opportunity" (freedom), but what we're all talking about is small-d democratic ideals (interestingly, within a small-r republican framework). I have served with Presidents Bill Clinton (D) and George Bush (R) and Speakers Newt Gingrich (R) and Tom Foley (D), and I can attest to the partisanship of their American visions; but I also can attest to their support of the progressive democratic march.

....

"DYING":

AMERICAN DEMOCRACY NO LONGER WORKS THE WAY IT HAS IN THE PAST, AND WE SEEM TO BE TIRING OF THE GREAT EXPERIMENT ITSELF.

The central idea of this lecture series (as stated in my introductory remarks) is a complex and disturbing question for Twenty-First Century America:

“Can our nation—a people of growing cultural diversity, with increasingly divergent ideals, values, and governance principles, in an environment of constricted political blessings and benefits—continue to sustain our collective pursuit of freedom, equality, and justice within the traditional framework of limited, representative government?”

To put this idea into more urgent terms, “How far can America pursue the Great Experiment without succumbing to the inherent, destructive tendencies of democracy?”

My rhetorical contention, of course, is that America may be dying—that American democracy no longer works the way it used to work and that we seem to be tiring of the Great Experiment itself. It is not my contention that America has died. Nor are we comatose. We are very much alive. But America is evidencing regressive civic illness that, without treatment, jeopardizes the future of our national experiment in democratic ideals.

I should repeat here that my “dying” inquiry is not tied to any specific issue or ideological interpretation of contemporary policy and politics. Today’s ailment goes beyond day-to-day developments within the political arena, and it inflicts unhappiness and discomfort on liberals and conservatives alike. My objective is to go beyond current conditions in order to deal with more serious and consequential considerations. My concern about America’s civic health is based on what I consider more basic, fundamental, structural developments—unhealthy systemic changes—in American democracy.

....

Our Great Experiment is a tricky endeavor, and its course can never be easy or straight. It requires sustained national commitment—by a multiplicity of citizens, political subcultures, and geographical entities—to democratic ideals and the balancing of inevitable strains among those ideals, such as freedom-versus-equality, individualism-versus-security, and majority rule-versus-minority rights.

Tricky too is the notion of controlled, popular governance, which has within it, not only the potential for what philosophers call the “good life”, but also the democratic seeds of tyranny and anarchy and perhaps dissolution. Interminable conflict is built into a system which gives ultimate authority to the people (through their elected representatives) to resolve their conflicts by adopting undemocratic policies and practices. The people have within their ultimate authority (through constitutional revision) the power to alter or even to terminate the Great Experiment itself.

That ultimate authority—the vast power of a democracy to pursue unhealthy, undemocratic “ideals”—is what I mean in my warning about “the inherent, destructive tendencies of democracy”. Our constitutional founders hoped, of course, that America would—forevermore—pursue democratic ideals within a limited, representative framework. But they realized that, with the passage of time, Americans might divide into opposing camps—pitting democratic ideal (such as freedom) against democratic ideal (such as equality)—in a win-lose

game to be determined by a weak, fragmented governmental apparatus. A cynicalized America—perhaps exhausted and divided in its pursuit of democratic ideals—might decide to expand (or constrain) our system of ideals and governance beyond (or to a lesser extent than) its intent. Future Americans might ask the American experiment to produce something that it is incapable of producing—perfect blessings and benefits—or we might inhibit the experiment from doing what it was designed to do—assisting, in a practical way, the pursuit of democratic ideals. Perhaps the greatest danger is that the American people might begin to view the Founders' experiment as no longer relevant to their lives—they could decide to walk away from our national system of ideals and governance.

Either option (expansion or constriction or abandonment) could be carried democratically to the ultimate, self-destructive resolution of conflicting American visions These dangerous inclinations toward democratic excess, democratic incapacitation, and democratic irrelevancy, then, are the inherent, destructive potential of our Great Experiment.

Thus our Founders structured an invitation to constant political assault on the delicate balance of the American system. They struggled vigorously with this fundamental dilemma; and it has challenged our political leaders and fascinated a worldwide audience ever since. Nevertheless, from the beginning, our American experiment has progressed toward the broad, general ideal of democracy. Now, after two centuries of the continuing dilemma, our delicate experiment is in trouble.

....

We will conduct an empirical examination of our ailing American system in the next lecture ("Political Observations of Dysfunctioning America"), but for now I want to establish the logic of my "dying" terminology.

Speaking in physiological terms, "dying" can be defined as the process of terminal systemic degeneration—the increasing inability of an organism to perform normal, essential, sustaining functions of life. Most healthy organisms experience spurts of growth, perform vital functions, and regenerate themselves periodically over the course of their lives. However, all organisms also represent an inevitably changing balance of growing, functioning, regenerating...and eventual degeneration. This balancing process can be altered, disrupted—and terminated—by unhealthy developments within the organism and/or its environment. Degeneration can take the form of specific, sudden, dramatic developments—such as a heart attack, a brain aneurysm, or drowning; however, more often than not, it represents the general onset of something like immune deficiency, metastatic cancer, or just old age. Quite often, furthermore, this degeneration is gradual, subtle, and not easily perceived. Regardless of the form or perceptibility, without organic adjustment (to accommodate changed environmental conditions) and/or environmental correction (to fit organic needs), the system will begin to experience increasing dysfunction and eventual shutdown.

Therefore, systemic decline is a natural, inevitable pattern for any living organism; and there are historic parallels among nations, empires, and civilizations. In this lecture

series, accordingly, I approach America's contemporary problem as progressive civic degeneration. The problem is not simply that yesterday America was healthy and today it is dying. It is not as though we have suffered dramatic public trauma. Nor is it a matter of a few, anecdotal, unconnected, unhealthy incidents. It would be irresponsible to invoke pathological terminology to refer to imagined discomforts, minor pains, routine ailments, or malfunctioning body parts. However, the term "dying" is appropriate if the suspect malady is of such widespread and critical nature as to jeopardize the survival of the American system.

The bottom-line measure of our civic health, of course, is whether we can continue—now and for the long term—satisfactory progress toward democratic ideals such as freedom, equality, and justice; and the key test is one of sufficiency. Is American democracy working sufficiently well—as it has in the past—to keep us, as a nation, committed to democratic ideals and the Great Experiment? Or, conversely, has American democracy changed—is it producing insufficient democratic progress? Have we tired of the experiment itself? Are we tending toward self-destructive sentiments and behavior?

My thinking is that America is approaching or may have reached the point of systemic imbalance and fundamental civic illness. Our condition appears to be a serious totality of numerous democratic declinations. We are experiencing the cumulative effect of an unfavorable national environment, a philosophical civil war, a strained political culture, broken political machinery, and crippled government; and, consequently, we are beginning to experience civic fatigue. Our nation is evidencing clear symptoms of a syndrome that I will label, quite simply, "Un-American democracy"—an increasing, interrelated pattern of environmental, organic, and civic deterioration. And my concern is that America—as we have known it for two centuries—may be in jeopardy.

In short, for purposes of my rhetorical inquiry, "dying" means systemic degeneration that threatens American democracy and the future of America.

This discussion will continue in the next lecture—with clinical observations of dysfunctioning American democracy. Before leaving my theoretical proposition, however, I want to suggest a diagrammatic model of, hypothetically, "dying" America.

....

A SYSTEMIC MODEL OF DYING AMERICA .

A quick reference to a field of analysis known as systems theory will help clarify my "dying!" proposition; it also will provide the conceptual framework for the remainder of this lecture series.

Systems theory has proven useful in explaining how systems (such as countries, organizations, and living organisms) work procedurally and substantively. Technically speaking, a system is a regularly interacting or interdependent group of elements forming a unified whole. Physiologically (the applicable perspective for my "dying" analysis), a system is a group of body organs that together perform a vital function. More pertinent to our discussion, systems theory, as presented by David Easton in A Systems Analysis of Political Life (1965), helps us understand how nations succeed or fail in the face of significant challenges.

According to Easton, a political regime's long-term survival is dependent upon proper functioning and interaction among the organic elements of that regime and upon a healthy relationship between that regime and the broader system within which it operates. Most importantly, there must be a positive relationship between systemic inputs (such as public opinion) and outputs (such as public policy). Another principle of systemic stability is the necessity of balance between two kinds of inputs—demands (that place pressure on authorities and processes) and supports (that sustain the system). This latter category includes diffuse supports deriving from the belief that the systemic regime is the proper and legitimate way to make decisions for society and specific supports for particular authorities, processes, and policies. The trick for the system, and any democratic regime, is whether its political institutions and processes can translate a variety of positive and negative inputs into acceptable outputs within a generally unfocused, unruly, and changing systemic environment.

This brief review of demand/support balance and the input/output relationship provides insight into why so many regimes worldwide are falling apart or have collapsed. More to the point, systems theory provides the basis for understanding what's happening in America. Systems analysis helps us sort out basic, causal factors (independent variables) from effect (dependent variables); it also helps identify factors that, while not basic, causal functions, are related and contribute to the problem (intervening variables). Such analysis further aids in recognizing factors that simply occur or appear to occur simultaneously (co-incidental or spurious variables).

....

Take a look at my "Is America Dying?" model, which depicts pertinent elements, variables, and relationships of the American system—and America's failing civic health—through a comparison of historical and contemporary diagrams.

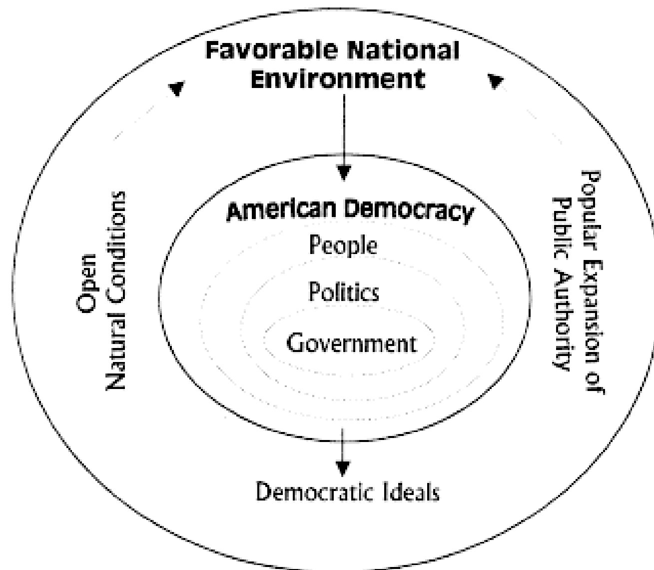
(Place "Is America Dying?" model about here.)

My systemic model is admittedly simplistic, since it is designed to emphasize the broad outlines of our predicament without the clutter of exacerbating or irrelevant problems. The value of this model is that it demonstrates graphically and concisely the theoretic foundation of my "Is

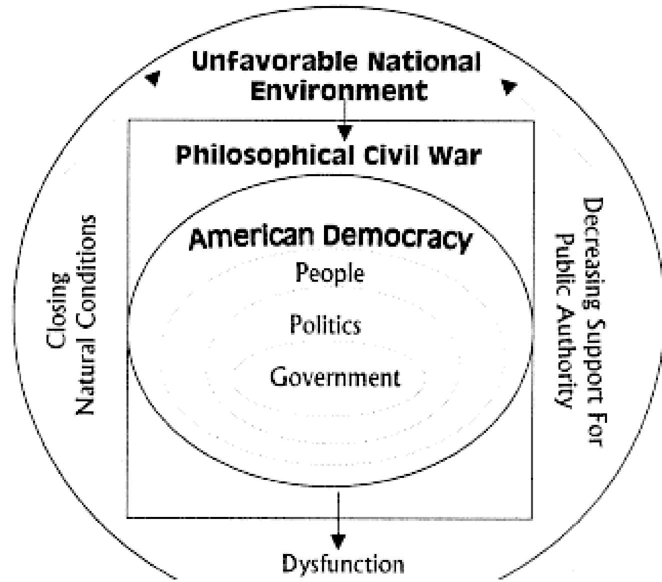
America Dying?” inquiry; and it provides the conceptual framework for my clinical observations in the next lecture.

IS AMERICA DYING?

HISTORICAL AMERICA



CONTEMPORARY AMERICA



The rationale of America's Great Experiment—and the basis of my model—is the idea that democratic ideals (even competing, contradictory ideals) can best be pursued by a diverse people through a loose framework of popular but restrained governance. Furthermore, that experiment works only under certain conditions. In other words, American democracy (our mix of people, politics, and government) was designed and has evolved within an environment of openness and opportunity—relatively free from a rigid, stifling orthodoxy of unworkable ideals, values, and governance.

Unhealthy changes in that supportive national environment obviously would create tremendous negative pressures on American democracy; and any changes among the organic elements (our people, politics, and government) of American democracy would further complicate our experiment. Eventually, these changes might begin to impact, negatively, our limited, representative system of governance—and our pursuit of democratic ideals.

....

The historical diagram shows American democracy pursuing democratic ideals within a favorable national environment (shaped originally by open natural conditions and sustained by the popular expansion of public authority). This favorable national environment provides positive inputs (both demands and supports) to allow and encourage American democracy (a civic people, functional political machinery, and effective government) to magically mix and implement democratic ideals. These positive outputs then feed back into the national environment for systemic regeneration.

The contemporary diagram shows struggling American democracy, especially American government, at the center of a troubled system. Our closed natural conditions and declining support for public authority have produced an unfavorable national environment for American democracy; furthermore, a philosophical civil war has entrapped, or "boxed", American democracy in a destructive fight over ideals, values, and governance. A cynical people and broken political machinery press ominously on beleaguered government, crippling day-to-day governance and more generalized aspects of American civic life. American democracy functions very poorly under such circumstances, and our national march toward democratic ideals slows to a contentious crawl. The resulting dysfunction then feeds back into the system as recycling negative environment.

Over time, without correction, this pattern translates into systemic democratic degeneration.

....

According to my model, the basic, causal factors in the systemic degeneration of America are the historic decline of our national environment and a contemporary philosophical civil war over democratic ideals, cultural values, and governance principles. These two inter-related factors are the primary independent variables straining American democracy, whose organic elements are experiencing significant changes and problems of their own. Together these developments are killing our Great Experiment.

In this respect, my theoretic perspective differs markedly from conventional wisdom. Most commentators blame our government, politicians, and political institutions (and a few criticize the public) for America's civic problems. While I hold these participants accountable for their actions, I also see them all as struggling players in a "fixed" card game. In my analysis, the cards of the current game—an unfavorable national environment and a philosophical civil war—are stacked against our people, politics, and government.

My model also differs from much of today's punditry in identifying what is not "the" problem—political scandals, declining morals, liberalism, conservatism, abortion, pornography, homosexuality, prayer in the schools, affirmative action, breakup of the family, crime, drugs, racism, incivility, talk radio, television, Hollywood, crooked politicians, campaign money, negative campaigning, the special interests, party politics, media scrutiny, the budget deficit, the national debt, or any of a variety of hot-button issues and villains. These issues and villains are important; some are corrosively controversial (but others are simply objectionable nuisances or trivial diversion). Many of them derive, in part, from the fundamental dysfunctions of the American system; in turn, they infect our national environment with political toxins and seriously exacerbate our civic ills. Expectedly, our public debate and media tend to focus disproportionately on them. But they are, from an analytic perspective, merely coincidental or spurious elements of our unhealthy situation, problems that the American system is expected to address even under duress.

In summary, my model proposes that the basic causal, fundamental problems of contemporary America are our declining national environment and philosophical civil war; and, together, these historic developments are stressing our people, politics, and government. The cumulative effect is systemic democratic degeneration.

....

There's no way, under current conditions, that American democracy can continue to mix its magic for the long run. In the past, an indefinable "spirit of America" seemed to immunize us against threats to our national health—it got us through the depression, two world wars, and even a civil war. But today's threat is different and more pathogenic,

challenging the continued functioning of limited, representative governance and our commitment to democratic ideals. Indeed, today's threat calls into question the future of America's Great Experiment!

In body and soul, America may be dying!

LECTURE # 3: <u>"POLITICAL OBSERVATIONS OF DYSFUNCTIONING AMERICA."</u>

<u>(Why and how is America dying?)</u>

<u>"PROPOSITION NUMBER ONE: THE FAVORABLE NATIONAL ENVIRONMENT OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY HAS DISAPPEARED."</u>

In preceding discussions, I laid the theoretic foundation—systems analysis—for my "dying" proposition. In this lecture, I will begin presenting political observations—or propositions—(based on my own direct examination and assessments by others) about the possible "why" and "how" of dying America. I also plan to elaborate on some important and personally interesting developments—such as the technological revolution and the rise of electronic democracy—in contemporary America.

My basic proposal, of course, is that America—our national democratic experiment—may be dying. We are not producing satisfactory democratic results, or even effective governance; and we seem, as a nation, to be tiring of the experiment itself.

The essence of my analytic theory (presented in the previous lecture) is that the basic, causal forces driving the contemporary American system are our unfavorable national environment and philosophical civil war; and the result is degenerating American democracy- and, of course, our faltering Great Experiment.

In a sense, I might speculate that America is dying (l) because our national democratic experiment is stalled (2) because American democracy no longer works (3) because of a philosophical civil war (4) because of a deteriorated national environment. Of course, it is impossible to prove empirically any cause-and-effect pattern or to sort out precisely our sickness from our symptoms. I simply will proceed on the dual premise that our adverse national environment, philosophical civil war, and dysfunctional American democracy are interrelated and that, collectively, they are hurting our national democratic experiment.

Obviously, this inquiry is not a major research project; nor do I provide full documentation for the observations presented here. My objective is a normative, provocative thesis, supported by my own experience and expertise and supplemented by related scholarship and commentary. My expectation, of course, is that my proposed theory and propositions will help us understand the "why" and "how" of our contemporary predicament; and my hope is that this inquiry will encourage others to engage in further discussion and more scientific research so that we might chart our course to a healthier future.

....

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 those conditions in recent decades helps explain our systemic degeneration.

AMERICA'S ORIGINAL, OPEN NATURAL ENVIRONMENT CLOSED LONG AGO.

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.

In brief, as visiting Alexis de Tocqueville wrote in Democracy in America (l835), the New World was a fairly open environment with economic, social, and political opportunity. These conditions provided a favorable setting for our people, politics, and government; and they encouraged the collective civic chemistry for pursuing the progressive ideals of our national purpose.

Tocqueville identified the practical attraction of this rich New World as the key motivation for early settlers and would-be Americans:

"Thus the European leaves his cottage for the transatlantic shores, and the American, who is born on that very coast, plunges in his turn into the wilds of central America. This double emigration is incessant; it begins in the middle of Europe, it crosses the Atlantic Ocean, and it advances over the solitudes of the New World. Millions of men are marching at once towards the same horizon;, their language, their religion, their manners differ; their object is the same. Fortune has been promised to them somewhere in the West, and to the West they go to find it." (Vol. 1, p. 303)

Tocqueville specifically cited these blessings as the foundation of democracy in America:

"The chief circumstance which has favored the establishment and the maintenance of a democratic republic in the United States is the nature of the territory that the Americans inhabit. Their ancestors gave them the love of equality and of freedom; but God himself gave them the means of remaining equal and free, by placing them upon a boundless continent. General prosperity is favorable to the stability of all governments, but more particularly of a democratic one, which depends upon the will of the majority, and especially upon the will of that portion of the community which is most exposed to want. When the people rule, they must be rendered happy or they will overturn the state; and misery stimulates them to those excesses to which ambition rouses kings. The physical causes, independent of the laws, which promote general prosperity are more numerous in America than they ever have been in any other country in the world, at any other period of history. In the United States not only is legislation democratic, but Nature herself favors the cause of the people." (Vol. I, p. 301)

These advantageous circumstances produced American democrats who were optimistic as well as practical:

"There is not a country in the world where man more confidently seizes the future, where he so proudly feels that his intelligence makes him master of the universe, that he can fashion it to his liking. It's an intellectual movement which can only be compared to that which led to the discovery of the new world three centuries ago; and one can really say that America has been discovered a second time." (Pierson p. 119)

....

A half-century later, in a little noticed speech at the Chicago meeting of the American Historical Association, another unknown young scholar named Frederick Jackson Turner expanded this idea into, perhaps, the most significant essay in American historiography. In the opening paragraph of his speech, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" (1893), Turner stated that "the existence of an area of free land, its

continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development." (P. I)

****

EDITORIAL NOTE:

Reliance on Frederick Jackson Turner evokes concerns similar to my earlier author's note regarding Tocqueville. Turner's frontier thesis has been questioned, criticized, and dismissed by hordes of historians as monocausal, deterministic, inconsistent, exaggerated, culturally biased, and scientifically suspect. But the reality is that Turner, like Tocqueville, provided a benchmark analysis through his timing (explaining America's democratic character at a critical transitional period in our national development), his method (examination of census data purporting the end of the frontier), and the power of his message (the positive impact of New World challenges and opportunities on American development). Turner's analysis has tremendous value because it helps us understand how we got where we are and it forces us to consider our future in a changed world. Although professional historians will protest my use of Turner's simplistic and dated version of western democracy, I think that it is worthwhile—both substantively and as background to my own analysis—to revisit the frontier thesis of American history.

****

Turner's thesis (known as the frontier hypothesis of American history) emphasized the challenge as well as the riches of the New World:

> "The peculiarity of American institutions is the fact that they have been compelled to adapt themselves to the changes of an expanding people—to the changes involved in crossing a continent, in winning a wilderness, and in developing at each area of this progress out of the primitive economy and political conditions of the frontier into the complexity of city life." (P.1)

All nations undergo developmental experiences, Turner said, but in most cases this development has occurred in fixed environs with limited consequences or real growth for the polity. The case of the United States was different, with initial developments on the Atlantic coast recurring endlessly in a process of progressive evolution as Americans expanded westward.

> "Thus American development has exhibited not merely advance along a single line but a return to primitive conditions on a continually advancing frontier line, and a new development from that area." (P. I)

> "This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnish the forces dominating American character." (P. 2-3)

In imagery reminiscent of Hollywood, Turner traced the transformational experience from Old World to New America. "The wilderness masters the colonist ... It strips off the garments of civilization ... Before long he has gone to planting Indian corn and plowing with a sharp stick; he shouts the war cry and takes the scalp in orthodox Indian fashion... Little by little he transforms the wilderness, but the outcome is not the Old Europe... The fact is, that here is a new product that is American." (P. 4)

American democracy derived not from some theorist's dream, Turner declared:

> "It came out of the American forest; and it gained new strength each time it touched a new frontier. Not the constitution, but free land and an abundance of natural resources open to a fit people, made the democratic type of society in America for three centuries while it occupied its empire." (P. 293)

Both Tocqueville and Turner stressed that such an environment not only transformed people but also facilitated the development of an American brand of limited, representative democracy.

To be specific, the openness and richness of the expanding frontier preoccupied America's people with their own endeavors, making government and politics relatively unimportant. Most Americans went about their lives without resorting to political institutions for help or redress of their grievances.

As long as the frontier worked, people left government alone; and a select, elite leadership ran government with impunity as long a it did not antagonize the public egregiously. The result was a functioning partnership, within an environment of opportunity, among the people, their government, and the political machinery linking them together.

Thus American democracy worked well. But how long could it last, Could it work well forever?

....

Tocqueville may have revealed his own anxiety about the future of American democracy after a pioneer encounter in the frontier wilderness. He referred to the pioneer as "a representative of a race to which belongs the future of the new world" (Pierson p. 244); but he also added, without explanation, a strange comment on the inevitable problems which would accompany the exhaustion of the frontier:

> "It's this nomad people which the rivers and lakes do not stop, before which the forests fall and the prairies are covered with shade, and which, after having reached the Pacific Ocean, will reverse its steps to trouble and destroy the societies which it will have formed behind it." (Pierson, p. 244).

The Frenchman perhaps realized that, eventually, western expansion must end, and therein would lie a basis of national discontent.

Turner saw the beginnings of this discontent in his lifetime. In a 1914 commencement address at the University of Washington, he said:

> "To-day we are looking with a shock upon a changed world... We have so far won our national home, wrested from it its first rich treasures, and drawn to it the unfortunate of other lands, that we are already obliged to compare ourselves with settled states of the Old World ... The disappearance of the frontier, the closing of the era which was marked by the influence of the West as a form of society, brings with it new problems of social adjustment, new demands for considering our past ideals and our present needs." (Pp. 293-307)

....

THE POPULAR EXPANSION OF PUBLIC AUTHORITY HAS REACHED ITS LIMITS.

Many Americans shared Turner's concerns about the changing world. The declining natural environment and growing economic anxiety had already forced them to begin exploring new worlds in search of their dreams. A never-ending parade of potential "new frontiers" proceeded from the late nineteenth into the twentieth century—immigration, urbanization, industrialization, education, globalization, science, space, civil rights, and other transformational experiences.

These developments are all reasonable explanations of enhanced opportunity and social progress; but none suffices as a universal theme or comprehensive explanation for what has happened in American history since the original frontier. Or, to put the point in question form, how do we account for the continued Great Experiment and enhanced democratic benefits throughout a continuum of mini-frontiers since the closing of America's open natural environment?

I propose that a very apt and useful explanation is that America turned from a natural environment 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 way to a governmental cornucopia of progressive development.

My "political frontier" proposition lacks the drama, precision, and documentation that normally accompanies the announcement of another "new frontier". But it does perform an essential basic service (in the way as does the frontier hypothesis) of explaining history in a way that helps us simplify the past, understand the present, and speculate about the future.

The popular expansion of public authority has exerted a clear, comprehensive, and important impact on democracy in America for over a century, enabling us to deal with serious national challenges and to enhance our economic, social, and political opportunities in much the same way and to a comparable extent as did our original, open natural environment. Expanding public authority provided a nurturing and protective governmental environment for the continuing series of "new frontiers" that have shaped the American nation.

In fact, we have discovered that public authority functioned, in some ways, better than could the wild frontier. Whereas New World conditions fostered freedom, individualism, and independence, the subsequent popular growth of public authority secured the more elusive blessings of equality, justice, and security for the people of our young nation. The government actually could create, distribute, and re-distribute values and benefits more progressively than did the state of nature.

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 America's pursuit of democratic ideals throughout our national history.

Now, however, we have to return to the nagging, critical question—"Can it last forever?"

....

**<u>AMERICA'S HISTORIC
DEMOCRATIC BOOM
HAS BUSTED.</u>**

Renowned historian Walter Prescott Webb raised the pertinent question at the midpoint of this century by articulating an "unpleasant logic" inherent in the frontier hypothesis of history:

> "If we grant the boom, we must concede that the institutions we have, such as democracy and capitalism, were boom-born; we must also admit that the individual, this cherished darling of modern history, attained his glory in an abnormal period when there was enough room to give him freedom and enough wealth to give him independence." ("The Frontier and the 400 Year Boom").

Webb believed that America was entering a political environment and period of history that would be far different from and less favorable for democratic progress than Turner's "open frontier" and Tocqueville's "boundless continent"; and he acknowledged serious personal

concern about the future for American democracy after several centuries of democratic prosperity. "The future of the individual, of democracy and capitalism, and of many other modern institutions are deeply involved in this logic, and the lights are burning late in the capitals of the Western world where grave men are trying to determine what that future will be." (Pp. 94-95)

My argument is that Webb's unpleasant mid-century logic has turned into an unpleasant end-of-century reality of constricted political blessings and benefits—a massive, disparate population crammed together in a limited environment, with little room to breath, facing stubborn challenges and finite resources. Gone is the free land, with its personal liberty and political opportunities. Apparently stalled, too, is the expanding governmental force that, with popular support, secured egalitarian benefits. The auspicious foundations that produced a practical people with civic virtue, that fashioned political mechanisms linking these people with their leaders, and that supported a sufficiently effective and efficient government, have faltered. The American people are becoming more cynical, we're junking our traditional political machinery, and we're overloading government with impossible demands.

A mainpoint of my analysis, therefore, is that, as Webb might say, the boom has busted. Our favorable national environment has disappeared; and, partly as a result, broad, sweeping, unsettling developments are buffeting our country and American democracy.

LECTURE # 4: "PROPOSITION NUMBER TWO: WE HAVE ENTRAPPED AMERICAN DEMOCRACY WITHIN A PHILOSOPHICAL CIVIL WAR."

The most unsettling development in contemporary America is that our nation has erupted into a divisive struggle over democratic ideals, cultural values, and principles of governance. We have plunged deep into a morass of serious and stubborn philosophical questions, some of which—like the role of religion and the power of central government—have dogged our nation since its birth and now threaten its future.

In effect, we have entrapped American democracy (and our Great Experiment) within a philosophical civil war over ideals, values, and governance. The combination of this growing

turmoil and our declining national environment presents a systemic crisis that is qualitatively different from anything experienced in this century. As will be discussed further in the concluding lecture, this "philoso-war" could have fundamental and radical impact on America in the Third Millennium.

Exactly What Is the Philosophical Civil War?

The philosophical civil war is a modern-day struggle to redefine the American experiment in terms of newly contentious democratic ideals, cultural values, and principles of governance. It can best be described as a civic brawl, an anarchic streetfight, a political free-for-all among disparate forces challenging the current course of American democracy. This is a systemic convulsion, an explosive reconsideration of what "democratic ideals" really means, mixed with destabilizing cultural values, along with the possibility of rearranged governance—all during, and perhaps reflecting, increasingly adverse environmental conditions for American democracy.

The contemporary philosophical civil war defies easy definition because there are no clear ideologies, armies, or battlelines, and because there are too many contradictions and inconsistencies for traditional characterization. However, I will attempt to convey my view of the basic nature and crosscurrents of the war.

The general mood of today's unsettling debate is one that supports democratic principles in general but questions, for a variety of rational and irrational reasons, the current course of American democracy. On one hand are hyper-champions of democratic ideals (particularly freedom) whose concept of democracy emphasizes majoritarian, traditional values. On the other hand are similar hyper-champions of democratic ideals (especially equality) whose concept of democracy emphasizes the values of an emerging, heterogeneous society. More often than not, the first camp favors a private-sector route to proper ideals and values (somewhat like the situation during our original, natural environment) and finds much to dislike about the contemporary democratic experiment; and the latter camp usually finds government (as in the historic expansion of public authority) in keeping with their views about ideals and values, views that fit more comfortably in recent development of the democratic experiment. Contributing to the anxiety of this situation is the fact that the majoritarian, traditionalist culture is in danger of losing its historically dominant status in an increasingly diverse America. The emergence of a national majority comprised of heterogeneous sub-cultures can only intensify the divisiveness and significance of our philosophical civil war.

Now I need to backtrack—and repeat my statement that this is a superficial conveyance that misses the variety and contentiousness of this debate. My emphasis on the majoritarian-heterogeneity clash ignores a growing libertarian movement that rejects both governmental and societal control—regardless of their philosophical orientation. These rabid democrats dislike governance and authoritarianism—period. They just want to be left alone, and they're fighting mad.

My description actually understates the destructive impact of this war on the political process as we know it. Countless, uncooperative factions are running amok with particularistic ideals, values, and principles for improving America; and every faction employs strategies and tactics befitting its immediate needs of the moment. About the only commonalities among these disparate forces, beside their determination to reshape America, are their disrespect for civic moderation and their rejection of normal rules of the political game.

....

It would be an incredible stretch to characterize today's civil war as a single, coordinated movement. However, the dominant substantive aspects of this war—democratic ideals, cultural values, and principles of government—are linked together in several important ways. In the first place, the three struggles are occurring simultaneously, a fact of more than casual significance; and there are some overlapping issues and constituencies. But, most importantly, they share kinship in that all three are disruptive of the prevailing direction and character of American history. After two centuries of democratic progress, values nationalization, and governmental centralization, these simultaneous, overlapping forces are now rebelling against an America they find increasingly unacceptable. In summary, the anarchic troops do not dress in similar uniforms, march in lockstep unison, or chant the same slogans; but collectively, they constitute a serious challenge to the continued course of American democracy.

Today's convulsion may be more disruptive than rational, and the disparate warring factions may or may not represent the majority of Americans; but this philosophical civil war, in tandem with our declining national environment, is forcing us as a nation to deal with some hard, basic questions about "what America means" in terms of ideals, values, and governance.

....

The average person, uninvolved directly but seriously impacted by this philosophical civil war, might reasonably ask why we are flagellating ourselves about "what America means" at this late date in our country's history. Surely, one might expect, these debates were settled in the beginning, when our country was founded. But the reality is that America's fundamental law, for all its strengths, is rather murky on these points.

Our Constitution provides mixed and muted directions about democratic ideals, cultural values, and the structure and mechanics of governing. Our Founders created an amazing and enduring body of principles and practices; but, in some important respects, they packaged a very loose system based on a "bundle of compromises" and a "fill-in-the-blanks" foundation, leaving succeeding generations to deal with unresolved questions as they travel the course of history. Over time, America grew and changed substantially, and we moved along an uneven and uneasy path toward freedom and equality, nationalized values, and centralized governance. The most serious challenge to the prevailing direction of American development was settled militarily by the Civil War; and we continued along the bumpy road to where we are today. Now, those same

basic questions (not about slavery, of course, but reflecting similar concerns about ideals, values, and governance) are back again.

....

No one should be surprised that America is re-visiting its rather nebulous vision of democratic ideals. Contending concepts of democracy have been central to our Great Experiment, and those contentions have chronicled the entire history of the United States. Disputes about freedom and equality and justice dominated the founding of our country and almost tore it apart in the mid-eighteenth century. What is surprising, I guess, is that it has taken us so long to raise the debate to its current frenzy.

There is not much need to elaborate further at this point about this aspect of the philosophical civil war, since my general thesis and this entire lecture series are built around the unavoidable crisis of democratic ideals. It will suffice here to say that apparently we have reached the quantitative and qualitative boundaries of our national democratic experiment—too many people crowded into a constricted environment, thereby maximizing specific, competitive, and conflicting claims upon the broad, democratic ideal. The inevitable problem of democratic ideals thus has reached a stage of "ripeness" for national debate, a ripeness enhanced by emerging issues of cultural values and principles of governance.

....

**WE ARE EXPERIENCING
A NATIONAL STRUGGLE
OVER CULTURAL VALUES.**

The most divisive and potentially far-reaching political development in contemporary America is the struggle to determine America's cultural values. After two centuries of functional indefiniteness, we seem to be heading toward a national cultural showdown.

"Bill Clinton-versus-the Republican Party" symbolizes to many the defining element of this culture clash. But the values movement is broader, deeper, and more consequential than politics. As James Davison Hunter explains in Culture Wars: The Struggle To Define America (1991):

> "...America is in the midst of a culture war that has and will continue to have reverberations not only within public policy but within the lives of ordinary

> Americans everywhere ... At stake is how we as Americans will order our lives together." (p. 34)

According to Hunter, today's culture clash is rooted in different systems of moral vision and worldviews deriving from moral authority. The war pits cultural conservatives, or those inclined toward orthodoxy, against cultural liberals, defined as those inclined toward the spirit of the modern age. (Actually, he uses the term "progressives" but I prefer the more common "liberal" appellation.)

The conservatives share a commitment to a consistent, unchangeable concept of what is good, who we are, and how we should live. They believe that moral authority comes from above and for all time.

For the liberals, on the other hand, moral authority tends to be defined within the experience of contemporary society; and they view truth as a process that is forever unfolding. Even liberals of religious convictions can translate their historic faith according to the prevailing assumptions of modem life.

Hunter is emphatic about the significance of this cultural struggle:

> "...the conflict is deeper than mere 'differences of opinion' and bigger than abortion, and in fact, bigger than the culmination of all the battles being waged. As suggested earlier, the culture war emerges over fundamentally different conceptions of moral authority, over different ideas and beliefs about truth, the good, obligation to one another, the nature of community, and so on." (p.49)

Hunter traces the culture war across numerous fields of conflict—family, education, media, the arts, law, and electoral politics. He connects the dots among seemingly disparate disputes to a comprehensive struggle over national life itself:

> "...the contemporary culture is ultimately a struggle over national identity—over the meaning of America, who we have been in the past, who we are now, and perhaps most important, who we, as a nation, will aspire to become in the new millennium." (p. 50)

....

Of course, we cannot leave this discussion of the cultural struggle without talking about the most confounding factor and flaw of American democratic history—race and racism. Just as slavery played a central role in our nineteenth century Civil War, racial factors figure prominently in today's cultural divide. Predictably, and philosophically, white Americans generally feel more comfortable with conservative orthodoxy while non-white Americans and other traditionally disadvantaged people quite often have a different vision of how we ought to define our country. These differing philosophical orientations lead to racially-charged fights over an endless list of political issues.

Thomas Byrne Edsall and Mary D. Edsall captured this volatility in Chain Reaction: The Impact of Race, Rights, and Taxes on American Politics (1991):

> "In a steady evolutionary process, race and taxes have come to intersect with an entire range of domestic issues, from welfare policy to civil service testing, from drug enforcement to housing regulation, from minority set-aside programs to the decline in urban manufacturing jobs, from prison construction to the globalization of economic competition, from college admissions standards to suburban zoning practices, from highway construction to Federal Communications Commission licensing procedures. In the struggle for government and private-sector resources, race has become a powerful wedge, breaking up what had been the majoritarian economic interests of the poor, working, and lower-middle classes in the traditional liberal coalition. Taxes, in turn, have been used to drive home the cost to whites of federal programs that redistribute social and economic benefits to blacks and to other minorities." (pp. 3-4)

According to Edsall and Edsall, race and taxes, joined by a rights revolution (on behalf of, among others, criminal defendants, women, the poor, non-European ethnic minorities, students, homosexuals, prisoners, the handicapped, and the mentally ill) created a "chain reaction" realignment of the American electorate. Their conclusion reflects the same anxiety with which I undertook this discussion:

> "...at stake is the American experiment itself, endangered by a rising tide of political cynicism and alienation, and by basic uncertainties as to whether or not we are capable of transmitting a sense of inclusion and shared citizenship across an immense and diverse population—whether or not we can uphold our traditional commitment to the possibilities for justice and equality expressed in our founding documents and embedded in our most valued democratic institutions." (P. 288)

....

ULTIMATE DEMOCRATIZATION IS THREATENING OUR TRADITIONAL SYSTEM OF LIMITED, REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNANCE.

A less dramatic, relatively unfocused, but equally unsettling challenge of the philosophical civil war is the contemporary drive toward ultimate democracy. It is perhaps the foremost irony of our time that this historic democratization movement masks a direct threat to the established and long successful character of American government. This movement embodies our democratic experiment's inherent capability for undoing America's limited, representative framework of governance.

....

The worldwide democracy explosion is usually described in glowing terms, as the triumph of western ideals over communism and authoritarian regimes. In America, we have fallen head-over-heels in love, again, with the idea that unlimited virtue, wisdom, and potential reside in the individual rather than society, government, or any established institution.

Consequently, we are engaged in a frantic, almost religious worship of "the people", a dizzying "demo-frenzy" that views total democratization as the pre-eminent moral value and pre-destined solution to all our problems. We celebrate the independence and individualism of an evolving "Free Agent Nation" with its "Free Agent Declaration of Independence" ("Free Agent Nation" in Fast Company, Dec-Jan l998). John Q. Public is courted, quoted, pampered, and pandered as never before. "Man-in-the-street" comments are obligatory for all public issues. Town Hall meetings, public participation shows, public opinion polls, initiatives, referenda, faxes, e-mail, and the internet increasingly are the venues and staples of contemporary discourse.

America's particularized version of the democracy movement is a natural reaction to the historic growth of "Big Government", which over many years concentrated power and resources in Washington and weakened states and localities. This steady process of nationalization and centralization created a monstrous officialdom of federal employees, military personnel, and government contractors; it proliferated a public sector empire of social security, medicare, medicaid, farm subsidies, veterans benefits, student aid, unemployment, disability, and what is known simply as welfare. In addition to these financially-based activities, a large constituency has developed for an endless array of Big Government mandates extending the rights and blessings of national citizenship. Regardless of how federal operations are titled or defined, it is clear that America has been hooked on Big Government for a long time.

....

It is just as obvious that many Americans are ready to break the Big Government habit. Their challenge to Big Government is part of a universal movement of "anti-big" forces that have been changing our country and the world for at least two decades. John Naisbitt introduced us to these forces in his 1982 bestseller Megatrends: Ten Directions Transforming Our Lives. The opening sentence of his book communicates a grandiose effort to change America-as-we-know-it:

> "As a society, we have been moving from the old to the new. And we are still in motion. Caught between eras, we experience turbulence. Yet, amid the sometimes painful and uncertain present, the restructuring of America proceeds unrelentingly." (p. 1)

Naisbitt's thought-provoking analysis, especially his interpretation of the road to and from Big Government, struck a responsive tone with many Americans:

“for decades, institutions such as the government, the medical establishment, the corporation, and the school system were America’s buffers against life’s hard realities-the need for food, housing, health care, education—as well as its mysteries—birth, illness, death.” (p. 131)

“More and more, we relied on government to provide for basic needs. Government’s traditional function is to safeguard citizens. We also asked that it provide food, shelter, and jobs.” (p. 131)

“but at various points during these last four decades, those institutions have failed us ... As we became more disillusioned we asked ‘What, or whom can we trust?’ The resounding answer was ‘Ourselves.’ “ (p. 132)

“During the 1970s, Americans began to disengage from the institutions that had disillusioned them and to relearn the ability to take action on their own.” (p. 131)

“By 1976, America’s two-hundredth anniversary, we had turned the corner: The growing strength of the decentralization trend surpassed the receding tendency to centralize.” (p. 161)

....

Besides challenging the notion of a universal national interest, the “anti-big” movement represents an assault on the historic representational relationship between America’s citizens and leaders (our constitutionally-guaranteed “republican form of government”).

Consider Naisbitt’s prescription regarding representative government:

“Politically, we are currently in the process of a massive shift from a representative to a participatory democracy .... We created a representative system two hundred years ago when it was the practical way to organize a democracy ... For two hundred years , it worked quite well.”

“but along came the communication revolution and with it an extremely well-educated electorate. Today, with instantaneously shared information, we know as much about what’s going on as our representatives and we know it just as quickly.”

“The fact is we have outlived the historical usefulness of representative democracy and we all sense intuitively that it is obsolete.” (p. 160)

....

Alan Rosenthal, a distinguished scholar of state legislatures, argues convincingly for the deliberative process of representative government designed by the Founders of our republic. In The Decline of Representative Government (l997), he reasons:

> "...the judgements rendered by a representative body, like those of the individual representative, derive in part from the give-and-take of discussion. More of a premium is on information, reason, commonality of interests, and even farsightedness than is the case in public judgements recorded by a poll or a referendum. Citizens are extraordinarily weak when it comes to deliberation. They are constrained by time, competing interests for whatever leisure hours they have, and the complexity that is usually involved ... And there is little recourse once a snap judgement is reached." (Pp. 40-41)

Rosenthal acknowledges and laments the trend toward participatory democracy:

> "Government is no longer conducted with the consent of the governed, according to the original Federalist plan. It is conducted with significant participation by the governed, and by those who claim to speak for the public's interest, according to a more populist plan. The voices of elected representatives are being drowned out by pronouncements made on behalf of the public. Representative democracy, as the states had experienced it for several centuries, is now in decline." (Pp. 4-5)

Today's leadership is wilting under assault by democracy's forces, according to Rosenthal. In a recent interview regarding state legislators, he said, "'I think they're getting too democratic in the sense that they're too tied, they're too responsive, too worried about public opinion polls, too insistent on pleasing rather than in doing what's right." (State Legislatures, pp. l4-15)

The dangers of declining representative government are real, he warns, including enfeebled legislative leadership, unchecked executive power, unworkable public policy, and increased inequality (as organized special interests dominate and manipulate the political process).

....

THIS PHILOSOPHICAL CIVIL WAR
IS A DIFFERENT AND
OMINOUS CHALLENGE.

The nature of the philosophical civil war demonstrates that we are dealing with something that, in several respects, is very different and potentially ominous for American democracy.

- First is the moral totality of the struggle. The contemporary battle over democratic ideals, cultural values, and principles of governance is one of philosophical character and universal authority rather than a scramble for the traditional spoils of politics. Today's philoso-warriors conduct themselves as self-ordained Founding Fathers and Mothers of "New Millennium America", evangelical crusaders who often demonize the opposition and sometimes attack their own friends in their fight for absolute victory. Virtually every public official in today's political process has been burned, at some time or another, by the fires of this war.

- Second is the comprehensive substantive nature of the battlefield. Some of the struggle falls along an ideological continuum, but it is not simply a Democrat-Republican fight or even a liberal-conservative competition. The range of debate is astounding—government vs. the individual, religion vs. secularism, community vs. diversity, rights vs. responsibilities, nationalism vs. globalism-the list goes on and on. The battle contaminates the entire universe of issues. For example, some of the most contentious debates in Congress over national defense now involve, not weapons systems, but abortion and homosexuality.

- Third, the war is a spatial ubiquity waged in all forums and at all levels, from the power centers of Washington, to the textbook committee of the local school board, and even to the playing fields of neighborhood youth sports. The combatants have no respect for established boundaries and inter-relationships of traditional institutions of governance or for the distinction between public sector and private sector activities; they fight the good fight anywhere and everywhere.

- A fourth distinctive feature of this struggle is the sophistication of its warfare. The participants are intelligent and well resourced, and they have mastered the art, weaponry, and technology of politics. Traditional American politics is having trouble dealing with the firepower of the warring factions.

- Fifth, the current struggle is being waged in an environment of corrosive cynicism without the ameliorative influence of traditional political machinery; in fact, today's political machinery quite often contributes to the negativity of our times.

- Finally, we must take seriously the potential long-term impact of today's philosophical civil war. Unlike other political movements or fights, this war, conducted within a declining national environment, could wreak permanent havoc on American democracy.

To summarize, what is new and dangerous about today's philosophical conflict is its massive cumulation of moral totality, substantive scope, ubiquitous reach, sophisticated firepower, corrosive cynicism, and potential impact. This is an all-out survival struggle over fundamental ideals, values, and governance. Powerful forces on different sides of

many divisive issues demand that whatever they want is a matter of moral imperative and public consequence which must be resolved, absolutely, now, with finality and authority, for everybody in America. Considering the anxieties and uncertainties of a changing society, this is a recipe for disaster, not only for American democracy but also for America.

LECTURE # 5: "PROPOSITION NUMBER THREE: AMERICAN DEMOCRACY NO LONGER WORKS THE WAY IT HAS IN THE PAST."

For some time, our declining national environment and philosophical civil war have been impacting negatively on American democracy. American democracy is not working the way it has in the past; and the critical elements of our magical mix—our people, politics, and government—individually and collectively are evidencing the degenerative effects of terminal civic illness.

Our current suffering differs significantly from past practice. Historically, the elements of American democracy—our people, politics, and government—developed and functioned for a loosely-structured system of limited, representative governance within a favorable environment; and, in fact, our historic system worked pretty well. The American people were a functional civic mix—self-interested, privately-oriented, and publicly-disorganized, but generally supportive of democratic ideals. Interaction between these politically unsophisticated people and their leaders necessitated the development of linkage organs—election campaigns, political parties, and news media, all tending toward democratic participation. Relatively unconstrained institutions of governance functioned, efficiently and sufficiently enough, in pursuit of democratic policies and practices. Thus, democratic ideals such as individualism and equality thrived in a non-zero-sum game played loosely within a supportive environment of natural conditions and national authority. The magical mix worked its magic.

Now, under changed circumstances, these elements of American democracy clearly are not functioning as they are supposed to or as they used to. This lecture series is not an American government and politics textbook, so I will not attempt a full presentation and documentation of

the structure, workings, and malfunctions of American democracy. I simply will characterize how our people, politics, and government are evidencing symptoms of systemic democratic degeneration.

....

THE AMERICAN PEOPLE ARE LOSING THEIR CIVIC SPIRIT.

The most discomforting aspect of dying America is that the American people are losing their civic spirit. Our national personality increasingly is one of uncivic public character—a "cyni-culture" that is undermining traditional American democracy.

I regret having to point my finger of blame at "we the people". It would be easier directing my attention toward popularized villains, such as politicians, politics, corruption, or the special interests as the dysfunctioning elements of American democracy.

However, governmental and political reform will be meaningless and unattainable unless "we the people"—including both the public and our leaders—admit our unhealthy civic condition. For decades, cynical notions have been replacing traditional concepts such as trust, duty, and patriotism. The eroding rights and responsibilities of individual citizenship and leadership are taking with them the healthy benefits of participation within a broader civil society. Our cynicism has reached far beyond the political arena, infecting our relationships with virtually all institutions of society—our work, our schools, our churches, the news media, sports, anything that smacks of authority and power.

....

The Importance of Civic Culture.

It has long been recognized that the nature of a country's government and politics depends, in important ways, on the basic beliefs and practices of its people. Certain civic principles must be present among the general population in sufficient degree to sustain a stable democracy. In short, a healthy political culture provides a favorable foundation for American democracy.

Although the ancient Greeks and successive philosophers deliberated extensively about civic virtue, systematic development and documentation of the idea is a relatively recent endeavor. The behavioral approach to politics in this century opened a door to analysis which was unavailable to earlier thinkers and scholars.

Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba provided the most significant and definitive statement of this classic theme in The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations (1963).

Almond and Verba focused on “civic culture”, a term which they differentiated from the more conventional idea of “civics”. Civics refers to what we usually read in textbooks about how citizens ought to act in a democracy; civic culture defines a situation in which political facts-of-life temper the civics ideal and make it work in the real world.

Their commentary is so instructive about the nature of the requisite mixture and balance that I want to quote extensively and selectively from their concluding chapter (“The Civic Culture and Democratic Stability”):

> “The civic culture, which sometimes contains apparently contradictory political attitudes, seems to be particularly appropriate for democratic political systems, for they, too, are mixtures of contradictions.”
>
> “thus the democratic citizen is called on to pursue contradictory goals; he must be active, yet passive; involved, yet not too involved; influential, yet deferential ... As our survey showed, there exists a gap between the actual political behavior of our respondents, on the one hand, and their perceptions of their capabilities to act and their obligation to act, on the other ... The comparative infrequency of political participation, its relative lack of importance for the individual, and the objective weakness of the ordinary man allow governmental elites to act ... Yet the very fact that citizens hold to this myth—that they see themselves as influential and as obligated to take an active role—creates a potentiality of citizen influence and activity ... But if a mechanism such as the one we postulate is to work, the attitudes of elites must complement those of non-elites. The decision maker must believe in the democratic myth—that ordinary citizens ought to participate in politics and that they are in fact influential.”
>
> “This balance between consensus and cleavage is managed within the civic culture by a mechanism similar to the one that managed the balance between activity and passivity; that is, an inconsistency between norms and behavior ... the civic culture allows a balance between apparently contradictory demands through the mixture of a set of norms ... and actual behavior ... that are themselves in contradiction one with the other.”
>
> “in sum, the most striking characteristic of the civic culture as it has been described in this volume is its mixed quality ... There is political activity, but not so much as to destroy governmental authority; there is involvement and commitment, but they are moderated; there is political cleavage, but it is held in check.”

> "the mixture of attitudes found in the civic culture, we have argued in this chapter, 'fits' the democratic political system. It is, in a number of ways, particularly appropriate for the mixed political system that is democracy."

The Emergence of Uncivic Society.

Almond and Verba's version of civic culture was a general description of America of the 1950s. Unfortunately, we have seen in the latter half of this century a drastic deterioration of civic character.

In a l980 update of their pioneering study, The Civic Culture Revisited, one of their contributors reflected on changes in civic America:

> "Americans today are more cynical about politicians, less confident in their institutions, and more politically sophisticated than they were only a decade earlier." (p. 203).

Public opinion and political participation data and analysis in the years since then have documented pretty clearly further deterioration of America's civic spirit and increasing jeopardy for the American system; and this declining civic spirit has important consequences for the future of American democracy. As Georgia Anne Geyer says in Americans No More: The Death of Citizenship (1996), "If allowed to persist, the phenomenon will surely destroy America as we have known it."

....

**THE POLITICAL ORGANS
OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY
ARE MALFUNCTIONING.**

Historically, there has existed in America a complex system of political mechanisms linking our people with their government. These mechanisms, working together as vital organs of our national political body, have been critical to the success of American democracy.

An Organic System of Elections, Parties, and Media.

America's organic system of elections, parties, and media was not designed originally as a fully functioning part of American democracy; it evolved, over time, from necessity. Some of these mechanisms developed integrally as formal interactions between the public and government (such as the electoral system); some developed consequentially (such as political parties); others simply coincided (such as the news media). But,

collectively, they constituted an organically functioning support system for American democracy and our national experiment in democratic ideals.

Normally, these political organs work to transmit public opinion to public officials (upward linkage) and, conversely, to relay the sentiments of those officials to their constituents (downward linkage). In the course of this mediating service, these institutions perform the equally valuable function of bringing together divergent segments and moderating uncivic tendencies of American society.

The organic machinery of American politics has worked in almost miraculous ways to translate public opinion into public policy (and just as importantly, to shape public opinion on behalf of national policy goals). Sometimes unintentionally, inefficiently, and ironically, this complex system has made American government sufficiently responsive to the diverse interests of its citizens while at the same time allowing the government to exercise responsibility for the broad public interest.

In simpler times, these vital political organs worked reasonably well. America needed intermediary mechanisms because direct democracy was inappropriate and impractical. Within a favorable and democratic environment, they served to link a relatively unsophisticated, uninterested, and disorganized people with their relatively unstructured government. Our system of elections, parties, and media worked well for our limited, representative system of governance.

Now, of course, this organic system of American politics is not working very well. The declined national environment, a philosophical civil war, and an uncivic populace have radically impacted such critically essential institutions as the news media, political parties, and elections. These developments have been documented elsewhere; what I want to focus on here is the increasing importance of modern technology on the future of our Great Experiment.

The Rise of "Electronic Democracy".

It is important to understand that the technological dynamics of modern life are contributing to the organic obsolescence of our elections, parties, and media. The American people and their government are being "wired" together by a technological revolution that is changing our national linkage mechanisms and the very nature of American democracy.

The technological wiring of American democracy is rampant and important—computerized data banks and research capabilities, personal computers, home computers, laptops, phone banks, cell phones, teleconferencing, direct mail-tv-radio, faxes, e-mails, beepers, the internet, world wide web, C-SPAN, CNN, and other constantly evolving technological progress.

These technological developments are changing all forms of political transaction—research analysis, advocacy, lobbying, fundraising, endorsements, advertising, campaigning, constituent relations—and virtually every aspect of the relationship between the people and their government. Upward and downward linkage in electronic democracy is more diverse, direct, personal, immediate, continuous, voluminous, and substantive—and increasingly unfettered by mediating bureaucracies of the past. Without question, traditional linkage mechanisms such as elections, parties, and media are becoming less relevant. Quickly and surely, America's traditional political process is transitioning into "electronic democracy".

....

Jon Katz declared the reality of this technological revolution and suggested its significance for American democracy in "Birth of a Digital Nation" (Wired Magazine, April, 1997). Katz concluded, after assessing the role of the Web on the 1996 elections, that the real story at the end of the twentieth century is the beginning of a postpolitical world:

> "I saw the primordial stirrings of a new kind of nation—the Digital Nation—and the formation of a new postpolitical philosophy. This nascent ideology, fuzzy and difficult to define, suggests a blend of some of the best values rescued from the tired old dogmas—the humanism of liberalism, the economic opportunity of conservatism, plus a strong sense of personal responsibility and a passion for freedom."
>
> "There are paradigm-shifting changes afoot: the young people who form the heart of the digital world are creating a new political ideology. The machinery of the Internet is being wielded to create an environment in which the Digital Nation can become a political entity in its own right."
>
> The potential of this inner-national movement is enormous:
>
> "Here is a growing elite in control of the most powerful communications infrastructure ever assembled. The people rushing toward the millennium with their fingers on the keyboards of the Information Age could become one of the most powerful political forces in history. Technology is power. Education is power. Communication is power. The digital young have all three. No other social group is as poised to dominate culture and politics in the 21st century."
>
> "If they choose to form a political movement, they could someday run the world. If they choose to develop a common value system, with a moral ideology and a humane agenda, they might even do the world some good."

The people of Digital Nation are not representative of the American population, Katz admits; they are richer, more educated, disproportionately white, predominantly male, inhabitants of wired institutions and industries such as universities, computer and telecom companies, financial outfits, and the media. As a result, he says, the ideas of the postpolitical

young, unlike America's rigid historic ideologies, are fluid; but some of their common values are clear—"they tend to be libertarian, materialistic, tolerant, rational, technologically adept, disconnected from conventional political organizations".

And they are politically restless:

> "They are not afraid to challenge authority. They take no one's word for anything. They embrace interactivity—the right to shape and participate in their media ... The digital young, from Silicon Valley entrepreneurs to college students, have a nearly universal contempt for government's ability to work; they think it's wasteful and clueless. On the Net, government is rarely seen as an instrument of positive change or social good. Politicians are assumed to be manipulative or ill-informed, unable to affect reform or find solutions, forced to lie to survive. The Digital Nation's disconnection from the conventional political process—and from the traditional media that mirror it—is profound."

....

What Does This Technological Revolution Mean For American Politics?

The rise of "Digital Nation" may indeed represent, as Katz proclaims, the beginning of a great revolution, a postpolitical ideology, the rebirth of love for liberty, a more civil society, a new politics based on rationalism, shared information, the pursuit of truth, and new kinds of community.

In a sense, we may be creating, through this technological revolution, a vastly different kind of American politics. Perhaps we now have available to us technology that can serve the needs of our national republic better than can old-fashioned political operatives and outdated campaign, party, and media mechanisms. In the future, liberty, equality, and all the other benefits of democracy may be pursued under changed institutional conditions. For example, our technological revolution may lead us to a different magical mix of people and their government, a mix devoid of intermediating political machinery. Or, maybe, it will lead us to reject both traditional political machinery and republican governmental arrangements in favor of direct, democratic self-government. And who knows where this could lead in terms of new ideals, values and governance?

In effect, we may be experiencing a third frontier—an "electronic frontier"—comparable in effect to our previous natural and governmental transitions. Perhaps we have entered a technological version of our original environment, an open, adventurous national experience that will radically alter opportunity and society and government. Perhaps, like the expansion of public authority, this newest frontier will enable us to revisit and perfect the institutional arrangements of our democratic experiment. Perhaps modern-day electronic pioneers are embarking upon a totally new, exciting, and different America.

But this technological revolution also evokes anxiety about the central question of our Great Experiment: "How far can we pursue democratic ideals through limited, representative government without succumbing to the inherent, destructive tendencies of democracy?" Regardless of the nobility of its sentiments, Digital Nation envisions a political system far different—socially, economically, politically—from the origins of our democratic experiment and what we now know as American democracy. Electronic democracy rejects traditional electoral/ partisan/media linkages and challenges the very concept of representative governance; and it could push our historic fuzziness about freedom-vs-equality toward an ultimate, unhealthy resolution of total freedom over equality, or something worse. The technological revolution may, unfortunately, be moving us perilously closer to the inherent, destructive tendencies of democracy.

....

A Broken Political System.

Perhaps I over-estimate the import of the technological revolution. As I have noted, there are those who hail electronic democracy as the rebirth of civil society. However, there is virtually universal agreement that our contemporary political machinery is malfunctioning. The historic functional relationships among the media, parties, and elections have deteriorated; and the representational linkages between our people and our government have weakened:

- The news media have lost their dominant role in bringing us together and mediating and moderating public debate. The people and public officials have figured out how to bypass the traditional press. What's left today is very little news and even less public dialogue.

- Political parties have fallen into disrepair and disrepute. The parties do a poor job of pulling voters and candidates together or linking the people with their government; instead they serve mainly as conduits of special interest money and influence.

- Elections too often have become empty and demeaning experiences. Campaigns and elections are held, but public participation and support are declining. Money and nastiness dominate as never before. Voters and candidates are disgusted with each other and the system.

In short, the American system of politics is broken. The forces of changing America are undermining the health of our elections, parties, and media; and our malfunctioning political machinery is creating serious problems for American government.

....

AMERICAN GOVERNMENT
IS HEADED TOWARD STROKE,
PARALYSIS, OR SOMETHING WORSE.

The clearest example and most maligned element of failing American democracy is government. We are overloading and crippling America's governance system with increasing, contradictory, impossible demands and decreasing supports. American government is headed toward stroke, paralysis, or something worse.

The easy and accurate explanation is that we have dumped all the burdens of degenerating American democracy on the formal institutions of government. The fact is that broad, systemic changes—especially the deteriorated national environment and our philosophical civil war—are stressing and straining America. These systemic developments, combined with unhealthy civic developments among our people and politics, are crippling American government.

....

There can be little argument that the condition of American government has changed significantly during the latter half of the twentieth century. Our touted model of modern democracy—known among academicians and journalists as "democratic pluralism"—has run seriously off-course.

Many of us are tempted to blame our troubles on easy scapegoats—"elitist politicians" and "the special interests". In their new Millennial Edition of The Irony of Democracy: An Uncommon Introduction to American Politics (l999), Thomas R. Dye and Harmon Ziegler offer biting commentary on whether the government is "run for the benefit of all the people" or "by a few big interests looking out for themselves":

> "Thirty years ago, when The Irony of Democracy was first written, a majority of Americans believed that their government was being run for the benefit of all; the elitist view was expressed by relatively few people. Today an astounding 80 percent of Americans believe that their government is run 'by a few big interests looking out for themselves.' The elitist perspective, which we developed as an analytic model of American politics, has now become part of the popular political culture!" (P. xiii)

Dye and Zeigler, original l960s proponents of an almost conspiratorial assessment of America's political system, now view our leaders with even greater jaundice:

> "This Millennial Edition of The Irony of Democracy...reflects, first of all, our increasing distress over current elite distemper—corporate greed, media arrogance, interest group gluttony, big money political influence, and, above all,

> the self-serving and shortsighted behavior of today's governmental leaders." (P. xiv)
>
> "It is not only the sordid tale of 'Presidential Sex, Lies, and Impeachment' on which we base our critical assessment, or even the 'Ambition and Ambivalence' of the Clinton presidency. It is also the sanctimonious, self-serving, and arrogant behavior of members of Congress, federal bureaucrats, and federal judges." (P. xv)

Their predictive assessment is almost as apocalyptic as my dying proclamation: "...over the years we have become convinced that the principal threat to democracy in the United States today arises from irresponsible elites seeking relative advantage at the expense of shared societal values." (P. xiv)

A less jaundiced but equally alarming analysis is provided by Robert Dahl, the foremost advocate of our mid-century theory of democratic pluralism. In The New American Political (Dis)Order (l994), Dahl says that American politics has changed so much since the l950s that it is now a new order. In the first place, political power is so fragmented today as to make the system almost inoperable; secondly, there now is unprecedented direct communication between the represented and their representatives. As a result, American pluralism is becoming incapable of deliberative, coherent, and effective government. Or as another prominent democratic theorist puts it, we are experiencing "hyperpluralism"—meaning too many special interest groups chasing too few benefits, ignoring the common interest, and eventually choking the governmental system. "I think that we have reached a threshhold of so much competition among the groups for scarce resources that we've reached a level of deadlock and crisis, says James Thurber." (Rauch, p. 61)

Jonathan Rauch characterizes the problems of contemporary American government at a more critical stage of ill-health, a condition he refers to as "demosclerosis", or "government's progressive loss of the ability to adapt". The problem is that we tend to form more and more groups demanding more and more benefits and then selfishly defend them to the detriment of our nation. As a result, he explains in Demosclerosis: The Silent Killer of American Government (1994), our government has lost its ability to make things work and solve problems effectively:

> "By definition, government's power to solve problems comes from its ability to reassign resources, whether by taxing, spending, regulating, or simply passing laws. But that very ability energizes countless investors and entrepreneurs and ordinary Americans to go digging for gold by lobbying government. In time, a whole industry—large sophisticated, professionalized, and to a considerable extent selfserving—emerges and then assumes a life of its own. This industry is a drain on the productive economy, and there appears to be no natural limit to its growth. As it grows, the steady accumulation of subsidies and benefits, each defended in perpetuity by a professional interest group, calcifies government. Government loses its capacity to experiment and so becomes more and more prone to failure." (P. 17)

Rauch asserts that the culprit of demosclerosis is us (“It is a crisis of American appetites”); and our sickness is a gradual, progressive disease (“like hardening of the arteries”) that gets worse if it is ignored (“it can be stopped only by a long-term change in behavior: a disciplined regimen of self-reform.”)

....

My “dying” proposition goes beyond “elite distemper”, “hyperpluralism”, and “demosclerosis”. The great threat to American government is bigger than bad leaders, bigger than interest group politics, bigger than our appetite for public goodies, bigger than our inability to reassign resources. Problems of normal political deadlock can be overcome within the current operating framework of American government by skillful leadership and improved socioeconomic conditions-and it appears that we may be benefitting from such good fortune. Our current impasse, however, is a debility of much greater consequence and danger than conventional political wrangling. Our greater predicament is the combination of declined national environment, philosophical turmoil, weakened civic culture, broken political machinery—AND—distempered, hyperpluralized, and demosclerosed governance.

Considering what’s happening throughout our system, we should not be surprised that American government is struggling to continue its normal, historic course. Without correction, American government is headed toward stroke, paralysis, or perhaps, theoretically, systemic shutdown. Consequently, the American people are beginning to question their commitment to the future of American democracy.

LECTURE # 6: “PROPOSITION NUMBER FOUR: AMERICA SEEMS TO BE TIRING OF THE GREAT EXPERIMENT.”

My final proposition reflects the cumulative impact of a deteriorated national environment, our philosophical civil war, and malfunctioning American democracy. America seems to be tiring of the Great Experiment itself.

....

As we have already observed in an earlier lecture, the American people have been tending in uncivic directions during the latter half of this century; and contemporary America evidences serious unease and dissatisfaction with our national experiment in democratic ideals.

It is easy to document, statistically, these patterns of democratic discomfort. Consider the following gleanings from the major national polls conducted within the past few years (by such reputable organizations as The Gallup Poll, The Harris Poll, CBS News Poll, CBS News/New York Times Poll, Gallup/CNN/USA Today Poll, CNN News/Opinion Dynamics Poll, CNN/Time Poll, Fox News/Opinion Dynamics Poll, NBC News/Wall Street Journal Poll, ABC News/The Washington Post Poll, The Los Angeles Times Poll, The Tarrance Group/Lake (R) Snell, Perry & Associates (D) "Battleground" Survey, Wirthlin Worldwide, Market Strategies, The Council for Excellence in Government, and The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press). The specific wording and figures vary from time-to-time and poll-to-poll, but their collective message of civic uncertainty and disinclination is unmistakable.

By combining and selecting data from these sources during l997, l998 and l999, I calculate that the public is divided (47%-44%) on the question of whether our country is heading in the "right" or "wrong" direction as we close the Twentieth Century; the most recent polls (September-October, l999) reflect splits of 47%-40% and 41%-43%. Furthermore, while a large majority (75%) of Americans think that government has the potential to contribute positively to their lives, more people think that the actual impact of government is negative (38%) than positive (30%); and they see it as "the government" (55%) rather than "our government" (42%). A majority (54%) feel that we do not have a government today that is "of, by, and for the people"; and an even larger proportion think that they can trust the government in Washington to to what's right "only some of the time" (63%), compared to "most of the time" (25%) or "all of the time" (4%). Most people report that they are "fairly disconnected" (34%) or "very disconnected" (29%) from the federal government; and they have less confidence in the federal government than either their state or local governments.

The sense of public disaffection is revealed more personally in variously worded questions about the relationship between individual respondents and their government. For example, about half (52%) of the people polled say that the people like themselves have "not much" say about what the government does; and they maintain that "we deserve better" (49%) as opposed to ""we get what we deserve" (38%). And whom do they blame?—"the special interest groups" (38%), "the media" (29%), "elected officials" (24%), "political parties" (24%), instead of "the public" (l4%). Not surprisingly, the public rates the President (54%) and Members of Congress (46%) much lower than "the ordinary man and woman" (71%) when it comes to telling the truth, attributing to the national government about the same "trust" standing as business leaders, journalists, and pollsters.

Perhaps the most prominent, comprehensive, and substantive measure of America's estrangement from our national democratic endeavor is the "Index of Civic Health" compiled by the National Commission on Civic Renewal. This organization, headed by former Democratic

Senator Sam Nunn and former Republican Education Secretary William Bennett, monitors a variety of civic indicators—such as civic trust, political participation, associational memberships, personal security, and family components—the kinds of things that Tocqueville would have considered. Their composite index (using estimated figures for l960-7l) shows that America's civic health has plunged from a score in the high 120s in l960 to the low 80s during the contemporary decade, with particularly notable drops in the political and trust components.

The Commission's report—"A Nation of Spectators" (June, l998)—concluded that America's civic life merits corrective attention:

> "Civic health may be measured along several dimensions—participation in electoral politics, political and social trust, voluntary sector activity, and attitudes and conduct bearing on the moral condition of society, to name a few...
>
> "Not all of these trends move in the same direction. Political participation and all forms of trust have declined significantly in the past generation, although there is some evidence of stabilization and perhaps even modes improvement during the past two years...But when most Americans evaluate our civic condition, their point of comparison is not the late l980s or early l990s, but rather their sense of how things were a generation ago. In this key respect, the Index of National Civic Health is consistent with the beliefs of most Americans: our overall civic condition is weaker than it was—and in need of significant improvement."

Arguments can be made about the precise weaknesses, conditions, and causes, but it is clear, judging from statistical data, that our basic national civic culture is significantly more problematic than what was observed at mid-century. Our overall mixture of orientations and behavior has shifted in a decidedly uncivic direction, away from the requisite emotional and participational foundation for our national experiment in democratic ideals.

....

Aside from quantitative measures of public opinion and political participation, a brief survey of contemporary American civic life provides case after case—at federal, state, and local levels—of increasing dispiritedness and disengagement from our historic experiment.

It is tempting—at the outset of this survey—to cite President Clinton's personal, political, and legal problems (and the public's accompanying angst) as the illustrative case of di dspirited, dysfunctional America. William Jefferson Clinton stands at the center of a tabloid political drama that is straining and redefining basic aspects of our democratic experiment. Strangely, the President from Hope has generated an industry of scandal and discord; and there has developed around "Bill and Hillary" an environment of destructive public

discourse. The bitterness of the Clinton impeachment process (combined with broader cultural tensions) has seriously corroded historic relationships among the White House, the Congress, the Judiciary, our political parties, and the American people. More importantly, in that process, our civic leaders, the media, and the general population have discovered unacceptable incongruities between their preferred political notions and our historic fundamental framework of governance. It has been a debilitative national experience, and America has suffered dearly in the process.

I also could focus on disturbing accounts of violence and killings in the schools of normal sounding places like Paducah, Edinboro, Jonesboro, Springfield, and Littleton as evidence of our civic depression. At Littleton, Colorado, for example, a couple of bright, shy, misfit teenagers apparently hated blacks, hispanics, religious people, jocks, and who knows what else. So they killed twelve classmates, a teacher, and themselves. Across the land there was grief—and the horror of something terribly wrong in America. In a floral shop thousands of miles away, a woman lamented that "You think we'd get hardened to this, but we don't...The things we assumed are evidently no longer true." In Washington, an angry parent of a seven-year-old exclaimed "I am so sick of this world being so screwed up!" (Washington Post, April 22, l999)

However, I will bypass diatribes about the Clinton wars and school shootings because there are other, less emotionally-charged, indicators of troubled American democracy. Throughout our country—in big cities and rural areas, in centers of money and influence and obscure, rundown neighborhoods, among powerful leaders and powerless nobodies, on major public policies and inconsequential private issues—seemingly unrelated developments demonstrate decreasing commitment to our national experiment in democratic ideals.

....

INCREASINGLY AND INCREMENTALLY, WE ARE RETREATING FROM OUR NATIONAL EXPERIMENT IN DEMOCRATIC IDEALS.

Upon close examination, it appears that—increasingly and incrementally—we are retreating from our national experiment in democratic ideals. Almost without realizing it, contemporary America is changing our Great Experiment. Ironically, our civic laboratory is producing a variety of revolutionary, devolutionary, convolutionary, and dissolutionary movements—all challenging the very nature—of historic American democracy.

....

Let's deal first with the far-fetched but revolutionary challenge—the rash of violent civil eruptions that have jolted the American system during the l990s. Virtually everyone has heard of Oklahoma City, the worst terrorist attack ever on U.S. soil. An anti-government American citizen loaded common fertilizer and fuel oil unto a commercial rental truck and

destroyed the nine-story Murrah Federal Building, killing l69 persons (including children attending a daycare center in the building). "It's the 'why' question. Why did they do that to me? Why did they do that to our country?" asked one of the survivors. President Clinton attempted an answer with ominous reference to "forces that threaten our common peace, our freedom, and our way of life." And the accused terrorist's defense attorney hinted at deep, dark, cultural troubles—"If we close our eyes to the social and political reality in which this crime occurred, we are fools." (CNN; December 30, l995)

There also was Waco, with 75 people dead (including 25 children) in a fight between the government and a religious sect. And Ruby Ridge, where the government shot and killed the wife and son of a right-to-bear-arms advocate...and the continuing militia movement...and increasing incidences of attempted and suspected chemical-biological terrorism...and sporadic abortion attacks...and hate crimes...and anti-social venom flourishing publicly on the internet...and on and on and on.

There's no real threat of revolution in the United States. But these civil outbursts and disruptions prove, dramatically and tragically, the presence of festering infections here in our own domestic body. They are like canker sores—ugly and painful and symptomatic of underlying conditions that bedevil our Great Experiment as we close the Twentieth Century.

....

More appropriate, at least symbolically, for my "dying" thesis is the following one-paragraph item buried in USA Today (July 29, l997):

> **SOUTH CAROLINA**
>
> **Greenville — The Greenville County Library no longer has a community events bulletin board. Director Phil Ritter ordered it removed, saying his staff was caught in the middle of sniping from both sides of the political spectrum about what was on it.**

The Greenville County community bulletin board is rich as Tocquevillian metaphor for civil America. Substantively and procedurally, it represents the essence of grassroots democracy—a voluntary forum open to anyone in the library community to post announcements and information of public interest.

The unseemly demise of that bulletin board sends a more pernicious message than presidential crisis, schoolhouse violence, and domestic terrorism about the state of our civic health. The library's action is a disturbing declaration by ordinary citizens that they cannot make the Great Experiment work anymore, that their democratic ideals and principles are not strong

enough to sustain a community bulletin board in a public building. Sadly, such incidents of democratic dissolution are occurring increasingly in libraries and schools and communities throughout the country

....

A more direct and unmistakable demonstration of what's happening in America—the convoluted alteration of the historic spirit and institutions of representative governance—is California's plebiscitary experience. California's penchant for initiatives (direct public policy-making via electoral majorities) have begun to reshape, democratically, the nature of that state's great experiment. As former newspaper editorialist Peter Schrag notes in Paradise Lost: California's Experience, America's Future (l998), the people of California, through popular initiatives, have radically altered their governmental machinery; and the result is significant disinvestment in public services and other civic endeavors:

> "California has not just seen a sharp decline in the quality of public services—education, public parks, highways, water projects—that were once regarded as models for the nation. It has also seen the evolution of an increasingly unmanageable and incomprehensible structure of state and local government that exacerbates the same public disaffection and alienation that have brought it on, thus creating a vicious cycle of reform and frustration."

Schrag maintains, furthermore, that government by non-deliberative plebiscite reinforces majoritarian indifference, if not hostility, toward minority rights:

> "To say all that, probably, is merely to say awkwardly, what the Framers of the Constitution said better in Philadelphia, what Hamilton, Madison, and Jay said in The Federalist, and what scores of delegates said in l787-l788 at the various state conventions leading up to ratification, even before the Terror of the French Revolution: unchecked majorities are a danger to liberty almost as great as oligarchs and absolute monarchs." (The Atlantic Monthly, March, l993, p. 30)

David Broder recognizes an additional, unfortunate byproduct of declining representation in California's governance by plebiscite ("Californocracy in Action", The Washington Post; August l3, l997). Broder notes that many of these direct democracy actions have ended up in court, with unelected judges settling more and more questions of public policy. "On the sidelines in this whole process," he wrote, "are the elected representatives of the people—the very folks we thought of, in our naive days as a nation, as the proper repository of governmental power."

Broder observes that this tension between the essentially unlimited power of a majority and the virtually unchecked power of judges could be avoided "if California ever learns to respect the wisdom of the Founders that a republic—with legislative power vested in elected representatives—is preferable to any other form of government."

....

Oklahoma City, Greenville County, and California represent intriguing and important developments. However, the perilous state of America's civic health is demonstrated most significantly and convincingly in our national retreat from the Great Experiment. The President's l996 State of the Union Message ("The era of Big Government is over!") represents more than the electoral outcome of a partisan or ideological campaign. It signals to the world the devolution of authority and responsibility that have been so important, historically, to our national democratic experiment. To a certain extent, the President's announcement echoes, at the federal level, a message of frustration and resignation about the progressive march of American history—in effect, "We the people...give up!"

Witness, for example, our national reluctance, despite a booming economy and international security, to tackle head-on—through full public power and institutions—a persistent plague of social ailments such as racism, drugs, crime, and violence. Fortunately, an improved economy is mitigating these ailments, because "Big Ideas" are out, and little things—such as staged town meetings about race, photo opportunities about school uniforms, symbolic restrictions on firearms availability—are in. There are no serious federal initiatives or proposals, from either the White House or Congress, comparable to Social Security, the New Deal, or the Great Society. The federal judiciary, unlike progressive activists of yesteryear, seems content to tinker and tweak. Nor does there appear to be sufficient interest outside government for anything resembling the civil rights movement of the l960s.

Even internationally, with no economic or military or ideological competitor in sight, we seem to have lost our way. The White House is still searching for a "Clinton Doctrine"; and many Members of Congress seem proud of the fact that they have no passports. Despite a slew of humanitarian, peacekeeping, and combat actions, our international policy too often resembles a "9ll" service. Apparently out of the question is any grand new effort—such as the Marshall Plan or the Peace Corps—for meeting our international obligations and promoting the global pursuit of democratic ideals.

....

John D. Donahue, who has studied extensively what he calls "America's endless argument" over the proper role of the federal government, recounts the contemporary decline of Washington in Disunited States: (1997);

> "As advocates of state primacy found their voice, the nationalist side of the argument was strangely muted. Washington acquiesced in the ascendancy of the states, and not only because of Republican dominance of both Congress and the statehouses. President Clinton, from what precise mix of conviction and stratagem it is difficult to say, proved broadly agreeable to letting Washington cede leadership to the states...The administration proudly noted, in a report on labor-market trends, that federal government employment had fallen by over one-

> tenth on its watch (from January l993 to March l996) while state and local government employment had grown." (P. 34)

As Donahue notes, this shift was most dramatically demonstrated in its budget actions. "Federal domestic spending (aside from transfers and interest) fell from around 3 percent of the economy at the start of the l990s to less than 2 percent in l996. And under the administration's budget plans, federal domestic spending will continue its decline." (P. 34)

Donahue predicts that Big Government will shrink further:

> "Aside from sending checks to health-care providers, Social Security claimants, and debt holders, the federal government will be a shrinking presence in most Americans' lives well into the early years of the twenty-first century." (P. 37)

Many applaud these trends. For example, Republican Senator Kay Bailey Hutchinson (Texas) declares that "states can be more efficient and more responsible if Washington just gets out of the way." (P. 33) But Donahue is concerned about the impact of centrifugal forces realigning our nation; "...if we want to have a free choice over the big questions of government's scale and purpose ... we must choose together, as a nation. Fifty separate choices sum to no choice at all," (P, 169) Donohue feels duty bound to make the case for "grown-up politics" against "the "false path to reform":

> "If we neglect the institutional foundations of national solidarity, the strains on our culture will become all the harder to contain. And the United States' willing disintegration, in the face of an integrating world, will be recorded as one of history's monumental follies." (P. 169)

....

The reality is that there is no strong national consensus for continuing the current level and scope of the Great Experiment here and abroad. Downsizing the federal government's size and reach seems to be the order of the day at the White House, the Congress, and the Supreme Court. It is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain working majorities for existing, long-standing, national policies and programs of fairness and opportunity—such as Head Start, bilingual education, affirmative action, and international aid. Indeed, the major course of government today is running in the opposite direction—turning over to the states or the private sector what used to be federal responsibilities. Even essential functions—such as Social Security, national defense, and public welfare—are undergoing scrutiny for some devolution or privatization.

Taken collectively, these and countless similar developments indicate that, in both substantive ideals and the political process, we are altering, significantly, the nature and operation of American democracy.

....

DEMOGRAPHIC, ECONOMIC, AND TECHNOLOGICAL TRENDS ARE EXACERBATING OUR CIVIC DECLINE.

I am struck furthermore by the uncivic ramifications of some less obvious but increasingly important trends during the past few years. Demographics, economics, and technology are contributing to public withdrawal from our collective democratic endeavor.

Social scientists of the l990s have documented pretty convincingly that Americans seem to be segregating themselves, along several dimensions, not just in terms of race, wealth, and status; and the gap between "us" and "them", by many measurements, is becoming more negatively consequential for our Great Experiment.

For example, William Frey, a demographer with the University of Michigan's Population Studies Center, has identified and documented a "new demographic divide" that is sharply different from what has happened for most of the twentieth century. Frey says that America is dividing into "multiple melting pots" (states such as California, Texas, Florida, and New York with high numbers of new racial and ethnic minorities) and much of the rest of the country that is older, whiter, and more middle class. This phenomenon has important consequences for the future of America as a national experiment in democratic ideals because it divides America into subcultural regions with differing views of America and American democracy. According to Frey, these emerging "multiple melting pots" will produce a different kind of "Americanization" for new immigrants in the twenty-first century (as contrasted with the assimilation process of the current century). But just as important is what Frey sees happening in the rest of the country:

> "New region-based political constituencies will emerge that place greater emphasis on middle class tax breaks and the solvency of the Social Security system, and that cast a wary eye on too much federal government regulation. Already these regions are becoming more conservative and more likely to vote Republican. Their residents will become far less energized over issues such as preserving affirmative action laws, extending the federal safety net to new foreign-born generations or maintaining bilingual education in the schools." ("New Demographic Divide in the US", p. 35)

Such pronounced subcultural division certainly bodes ill for the national democratic experiment.

I have similar concerns about the aggravating effect of contemporary economic developments—particularly the globalization of business and commerce. Without being jingoistic, I am concerned that we're divorcing ourselves—in a process of economic internationalism—from the American experiment. Of course, there's nothing wrong with corporate leaders looking abroad for bottom-line profits; nor is it a crime for America's consumers to ignore "Buy American" campaigns in search of better or cheaper products. However, "American nationism" is getting squeezed between the aforementioned demographic subnationalism and the globalizing economy. I do not have any empirical evidence for my

concern, and I certainly do not want to encourage reactionary nationalism; but eventually, we probably ought to pay some analytic attention to how these atomizing pressures are affecting public allegiance to our national experiment in democratic ideals.

These demographic and economic trends bother me, too, in light of our technological revolution and its impact on our collective pursuit of democratic ideals. The technological revolution opens a world of opportunity and benefits to all of us; but it is disproportionately tilted in favor of those who already sit atop America's opportunity ladder (and those least interested in sustaining our national democratic experiment in its present form).

A recent Commerce Department report, for example, reveals a widening "digital divide" between the "haves" and the "have-nots". The national survey showed that whites are more than twice as likely to own a home computer as blacks or Hispanics. "It's shocking that these groups are being left behind", said Donna Hoffman, a Vanderbilt University expert whose research confirms these patterns. However, President Clinton's top telecommunications adviser says that "The political, cultural and economic gaps in our society are only going to get exacerbated...we've got a problem as a nation."

Thus, some of the central and normally positive dynamics of American life—demographic fluidity, economic growth, and technological progress—are exacerbating our civic ailment by segmenting American society and facilitating political secession from the American experiment. Those who are relatively advantaged—socially, economically, technologically—are backing away from our historic experiment, retreating into regional constituencies, suburban enclaves, gated communities, with privatized schools, security, recreation, social services, and other important functions normally provided by government. And left behind are those most dependent and insistent upon the continued democratic and material blessings of our Great Experiment.

....

THE MAGICAL MIX IS LOSING ITS MAGIC, AND AMERICA MAY BE DYING!

If we accept historic America as the model of civic health, then it appears that our progressive experiment is changing dramatically as we close the Twentieth Century. Thus it is time to restate the central idea of this lecture series in the more urgent language of my "dying" inquiry:

> **"How far can we pursue democratic ideals through limited, representative government without succumbing to the inherent, destructive tendencies of democracy?"**

It also may be time to consider whether we are flirting with those inherent, destructive tendencies.

I contend that America has entered—perhaps unconsciously—an "insufficiently satisfactory" stage of civic health. Despite our current economic bonanza and Cold War celebration, our nation is developing—both procedurally and substantively—a relatively undiagnosed but serious case of democratic dysfunction. My judgement is that the American people are losing their commitment to the Great Experiment.

To be more specific, I suspect (and there are increasing "dark signs of the times") that America's leaders and the public are inclining incrementally toward the less-inspired tendencies of democracy:

- **First, we are segregating ourselves as divergent communities, constituencies, interests, philosophies, and ideologies, in various geographical areas, and at different levels and units of government; and we are de-emphasizing our "American nationism" (an essential requirement of American democracy) in favor of individualism, groupism, localism, regionalism, and transnationalism.**

- **Popularly-expressed support for democratic ideals in general remains strong, but in-depth study reveals that Americans are developing reservations about the specific application and advancement of these ideals through government (especially the national government); and political initiatives and referenda throughout the country reveal substantial and outright opposition to expansive democratic ideals.**

- **We seem increasingly impatient with American democracy's convoluted, contentious, difficult balancing of inconsistent, contradictory, confusing democratic ideals; many now favor a more structured, efficient democratic experiment with particularly preferred and absolute ideals.**

- **Some want to elevate cultural values (such as the family, religion, community, and diversity) as central elements—alongside or above traditional democratic ideals—of our national experiment.**

- **There are increasing demands for re-arranging and experimenting with America's historic framework of limited, representative governance (such as calls for proportional representation, electronic politics, and direct democracy) to accommodate our contemporary inclinations.**

- **There is a disturbing propensity for individuals, institutions, and communities to simply walk away from our experiment, abandoning the notion of a public, collective, democratic endeavor entirely or resorting to anti-democratic, illegal, or violent alternatives.**

- **Finally, we seem insufficiently concerned about the danger of these unhealthy inclinations for our historic experiment.**

Thus America seems to be moving, quite often consistently with certain inherent democratic principles and processes, in ways and directions that are unhealthy for American democracy.

....

I would like to think that today's developments constitute a case of temporary distemper, or a simple pause, or a few targeted institutional adjustments, or a shifting of some of the burden of democratic progress to a broader, supportive society. In the long run, furthermore, some of these developments may be inconsequential or even therapeutic for America. Indeed, an improving economy is already proving somewhat effective in relieving some of the more superficial strains on American democracy.

But, I am convinced that, as we close the Twentieth Century, American democracy is evidencing fundamental degeneration; and, altogether, these unhealthy developments are pushing America toward the inherent, destructive tendencies of democracy. Eventually, without corrective action, an impatient populace may—democratically—alter our historic version of America. I share the sentiments of Jean Bethke Elshtain, who despite her faith in "democracy's enduring promise", says in Democracy On Trial :

> "As an American who has passed her own mid-century mark, I have never known the loss of independence, foreign armies, or occupations, but I have joined the ranks of the nervous generation. I believe we are in the danger zone. No outside power will take us over and destroy our freedom. We are perfectly capable, my nervousness tells me, of doing that to ourselves, all in the name of more freedom." (Pp. XIV-XV)

....

In a fit of wild speculation, I can imagine our nation moving beyond simple adjustment into the far side of the danger zone—in the name of democratic ideals. America may decide to resolve our historic fuzziness about freedom and equality with some less-than-ideal repercussions; or we may decide to incorporate contentious cultural values into our fundamental law. We may even decide to dump our limited, representative framework of governance for more responsive direct democracy. In the process, America could become perverse parodies of America; or, ultimately, America could die, democratically dissolving into a variety of dog-and-cat nation-states.

None of these wild speculations is likely, but they serve as useful, sobering background for assessing our present predicament. It is worthwhile analysis, not idle speculation, to conclude that these are unhealthy times for America—and to worry about our Great Experiment.

....

In short, the magical mix is losing its magic. The essential elements of that mix—our people, our politics, and our government—no longer work their collective civic chemistry the way they are supposed to. We are questioning anew our basic democratic ideals, as well as our cultural values and system of governance. By most accounts, traditional civic virtue is yielding to cynicism, frustration, and resignation. In some sectors, as we have pointed out, there are signs of even darker moods and anxieties.

Sometimes noisily (as in Oklahoma City), sometimes silently (as at the Greenville County library), sometimes openly (as in California's governance by plebiscite), but, of most significance, both consciously and democratically (as in Washington's retreat from "Big Government"), America, as we have known it, seems to be disintegrating.

Furthermore, our preliminary prognosis—absent further analysis, corrective treatment, and recuperative therapy—has to include, in theory, more seriously negative consequences, even national demise. Theoretically, America may be dying!

LECTURE # 7: "THE CONTEMPORARY REALITIES OF OUR GREAT EXPERIMENT."

(Is America really going to die?—And some alternative scenarios for our uncertain future.)

My analysis thus far has shown that contemporary America is locked in a national struggle of historic significance unprecedented except by the 1860s Civil War. Our national environment and philosophical health have taken a turn for the worse, and the magical mix of American democracy has turned into a divisive, disruptive, unwinnable family fight.

Victimized in the crossfire of our family fight are not only routine functions of government but also, and of critical importance, our historic Great Experiment. Ironically, we are stifling the pursuit of democratic ideals with our current efforts at achieving "a more perfect union".

It really is not surprising that America has come to this point. **Systemic overload was guaranteed sooner or later.**

American government and American democracy developed originally to accommodate a loose, unstructured, diverse society, which enjoyed sufficient room to breathe and experiment with different ideas about "the good life". The Founders designed a system for pursuing democratic ideals and material benefits within the framework of open opportunity and limited, representative government; and they wisely avoided the resolution of contentious inclinations into national absolutisms. In time, with relatively successful, satisfactory operation of that system, we evolved into a tradition of majoritarian democracy that accommodated minority rights. Modern America may not be exactly what the Founders had in mind, and it certainly is not perfect; but it has proven remarkably progressive and resilient . Other than the l860s civil war, the system worked fairly well for two centuries.

However, considering the irresistible forces of democracy and the restrained framework of governance established by our Founders, America was destined to reach the juncture at which (1) public demands for policies, services, and benefits would push American democracy to the maximum of its capabilities and (2) conflicting democratic ideals, cultural values, and principles of governance would disrupt the Great Experiment. Now, our "boundless continent" in many ways resembles the "old world" of crowded peoples struggling in fixed place and time for the same limited natural and political resources; and we are attempting to deal anew with ideals, values, and governance in an environment of constricting opportunity. Thus, we are attempting a fundamental, traumatic, risky redefinition of our historic system.

Today's debate is dangerous because it jeopardizes the continued pursuit of democratic ideals. The search for democratic ideals—and the balancing of competing democratic strains in those ideals—is a precarious venture by itself; mixing moral and religious values and new ideas of governance into that experiment is a toxic, explosive reformulation that makes a positive outcome virtually impossible. The philosophical civil war weakens the drive toward democratic ideals by pitting warring faction against warring faction, with neither side interested in furthering general freedom or equality (or various other democratic ideals) because they now see specific democratic ideals as integral to their particularistic cultural values and principles of governance. Their continued warring distracts and derails the democratic movement as a common endeavor.

Philosophical order has never been a rigid rule of American democracy, but as a result of today's constricted national environment and intense intermingling of ideals, values, and governance, the governmental process has become a study in disorder and dysfunction. Philosophical warriors of all types—Democrats and Republicans, liberals and conservatives, even libertarians, all hell-bent on promoting their immediate pet missions—are trashing traditional democratic icons such as the First Amendment and the Bill of Rights. Radical reformers are short-circuiting representative government in favor of direct democracy. Affirmative action, immigration, gun control, abortion, homosexuality, and pornography dominate our policy agenda, exacerbating more conventional democratic pursuits. Day-to-day government plods along, but important questions of public policy—such as long-term budget problems, national defense, and healthcare—are held hostage and suffer collateral damage. In the absence of acceptable progress on pressing issues, the governmental forum too often is filled with finger-pointing, symbolism, and other political games.

Our political free-for-all is not limited to politicians and the governmental forum. Various segments of the American people have joined the fray in unconventional and ironic manner. We see grandparental senior citizens, permanently dependent upon a bankrupting governmental transfer payments program, angrily warning elected public officials to "keep your blankety-blank hands off social security". We see farmers, philosophically conservative and culturally apolitical, protesting the termination of public subsidies. We see minorities, historically victimized by official discrimination, parading for governmentally-decreed racial arrangements. We see religious groups, fundamentally supportive of religious freedom, fighting for governmentally-sanctioned religious activity. In fact, we see a large portion of Americans benefiting from governmental action schizophrenically dog-cussing government. It's not a very pretty picture, somewhat like watching a hatchet fight between siamese twins.

....

AMERICA'S GREAT EXPERIMENT MAY SIMPLY HAVE RUN IT'S COURSE.

It appears that America's Great Experiment may simply have run its course, that American democracy may have outlived (or outgrown) its historic foundations. Our Great Experiment was designed for pursuing fuzzy democratic ideals in a favorable national environment and within a loose framework of limited, representative governance; our federal republic was not designed to work and cannot function as a democratic leviathan.

America's history has shown that we "can" successfully pursue democratic ideals within the framework of limited, representative government. Our history has demonstrated also "how" we can conduct this pursuit. But now we may be in the unpleasant position of finding out "how far we can"—or, more accurately, "how far we cannot"—pursue democratic ideals without succumbing to the inherent, destructive tendencies of democracy.

The progressive evolution of the American system is remarkable; but there undoubtedly are realities that, sooner or later, constrain American democracy. We may have to acknowledge that today's crisis—a declining national environment and philosophical civil war, accompanied by our struggling, people, politics, and government—is straining those limits. Powerful forces of cynicism, frustration, and resignation have been building for the past half-century, and we may be coming face-to-face with the inherent, destructive tendencies of democracy. We must now ask ourselves whether our Great Experiment can continue—or will America fall to those inherent, destructive tendencies.

....

The possibility that our Great Experiment may have run its course is eliciting a diversity of unconventional analysis and commentary.

A veteran Foreign Service analyst suggests that we temper our expectations of American democracy. Graham Fuller warns, in The Democracy Trap: Perils of the Post-Cold War World (1991), that "our greatest enemy is no longer overseas but lies in the inherent contradictions of ourselves and our system" (P. 267):

> "No system—a few occasional benevolent dictatorships aside—other than liberal democracy is more systematically reliable in bringing about the well-being of society. But this belief, this faith, does not guarantee that the path will be permanently sustainable. It has also been the cardinal thesis of this book that our democratic values are creating increasingly severe operational dilemmas in their wake. Particular social problems, including the handling of race and ethnicity, morality, and maintenance of the social order are daunting; they may even be exacerbated by the systematic furthering of democratic practice ... If the social problems become critical enough, and the democratic order becomes paralyzed, it may result in a sharp pendulum swing toward an authoritarian solution in order to preserve society." (Pp. 266-277)

Democracy becomes a trap, Fuller says, by stimulating the erroneous belief that with the end of the Cold War we are entering an automatically perfect world:

> "The Democracy Trap is the possibility that democracy may not simply go on getting better, but may contain the seeds of its own decline, possibly spurring an eventual authoritarian response from within our own society. Indeed, the Democracy Trap may lie in the very nature of postindustrial American democracy itself—its tendency to intensify the disorders of an unstructured and possibly decaying society—one in which the traditional binding social institutions of the past are falling by the wayside. Uncritical extension of the frontiers of democratic society and practice could mark the deterioration, rather than the maturation, of American society." (P. 2)

Fuller predicts that America's faith in democracy will be tested in the next few decades as we confront neo-nationalism, perhaps even here in the United States:

> "But what about our Union? Washington indeed fought four bloody years in order to attain a settlement at Appomattox that preserved the Union ... Could George Bush today call in federal troops and go to war against our own population if, say, the South decided that economically and culturally it no longer wished to remain in the Union? If it undertook a referendum and freely voted for independence? Or if the Spanish-speaking parts of the United States voted for autonomy or separation? Can anyone imagine American troops today killing tens of thousands of Americans—in front of TV cameras—in order to prevent regional separation? I submit that the Appomattox solution—the use of military force to preserve the Union—is no longer tenable. Should a new attempt at regional autonomy or separation ever emerge in America—supported by a local referendum—it could no longer be stopped by force from Washington. American and world values have changed too much for that kind of violence to be wreaked ever again—at least in America—simply in the name of preserving the Union." (P. 99)

....

Patrick Kennon, recently retired after 25 years with the Central Intelligence Agency, says that it is already too late to save American democracy. "Democracy has become marginal as a system of government," (P. XI) he writes in The Twilight of Democracy (1995). He explains that:

> "Far from being a divinely ordained arrow in the blue, beyond gravity, destined to rise to ever-greater heights, democracy is an earthbound, human creation subject to the entropy of all such creations. It now travels a course of declining relevance much like that of European monarchy from the power of Elizabeth I to the impotence of Elizabeth 11 ... Democracy, like the queen, is gradually ceasing to be a force and becoming a symbol." (P. 255)

Kennon, declaring that the very completeness of democracy's victory as an ideology constitutes a threat, offers an exceedingly cynical preview:

> "The citizen who once found the meaning of life in work now finds it in consumption and leisure and 'respect'...The individual ceases to be an individual and becomes an oilman, a doctor, a woman, a black, a lesbian, an automobile worker, a teacher—a member of a group that has a claim on the national treasury, a group that is not going to have its rights trampled upon, a group that is suspicious of all other groups, a group that is willing to shut down the country if necessary. The bureaucracy is privatized, captured by special interests. It ceases to be a machine for progress and becomes a conduit for passing out subsidies.

> The politicians, now with no other function than to pander to the groups, mud-wrestle for a cardboard crown and a meaningless title." (Pp. 260-261)

Kennon's pessimistic prediction is that "Those societies that continue to allow themselves to be administered by individuals whose only qualification is that they were able to win a popularity contest will go from failure to failure and eventually pass from the scene." (P. 263)

....

Daniel Lazare rejects outright the limited, representational wisdom of our historic institutional arrangement; and he proposes that America junk our constitutional republic. His ideas, in The Frozen Republic: How the Constitution Is Paralyzing Democracy (1996), deserve more than passing comment:

> "The problem with the Constitution as it has developed over two centuries is that rather than engaging in a fundamental reordering, Americans have tried to democratize a predemocratic structure... The electorate, as a consequence, is locked in a desperate internal struggle, which, as long as Madisonian checks and balances remain in effect, can never end. The results are tortuous, yet ultimately only two outcomes are possible. Either the body politic will keel over from exhaustion or it will explode." (P. 301)

Lazare claims that the Constitution was designed, purposively, to be counterdemocratic; and he proposes that we start over:

> "What Americans need is less faith and more thought, less willingness to put their trust in a bygone political order and a greater realization that they, the living, are the only ones capable of maneuvering society through the storm. Instead of beginning with the Constitution as the essential building block, they should realize that there are no givens in this world and that all assumptions, beginning with the most basic, must constantly be examined and tested." (P. 4)

Lazare recommends that somebody—specifically California—start the revolutionary process by challenging the undemocratic nature of the U.S. Senate. He states the case for a political ultimatum: "No taxation ... without equal representation." (P. 286-287) If America accepts the change to a democratic Senate by either constitutional or political means, he says California should stay in the United States. "If not, it will go..." (P. 287) And he's confident that such a successful challenge would be followed by the toppling of an outdated constitution and system of governance.

Americans should cast off their chains, Lazare says. "They have nothing to lose—except one of the most unresponsive political systems this side of the former Soviet Union." (P. 9)

....

Robert Kaplan, an imaginative seer who has roamed America and the ends of the earth in search of the future, takes an equally disconcerting view of our destiny. "The United States is born to die," he claims.

Our country will not be conquered or collapse as did earlier civilizations, Kaplan explains in An Empire Wilderness: Travels into America's Future (l998). Instead the United States will transition into a junction point for the world's most talented people.

We get some idea vision of "International America" in Atlantic Monthly's introduction to his recent article "Travels Into America's Future":

> "Imagine a land in which the dominant culture is an internationalized one, at every level: in which the political units that really matter are confederations of city-states; in which loyalty is an economic concept, when it is not obsolete; in which 'the United States' exists chiefly to provide military protection. That is the land our correspondent glimpses, and it is no longer beyond the horizon."

Kaplan glimpsed this horizon in extensive travels throughout the country, during which he saw a nation polarized ethnically, economically, and politically, where technological progress moved privileged society forward with a radically different world-view from that of their less privileged neighbors. For example, while visiting Orange County, California, he asked a routine question of political reporting—"Where's the power?" He found his answer not in any governmental building or political machine—but in the restaurant where he was having lunch:

> "Power was here, in this restaurant, dispersed among many more people, who were much less accountable. The issue was simply profit, disconnected from political promises or even geography. Orange County was merely a home base for the headquarters of global corporations, which could be moved in an instant—for example, in response to a tax increase."

Kaplan posed a further line of blunt inquiry—"Will this place fight for its country?"... "Are these people loyal to anything except themselves?" Rick Reiff, a Pulitzer Prize winning reporter from Ohio and now editor of the Orange County Business Journal, was equally direct in his response: "Loyalty is a problem...People came here to make money and enjoy the good life. In the future patriotism will be more purely and transparently economic. Perhaps patriotism will survive in the form of prestige, if America remains the world economic leader."

The gist of what Kaplan heard from the Americans he talked to is that our country must change—actually it must evolve—in ways, directions, and destinations very different from the past:

> "They all believe that the federal power structure is waning. The massive ministry buildings of Washington, D.C., with their oxen armies of bureaucrats, are the products of the Industrial Age, when American society reached a level of

sheer size and complexity that demanded such institutions. This leaden federal colossus must somehow slowly evolve into a new, lightframe structure of mere imperial oversight—for the sake of defense, conservation, and the rationing of water and other natural resources. The evolution may allow for a political silver age, though not another golden one."

....

William Strauss and Neil Howe provide an open-ended future in The Fourth Turning: An American Prophecy (l998). Drawing upon their cosmic interpretation of historical eras, or "saeculums", they predict that, early in the new century, we may see a major national crisis on par with the Revolution, the Civil War, and World War II.

Among their projected possibilities are "the end of our nation" (closing the book on the political constitution, popular culture, and moral standing of America), "the end of modernity" (a complete collapse of Western Civilization), or"the end of man" (an omnicidal armageddon).

In their final chapter, Strauss and Howe also see the possibility of a reborn nation—but not necessarily the same America:

"The new saeculum could find America a worse place. As Paul Kennedy has warned, it might no longer be a 'great power.' Its global stature might be eclipsed by foreign rivals. Its geography might be smaller, its culture less dominant, its military less effective, its government less democratic, its Constitution less inspiring. Emerging from its millennial chrysalis, it might evoke nothing like the hope and respect of its 'American Century' forbear. Abroad, people of goodwill and civilized taste might perceive this society as a newly dangerous place. Or they might see it as decayed, antiquated, an Old New World less central to human progress than we are now. All this is plausible, and possible, in the natural turning of saecular time."

Or, they project, we could see a more positive future:

"Alternatively, the new saeculum could find America, and the world, a much better place. Like England in the Reformation Saeculum, the Superpower America of the Millennial Saeculum might merely be a prelude to a higher plane of civilization. Its new civic life might more nearly resemble that 'shining city on a hill' to which its colonial ancestors aspired. Its ecology might be freshly repaired and newly sustainable, its economy rejuvenated, its politics functional and fair, its media elevated in tone, its culture creative and uplifting, its gender and race relations improved, its commonalities embraced and differences accepted, its institutions free of the corruptions that today seem entrenched beyond correction. People might enjoy new realms of personal, family, community, and national fulfillment. America's borders might be redrawn

> around an altered but more cogent geography of public community. Its influence on world peace could be more potent, on world culture more uplifting. All this is achievable as well."

....

Apparently, then, we have reached a critical juncture in American history, a political and philosophical crossroad, a struggle for the body and soul of America.

To reiterate, my rhetorical question ("Is America Dying?") is designed to dramatize my contention that American democracy is not producing satisfactory results and that we are losing our commitment to the Great Experiment. American democracy no longer works the way that it is supposed to work. The American people are losing their civic spirit; the political organs of American democracy are malfunctioning; and American government is headed toward stroke, paralysis, or something worse. The bottom-line result is that our national experiment in democratic ideals is dysfunctioning. We therefore are questioning our basic democratic ideals and our historic framework of governance. This is a sickness of spirit and body.

I do not believe that we are going to die. But it is time for us to call time-out, to discuss what is happening, where we are going, and what we want America, eventually, to be. We need to determine, in Tocqueville's terms, our hopes and fears for the Great Experiment. I can envision, for example, several alternative scenarios in America's uncertain future:

ALTERNATIVE SCENARIO NO. l: DISSOLUTION. ("Death of America"?)

The battle for the body and soul of America could lead to a breakup of the United States, by either peaceful or violent means.

ALTERNATIVE SCENARIO NO. 2: DEFORMATION. ("Amerika" or "USSA"?)

America could change, by democratic process, into a far different nation from what exists today. Simple constitutional amendment could create deformed, polar versions (or something in between) of our present system, such as a majoritarian, nationalistic, centralized "United State of Amerika", with conservative ideas about freedom and right-wing cultural values. Or we could become the "Union of Socialist States of America", representing an ultimate confederation of heterogeneous, egalitarian, left-wing sentiments. Of course, "Amerika" or "U.S.S.A" (or any other deformation) likely would incorporate extreme interpretations, variations, and mixtures of our historic democratic principles in their refashioned Great Experiment.

ALTERNATIVE SCENARIO NO. 3: RESTORATION. (“New America”?)

The acceptable alternative to dissolution and deformation, in my opinion, is restoration, refurbishing the structure without altering the fundamental principles of our national democratic experiment. Whether or not America has reached its limits, we should be able to redesign our Great Experiment and continue—in new manner—our pursuit of democratic ideals. America can survive if we address our problems without succumbing to destructive tendencies. The process outlined in my next, final lecture might lead us to restoration and “New America”.

LECTURE # 8: “‘NEW AMERICA’ IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM?”

(How can we restore America?)

The central message of this lecture series is that America is changing in important and unsettling ways and that we have an obligation to our children and future generations to deal constructively with these changes. Over the past few weeks, I have attempted to address these troubling developments by presenting for your consideration and discussion my own theoretical, political, and personal analysis of “The Future of American Democracy”.

First, I introduced my assessment of the contemporary distemper of American democracy, and I posed my rhetorical question—“Is America Dying?”.

Second, I defined my conceptions of “America”, “American Democracy”, and “Dying”; and I diagrammed a “systemic model of dying America”.

Then, I presented several propositions as the basis of my “dying” analysis: (l) “The favorable environment of American democracy has disappeared;” (2) “We have entrapped

American democracy within a philosophical civil war;" (3) "American democracy no longer works the way it has in the past;" and (4) "We seem to be tiring of the Great Experiment itself."

Last week, I talked about some of the wild things that other end-of-century commentators have been predicting for our nation, including deformed transformations of American democracy and even dissolution, or death, of America.

Tonight, I will end this lecture series by discussing two, alternative, "what if" scenarios—representing less radical notions—about "How we can restore America?" in the New Millennium. I want to project where our current course may be heading ("The American Federation") and call for a change of course ("American Democratic Renaissance") in "New America".

…………………………

A SPECULATIVE PROJECTION: "THE AMERICAN FEDERATION"

Obviously, America and American democracy will never be the same as before because of our deteriorated national environment and philosophical civil war. These systemic factors, combined with political, demographic, economic, and technological dynamics, will force us to change, fundamentally and permanently, the future character and operations of our Great Experiment.

No one can say for sure what that future holds; and there is no such thing, of course, as a comprehensive "how to" manual—something like a "New America" For Dummies—with simple, straightforward instructions for achieving civic restoration.

But I am prepared to speculate here—by and with the full authority of my self-invoked political and literary license—about where we might be heading if we continue our current course. This projection is neither my prediction nor my recommendation; it is a speculative discussion of how contemporary conditions and developments might play out in the next century. It is an heuristic artifact designed simply to stimulate thinking and discussion.

My projective assumption is that our fundamental, systemic condition—an unfavorable national environment and philosophical civil war—is not going to change magically or overnight. Regardless of how we approach the problem, restoration is likely to reflect the sober realities of our broader system; and our people, politics, and government will have to reconstitute their civic magic through a different formula.

To be specific and direct, I project that America may turn into "The American Federation". More precisely, I am projecting that America may become "a national experiment in democratic ideals through limited, representative, federal governance"—with emphasis on the addition of the term "federal" to my original definition of America.

My thinking is that we might democratically restructure the relationship between central and regional government to meet the changing demands of today's increasingly diverse, divergent, pluralistic America. In this scenario, restoration would be, theoretically and politically, a balancing response to two centuries of popular nationalization and centralization of American life. Thus The American Federation would represent a logical next stage in the historical development of our nation as a federal republic and pluralist democracy; and it could be accomplished through minimal tinkering with our constitutional foundations.

WHAT WILL "THE AMERICAN FEDERATION" LOOK LIKE?

Clearly, America will look differently in the next century. There's general agreement among social scientists that population growth patterns will create a new social order—with the historically dominant white population losing its numerical majority by mid-century. Thus, Traditional-Majoritarian America will yield to Emerging-Heterogeneous America as demographic trends continue the churning of our population.

However, it is very probable that the traditional, majoritarian culture will retain its dominant status—as a plurality force—in American society; and Emerging America will be an eclectic lot, thereby further segmenting American society. Thus The American Federation will be even more culturally divergent than has been the case historically.

More importantly for the future of American democracy, Americans increasingly will settle into subnational enclaves distinctly defined by their political culture, lifestyle, demographics, and geography; and these "subamerican" regions, communities, and groupings will shape American politics and government thereafter. We used to view the white South as America's singularly important "subamerican" culture; then we discovered urban black culture. Now we speak prophetically of important new subcultural configurations and movements, such as the mixed ethnic and racial concentrations, or "multiple melting pots", in California, New York, Florida, and Texas, and the "Caucasian bastion" of the Pacific Northwest, and the wired, restless, unpredictable community of "Digital Nation".

Supplementing this important subnational development will be a tendency for Americans to transcend national boundaries and institutions in their daily lives. Increasingly, we seem to be reorienting ourselves toward the global economy and the international community—with particular affinity for our northern (Canada) and southern (Mexico and the Caribbean) neighbors. With the Cold War over, the economy booming, and transcending technology cheap and easy, we are now free to locate ourselves wherever suits our cultural fancy, living the lifestyle and earning our livelihood without regard to what happens in the U.S. Capitol or the White House.

As I will soon explain, the phenomenon of "subamericanism" will impact future America in important and lasting ways, perhaps most consequentially through the emergence of "subamerican democracy". The powerful force of subnational acculturation, combined with the dizzying energy of the democratization movement, will undermine and overwhelm our American federal republic.

HOW WILL "THE AMERICAN FEDERATION" WORK?

My projection is that our deteriorating national environment and philosophical civil war will force the ultimate federalization of the American system. America will remain a system of mixed government with central and regional jurisdictions and shared, exclusive, overlapping powers; and we will continue as an institution of limited, representative governance. But our national experiment will operate differently, and there will be serious re-sorting, in terms of our federalist-republican arrangement, as a result of subamerican democracy. In other words, the United States of America will transition into "The American Federation"; American democracy will transition into "American federal democracy"; and our Great Experiment will become "a federated experiment in democratic ideals".

I anticipate, of course, that basic national authority will continue, and that fundamental freedoms will survive in The American Federation. Those responsibilities that are consensually broad, general, and beyond provincial capabilities (such as national defense, foreign policy, social security, and economic/monetary policy) will still be handled by the central government. Perhaps certain responsibilities (or at least certain aspects of important policy areas) such as education and health care will be enhanced as national jurisdictions.

However, "American Federocracy" will deprive Washington of some of its power and influence. The historic nationalization of American life, the centralization of governance, and federalized redistribution of wealth will, at the least, slow down. Important issues may shift to subnational forums and policies.

These prospects should strike fear in the hearts of the Big Government Establishment; but states righters should not get overly exhuberant. The states, counties, and cities probably will suffer the same atrophy as will the national government in our new political order.

I therefore see in The American Federation a national system of subamerican democratic experiments—a mixing of national democratic ideals with regional pursuit of those ideals (or variations of those ideals) from a particular cultural perspective and through unconventional governmental initiatives. Hence my term "federal democratic ideals" (as distinguished from "national democratic ideals").

In fact, subamerican democracy may introduce radical new concepts and initiatives that rival or eclipse traditional governmental institutions and practices. The American Federation could, in some areas and circumstances, redefine our concept of democratic ideals or further the course of direct democracy; it could involve regional partnering with our North American neighbors; or it may transcend geography altogether, bringing broad-based public interest constituencies or electronic communities into the federal relationship.

Subamerican democracy thus will address many of the problems of contemporary America by introducing flexibility into what has become a nationally conflicted, zero-sum

political game over increasingly difficult and indivisible blessings of American democracy. It also would encourage American citizens to experiment anew with their political and governmental systems. Through this more flexible federal arrangement, some national conflicts might be resolved subnationally—in new and different games, in new and different ways, with new and different democratic outcomes. Arguably, these developments might re-inspire and re-bond the American people to their Great Experiment.

Obviously, subamerican democracy will trouble many democratic theorists and American citizens; but in The American Federation, it likely will be the conventional way of dealing with nationally contentious cultural problems such as the role of religion in civil life, affirmative action, gun control, abortion rights, and lifestyle issues. Disgruntled Americans will have to pursue their democratic dreams, as did earlier Americans, by going elsewhere to more acceptable environs.

Interestingly, the transition toward The American Federation will entail little if any constitutional amendment. The Congress (through statutory mandates) and the President (through executive orders) already have within their constitutional jurisdiction the power to reshape American federalism. Furthermore, just as the courts historically have nationalized various aspects of American public life (through the fourteenth amendment), they can lead in other directions (perhaps by "rediscovering" the tenth amendment). Certainly legislative-executive-judicial activism, combined with administrative implementation, could redefine—just as it has done for years—the substance and process of American democracy. With popular support, the federalization of American democracy could proceed without restructuring our fundamental law.

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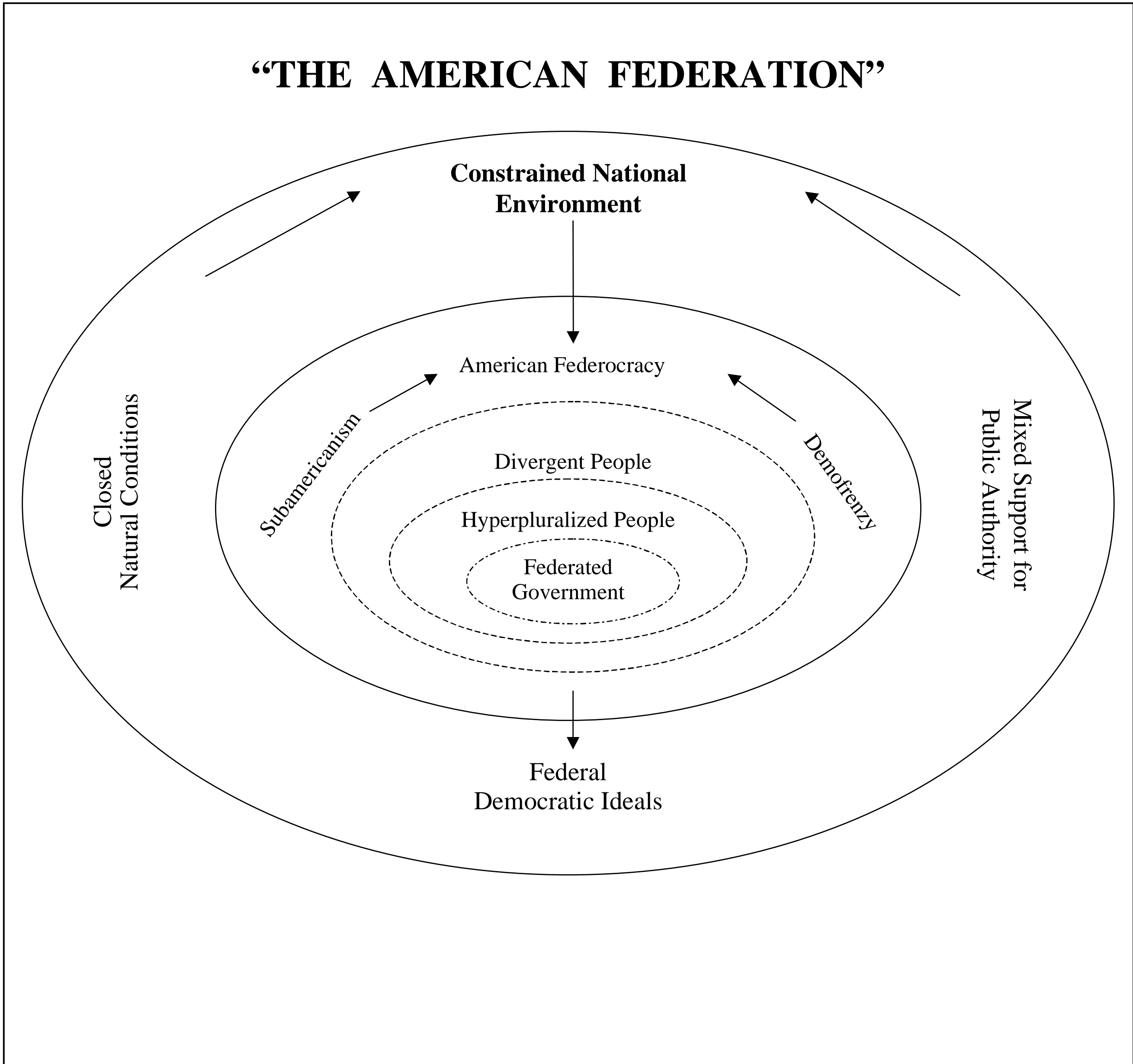
I have incorporated these projections into a systemic diagram that allows us to compare "The American Federation" with Contemporary America and Historic America (as presented in an earlier lecture).

Place "The American Federation" model here.


"THE AMERICAN FEDERATION"
Constrained National Environment
American Federocracy
Closed Natural Conditions
Subamericanism
Divergent People
Hyperpluralized People
Federated Government
Demofrenzy
Mixed Support for Public Authority
Federal Democratic Ideals

As my model shows, The American Federation begins with a constrained national environment (closed natural conditions and mixed support for public authority) that imposes unprecedented limitations on our national democratic experiment. Furthermore, our philosophical civil war has dissipated into symbiotic spin-off movements—"subamericanism" and "demofrenzy"—that, in turn, have forced a federational restructuring of American democracy. Consequently, "American Federocracy" represents a challenging new mixture: (l) an Emerging American people with a heterogeneous majority and greater societal divergency, (2) a radically altered political party, news media, and electoral system reflecting the impact of subamerican politics, and (3) federated government to serve the needs of a highly pluralized polity. The result is "federal democratic ideals" (instead of national democratic ideals).

The American Federation therefore represents a practical response to my original questions: "Can…", "How can…", and "How far can our nation—a people of growing cultural diversity, with increasingly divergent ideals, values, and governance principles, in an environment of constricted political blessings and benefits—continue to sustain our collective pursuit of freedom, equality , and justice within the framework of limited, representative government?" The American Federation would continue the pursuit of democratic ideals, in a changed world, through a revised arrangement of our federal system.

IS "THE MERICAN FEDERATION" THE BEST THAT WE CAN DO?

But is The American Federation the best that we can do in "New America"? An American Federation may indeed be the next logical chapter in the developing drama of American history, and it may deal, practically, with many of the civic ills of contemporary America. It is an alternative to deformation and dissolution. But does it represent inspired restoration of American democracy? Or is it uninspired, uninspiring compromise with perceived reality? Is it simply a stopover on the road to "the United State of Amerika", or "the Union of Socialist States of America", or something worse?

It seems to me that we are proceeding haphazardly—without a great deal of thought and discussion as a nation—toward The American Federation. We can do better—but only if we dedicate ourselves to the task of democratic renaissance.

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AN ALTERNATIVE CHALLENGE:
"AMERICAN DEMOCRATIC RENAISSANCE".

The challenge for "New America" is how to accommodate the changes of the past few decades without mortally weakening our Great Experiment. To return to my unpleasant question at the beginning of this discussion:

“Can our nation—a people of growing cultural diversity, with increasingly divergent ideals, values, and principles of governance, in an environment of constricted political blessings and benefits—continue our collective pursuit of freedom, equality, and justice within the traditional framework of limited, representative government?”

Or, more simply: “Can contemporary America deal with the forceful demands of ‘subamericanism’ and ‘demofrenzy’ without going too far, without succumbing to the inherent, destructive tendencies of democracy?”

My conclusion, after three decades of public service, is that successfully addressing this challenge will be possible only through a comprehensive, transformational, public effort. I propose, then, that we launch an “American Democratic Renaissance”.

Restoring the American system to its historic health is no small assignment, and it certainly is not a job for government alone. Restoration surely is a national responsibility requiring participation by the totality of people and institutions that make up America’s public life. We all must engage in an open, far-ranging, free-wheeling search for our democratic destiny in the new century.

However, after placing responsibility upon all of us for the future of American democracy, I now put the primary burden of restoration squarely upon the shoulders of America’s leadership. Initiating and guiding such a public effort will depend inevitably upon the actions of the American political elite simply because that is the way things happen in modern society. My emphasis on the role of leadership does not represent elitist homage to an “iron law” of political oligarchy; it simply recognizes an essential, sustaining principle of American democracy. There are those of us who (by virtue of our democratically-vested power, personal resources, or societal standing) occupy positions of authority and accountability for exercising positive, small-“r” republican influences upon small-“d” democratic inclinations toward excess. It therefore is in the interest of continued representative democracy that responsible leaders exercise their “r”-“d” responsibilities in such manner as to guide public policy and inspire public confidence. In sum, “We the people” are all in this together, but “we the leaders”—particularly politicians, educators, and private-sector leaders—must jump-start national democratic renaissance.

I do not know exactly how to pull this off, but an American democratic renaissance would probably require a broad, focused, aggressive campaign—a public/private partnership involving government of all levels and forms, political parties, interest groups, the business community, unions, schools, churches, public interest foundations, philanthropic organizations, the news media, the entertainment world, influential leaders, and celebrities from across the American spectrum. It would entail the formation of a national civic organization—something like the Bicentennial Commission—to sponsor and coordinate educational programs, conferences, reports, debates, contests, and other activities.

Actually, the creation of an American Renaissance Commission is not such a far-fetched idea. Numerous initiatives already are engaged in civic restoration—consider, for example, the

efforts of the Nunn-Bennett National Commission on Civic Renewal, Colin Powell's America's Promise, The Pew Charitable Trusts, The Kettering Foundation, The Century Foundation, The Center for Civic Education, The Center for Civic Networking, The Institute for the Study of Civic Values, The Close-Up Foundation, C-SPAN, The Center for Democracy and Citizenship, and Democracy Forum USA. What we need to do now is enhance and merge these initiatives into a comprehensive national movement.

There are no simple solutions or secret formulas for such a mission of national renaissance. However, the theoretical-political-personal approach employed in my earlier analysis of systemic degeneration also provides a useful framework for conceptualizing national restoration. Accordingly, we must go through a comprehensively regenerative experience: (l) theoretically, politically, and personally rediscovering what we want America to mean, (2) reworking the Great Experiment for changing America, and (3) proceeding systematically with the restoration of American democracy.

WE MUST REDISCOVER—THEORETICALLY, POLITICALLY, AND PERSONALLY— THE ESSENCE OF OUR AMERICAN NATION.

It is critical for America to rediscover itself—theoretically, politically, and personally—through our national democratic renaissance. We must put ourselves through a democratic rebirthing, something similar to the civic ordeal of our Founders.

Our rediscovery might focus, theoretically, on the original essential elements of American democracy. In the beginning, a hodge-podge of diverse, divergent peoples committed themselves to inspired nationhood—the sense that we are all in this together; and they based their aspirations primarily on democratic ideals instead of royalty, religion, or rigid class distinctions; then they entrusted public power to a limited, representative system of government. We would do well to revisit the simple genius of our national origins.

I suggest furthermore that, politically, we need to emphasize and accept America for what it is—an experiment that has served us well. Our inspired but uncertain exercise in popular self-governance is sometimes awkward, faulty, and painful; but it has allowed us to pursue practical democratic ideals and the American dream, within the framework of limited, representative governance, fairly successfully, for over two centuries.

My idea of rediscovery also requires that we come to terms politically with what America is not—perfection. Our historic experiment searches for "a more perfect union"—not "a perfect union"; and America provides an opportunity for—not a guarantee of—the American dream. Robert Samuelson rightly observes, in The Good Life and Its Discontents (l997), that America's current distemper derives in great part from our unrealistic expectations of American democracy. Americans, as a nation, have made more public commitments to ourselves than we can keep; and, unfortunately we have become a prisoner of our expectations:

> "We feel like the country hasn't lived up to its promises, and we are right. But the fault lies as much with the promise as with the performance. Our present pessimism is a direct reaction to the excessive optimism of the early postwar decades. It stems from the confusion of progress with perfection. Having first convinced ourselves that we were going to create the final American utopia—an extravagant act of optimism—we are now dismayed that we haven't—a burst of unwarranted pessimism." (p. XV)

Critical to rediscovery, too, is the simple idea that we the people must re-ordain and re-establish our commitment to the fundamental principles of our national experiment in democratic ideals. As responsible citizens of a new democratic order, we should personally endorse "New America".

In sum, proper theoretical, political, and personal understanding of the possibilities and limitations of America would put us on the course of national recovery.

WE ALSO MUST REWORK OUR GREAT EXPERIMENT FOR TODAY'S WORLD.

Successful restoration requires also that we rethink how we run American democracy. We need to address the practical requirements of a changing national environment while respecting the basic theoretical parameters of our historic Great Experiment.

It is clear, for example, that further progression of democratic ideals will have to proceed with renewed national appreciation for the realities of our Great Experiment. This experiment is a contentious, messy, meandering journey toward an unreachable democratic destiny. We must now chart our course within a relatively bounded national environment; and we will have to acknowledge the risky dynamics of our philosophical civil war. We also must adjust the elements and interactions of our magical mix to accommodate the challenges of a more diverse populace, the coming of electronic democracy, and the necessary restructuring of our governmental system. We must be ready to conduct ourselves as a national community in ways that may be far different from what we have known for most of our lives.

We have available for our use in this "reworking" assignment the experiences and insights of our original founders; and there is evidence of clear, rethinking among contemporary American theorists and practitioners. For example, in the area of government, B. Guy Peters, in The Future of Governing (l996), offers a useful typology of alternative governance models (market, participative, flexible, and deregulated government) for organizing the public sector. He also suggests that we consider matching specific problems with specific solutions, in other words accomplishing particular governmental tasks with different forms of organizing and managing:

> "It may well be that for the provision of certain marketable services, the market model is adequate and desirable, but that same model would be totally inappropriate for many social services, for example, education. Likewise, the participatory model would be well suited for urban planning or environmental issues but would produce difficulties for many criminal justice programs...My purpose is not so much to force choices among the alternative models of governance but to make the implications of the choices that now face governments more evident...the benefits and sacrifices should be clear in making judgements about governance." (p. l33)

Peters asserts furthermore that, while we cannot restore the "status quo ante", basic elements of America's traditional governmental system can and should be salvaged. In response to his own question ("Can we go home again?"), he says:

> "Perhaps most fundamentally, analysts and citizens alike should ask which components of the old system, once abandoned, are worth saving. Clearly some critics would say absolutely nothing should be salvaged and would be quite willing to throw it all out and start anew. It should be obvious by now that I am less sure of the vices of the old system or confident in the virtues of alternative replacements. The old system did place a high value on accountability and on service to the public as a whole, if not always to each individual client or customer. Those values are crucial for any public organization and should not be dismissed without adequate reflection." (p. l33)

THEN WE CAN PROCEED WITH COMPREHENSIVE RESTORATION OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY.

After redefining our basic national essence and redesigning our national democratic experiment, we will be able to move forward with restoration of American democracy. Fortunately, as has been pointed out, there already are in place numerous initiatives for civic renewal; and my systems analysis suggests a five-step framework for organizing these initiatives into a national movement.

STEP 1. REVITALIZING THE NATIONAL ENVIRONMENT OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY.

We cannot replicate our original natural frontier or endlessly expand public authority, but we can revitalize our national environment in the process of rediscovering ourselves, as a nation, and recommitting ourselves to America and American democracy. At the least, if we recognize the reality of our current predicament, we should be able to accommodate and mitigate some environmental constraints on our Great Experiment.

STEP 2. RESOLVING THE PHILOSOPHICAL CIVIL WAR.

Complementary to revitalizing our national environment is the requisite resolution of our philosophical civil war. We have to decide that America is worth saving and that the philosophical civil war is crippling America. Then we can institute forums and procedures for debating—civilly—democratic ideals, cultural values, and principles of governance.

STEP 3. REVIVING OUR CIVIC CULTURE.

Citizenship—in all its facets—must be revived among our general population and leadership. This does not mean that every single American becomes a renaissance democrat; however, it is imperative that we achieve a sufficient civic mixture for popular self-governance.

STEP 4. REPAIRING OUR POLITICAL MACHINERY.

Perhaps no aspect of American democracy has been scrutinized so thoroughly as have been America's parties, media, and electoral system. We cannot return to earlier conditions and institutions of by-gone America, so our parties, media, and elections must adjust—or be replaced—for a different democratic experiment.

STEP 5. RE-INVENTING OUR GOVERNMENT.

The term "re-invention" has a superficial, bumper sticker connotation, but we know from successful experience that governance at all levels can be redesigned to work more efficiently and effectively.

If we embrace the concept of democratic renaissance and commit ourselves to the hard, tedious, heavy lifting of civic restoration, then, maybe, with some luck, we will discover "New America" and resume our Great Experiment in the next millennium.

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THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY?

Thus it is time for me to conclude this lecture series about the uncertain future of American democracy.

My contention, of course, is that our deteriorating national environment and philosophical civil war, along with other dynamics, increasingly will push America toward "New America". Sooner or later, our country will have to acknowledge our closing natural conditions and decreasing support for public authority; and our nation will have to deal with nagging questions about "what America means" and "how America ought to work". Furthermore, American democracy must accommodate the growing forces of subamericanism and demofrenzy. Thus we must "rediscover" America and American democracy in the next millennium. Eventually, according to my "what if" scenario, "New America" conceivably could do so—as did Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union—by transitioning into The American Federation.

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I wonder what our young friend, Monsieur Tocqueville, would say if he were to visit "New America"? Would he smile, and exclaim "Oh, quel spectacle! Quelle grand experience!" Or would he mutter something to the effect that "Frankly, it's not what I had hoped!"

I seriously doubt that The American Federation, as I have projected it, is what Tocqueville had in mind for America; nor am I convinced that "subamerican democracy" is our pre-destined future.

I believe that our ultimate destiny will be an even greater democratic experiment for "New America". Obviously, America is stronger and more durable than my original "dying" proclamation suggested (that inquiry was designed, in part, as a rhetorical framework for this lecture series). Furthermore, our latest research suggests that our civic dispiritedness—at least in statistically measurable public confidence in the future—may have bottomed out. I am confident that, with proper attention, we can deal creatively and nobly with the problems of American democracy.

As these lectures end, I hope you leave this forum with healthy, renewed appreciation for the strengths and vulnerabilities of our Great American Experiment; and I conclude with an observation and a challenge. First, we should recognize America for what it has been and still is—an historically glorious national experiment in democratic ideals. Second, we should dedicate ourselves to democratic renaissance—inspired, inspiring restoration of American democracy in "New America". Perhaps we will devise another, more spectacular Great Experiment in the New Millennium. But we also must acknowledge that our destiny could be less than spectacular.

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In parting, I want to repeat, for emphasis and perspective, Alexis de Tocqueville's final words in <u>Democracy in America</u> (l835):

> **"The nations of our time cannot prevent the conditions of men from becoming equal; but it depends upon themselves whether the principle of equality is to lead them to servitude or freedom, to knowledge or barbarism, to prosperity or wretchedness." (Volume II, p. 352)**

America is not dying. But we are undergoing a democratic metamorphosis that, for better or worse, is reshaping our nation and world history. In our hands, in our hearts, in our minds, lie prosperity, and knowledge, and freedom—or wretchedness, and barbarism, and servitude. The future of American democracy demands our attention.

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