TEACHING/PRACTICING ALABAMA POLITICS:

REFLECTIONS ABOUT LIFE AS A PROFESSOR-POLITICIAN

By Glen Browder and Geni Certain

Introduction:

In this paper, Glen Browder and Geni Certain present reflections, or “lessons-learned” from teaching and practicing (and writing about) Alabama politics. These reflections—based on their experiences and derived through their recent biographical collaboration—are presented in Q&A fashion and in roughly thematic and chronological order so that the reader can easily select material of particular interest.

This presentation deals specifically with Alabama politics; and most of the reflections listed here are regionally and substantively pertinent. Since Browder and Certain often field broader questions regarding the biographical project, they have included additional items that relate to general aspects of teaching, practicing, and writing about public affairs.

The authors define “reflections” and “lessons-learned” loosely to include personal insights, political anecdotes, historical commentaries, and biographical information that may be interesting and useful to the audience. The material begins with items related to teaching, proceeds to practicing, and concludes with writing about politics. Of course, it is impossible to reduce complex inquiries and responses to a sentence or paragraph. But the authors have tried to strike a balance in communicating the essence of the reflections; and the reader can ask for elaboration or consult other recommended sources. This is an evolving project; so please suggest additional questions for inclusion in future presentations.

Background:

Former Congressman Browder and journalist Certain worked together for several years to tell the story of Browder’s mixed careers as political scientist and public official over the past half-century. Their joint product—A Different Kind of Leader—will be published by NewSouth Books later this year.

Browder had wrestled with challenging issues and compiled substantive notes along the trail from the classroom, to party activism, to the campaign trail, to public office, and finally in retirement; and many of these reflections are incorporated in the book. Toward the end of the project, the authors decided that these observations, along with new elaborations and comparable material from previous sources, might make interesting reading as enumerated items in a separate presentation—hence this paper.

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Summary:

This paper, as a byproduct of the biographical project, bears the imprint of Browder’s varied background, civic perspectives, and thoughtful, sometimes unconventional analyses. His past work has been described as “insightful,” “brutally candid,” and even “Machiavellian” in national publications.

The reflections deal mainly with “practicing” politics; and they include Browder’s politicking as a party activist, campaign consultant, political candidate, and public official during the 1970s-80s-90s and further thoughts during his political afterlife. These observations represent two-thirds of the total items. About a fourth of the observations relate to “writing”; and about a tenth deal with “teaching”.

The substantive core of the presentation lies in numerous references throughout the paper to race, Alabama/southern politics, and American democracy. Additionally, there are several listings of “most-important-lessons” about classroom experience (Q.15), consulting/campaigning activities (Q. 27), dealing with public officials (Q. 87), words of wisdom to politicians (Q. 85), secrets of political leadership (Q. 84), and insights of the political afterlife (Q. 83).

Perhaps most interesting and-or useful otherwise are observations about specific aspects of teaching/practicing/writing regional politics. According to academic friends who have reviewed this paper thus far, the following items stand out:

- What is the South? And what’s happening to the Southern Politics course? (Q. 8-14)
- The “race game,” the “race card,” and the “new racial system” in Alabama and southern politics, along with commentary about race in our national capitol. (Q. 30, 63, 93, 95)
- Necessary but difficult compromises in practical politics. ((Q. 41)
- Tacky gimmicks and negative ads in political campaigning. (Q. 24, 25)
- Bribes and threats in the politician’s world. Q. 51, 52)
- Staying out of jail. (Q. 53, 54, 55)
- Burnout over time as a politician. (Q. 82)
- Scorecard of “biggest wins” and “biggest losses” in politics. (Q. 77, 78)
- Best politicians in Alabama and Washington. (Q. 76)
- Dealing with George Wallace, Bill Clinton, Newt Gingrich, and others. (Q. 46, 73, 74, 75, 76, 125, 126)
- Positives, negatives, and comments about biographical writing. (Q. 110-117, 130-132)
- Advice to colleagues who may be considering biographical projects. (Q. 103, 133)
The Authors and the Biographical Project:

This project is an interesting biographical endeavor in several respects. Browder represents an uncommon combination of academic background and public service. He established a solid reputation as a political science professor before going into politics; and his public service reflected his concerns about good government. Also interesting is Certain’s varied research approach, which involved talking extensively with the subject, interviewing dozens of knowledgeable associates, reviewing news media and journals, and investigating original documents in the Browder Collection at Jacksonville State University.

Browder served as a U.S. Congressman (1989-96), Alabama Secretary of State (1987-89), and State Legislator (1982-86). A graduate of Presbyterian College (BA in History) and Emory University (MA and PhD in Political Science), he is a longtime college professor who taught at Jacksonville State University since 1971. He has taught thousands of students there, including many prominent politicians. He returned to JSU in 2000 as Eminent Scholar in American Democracy and currently enjoys status as Emeritus Professor. He is the author of several books, including *The Future of American Democracy* (2002), *The South’s New Racial Politics* (2009), and *Stealth Reconstruction* (2010).

Certain has been an editor of *The Anniston Star* (1993-2006) and editor-in-chief of the *Daily Home* in Talladega (2010-11). She now splits her time between Alabama and Mexico. She is a Communications graduate of the University of Alabama; and she received her M.A. in History from Jacksonville State University. Her Master's thesis was: "Professor-Politician: An Examination of the Public Career of Glen Browder" (2008).

In a Foreword to the upcoming biography, distinguished Auburn historian Wayne Flynt calls Browder “a different kind of politician”:

> Glen Browder was a different kind of politician for lots of reasons. He was certainly the most cerebral Alabama politician of his era, and one of the most thoughtful in American politics. As a professor of political science, he drank deeply from the well of Greek philosophy as well as from the realities of current American political strategy. Like his hero, Plato, he sought to combine public power with “virtuous knowledge.” He might disappoint his loyalists (and I was one of them) by his votes on individual bills, but he never embarrassed us by his ethical lapses.

But, Flynt notes, times changed, and “Alabama lost the services of its finest congressman of his era.” He also says: “In this well-written biography, Browder emerges as a complex political leader during a critical period of Alabama and American history. Anyone who wants to understand state or national politics will find it a splendid read.”
Reflections/Lessons

In the rest of the paper, we present 100 reflections and lessons-learned from teaching/practicing/writing about politics and history. (We know, this list includes more than a hundred items; and we’ll probably cut it down eventually.) These lessons are presented in Q&A fashion and in roughly thematic and chronological order so that the reader can easily select material of particular interest.

Q&A For the Professor:

(Teaching)

1. Did you want to be a teacher or a politician in your younger days?

   No, neither one of these. As a kid, I wanted to play baseball, center field for the Brooklyn Dodgers. I tried several things as a young man, including briefly and unsuccessfully trying to sell tombstones, before becoming a political science professor at age 28 and entering public service as a 40-year-old state legislator. Along the way, I learned a simple but valuable lesson that helped me throughout my political career: “Things change!”

2. Was teaching your first job after graduating from college?

   No. I followed an unplanned, roundabout course to my calling as an educator. I worked my way through Presbyterian College as a student assistant in sports publicity; and I stayed on for a year as full-time sports information director. I moved from there to the Atlanta Journal for a year as a sportswriter. Then I worked for two years as an investigator with the U.S. Civil Service Commission before entering graduate school at Emory University. I went from Emory to a teaching position at Jacksonville State University in Alabama. There I learned another lesson: “The best job in the world is being a college professor.”

3. How did your educational background prepare you for service as a “professor-politician”?

   Looking back, all my schooling seems to have pointed me in this direction. The public schools of Sumter, SC, instilled an interest in public affairs; Presbyterian College triggered my curiosity about southern history; Emory University developed my skills as a regional analyst; Jacksonville State University allowed me to hone my academic understanding and jump into real-world southern politics; and Naval Postgraduate School provided an opportunity to teach national security and contribute to international affairs.

4. How did you end up at Jacksonville State University in Alabama after being born/reared/educated in SC and GA?

   A good job, clear and simple. Jacksonville State University offered me a position as Associate Professor in Political Science, contingent on my earning my doctorate by August 1971. The position paid $12,000, more than most of my Emory professors were making. Loved teaching at JSU. Great community, too. I thought I was just passing through Alabama at that time, but I’m still here.

5. What was the “JSU Mafia”?

   Although Jacksonville State University had alumni in politics before I arrived, I have been most often identified as the catalyst for JSU’s political cadre. The Mobile Register described a “JSU Mafia” in Alabama politics, with me as its main mentor; and JSU political scientist Dr. Hope Davis cited me as “a major influence on individual students and on the department’s emphasis on the practical.” I’ll admit that my hands-on approach connected with the younger generation. I taught the kinds of courses that future political leaders might be interested in taking, and I found that there were a lot of young men and women who were receptive. These people would have gone on to become leaders regardless of whether they had come to JSU and taken my courses, but we did have a good environment for them to develop their interests.

6. How did you end up back at JSU in 2000?

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JSU offered me a tremendous opportunity—Eminent Scholar in American Democracy. Where I could focus on what most interested me at that time, “The Future of American Democracy”.

7. What do you like about being retired and Emeritus Professor?

I get to do what I want to do: research, writing, public commentary. JSU is nice enough to offer me an office and supports my work, which deals mainly with southern politics. In effect, I’m still working and enjoying the best job in the world; I just don’t get paid now.

8. Let’s shift the conversation. You taught “Southern Politics” often at JSU and elsewhere. What is the South?

I taught a visiting professor course on southern politics at Harvard a few years ago. I like what I put together for “outsiders” then, so I guess I’ll answer with what I told them. The South is an American subculture defined by regional history, geography, climate, demographics, linguistics, religion, economics, politics, and other factors. The South began and prospered as a rigidly aristocratic, agricultural society, alongside rabid individualism, perverted originally by slavery and forever since troubled by racism and poverty. The South developed as a culturally different part of the country (and often pursued societal ideas and ways outside the mainstream of American identity); and southern politics reflected important afflictions associated with its wayward culture (such as legalized discrimination, backward populism, and its one party political system). These afflictions have dramatically shaped southern history, both internally and in national affairs, in ways that often contradict the course of American democracy.

9. What is the South not?

I’ll borrow again from my Harvard presentation. However accurate the assessments of classic observers such as Cash and Key, and some important insights of contemporary writers, most analysis unfortunately fosters mythical and stereotyped presumptions about the South. In the first place, the South is not a monolithic region. The “old South” was very homogeneous relative to the rest of the country, but the region today is very diverse by all measures (demographics, etc.) Simplistic characterization as the “solid South” serves little purpose beyond dramatic and historic introduction to elementary American politics. Furthermore, race is not the totality of southern existence. Slavery and segregation dominate discussion of southern history; and race is still very important, consciously important in the contemporary South. But the southern people generally live their lives without constant, dominating thoughts about white supremacy. Finally, the South is not a threat to American democracy. Concerns about the “southernizing” or “dixiefying” of our nation miss the important dynamics of contemporary America. In summary, despite the valuable insights of historical analysis and some dramatic contemporary presumptions, the modern South is not monolithic; race is not the totality of southern existence, and the South represents neither salvation nor damnation for American democracy.

10. How and why is the South different from the rest of the country?

According to my simple framework, southerners are people, probably white and likely born and reared in the South, who, because of their cultural experience, think of themselves as “southern”. Most southerners, while diverse and individualistic in their backgrounds and attitudes, share a felt heritage reflecting, in varying degrees, the impact of a distinct “southern experience”. In other words, the South has secured for itself a mixed, problematic legacy that gives southerners a histrionic outlook about themselves as special beings, with either positive or negative connotations; and that legacy marks southerners for differential perceptions among other Americans. The principal elements of the collective southern experience are secession, war, reconstruction, race, poverty, pride, and stereotypation. Regardless of whether they have ever wanted to secede from the Union, practiced racism, or suffered privation, this shared experiential legacy has shaped the lives of most southerners; and, quite unconsciously and continuously, the southern experience reinforces their mindset and standing as a distinct subcultural society.

11. What do you mean by “hard history” in the South?
I’ll explain this very briefly, with respectful credit to historian Arnold Toynbee and journalist Brandy Ayers. In writing about the British Diamond Jubilee of 1897, Toynbee noted his thoughts as an eight-year-old, sitting atop his uncle’s shoulders, watching the celebration of their world supremacy: “Well, here we are on top of the world, and we have arrived at this peak to stay there forever. There is, of course, a thing called history, but history is something unpleasant that happens to other people. We are comfortably outside all that, I am sure. If I had been a small boy in New York in 1897 I should have felt the same. Of course, if I had been a small boy in 1897 in the southern part of the United States, I should not have felt the same; I should have known from my parents that history had happened to my people in my part of the world.” As Ayers has noted, other people celebrate history; but southerners have lived history. And history has been very hard in this region, ravaging all southerners, black and white.

12. Why do you say that the South is a flawed democracy?

I’ll rely on one of the intellectual giants who preceded all of us, V.O. Key, to make this argument, as he did in Southern Politics in State and Nation (1949): “When all the exceptions are considered, when all the justifications are made, and when all the invidious comparisons are drawn, those of the South and those who love the South are left with the cold, hard fact that the South as a whole has developed no system or practice of political organization and leadership adequate to cope with its problems.” I’ve added, in an earlier publication, my own thesis about the southern race game as a perverse historical practice of southern democrats: “Ever since their colonial beginnings, the white leaders and people of this region have engaged in perverse, contorted politics designed to provide themselves the blessings of democracy at the expense of black southerners. Gaming the system for racial advantage was not the singular, continuous, consuming passion for most southerners; but slavery had warped the southern political system from the start, and race forever lurked in the background of southern political life.” As I will explain in another observation in this paper, the South has changed in the past few decades; but a modified race game, played by both races and consisting of biracial accommodation, endures today.

13. How have “Southern Politics” and “Southern History” changed as courses of study in recent decades?

A couple years ago, I did a brief internet survey of Southern Politics and Southern History course syllabi, and this review indicated that the academy has changed dramatically—with little formal discussion—in recent years. For example, many of these courses have stayed basically the same for decades, focusing on staples such as the history of the South, state-by-state analyses, the civil rights movement, partisan realignment, and demographic-electoral patterns. However, others have been shifting towards such concerns as black politics, religion, gender, culture, and policy analysis. There also seem to be important adjustments in the offering of Southern Politics and History. Some colleges have dropped these courses from their curricula; the traditional courses are being taught mainly by white instructors on mainly white campuses; and, as more African-American scholars and students have entered the discipline, larger state universities and primarily black institutions have launched expansive, competing initiatives in the broader study of race and politics in America. Apparently the two races have distinct ideas and are situating themselves disparately in southern academe, with serious ramifications for the teaching of regional politics and history. Perhaps these developments simply reflect various unfolding trends such as black empowerment and southern convergence with national patterns; or, to put it another way, it may be that this is the natural result of a South that is becoming less southern. Whatever the explanation, I think it worthwhile to consider the fact that the traditional courses of Southern Politics and Southern History, while still interesting for many of us, are receding as subfields of academic stature.

14. What reading list would you recommend to someone who doesn’t know much about southern politics and history?

I have too many old friends in this business to fall into the trap of naming the best books on southern politics; and younger scholars are producing valuable analyses every day. Serious folks may want to begin with Glenn Feldman, Reading Southern History (University of Alabama Press, 2001) and Robert P. Steed and Laurence W. Moreland, Writing Southern Politics (University Press of Kentucky, 2006). South-
watchers should also take in the biennial Symposium on Southern Politics at The Citadel in South Carolina. I will also be immodest enough to suggest that anyone interested can consult the following publications for their extensive endnotes/bibliographical references: *A Different Kind of Leader* (NewSouth Books, upcoming 2012), *Stealth Reconstruction* (NewSouth Books, 2010), and *The South’s New Racial Politics* (NewSouth Books, 2009). Additionally, there are catch-all references in the back of these books that identify useful lists of pertinent sources under generalized headings, such as “Alabama Political History,” “Alabama History and the South Since the Civil War,” “Southern Systemic Transformation,” “Re-Visioning of Southern Politics,” “The Civil Rights Movement,” “Race and Southern Political History,” “The South’s Historical Race Problem,” and “The Race Game and Real Southern Politics.”

15. **What academic lessons helped as you moved from the classroom to real-world politics?**

My experience in the classroom generally gave me advance comprehension of and insight into politics, which I otherwise would have had to develop through experience (entailing battle scars and lost opportunities). Furthermore, the academic experience aided me specifically in terms of the following:

1. Knowing how to conduct survey research.
2. Accepting politics as a non-pejorative experience.
3. Understanding the race, poverty, and the failure of leadership and the political system in southern politics.
4. Understanding and making sense of ideology.
5. Understanding the complexities of pluralist democracy.
6. Understanding the linkage between public opinion and public policy.
7. Understanding the psychological and sociological theories of electoral behavior.
8. Understanding the role of party and media in modern politics.
9. Understanding legislative roles and styles.
10. Understanding the relational character, opportunities, and limitations of political leadership.

16. **Did it work in reverse—did you take your real-world political experience back into the classroom?**

Most certainly. I think it greatly enhanced my teaching to explain academic material with practical examples for my students in “U.S. Government,” “State and Local Government,” “Southern Politics,” “Political Parties,” “Public Opinion,” “Elections in America,” “American Political Leadership,” and even “Scope and Methods of Political Science.” I was scrupulously careful to respect ethical standards and to keep the discussions academic; and I never talked about my own politics in the classroom.

17. **What was the “Gameplan” you devised and followed as you moved from teaching to politicking?**

From the beginning, as a professor, I developed a “Gameplan” that I tried to follow in politics. I did not specify any particular targets or dates, but I did identify what 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 preordained, with timely steps up the political ladder from Jacksonville to Montgomery to Washington. According to my three-stage plan, I would start by establishing my presence in the state Democratic Party, then run for office in Alabama, and from there build name recognition to win a spot in the national arena.

**Q&A For The Politician:**

*(Party Activism and Campaign Consulting)*

18. **Why did you get involved in party politics and consulting in political campaigns?**

After five years of teaching government and politics, I got the itch to apply my ideas in the real world. I knew that I had to keep my regular job as a professor; but I figured I could easily handle the party chores
and moonlight as a consultant. It was very hectic at times; but I never neglected my academic responsibilities. When I was elected to the part-time position of State Legislator in 1982, I adjusted my college load (reduced my salary and schedule from a 12-moth to a 9-month arrangement); and I took unpaid leave-of-absence when I was elected Secretary of State. Eventually, as a Member of Congress, I vacated the university position.

19. **How did you get started with the Democratic Party?**

My 1980 Gameplan included party activism as the entry to politics; so I immediately asked Billy Isom, my local, elected representative on the Alabama State Democratic Executive Committee, how I might get involved. He said that he was thinking about stepping down and asked if I would be interested in taking his place at their next meeting. He then recommended me to the state committee and they quickly installed me as his replacement. That entry taught me a valuable lesson; it’s easier filling an empty slot than having to fight an incumbent. Thereafter I targeted open seats for my ascension up the political ladder.

20. **Were you an ideological party activist?**

No, I never was highly ideological or partisan. My interest (other than my own career) was making American democracy work better.

21. **How did you get started in campaign consulting?**

In 1977, I went down to Montgomery and asked Bill Jones and Ed Ewing, who ran the state’s premier consulting operation (Viewpoint Enterprises), if I might join them in some capacity as a moonlighter. My specialization was survey research; so I started doing polling for Viewpoint. I’m forever indebted to them. They took this professor under their wings and taught me much about campaigning and politics.

22. **What kinds of candidates/campaigns did you consult for?**

At first, I worked as a consultant for anybody who would pay me—including doing image research for a funeral home and an environmental impact study for red-cockaded woodpeckers. I worked for some real political characters back then; and probably did my best work helping somebody get 40% of the vote when they should have been beaten 90%-10%. Fortunately, successful managing helped me be more selective. Overall, I would characterize my primary market as state legislative races, with numerous local races and a few statewide/congressional candidates, mainly in Alabama, among my clients.

23. **Exactly what did you do as a campaign consultant?**

Just about everything. Campaign strategy, polling, television-radio-newspaper advertising, financial counsel, field advice, etc. But, as a general rule, I did not do any campaigning myself.

24. **Did you ever recommend tacky gimmicks as a campaign manager?**

Oh yes. Gimmicks aplenty: catchy slogans, dramatic graphics, silly sound effects, anything to get attention of voters and media. These things work when the electorate doesn’t have anything better on which to base its vote than name recognition. I’ll use myself as an example. Early in my career, I was an unknown figure; and I had to raise my profile and enhance my image without a lot of media money. I adopted an apple as my symbol, in an effort to emphasize my positive approach to public service. I hung red, apple-shaped signs in trees along the highway; I handed out fresh red apples in courthouses and other public venues; and I planted live apple trees everywhere, at parks, schools, nursing homes. At one of these tree-planting events, a friend told me about hearing a conversation among media folks who showed up on a bitterly-cold day. A camera man for one of the local television stations looked puzzlingly at a newspaper reporter, and asked: “What does planting an apple tree have to do with running for Secretary of State?” The newspaper journalist laughed and answered: “I don’t know, but we’re out here covering it. Freezing our butts off. And he’ll be in our morning news!”
25. Did you ever advise negative campaigning as a consultant?

Yes. As for negative campaigning, it’s almost impossible to win a competitive race in modern politics without a rough-and-tumble mentality and what we call “comparative advertising”. I don’t care to dwell here, but I did have to present some bad results and tough recommendations based on my polling, to clients. Obviously, the most common strategy is making the opposition unacceptable to the voters. In one race, I helped a wronged client stir public anger against special interest party bosses. The bluntest call was when I told a candidate that he was not going to get any black votes in his district, so he may as well focus on the white electorate. Not anything to brag about; but, in these situations, my obligations as a consultant trumped my civic sentiments.

26. Is it true that you once managed to get a state senator elected when his name wasn’t even on the ballot?

Yes. Back in 1983, after the State Democratic Executive Committee (of which I was a member) took advantage of federally-ordered redistricting to dump, Lowell Barron, an independent-minded state senator, and putting a party loyalist on the ballot. It was a hectic, hasty, nasty mess, a fait accompli since the special election was only a month away, there were no other races on the ballot, and the only candidate listed was the party nominee. I had managed Barron’s first election in 1982, so I knew the territory pretty well. We conducted a secret campaign—running a quiet poll, preparing media outside the state, and keeping all the locals agitated about the state party bosses. Then, one week before the election, the senator announced his write-in effort. By then, it was too hard for the party elites to respond effectively, and the senator won by an almost 2-1 margin. Only time I’ve ever been associated with anything like that; and I don’t know if it could ever be repeated.

27. What lessons did you learn from your experience as a campaign consultant?

Actually, I began compiling a list of lessons-learned about consulting and campaigning early in my career; and I keep updating it. Here’s my latest version.

1. Campaigning is a nasty business.
2. Money separates “doers” from “dreamers”.
3. Don’t accept what the candidate says.
4. Don’t believe everything the public tells you.
5. Name recognition wins most elections.
6. Negative campaigning works.
7. Television commercials move the numbers.
8. Race and party are critical elements in southern elections.
9. It is hard—but not impossible—to make a winner out of the town fool, drunk, or crook.
10. The key to successful campaign consulting is to work for winners.

28. What was the most striking thing you learned as a consultant about southern politics?

My early consulting work confirmed the need for racial reconciliation in Alabama but, as might be expected, it also educated me about the limitations of academic theory and conventional niceties. Most startling was the ominous power of race. In poll after poll, and on election day after election day, I learned that racism contaminated both sides of the racial divide; this factor had the awesome power to disrupt virtually every aspect of southern public life. I discovered, in fact, that sometimes there was no market for open, bold, biracial leadership. My polling showed that whites and blacks were so polarized in one community that my paid counsel to the white client, who actually was the best candidate for the job, was pure race-gaming: “Realistically, you’re not going to get any black votes; so you may as well try to maximize your white base.”

29. You’ve talked about a race-based calculation, the 90%-40% formula, that is critical in southern political campaigning; what does this mean?
Race is such a powerful force in most southern elections that campaign managers automatically factor black-white voting patterns into their basic calculations. Most commonly for Democrats, it’s a 90%-40% formula. That is, if the Democratic candidate can get 90% of the black vote, he or she only needs 40% of the white vote in order to win the campaign (and, conversely, the Republican candidate needs to thwart such a plan). So each side designs their campaign plan around this formula. It’s racial—but not inherently racist—a business-as-usual practice reflecting stubborn legacies of the past. But it can get unsavory. If the Ds find themselves falling short of the projected majority, their normal first response is pushing harder to maximize their proportion of the black vote. If the Rs get concerned about their polling numbers, they usually try to gin up their white margin. It’s not always this simple or rigid, and there are differences from one area to another; but some version of this race-based formula is pretty common in the toolbox of southern campaign managers.

30. **You also have an interesting take on “playing the race card” in southern campaigns; explain your position.**

There is a lot of talk and media attention devoted to what’s called “playing the race card”—i.e., when one side or the other injects race into the campaign. Conventionally, the term is used to refer to white politicians invoking race or some code-worded issue against African-American candidates at a critical point in the campaign. Usually there’s a public shouting match about who did it first; and inevitably both sides accuse the other side of racism. But, the truth of the matter is that, in southern elections, the big race card was played long ago, in the beginning; and it is a permanent factor in our campaigns. The fact is that race-formulas (90%-40%, or some other numerical calculation) come into play regardless of whether both candidates are white, if one is white and one is black, and even when both are black. Interestingly, media folks, especially those from outside the region, find it difficult to understand that both races now use race, either strategically or tactically, in southern politics. It would be more accurate to talk about the South’s historic “race game” and explain the “new racial politics”; but we seem to prefer the quick-and-easy staple of “playing the race card” in southern campaign coverage.

(Politicking)

31. **Why did you decide to run for public office?**

I guess it was a natural progression for me, from classroom lectures, to testing my academic knowledge as a party activist and campaign consultant, to full immersion in politics as a public official. I knew the political game and I had helped several others get elected; and I felt I could do just as good or a better job in public office.

32. **You call yourself an “American Dreamer”?**

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 childhood tragedy and poverty to enjoy the full blessings of American life. Thus, I achieved my version of the American dream; and that dream served me well in my academic and political endeavors.

33. **You also identify as a “Professor-Politician”; where did that come from and what does it mean?**

I have always been intrigued with Plato’s ideas about the two sides of human life, the balancing of spiritual soul and physical body, the possible combination of virtuous knowledge and public power in pursuit of the “good life” — i.e., his conception of the “Philosopher-King” in an ideal society. I had no delusions about being a “Philosopher-King.” However, I did aspire — presumptuously but sincerely — to be a “Professor-Politician,” a less mythical leader with sufficient civic vision and practical ability to achieve as much philosophical progress as is politically possible. I wanted to do the right thing — and to make it work!
34. **What authors/books most inspired or influenced you as a politician?**

There are many. But I’ll restrict myself to the Big Five: Plato, *The Republic* (mixing political power and virtuous knowledge), Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (the nature of American democracy), Jefferson, *The Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (the political leader as civic educator), Cash, *The Mind of the South* (southern mentality), Key, *Southern Politics* (problems of southern leadership, political system, race, and poverty).

35. **What motivated you as a politician?**

I entered public service, as did many others, with a burning urge to help make the “Great Experiment” work better than it was working at that time. I was never really moved by ideological or partisan issues, nor did I develop any powerful special interest support groups that would walk through hell with me. If forced to describe my political philosophy, I would say that I was driven by civic love of America and American democracy. My civic commitment was to make the democratic experiment function the way it should function — in short, good government. Mostly, that commitment meant simply pushing the process to work better; sometimes, however, it required fundamentally reforming the system itself.

36. **Did your being a professor or having a PhD help or hurt you in politics?**

Overall, it was positive. Some folks, both voters and other politicians, were wary at first. One local guy belittled me as a “tea sipper” and another gossiped about the “wild college crowd”; and one opponent always addressed me as “Dr. Browder” and “Professor Browder”. So I often referenced my working class origins (we even ran a comic book newspaper ad showing my childhood struggles); and I called myself a “teacher” rather than a professor. But I’m sure a lot of people respected my education background. In fact, the more I climbed the political ladder, the more it helped being “Dr. Browder”.

37. **Was it hard mixing your lives as a professor and politician?**

Making all of this work proved to be a frenetic, consuming, euphoric addiction. I led three lives — political scientist, public official, and concerned citizen — and I constantly juggled and balanced the demands of those three lives, often to the detriment of my responsibilities as a husband and father. First and unfortunately, my systematic approach as a political scientist consumed valuable time and attention; it also presented nagging dilemmas that could never be resolved expeditiously or philosophically. Second, as a public official — or politician — I struggled to merge my civic vision with the unpleasant but practical demands of political survival. Finally, in pursuing the fuzzy notion of “civic vision,” I had to deal as a citizen with my own personally conflicted feelings about America and the American dream. And my civic philosophy never easily translated into certainty on normative issues and practical matters in day-to-day politics.

38. **What did you like most about politics?**

I liked being involved in something important and worthwhile. I would have paid to participate in those “seminars” in the Alabama State House and the U.S. Capitol.

39. **What did you most dislike about politics?**

I hated raising money! I can say without question that the toughest part of public service is money. I was uncomfortable asking friends for money; and I despised begging people with special interests for campaign contributions today knowing that tomorrow I would have to make critical decisions and votes weighing those special interests against the general interest. Federal Judge Dean Buttram, a former student and constant ally throughout my career, accurately called me “the worst money-raiser I have ever seen.”

40. **How did you survive, in most elections, without big money?**
I think I survived because I was a good politician and public servant. Actually, big money played a role in my first congressional race, a 1989 special election to fill the seat of the late Bill Nichols. This was a major national event, coming at the end of the Reagan era, and both parties went all out to win this election. Once I got the Democratic nomination, money and people poured in from all over the country; I actually lost track of who was helping me. After that election, I ran low-budget operations. Sometimes friends flatter me by telling me that I could have held that seat forever; but I know better. Sooner or later, some Republican with big bucks would have swamped me.

41. **How much did you have to compromise in politics?**

A lot. The truth is that political life was never a simple matter of conviction and courage. For example, on the floor of Congress, I calculated each vote in terms of my general mission, representational style, mixed constituency interests, and politics. On major issues, I first looked at the broad substantive agenda, and then I weighed my own personal beliefs with constituent needs/desires and with the national interest (the classic clash of representational theory). On minor, procedural, symbolic, or “throw-away” votes, I might calculate the political baggage of the particular action. For example, colleagues from both sides of the partisan and racial divide often attempted to attach a quota or affirmative action amendment onto a general appropriations bill for personal posturing, or for putting opponents in a tough situation, or sometimes simply for “score-card” padding. Then, in addition to the substantive merits of the amendment, I had to consider (a) whether my vote had any real bearing on the prospects for that specific amendment, (b) whether the general appropriations bill had any chance of final passage, (c) how my Alabama colleagues were voting, (d) how important the issue was to my political allies, (e) how much flack I’d catch back home, from either the right or left, and (f) how much money I’d have to raise and spend fighting a negative commercial based on that vote.

42. **Who was it that called you the most liberal person in Alabama?**

Republican National Committee Chairman Lee Atwater said that I was “the most liberal guy in the state” during the 1989 special election to replace Congressman Bill Nichols. Lee Atwater and Ed Rollins had launched their attack machine in the 1988 presidential election; and we knew it was coming. Fortunately, we were able to inoculate the Alabama media in advance of the “liberal” labeling tactic; and it had little effect.

43. **You were criticized by the right as a liberal and by the left as a conservative; how do you react to those labels?**

I’m never troubled too much about such labels. Partisans might not like it, but I always felt I was right where I needed to be, with middle America. And National Journal studies of my voting record support that fact. Throughout my congressional career, I scored 48%-52% on their scale (with 0% being most liberal and 100% being most conservative).

44. **Did you ever consider switching parties?**

Not seriously. Part of that was philosophical. My background and philosophy inclined me toward the Democratic Party. But at least half of my sticking was stubbornness — I considered myself more than an opportunist and I just did not want it on my political tombstone that I switched parties to hold on to some stupid office and power and perks. Besides, I knew that, with the moderate, reform course I had chosen, I would have the same trouble with the Republicans that I had with Democrats: The core Right didn’t like me any more than the core Left; and the moneyed special interests in both parties had no strong, positive feeling for me.

45. **Who served as your mentor as a politician?**

Alabama State Senator John Teague, without a doubt. I had worked as an early campaign consultant for John Teague (a Democrat from nearby Talladega County), and we formed a close personal relationship when I entered the Alabama House and John climbed into the President Pro Tempore position in the
Alabama Senate. Teague was a consummate Alabama insider who knew how to deal discreetly, amiably, and effectively with virtually everybody—Democrats, Republicans, liberals, conservatives, educators, business leaders, labor representatives, men, women, blacks, and whites. Teague thus was able to help me push my bills through the legislative process, including some reforms that were not really popular among other politicians. In those dealings, I learned that quiet diplomacy, good personal relations, and practical politics inside the system can be just as effective as substantive merit, dramatic speeches, and external political pressure. My relationship with John Teague and the lessons I learned from him were critical to just about every aspect of my agenda as a new-kind-of-leader and successful biracial politician.

46. **What was your relationship with George Wallace?**

I had never met George Wallace until my term in the Alabama Legislature, which was his last term as governor. We formed a positive relationship, for some reason. I guess it was partly because I was aggressive and ambitious and partly because I met their needs: a reform-oriented college professor with publicly stated objectives of clean elections and good government (and excellent relations with the news media). I could always call on him personally and he would see me and, amazingly, he always responded well to my reform initiatives and suggestions. I would visit him in the governor’s office, at his private quarters in the governor’s mansion, or by telephone; and he always said to me, “Glen, I want you to do what you think is the right thing to do!” Then, he’d turn to one or more of his aides and say, “Do what we need to do to get this taken care of!” I’ll not comment on his racial history because the George Wallace that I knew in his final term was committed to helping black people and poor people.

47. **What was the difference between serving in the Alabama Legislature and the U.S. Congress?**

Both were challenging and worthwhile experiences. But I’ll have to add that serving in the Alabama Legislature was fun and serving in the U.S. Congress was work. The biggest reason for this was that in Montgomery I enjoyed daily contact with the other legislators and in Washington I could go for a week without seeing my Alabama colleagues.

48. **You once asked to be sued as a public official?**

Yes, I asked to be added to a federal lawsuit against the state of Alabama. That was in 1988, during my second year as Alabama Secretary of State. A federal court determined that Alabama’s election system unconstitutionally excluded minority citizens from meaningful participation in the administration of elections, despite numerous decrees ordering compliance by state and local officials. U.S. Judge Myron Thompson indicated to defendant Governor Guy Hunt, Attorney General Don Siegelman, and local elections officials that he was prepared to hold everyone in contempt of court. This case was another potentially divisive development in a long tradition of black-white contention in the Heart of Dixie. The Secretary of State was not a defendant in the case, but I saw this challenge as a personal and professional opportunity as much as a political problem. Dr. Robert Montjoy, an Auburn University elections expert and friend, suggested to the court, and the involved parties agreed, that the new “Chief Elections Officer” be empowered to tackle the assignment. The other major state leaders were relieved of their responsibilities, and Montjoy and I eagerly joined forces to move Alabama toward compliance with the federal order. It was a dicey venture; but it turn out well.

49. **You asked for a 5% cut your first year as Alabama Secretary of State. Explain that.**

In my first year as Secretary of State, I went before the legislature and asked them to cut my budget by 5%. It was a strange request, but I wanted to show that I was being frugal, “a different kind of leader”. I figured I could find ways to cut. But mainly I had a plan for computerizing the entire office through a new federal program; and I knew that the new program would help the state economy. Sure enough, we drew up the bill, the agriculture and business communities backed the plan, the legislature passed supportive legislation; and we paid for the modernization and poured money into the general fund.

50. **Is it true that you turned back a full $1,000,000 dollars to the U.S. Treasury over the course of your eight years in Congress?**
I always tried to be responsible with taxpayer money. In my eight years as a congressman, I turned back a million dollars of unused office expenses. In 1996, I even announced the formation of the “Million Dollar Turnback Club,” with myself as the sole member. But, if I had to do it over again, I wouldn’t do that. I had very good public servants on my staff and I wish I had just paid them better salaries.

51. Have you ever been threatened?

Yes, in various ways. In 1989, on the Friday night before Tuesday’s qualifying to run for Congress, I got a message through a newspaper reporter that the opposition had a warning for me. If I qualified, they’d publicly reveal sealed court documentation of a homosexual affair with a former student. I knew no such incident happened, so I told the reporter to tell this to the opposition: “I’m going to qualify. So get your documents ready, and I’ll round up the press for all of us on the steps of the state capitol Monday morning.” Of course nothing ever came of that threat. On another occasion, an Alabama District Attorney once got mad at me and said, very pointedly and repetitively in a private conversation, “I’m going to get you.” Fortunately, as another person later told me, “That’s just whiskey talking.” The only threat that I ever took seriously was a screaming message left on my home telephone answering machine: “You (expletive)! I’m a kill your (expletive)! I’m a blow your (expletive)! You (expletive)! You just wait, you (expletive)! I’m gonna blow your (expletive) brains out! You (expletive)! You (expletive) (expletive)! You (expletive)! (expletive)!”

52. Have you ever been offered a bribe?

I can assert that I was never offered a bribe—probably because I never let the conversation proceed beyond inappropriate chit-chat. There were times when I figured an offer might be forthcoming, particularly in the form of campaign contributions during my term as a state legislator. For example, I once was invited to dinner with an important business leader who was interested in an issue; and it was hinted that attendees could expect a $1,000 campaign contribution before the next election. Another friend suggested that it would likely mean a $1,000 contribution from some people if a certain bill got out of my committee and maybe as much as $5,000 if it passed the legislature. In another situation, late one night during heated debate on a controversial bill, an associate told me that such-and-such group could probably raise $20,000 for my upcoming campaign. Fortunately, I let everyone know that I wasn’t interested in continuing such conversations. (I repeat, for the record, that no quid-pro-quo offer was actually articulated; and none of these people is involved in politics today.)

53. Have you ever done anything illegal as an official?

No, not that I know of. I was always careful not to do anything that might put me behind bars. I had a personal rule for myself and my staff that we would stay far away from ethical or legal boundaries; that way, we steered clear of even the appearance of wrongdoing. In one case, I had to tell a well-meaning supporter to put back into his pocket the envelope crammed with about an inch thick stack of hundred dollar bills. I’m sure he was not aware of the legal ramifications about taking cash; so I tactfully told him that I wanted to keep him and myself out of jail.

54. You have written about “Staying Out Of Jail” as one of your big accomplishments in politics—explain what that’s about.

This comment is a personal, perhaps foolish admission about the realities of public service in Montgomery and Washington. Politics is a strange business, conducted in a gray area where powerful politicians legally do things in service to their friends, constituents, and campaign contributors and where legitimate activities are separated from illegality by uncertain and arbitrary parameters. If you stay in this business long enough, you will likely stray into questionable legal and ethical areas — or so will charge your political enemies and well-meaning but suspicious and overly aggressive news media. I acknowledge — for purposes of honest disclosure — that, despite the professor’s preachments, this politician was no saint. I was truly committed to good government personally, politically, and professionally; and I never did anything that would have put me behind bars. But, frankly, I sometimes wandered in unsavory political environs; I did
some things in those days that I would do differently if I had the chance today; and it was probably fortunate that C-SPAN cameras didn’t follow me around 24-7.

55. What about your friends—some of them have gone to jail?

Throughout my career, I have kept a file, simply as a cautionary reminder, of associates and close friends who got into trouble due to personal misbehaviors, political transgressions, partisan vendettas, or being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Their situations generally ranged from unfortunate happenstance to simple bad judgment and to outright corruption; their most common admitted offenses were ignoring ethics requirements, drunk driving, and sexual impropriety; some have been convicted of bribery and extortion; a rare few have even been suspected of murder. That file includes dozens of former colleagues — from city council members to U.S. presidents — and many spent time in prison. As a group, public officials are a good lot, but politics can be a tough neighborhood and you can get into trouble without really trying.

56. What did you conclude about reform politics in Alabama?

Late in my term in the State Legislature, I recognized a “vacuum of leadership” in Alabama. The system and its adherents were entrenched; and very few political leaders or any powerful interest groups — within the system — were willing to flex their muscle for our reform agenda. I concluded that the paucity of vision and leadership and success throughout the system was no accident — that’s how those in control keep things from happening that they do not want to happen. In order to win on such tough issues, those of us with vision had to get full control of the leadership.

57. What did you conclude about reform politics in Washington?

Important people talked often about political reform in our nation’s capital — President Clinton and Speaker Gingrich even shook hands, in front of a national television audience, on changing the campaign finance system. But the strategy of America’s national political leadership seemed to be one of posing for “holy pictures” and then making sure that nothing jeopardized the rules of the game that keep them in power.

58. What role did political parties play during your early years in Alabama?

The Alabama legislature was undergoing partisan change in addition to racial accommodation during that era. Republicans were of mixed politics and sentiments. Politically, the Republicans (all white, of course) had different ideas of what the state legislature was about: they prioritized limited government, low taxes, a favorable business climate, and pro-family/morality issues. Especially in the beginning, the Republicans had fewer outright racists in their ranks; the old-line business types dutifully accepted change and biracial politics in principle. But, besides natural partisan debates about the government’s role in dealing with racial, social, and economic problems, some of the political practices of the new day offended them—and they vociferously attacked the Democrats for race-based political dealing. Also, the insurgent Republicans relentlessly assailed ethical shortcomings of the Democratic establishment.

59. What role did race play when you were in the Alabama State Legislature?

Race played a continuing, pervasive role in the Alabama Legislature. Policy and government reflected the routinization of racial politics, and black-white differences served as the flashpoint for daily argument among competing factions. The race factor directly or indirectly impacted just about everything that happened on Goat Hill. Black legislators struggled constantly and aggressively to deal with their policy and political disadvantages in a system in which obvious racial considerations — and some racism — still prevailed. Likewise, many white legislators resented the attitudes and ways of aggressive black colleagues. Consequently, the public debate often degenerated into shouting matches about fairness, justice, racism, and corruption; and none of us was ennobled in the process. This problem was especially frustrating for those of us interested in fundamentally changing the Alabama political system. We found that it was virtually impossible to address obvious and serious problems — whether it was education, elections, taxes,
welfare, the constitution, anything involving systemic progress — without running into racial obstacles among both white and black legislators; each side was unwilling to consider change because it might hurt them in the historical struggle of white versus black.

60. Can you characterize your associates, of both races, while you were in the State Legislature?

To begin, I would say that most white leaders during that time knew that a new day had dawned in their state; they did not like it, but they accepted the reality of a new, biracial politics. The Democratic white leadership in particular embraced the new way of doing business. These practical white leaders, in concert with the coalition of special interest groups, thus changed the system, incrementally and pragmatically, to establish internal power-sharing arrangements with black politicians. Of course, some Democratic white politicians never accepted or changed; they continued to rant and obstruct. Some switched parties. Many inevitably faded from the scene. When I began working with and forming extensive relationships with African Americans in Montgomery and throughout the state, I concluded that—other than obvious historical differences and public posturing—most black leaders in Alabama were like white leaders in Alabama in that they were politicians eager to assert their new influence on important public policy. They were no more nor less noble and no more nor less political than their traditional adversaries. For the most part, they were interested in the same things as white politicians—improving the state’s education system, economic development, jobs, and social services, while also looking out for black constituencies, other disadvantaged people, some powerful special interests, local areas, and pet causes.

61. How did race factor into your campaigning and service as a southern politician?

My primary motivation for getting into politics was civic commitment to American democracy. But I realized that, because of who I was and where I lived, race would be important to my success as a Professor-Politician. So, throughout my career, race factored into my campaigns and service. For example, I diligently calculated the formula for electoral victory, which required maximizing my black vote without antagonizing the majority white electorate. I also was attentive to minority interests in my work as a public official, including staffing, services, and voting. The bottom line is that I mainly pursued a good government agenda; but I conscientiously did what I could on behalf of a progressive racial agenda.

62. What was your involvement in the controversial “handpicking” (the “Saturday Morning Massacre”) in Alabama?

In 1982, the federal government ordered the Alabama Legislature to redraw legislative boundaries to make the districts more accurately reflect the racial makeup of the Alabama electorate. The real debacle occurred when the Democratic Party grabbed the opportunity to hand-pick its nominees for the special election. On Saturday, October 1, 1983, five weeks before the elections, the state executive committee members (including myself) carefully selected the Democratic Party’s candidate for each House and Senate seat. This momentous hand-picking became known as the “Saturday Morning Massacre,” and it would foretell trauma for partisan politics of the future. I bled emotionally and politically for my part in the notorious hand-picking scandal, but it significantly expanded African American representation in the Alabama Legislature.

63. How did race play in Washington?

It was also clear to me that race and racism were alive and well, although more subtle and sophisticated, in the national capital. While white leaders in Alabama often pursued progressive government in private concert with black leaders, a candid, cooperative, personalized relationship that, strangely, was facilitated by their shared history, I found the course of biracial politics in Congress to be more public and showy, but also more impersonal and cynical. Both Democrats and Republicans, white and black alike, professed color-blind and civil rights principles; but pertinent transactions often resembled an insider game of crass, race-based politics. Maybe I looked at all of this through the eyes of a white southern sentimentalist; but, sometimes, racial politics in our national capital seemed just a refined, hypocritical rendition of what happened back in Alabama.
64. You had to deal with an explosive racial problem in your district in the 1990s; what happened with the school arson in Alabama?

In 1994, a smoldering racial conflict erupted in my district, begun by an argument over inter-racial dating at a high school prom and exploding into arson that destroyed Randolph High School in Wedowee. The KKK came to town, as did every major news media in the country. I had no jurisdiction in this fight, but I also knew I had to do something. So I went down and secretly summoned all black and white ministers in the county and we worked out a joint plea for peace and humanity; then two of my field representatives (one white and one black) camped out there for weeks. Eventually, we got them to come together in a Sunday morning service and public prayer for the school kids. Fortunately, there was no violence and the community moved forward.

65. You had a similar experience with church burnings in the South?

Toward the end of my Washington service, a more widespread conflagration revived images of Alabama’s past and threatened to ignite racial tensions throughout the South. Old anxieties swirled in the Black Belt in 1995 as two small, rural, African American churches burned in Greene County, Alabama, just before Martin Luther King Day. Over the next two years, a dozen churches burned in Alabama and dozens more burned across the region—and most were cases of arson. Both white and black houses of worship were victimized, actually in equal numbers but the media focus was on race and southern history. I got together with Cleo Fields (Louisiana) and we quickly forged a biracial congressional coalition—bringing together the mainly white and southern Blue Dogs and the southern members of the Black Caucus—to get the federal government involved in the problem. The Blue Dogs and Black Caucus effectively focused federal attention on the problem, and Congress passed the Rural Church Arson Prevention Act (1996), enhancing criminal prosecution and penalties for these transgressions of America’s conscience.

66. Much of your congressional work focused on national security; why did you choose to serve on the House Armed Services Committee?

Alabama’s third congressional district is very defense-oriented, with several military installations and many veterans, so all of us who ran for this open position in 1989 pledged ourselves to fight for a seat on HASC.

67. What was it like fighting “The Battle of Fort McClellan”?

I didn’t go to Congress to fight “The Battle of Fort McClellan” but leading that fight was my responsibility. It was an exhausting, never-ending nightmare; and I’m convinced the Army made the wrong decision for political reasons. Most of us in this area still harbor ill feelings about how the Pentagon treated us; but I’ll also have to admit that we had as fair a shot as possible at saving the base.

68. How did you deal with the “Toxic Terror” of chemical weapons stored at Anniston Army Depot?

Ironically, even while we were fighting “The Battle of Fort McClellan”, we knew that we had another major battle brewing across town at AAD. My concern was that the U.S. did not know much about how to get rid of this horrible stockpile; and I worried that we might make a decision that one day would visit great harm to the people of this area. Again, we didn’t like the situation, but, after another nightmare ordeal, we faced it head-on. Now, all the toxic agent and weapons are gone.

69. Why did you get involved with “Gulf War Syndrome”?

It began when some of my constituents who had served in the first Gulf War contacted me about medical problems they were having and complained that the government was brushing them off. I became suspicious when I saw reason to believe that there was a problem and the Pentagon simply stonewalled. I think we’ve been able to get some help for “Gulf War Syndrome”, but it remains one of the biggest disappoints of my congressional service that we were not able to make our government face up to its full responsibility for these veterans.
70. You were one of the original founders of the Congressional Blue Dogs in 1994. Why did you help start the Blue Dog Coalition?

There was a handful of us, moderate-to-conservative Democrats, primarily from southern states, who characterized ourselves as the voice of common sense; and as such we were a major irritant to the leadership of both parties. The members felt a growing separation from the increasingly liberal Democratic leadership and hoped to move the party back toward the center. We realized that what we could not accomplish singly we might be able to achieve together. Thus the Blue Dogs were born in late 1994.

71. What was the response of the Democratic leadership to the Blue Dogs?

The Democratic Caucus never cared much for us, but the leadership accepted and quietly encouraged us. I approached Dick Gephardt, who was then majority leader, and told him what we were doing. He was in agreement with our strategy. “Do whatever you need to do in order to keep that seat in the D column,” Gephardt told me. “You guys perform your major contribution to the cause in helping us reach the magic 218 votes needed to put Democrats in control of every facet of House activities; anything beyond that vote is gravy for us.”

72. What was your major contribution as a Blue Dog?

I think I contributed in two significant ways. First, I was one of the original four-five congressmen who started talking about and organizing the Blue Dogs. Second, I was the official Budget Chairman for the Blue Dogs when we started putting together our Common Sense Budget in 1996. That budget ended up as the model for final compromise between President Bill Clinton and the Congressional Republicans.

73. Why did President Bill Clinton call the Blue Dogs to the White House and thank them?

That was an interesting development. President Clinton was able to force Congress to compromise on the budget in 1996; and he credited the Blue Dogs for crafting the basis of that compromise and giving him ground to stand on in his negotiations with Democratic and Republican leaders. He actually thanked us at that meeting.

74. What was your relationship with Bill Clinton?

I was never a close associate or avid promoter of President Clinton, but our worlds overlapped and sometimes intersected in Washington. There were occasional White House sessions on the budget, particularly since I was a member of the House Budget Committee and a leading player in the Blue Dog budget effort. I also clashed with the president and the House Democrats on campaign finance reforms. Of course, there were regular events at the White House — Christmas parties and miscellaneous social gatherings which usually included individualized photos and quick personal exchanges. But we were never close, either personally or politically. I can now better appreciate the conditions — both personal and political — under which Bill Clinton operated. I’m convinced he was the best person to lead our country during changing and uncertain times; and he did a good, credible job as president. Actually, as goofy as it sounds, I can’t help but like the guy.

75. What was your relationship with Newt Gingrich?

It’s somewhat strange, but I never really had a relationship with Newt Gingrich; I don’t remember us even saying “Hello”. We came along at the same time; we were both college professors (he in history and I in political science) at regional state colleges in districts that actually were side-by-side. But I guess there was just too much distance between us otherwise.

76. Who was the best politician you ever dealt with?

I’ll separate this into two parts, Alabama and Washington. I had always heard that George Wallace was the supreme politician; I don’t know about that because I never saw him campaign and I only knew him from
his last, strange administration as governor. I would say that Alabama State Senator John Teague was the best politician in my experience. John worked with everybody, and he was a master at getting things done. He could tell you “No” and make you feel like he had done you a great favor. On the national stage, there’s no doubt—Bill Clinton. He could work different, oppositional audiences; and leave them both convinced he was their champion. Most importantly, he talked to every person as a personal friend.

77. Looking back, what would you consider your biggest “wins” as a public official?

Among the victories, by my accounting, are several successful initiatives that have improved Alabama politics and American democracy:

1. Education Reform. I sponsored several important laws in the 1980s that impacted Alabama public education positively.
3. The Federal Budget. When I left Congress in 1997, the foundation for a balanced budget was in place; and our country enjoyed budget surpluses for several years.
4. National Security. I devoted considerable time to various issues and matters of national security during my few years in D.C.
5. Civic Representation. I also like to count among my victories those civic initiatives that reflect in some manner Plato’s idealized combination of virtuous knowledge and practical political power.
6. Quiet, Practical, Biracial Progress. During my time, many public officials and activists, both white and black, tried to lead Alabama politics and American democracy in positive directions.
7. Staying Out Of Jail! This startling point is included here as a personal, candid, perhaps foolish admission about the realities of public service in Montgomery and Washington.

78. What were your biggest “losses”?

Unfortunately, I also experienced serious disappointments during my run as a Professor-Politician. I should explain that my “losses” quite often overlapped and underlay my “wins,” since victorious reforms are never complete.

1. Education Reform. For example, my educational efforts as an Alabama legislator were limited in scope and funding; and some reforms were later killed.
2. The Federal Budget. The federal budget reforms I championed in Washington have unraveled in the difficult and partisan politics of the past few years.
3. National Security. Of course, my national defense work always had its downside, i.e., Fort McClellan.
4. Campaign Reform. Without doubt, my most distinctly disappointing experience was failure to pass meaningful campaign finance reform at the national level.

79. Why did you run for the U.S. Senate in 1996?

From the beginning, I had planned to spend no more than ten years in the House, and as my eighth year approached, I knew I didn’t want to spend much more time doing the same sort of job. I wanted something that would be different and challenging and worthwhile and would allow us to live a family life. I figured one term in the U.S. Senate would be worthwhile and that I could do something else afterwards. I had not grown overly cynical, or physically fatigued, and my House seat was not threatened by growing Republicanism. I had come to Washington as a reformer, and I realized that the House of Representatives was not the best place from which to launch the kinds of changes I advocated. After fourteen years in politics, it was time for me to consider something different — either move to the Senate, where service is more in line with the role of a Philosopher-King, or get out of politics, where perhaps I could address more effectively some of my concerns about the future of American democracy.
80. **What ended your political career?**

There are many excuses that politicians give for leaving public service, but the simple fact is that I got out of politics because I lost my last election (a race for an open seat in the U.S. Senate in 1996). I lost the Democratic primary runoff due mainly to my centrist philosophy and inability to raise campaign money. My political reforms, my fiscal policies, my ideological centristm, and my bipartisan history, the very things that would have helped me against a Republican, made it impossible for me to win the Democratic nomination. On the other hand, my opponent, Roger Bedford, actually was a better candidate than I was for that primary. He was a great campaigner; he was a party loyalist; and he diligently cultivated powerful Democrats and moneyed interests. My former student and political science friend Dr. Jess Brown summarized my exit this way: “Campaign politics essentially transitioned to a much more visceral state, and while Browder understood this change on an intellectual plane, he refused to adopt it as a modus operandi for his ‘new kind of politics.’”

*(Political Afterlife)*

81. **Do you miss politics?**

I miss seeing my old friends in Washington and Montgomery. But I can say with certainty that I am happy being a former Congressman. Serving in public office has been a treasured highlight of my life. But it was very difficult balancing philosophical inclinations with the grinding, consuming, partisan demands of political office while struggling to maintain some semblance of personal life, without having to bear all the awesome (as well as trivial) burdens and trappings of public service. Furthermore, I can spend family occasions and national holidays—such as birthdays and anniversaries 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 politicians.

82. **How did you change over the years as a politician?**

My years in elective office were intensely exhilarating. But over the course of my career I simply enjoyed about as much as I could stand—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. The most important change was my idea of representation. As my years in political life wore on, 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 judgment about what should be done). In all honesty, I realized that, after fourteen years in public office, it was time for me to consider something different—either move up to the Senate (where service as a philosopher-politician is more appropriate and rewarding) or get out of politics (where perhaps I could address more effectively some of my concerns about the future of American democracy). So I ran for the Senate and I lost and I’m out of politics.

83. **What are some of life’s lessons that you took from your years in politics?**

Some of the following lessons also serve as advice to current politicians; but I think they apply just as well on the list of useful reflections:

1. I have found that my career as a political scientist helped me tremendously in politics. It never gave me the right answers, but it did help me understand the basic questions.
2. My work as a campaign consultant gave me advance insights and skills (which I otherwise would have had to learn through spilled blood, battle scars, and lost opportunities).
3. I learned early on to never be afraid of being afraid—as long as I was trying to do what was right.
4. The best politics was always good government.
5. The worst part of politics was raising campaign money.
6. There are some things worse than losing an election
7. There is life after politics.
8. The longer I’m out of politics, the less partisan I am.
9. In fact, the longer I’m out of politics, the less political I’ve become.
10. I still have mystical confidence in American democracy—although these days I’m more mystical than confident.

84. What do you think makes a good political leader?

Leadership is a relational and situational phenomenon; but I think that there are several personal qualities or attributes that contribute to success for politicians, preachers, coaches, or any other person in a position of authority:

1. Mission: Personification of a special mission that is bigger than the leader and followers.
2. Plan: Possession of a definite plan of action for accomplishing the mission.
3. Righteousness: A sense of being morally right and committed to doing what is good for society.
4. Empathy: Evidenced feeling by the leader for the followers.
5. Challenge: Personal challenge or appeal from the leader to followers.
6. Power: Possession of the resources to demand followership, reward followers, and punish non-followers.
7. Destiny: An air of certainty that the leader is going to prevail in this mission.

85. Do you have any “words of wisdom” to pass on to today’s politicians?

The following are my recommended rules-of-the-road for practicing politicians and wannabe leaders.

1. Always strive to understand who you are; don’t ever forget where you came from; and, if you do these things, never worry needlessly about where you’re going.
2. Whether for good or bad, and especially in politics, money often separates “winners” from “losers” and “dreamers” from “doers.”
3. The best politics is good government.
4. Don’t believe 90 percent of what you hear -- and only about half of what you see.
5. Don’t argue with the press – unless you have to.
6. Don’t ever be afraid of being afraid.
7. Work hard, play smart, and get lucky (and that third item may be the most important element).
8. I have come to appreciate through experience the wisdom of a couple of bumper-sticker reminders (which I’ve cleaned up for public consumption): “Things Change!” and “Stink Happens!”
9. There are worse things than losing an election; and there is life after politics.
10. The longer I’m out of politics, the less partisan and even less political I’ve become.
11. I have almost mystical confidence in the future of American democracy -- although I’m sometimes more mystical than confident.
12. Life is complicated; and it’s not always fair; but it is worth living

86. Which one of these lessons would you consider the “golden rule” for consideration by today’s politicians?

Several of these might serve as “golden rules”, but I particularly like No. 9. First, there are worse things than losing an election. Many times when campaigning for office, you face the critical issue of money – or more precisely, what you’re willing to do to get the campaign contributions so necessary for a winning campaign. It’s not simply a legal question of “quid pro quo,” or “bribery,” or “corruption” as depicted in current scandals. The real issue is most often personal, how will you feel about yourself in the long run. Second, there is life after politics. Some of the most pitiful people I know are ex-politicians who cannot deal with electoral defeat – people who never realized that they were in trouble until election night, who
went to bed in utter dismay about losing, who woke up the next morning without any constructive ideas for post-political life, and who consequently were miserable for the rest of their days. Alternatively, some of the happiest people I know are former politicians who quickly moved on to another career, spending time with their family, or some other worthwhile calling.

87. **What advice would you give to anybody or group about dealing with public officials?**

Once again, I’ve compiled my list of suggestions for dealing with public officials:

1. Be positive and straightforward.
2. Understand the process.
3. Educate yourself on the issues.
4. Establish a personal and professional relationship with the official.
5. Don’t ever lie to the official.
6. Pay attention to the official’s staff.
7. Get a commitment.
8. Communicate regularly.
9. Allow the official “room to breathe” politically.
10. Support the official in your community.

88. **What advice do you offer to young people who might want to consider going into politics?**

My message to aspiring young public servants is simple. You can contribute positively to Alabama politics and American democracy if you get your head on straight, i.e., if you’re committed to good government, are willing to work hard, and can balance philosophical principle with political practicality.

89. **In answering an earlier question about your political career, you counted “quiet, practical, biracial progress” as an important “win”. Explain this.**

Obscured within my more obvious politicking on education reform, campaign finance disclosure, federal budgeting, national security, and general good government is an important endeavor that rivals everything else on my personal scorecard. During my time, many public officials and activists, both white and black, tried to lead Alabama politics and American democracy in positive directions. Our biracial work was difficult, somewhat secretive, and sometimes more practical than noble; but we worked conscientiously toward ending racist vestiges of southern history, moderating the tone of southern public discourse, and substantially normalizing southern politics. We were not civil rights workers — we were ambitious politicians — and we left much more to be done in this troubled area of the democratic experiment. However, our work contributed significantly to racial progress of that era, and I’m particularly proud of this unheralded aspect of my public service.

90. **Why are race and racism so powerful in southern politics?**

Slavery was the original sin of American history and the confounding flaw of American democracy; and no region of the country has been so cursed with the afflictions of race and racism. The more I live and learn, the more convinced I am that race, religion family, tribe, nation, etc., bias us, almost as forces of nature, against others/outsiders in our subjective feelings and even observations regarding objective phenomena. Furthermore, I am convinced that, because of southern history and stubborn lingering legacies, many southerners, black and white, still seem programmed to view things “our way” culturally. Even as we make progress in black-white relations, that cultural struggle continues; and some on both sides seem determined to fight this war forever. So it is not surprising to me that race endures in southern politics. As William Faulkner might say, the southern racial beast lives on because neither white nor black southerners will let it die.

91. **Did you do all you could for black people during your political career?**

I probably should have been more supportive of minority issues back then; and I acknowledge that my
circumspect approach to racial politics helped terminate my public career. The bottom line is that I conscientiously did what I could on behalf of a progressive racial agenda; however, back then, being “balanced” was the unspoken survival requirement for most moderate white politicians who were from the Deep South and had a “D” behind their names. It’s nothing to brag about; but that was how we stuck around to “do good” as long as we did.

92. Why did you write *The South’s New Racial Politics* (2009) and *Stealth Reconstruction* (2010)?

We know a lot about the “heroic drama” of the civil rights movement, with its morality tale of good versus evil; but we don’t know much about what happened—what really happened inside the “race game” of “real southern politics”—since then. Southern politicians don’t like to talk about their politics (particularly racial aspects of politicking); academics find it hard to get “inside” the backrooms and minds of these politicians (again, particularly on matters involving race); and journalists, besides being handicapped in both respects cited here, tend to dwell on the historic, heroic drama rather than depicting the realities of changing southern politics. I hope that these two books convey some useful lessons-learned about the changing South.

93. What do you mean by the “race game” of southern politics?

The race game itself is really quite simple. Ever since their colonial beginnings, the white leaders and people of this region have engaged in perverse, contorted politics designed to provide themselves the blessings of democracy at the expense of black southerners. Gaming the system for racial advantage was not the singular, continuous, consuming passion for most southerners; but slavery had warped the southern political system from the start, and race forever lurked in the background of southern political life. As I point out elsewhere, the historical race game has changed during the several decades since the civil rights movement. Now, there’s a new race game, and it consists of biracial accommodation; successful, effective leaders of both races have learned to live together in a half-way house of racialized politics.

94. What do you mean by “real southern politics”?

I define “real southern politics” as the raw racial conflicts, trade-offs, alliances, and transactions, both out front and behind the scenes, that have underlain the southern race game for the past half-century. It may seem strange to imply that “real politics” has been slighted in normal coverage of the South; but to a degree that has been the case. Scholars and journalists have filled libraries worldwide with useful, interesting books and articles about race and southern political history; but it is hard to find anything that documents or explains the actual, essential, base racial politicking that is usually hidden in the back rooms and in the hearts and minds of white and black leaders in this region. Public officials don’t normally like to talk about such sensitive matters as white-versus-black contention; journalists love the race conflict but aren’t interested in the practicalities of making democracy work; and academics, whether interested or not, generally don’t have inside knowledge about racial politics and government. “Real southern politics” indeed happened and is still happening in ways that are uniquely regional and systemically important; and this story merits consideration in standard assessments of politics in the South.

95. What is *The South's New Racial Politics*?

*The South's New Racial Politics* is a new and original analysis of the current southern political system, in which black and white politicians have settled together into their halfway house of racialized politics. In this interpretive analysis, I talk candidly and comprehensively about race—the most essential and difficult aspect of southern history—and the race game that southerners still play as part of their historical legacy. After a half-century of study and experience, I have concluded that today’s racial politics is different from the old race game; the modified game is one of biracial accommodation, as evidenced in substance, style, strategies, operations, and outcomes. The "New Racial Politics" is now the prevalent relationship, openly practiced and generally accepted by both races; it is sometimes cynical, but it probably is better than anything we've ever tried before. Moreover, it is really just a more intense, racialized version of what goes on in the rest of the country.
96. **What is Stealth Reconstruction?**

*Stealth Reconstruction* is an even stronger dose of unconventional analysis, written in collaboration with Dr. Artemesia Stanberry (North Carolina Central University). This book is a solid thesis, original study, and comprehensive analysis of "stealth leadership, politics, and reconstruction," or how the South changed, in part, due to quiet, practical, biracial relations in the 1970s-80s-90s. Essentially, this book re-opens the Hillary Clinton-Barack Obama conversation (i.e., whether a white politician helped implement black dreams) to honest analysis and constructive discussion. The fact is that most politicians/academics/journalists today won't touch this idea—but quiet, practical, biracial politics was critical to moving the South beyond the raw confrontations of the Civil Rights Movement era. Nobody dared tell this story back then, and even today there's reluctance for the participants to talk; but it needs to be told before the biracial partners die out. We tell that story in *Stealth Reconstruction*.

97. **Why have these “untold stories” never been told?**

There are two reasons, normative and practical. First, these realities don’t fit comfortably within the monumental civil rights struggle of the past half century; so many resist such information for normative reasons; they simply cannot abide anything—such as simple politics—that challenges the “heroic drama” of history. Second, politicians don’t like to talk about their politics, especially when it involves race; academics find it hard to get “inside” the backrooms and minds of politicians, again especially when it involves race; and journalists face both problems and tend to dwell on controversy rather than depicting the realities of racial politics.

98. **Is “Southern Democracy” dead?**

“Southern Democracy” is in trouble! Certainly the Democratic Party in the South is not “dead” in the technical sense of total, terminal collapse. But this blunt rhetorical question is a legitimate setup for talking about the future of the Democratic Party in changing southern politics. Southern Democracy—defined as the ruling regime of regional politics for most of this country’s existence—involves a perverse marriage between one-party control and white supremacy/racial segregation; and the decline of Southern Democracy obviously involves evolving racial and partisan dynamics in this part of the country. Race is still a in southern politics; but it is no longer “the” driving force as it was throughout most of regional history. Racism and its stubborn legacies contaminate Democratic-Republican campaigns and partisan governance; but, today, southern party politics is mainly reflective of more conventional factors, such as religion, culture, philosophy, and demographic patterns. The South turned a sharp partisan corner in Election 2010; and most now consider the area a staunch citadel of Republicanism. Southern Democracy, however now defined, clearly faces uncertain prospects in the future.


When I left politics, a few major publishers were interested in standard college texts and partisan kiss-and-tell books, but I wasn’t. I wanted to talk seriously and unconventionally about what I considered the most important issue of contemporary public life, i.e., the future of American democracy. 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.

100. **What is your message in *Future?***

I argue 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 turning our national democratic experiment into an exercise in democratic distemper. 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 for our historic “Great Experiment”.

24
101. What do you project as the future of the “Great Experiment” of American democracy?

To generalize broadly, America is indeed experiencing fundamental change and civic distemper of serious nature that raise questions about the future of American democracy; and I predict several consequences (actually a mixture of predictions, projections, and personal observations). Systemically, America of the future will operate in a fundamentally different, less propitious, and more challenging setting than has been the case in the past two centuries. Culturally, “Traditional America” (an historically-dominant white society, rooted in rural, small town and middle regions, which subscribes to religious convictions, community values, and relatively conservative government) will yield to “ Emerging America” (a growing, eclectic society of relatively liberal and historically disadvantaged citizens in urban and coastal areas who are inclined toward social diversity, moral tolerance, and activist government). Politically, American democracy will never again work the way it has in the past. Simply by historical definition of our Great Experiment, unfolding demographic reality, and democratic destiny, American democracy will move in progressive directions; but it will have to accommodate the demands of centrifugal democracy and the technological revolution. If we mindlessly proceed on our current course, the United States will become “The American Federation” by 2050.

102. What do you hope to accomplish with your biography?

Obviously, I think our project will add valuable new information — in the way of first-person testimony and original research — to historical accounts of the past half-century. More importantly, I hope to challenge the common, dysfunctional depiction of politics as a struggle of heroes-versus-villains and good-versus-evil — with evil villains prevailing in virtual dominance over good government. Finally, and most importantly, I want young people to understand and embrace the critical role of practical politicians in positively impacting public life.

103. After your experience with this biography, do you have any advice for other public officials and journalists or scholars contemplating a similar project?

I would recommend doing it. But make sure you and the author agree on the objectives; make sure you like and respect each other; make sure you challenge each other; make sure you devote enough time and energy to the project; and make sure you collaborate sufficiently. Fortunately, Geni Certain and I worked well on all these counts.

Q&A For The Biographer:

104. Why did you write A Different Kind of Leader?

Browder was in Congress when I became an editor at The Anniston Star. He was more accessible to the local press than any politician I had encountered up to that point. The Star's coverage of Browder's career changed my attitude about politicians in general, and I welcomed the opportunity to delve deeply into that career—and to write a book in the process.

105. Why is a Browder biography written by Geni Certain better than a Browder-written autobiography?

It is simply a matter of added perspective and credibility. I am a professional journalist; I bring not only independence but different points of view, with critical assessments, and perhaps new insights. Also, we wanted to interview other people; and we knew that they might, in some cases, say things to me that they would not say to him.

106. Is A Different Kind of Leader a political book or a history book or a civics book?
It is all three. It tells a story of inside politics, fills in gaps of the historical story, and encourages young people to engage in the political system.

107. What is the specific contribution of A Different Kind of Leader to political science and historiography?

This book relates the otherwise untold story of a politician who contributed substantial, positive changes to Alabama and American government and the daily lives of citizens. It draws together Browder's unique experiences and provides context for his candid observations and unconventional analyses. I also think we have successfully documented, from several perspectives, important developments during changing times in this part of the country.

108. What is Browder’s “place” or role in state, regional, and national politics and history?

Browder was a unique, interesting, consequential combination of political science and politics. He never stayed in one place long enough to establish himself as a prominent scholar or powerful official. But he developed sufficient skills to write productively as a political scientist; and he had impact at all levels—in local, state, regional, national, and even international politics. He used that experience to contribute substantively and substantially to Alabama politics and American democracy.

109. What does this book tell us, that we don’t already know, about Browder?

In the first place, there’s no other source of information about the personal life of Glen Browder. More substantively, this book is the authorized accounting of his political origins and constant balancing of progressive principle and gritty politics. For example, he overcame childhood poverty through education in South Carolina and Georgia. Jacksonville State University in Alabama provided roots for Browder at both ends of his career in elective office. It was a stable home base where the young Browder honed his expertise, and it celebrated his return after his tenure in Washington. He was rewarded at each step along his road to politics. As an academic, he enjoyed analyzing the process of government. As a political consultant, he enjoying participating in the process by helping candidates get elected. Joining the game was the logical next step. He truly believed that government should work for the good of the governed, not to advance a political ideology. He admits and regrets that he had to make compromises along the way. But he conducted his life inside the context of “doing good” personally and publically; and he succeeded in some worthwhile endeavors. This is an interesting and important story, much of it heretofore untold, and substantiated from several perspectives in this book.

110. What were the advantages and disadvantages of working with a living subject?

The major advantage of writing with and about a living subject—this one, anyway—was that he kept me on track or steered me back when I threatened to veer off chasing unimportant details. How many times he said, "You're getting lost in the weeds." Another advantage was that he could and did introduce me to some of his colleagues who might not have agreed to be interviewed if the request had come from me. As for disadvantages, sometimes we disagreed about how much needed to be said about a particular topic. Mostly, though, we disagreed about punctuation.

111. In addition to your extensive sessions with Browder, you researched this book through original documents (the Browder Collection), the public record (news media and other publications), and personal interviews (with a few dozen of his associates)—tell us about the value of this multi-faceted methodology.

Each source provided a slightly different perspective on a given question. By the time I had exhausted my source material, I felt I had relived each problem in all its contentiousness. Generally, the press reports built a framework or outline of events; memos, letters, press releases and official documents from the Browder
Collection filled in details; and interviews with Browder and his associates explained the human relationships and negotiations that went on behind the scenes.

112. What is the Browder Collection?

The Browder Collection is a public resource for interested citizens, journalists, and academic researchers. More than three hundred boxes (four hundred fifty linear feet) of material are housed at Jacksonville State University’s Houston Cole Library and the JSU McClellan Center in Anniston. The actual boxed files are stored for the most part in their original physical condition and order; however, the collection has been organized in a coherent, comprehensive framework reflecting Browder’s public service and important aspects of Alabama politics and American democracy in the latter half of the Twentieth Century.

113. Who was your favorite interview, and why?

This is maybe the most difficult question. Every personal interview was fascinating for its own reasons. To mention one and not another would indicate only a momentary lapse of memory. If I must choose one, I’ll say Becky Browder. She told me things about the Browders’ family life that he would not discuss and some things about herself that he might not even have known before reading the transcript of the interview. Her picture of Glen Browder as a husband, father, son and brother could not have come from anyone else.

114. Was there much congruence and/or incongruence among those sources?

For the most part, all the sources pointed to the same conclusions. I found very few (if any) outright contradictions. More often, one or another of the sources provided incomplete information that led to additional questions to be addressed through additional research/interviews.

115. How did the original documents relate to what Browder said, what the public record said, and what the interview respondents said?

Sometimes the original documents explained details that Browder either did not remember, glossed over or did not want to go into. Sometimes they referred to historical information that required further research. Sometimes—particularly staff memos during the 1996 budget negotiations—they led me off on wild goose chases. Frequently they corroborated media accounts of events and filled in holes in the reporting. Of particular value were the Army and GAO reports concerning the base-closing decisions.

116. Was there any difference between what Browder said and what the other interviewees told you?

Interviewees tended to want to paint a halo over Browder's head, while Browder himself was much more circumspect. But when describing the events in question, their accounts tended to support Browder's. Only in the issue of Alabama education reform did interviewees disagree with each other or with Browder, and then only on minor points.

117. Which approach gave you the best window into Browder’s life?

No one source or category of sources was absolutely superior to the others. The book could have been written without interviewing Browder, but it would not have been as complete or as accurate. It could have been written without any of the interviews or the news accounts, but it would have been less interesting to read and less fun to write. It could have been written without the Browder Collection, but the same information would have to have been assembled independently, which would have taken a really long time.

118. What do you think is new or different about this book?
It is an unusually candid story about southern politics and American democracy, told from the unique perspective of a scholar-turned-politician, and verified through personal interviews, media reports, and public/private documents.


Sorry, no kissing and no telling; no scores evened; no skeletons uncloseted; and precious little puffery, although Browder certainly is the hero of his own story.

120. Is there anything controversial in this book?

Essentially, *A Different Kind of Leader* was written to communicate the positive contributions and possibilities of practical leadership. However, Browder made some strong statements about the past (like his many comments on the “pervasive role of race” in Alabama and his criticism of “Washington politicians unwilling to change a system that favored their re-election”); and he articulated some unconventional rhetoric about the future (“America may be dying!”). So he likely will r ankle some feathers among the political right and left and and center. Furthermore, there is enough in this book about behind-the-scenes machinations of hyper-partisanship, racism, money, bribes, threats, and other malpractices to trouble folks in all sectors of civic society.

121. What is the essential “takeaway” for the reader of *A Different Kind of Leader*?

The essential takeaway is that political progress is a difficult assignment—but the task is worthwhile and good things are possible. Politicians may be ideologues or demagogues, but not necessarily one or the other. This is the story of one whose goal was to make government work better, how politics got in the way, but did not stop him.

122. What is the most interesting thing in this book?

There are several interesting things. Generally, the reader will be impressed with Browder’s conscious effort to meld theory with practice in the political arena. Additionally included are countless, intriguing, inside references and insights about historical incidents. Ironically, the history of the late 1980s and 1990s politics is being replayed in the twenty-first century, with many of the same characters. I can’t help feeling that we’ve been through this movie before.

123. What is the most disturbing information/insight in the book?

The most disturbing reality is the necessity for playing a tough political game in order to get anything worthwhile done in Montgomery and Washington. It is also troubling how much political deal-making goes unreported.

124. What was the most disappointing thing you learned about politics?

It made me sad that race still plays such a determining role in politics, policy, and law-making. Race and racism are powerful regional and national problems; and it is not easy to comprehend or address this historical predicament. Considerations of race can paralyze — or accelerate — political action; and, after four decades of civil rights advances, racial divisions still steer people to vote against their own interests.

125. Did you learn anything particularly interesting about Browder’s relationship with George Wallace in this project?

Wallace anointed Browder to implement important education reforms in the state, and their acquaintance deepened to a close personal friendship that Wallace valued to the end of his days.

126. What did you learn about Browder’s relationship with Bill Clinton?
Browder was no fan of Clinton while both were in Washington, but his opinion has become more generous in the intervening years.

127. What does this book tell us generally about Montgomery and Washington?
This book tells us just how difficult it is to achieve progress in either place. To quote Browder, “It’s no way to run a railroad.” Actually Browder’s experience shows that, despite popular opinion and some hard evidence to the contrary, at least a few of our elected officials in both capitals seek office to smooth the tracks on which government runs.

128. Did this project impact your thinking about the media and politics?
I was mightily impressed with the quality of the political analysis in Alabama’s newspapers. After reading reams of original documents and gathering dozens of first-hand accounts, I found that the political writers in the state were getting it right, both in detail and in evaluation.

129. After writing this book, are you optimistic or pessimistic about the future of Alabama politics?
I don't know that optimism or pessimism is an appropriate label for my opinion. Researching the book gave me a deeper understanding of how the change from overwhelmingly Democrat to overwhelmingly Republican happened in Alabama; but I do not believe that attitudes have changed much. Editing newspapers in the state for most of the past twenty years has shown me that the loudest voices tend to be the most extreme. Those people frustrate me. That experience, along with writing this biography, however, has made clear to me that an overwhelming majority of the people in the state want the same things: steady work, affordable housing, good schools, safe neighborhoods, trustworthy public officials, clean air and water, a comfortable retirement, reliable health care, and a government that ensures access to these things but otherwise stays out of their lives. I don't think either party or any political label has a franchise on these values.

130. What was the most difficult aspect of this project?
I wish I had been able to devote uninterrupted time to research and writing; and I wish we had been able to cover everything we wanted in the book.

131. What do you wish you had done differently in this project?
Looking back on it, my organization of the materials was rather haphazard. I should have outlined the book more thoroughly at the beginning and had Browder annotate the outline.

132. Is there anything you’d add or subtract or change if you could edit the book now?
As the writing and editing stretched to several years, a number of people have come to greater prominence. Although talking to them about Browder likely would add only length and not substance to the book, the journalist in me now yearns to include comments from the likes of Don Siegelman, Bob Riley, Robert Gibbs, and Newt Gingrich.

133. Based on your experience researching/writing A Different Kind of Leader, what would you recommend to future officials and journalists or scholars attempting such a project?
Browder has already addressed several points, like agreeing on the objectives, liking/respecting/challenging each other, devoting enough time to the project, and collaborating sufficiently. I would add only this: Make sure you have appropriate original source materials available. Especially if you’re located in Alabama or nearby states, anyone contemplating such a project would benefit by examining the Browder Collection.