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## Ten questions/answers about Glen Browder and the future of American democracy

Browder, Glen

Monterey, California. Naval Postgraduate School

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## **DRAFT**

### **TEN QUESTIONS/ANSWERS ABOUT GLEN BROWDER AND *THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY***

#### **1. WHO IS GLEN BROWDER AND WHAT IS *THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY*?**

Glen Browder is Eminent Scholar in American Democracy at Jacksonville State University (in Alabama) and Distinguished Visiting Professor of National Security Affairs at Naval Postgraduate School (in California). Dr. Browder has bridged the gap between classroom civics and real-world government during a diverse career as public official, political activist, and professional educator. His extensive public service (as United States Congressman, Alabama Secretary of State, and Alabama State Legislator), political experience (as party official and campaign consultant), and academic background (as political science professor) have focused on political reform and adjustment to a changing world. In *The Future of American Democracy: A Former Congressman's Unconventional Analysis* (University Press of America, 2002), Browder questions America's democratic destiny and encourages national dialogue about the uncertain future of our "Great Experiment".

#### **2. WHY DID GLEN BROWDER WRITE *THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY*?**

The former Congressman says that when he left politics a few years ago, major publishers were interested in standard college texts and partisan kiss-and-tell books—but he wasn't. "I wanted to talk seriously and unconventionally about what I considered the most important issue of contemporary public life—the future of American democracy—but apparently nobody in the commercial publishing business shared my ideas. Over time, I would learn many realistic, sometimes discouraging, sometimes rewarding lessons about the writing and publishing world—and retrospectively, the most useful lesson I learned was pretty simple: I wrote the book that I wanted to write rather than what other people told me to write; and I'm happy with the outcome."

#### **3. WHAT'S SO "UNCONVENTIONAL" ABOUT BROWDER'S UNCONVENTIONAL ANALYSIS?**

Browder's analysis is an unusual challenge (comprehensive in its scope, bold in its critique, yet responsible in its provocation) to conventional democratic wisdom from someone who should know (based on a unique combination of political experience and academic credentials) what he's talking about. Unfortunately, Browder says, "Current public discussion about American democracy is a stale orthodoxy of simplistically-

progressive ideas buttressed by theoretically-limited and politically-cautious analysis; furthermore, those who muster sufficient civic courage to sound the alarm too often are afflicted with excessive ideological arrogance.” After a lengthy career rooted in practical reform, he contradicts conventional democratic wisdom that the cure for America’s ills is more democracy; and he confronts the uncertain future of our Great Experiment with provocative but constructive recommendations for transforming America.

#### **4. WHAT IS THE THESIS OF *THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY*?**

Browder argues that America is changing in ways that are important and unsettling for the future of American democracy. Inevitable systemic developments and growing philosophical tensions over historic ideals, cultural values, and principles of governance are transforming our national democratic experiment. Our civic mix of people, politics, and government no longer works the way it has in the past; and we seem to be tiring of the Great Experiment itself. Therefore, it is time for serious national dialogue about America—including some alternative scenarios and the possibility of a transformational “New America”—in the Twenty-First Century.

#### **5. WHAT IS THE CENTRAL QUESTION POSED IN *THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY*?**

According to Browder the central, disturbing question for Twenty-First Century America is as follows: “Can our nation—a people of growing cultural diversity with increasingly divergent ideals, values, and governance principles, in a constrained systemic environment—continue to sustain our collective pursuit of freedom, equality, and justice through 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?” Or, more bluntly and rhetorically, “Is America dying?”

#### **6. WHAT ARE THE KEY ELEMENTS OF BROWDER’S ANALYSIS?**

- “Browder’s Thesis of American Democracy”
- “America: A National Experiment in Democratic Ideals”
- “National Democratic Distemper”
- “A Systemic Model of Dying America”
- Proposition #1: “The favorable systemic environment of American democracy has disappeared.”

- Proposition #2: “We have entrapped American democracy within a philosophical civil war.”
- Proposition #3: “American democracy no longer works the way it used to work.”
- Proposition #4: “America seems to be tiring of its historic Great Experiment.”
- “Subculturalism” and “Neopopulism”
- “Traditional America” vs. “Emerging America”
- “A Projection: The American Federation (by 2050)”
- “Election 2000: A Transformational Juncture”
- “The Challenge of National Democratic Renaissance”

## **7. FOR WHAT KIND OF AUDIENCE IS THIS ANALYSIS MOST APPROPRIATE?**

This book is written for people who think seriously—beyond day-to-day politics and conventional liberal-conservative arguments—about the future of American democracy. Browder has presented his thesis in public lectures, classroom seminars, and public affairs programs to a wide variety of audiences in the Southeast, the West Coast, the Washington, DC, area, and even in Russia. Because of its sobering and challenging message, he carefully adjusts presentations to the particular nature and sophistication of his audiences; but most concerned citizens, political activists, and public officials will be intrigued with the unique, creative and constructive ideas of *The Future of American Democracy*. As one reviewer said, the book is a bit difficult for the general reader, “But it will repay the effort for anybody interested in our future as a free and democratic nation”.

## **8. WHY IS THIS BOOK/MESSAGE OF PARTICULAR INTEREST TO CALIFORNIANS?**

This book and its message should be especially interesting to Californians because Browder suggests “The California Analogy” as a contemporary, perhaps ominous, vision of America’s democratic future. In a chapter on “What America Might Look Like in 2050”, Browder proposes that California is going through inevitable systemic challenges slightly ahead of the rest of the country; and Californians seem to be struggling—pretty distemperately—in that process. After assessing Golden State society, politics, government, and democracy as portentous embodiment of national democratic distemper, he concludes: “The analogous dynamics of the contemporary California political system thus raise particularly tricky questions and provide some useful points of

guidance about important developments—the delicate, difficult, dangerous interplay among diversity, divergence, dissentience, and democracy—in future America.”

## **9 WHAT DOES BROWDER’S “THESIS OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY” TELL US ABOUT DEMOCRATIZATION ENDEAVORS IN IRAQ, AFGHANISTAN, AND OTHER CULTURES?**

Essentially, Browder’s analysis suggests that we be very careful and constrained in our attempts to export American democracy. America’s original, open, natural environment and philosophical national mindset provided very advantageous systemic conditions for a “national experiment in democratic ideals”. These advantages allowed a diverse people to develop, over time, a limited, representative process of governance whereby we might pursue—unevenly but progressively—our fuzzy notions of individualism, equality, and justice. Attempting to transfer America’s “Great Experiment” to less propitiously blessed areas and cultures of the world requires splendid but arrogant naïvete. In fact, any American efforts toward international democratization should be attempted cautiously in humble, limited, incremental fashion; and we must proceed on such ventures with extreme patience, hopefully some luck, and advance realization that we may not really like the outcome.

## **10. WHAT ARE OTHERS SAYING ABOUT BROWDER AND *THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY*?**

Leon Panetta (former White House Chief of Staff):

"Glen Browder's book is a wake-up call for our democracy. This nation was built on the principle that leadership would find the necessary consensus to advance the national interest. That principle has been lost in the current battles over power, parties and politics. This book challenges all of us to awake to the civil illness in our midst and restore the fundamental strength of our democracy."

Alan Ehrenhalt (Executive Editor, *Governing*):

"Glen Browder is one of a rare breed in American politics: He genuinely combines serious scholarship and a commitment to public service. Browder is one of the most thoughtful and practical critics of the overnmental inertia that plagues us these days, and all of his recommendations are worth reading and paying attention to."

Dr. Larry Sabato (Director, University of Virginia's Center for Governmental Studies):

"Rare is the academic who combines theoretical knowledge with practicality. Glen Browder is such a person. In this remarkable book, he challenges every citizen, especially the young, to think anew about America's democracy. Students will love it!"

Chloe Albanesius (Reporter, *Roll Call*):

“Former Rep. Glen Browder (D-Ala.) is worried about the future of American democracy... ‘America is changing in important and unsettling ways. And we owe it to future generations to address these changes positively,’ he said...Browder purports that America is developing a fundamental civil illness and it is time for a Tocquevillian checkup of American democracy.”

Dana Beyerle (Montgomery Bureau Chief, New York Times Regional Newspapers):

“In his book and in lectures around the country, Browder asks one question, ‘Is America dying?’ In asking his audiences to answer the question, Browder seeks to stimulate a national dialogue about America, including alternative scenarios and the possibility of a ‘New America’ that is segregated culturally, financially, politically, and racially.”

Paul Rilling (former Executive Editor, *The Anniston Star*):

“Glen Browder has written a scary book...The result is an interesting and unusual book, one well worth reading for anybody concerned about the state of our democratic system...This book should shatter anyone’s complacency about our political system.”

Reagan Smith (FRN News Anchor and Host, “Florida Roundtable” on Florida’s Radio Network):

“This is a thought-provoking book...an important read, a serious read, one you need to pay attention to.”

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT GLEN BROWDER AND THIS BOOK  
AND THE POSSIBILITY OF SCHEDULING AN EVENT REGARDING *THE  
FUTURE OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY*:**

GB, NPS, JSU phone, email, fax, website.