

DELIBERATION DAY

DELIBERATION

DAY

Bruce Ackerman and
James S. Fishkin

Yale University Press
New Haven & London

Published with assistance from the foundation established in memory of Philip Hamilton McMillan of the Class of 1894, Yale College.

Copyright © 2004 by Bruce Ackerman and James S. Fishkin. All rights reserved. This book may not be reproduced, in whole or in part, including illustrations, in any form (beyond that copying permitted by Sections 107 and 108 of the U.S. Copyright Law and except by reviewers for the public press), without written permission from the publishers.

Designed by Nancy Ovedovitz. Set in Galliard Old Style with Copperplate 33BC type by Achorn Graphic Services. Printed in the United States of America by Vail-Ballou Press.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Ackerman, Bruce A.

Deliberation Day / Bruce Ackerman and James S. Fishkin.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-300-10101-5 (cloth : alk. paper)

1. Political participation—United States. 2. Democracy—United States. 3. Elections—United States. 4. Legitimacy of governments—United States. 5. Forums (Discussion and debate) I. Fishkin, James S. II. Title.

JK1764.A27 2004

324.6'0973—dc22 2003019490

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

The paper in this book meets the guidelines for permanence and durability of the Committee on Production Guidelines for Book Longevity of the Council on Library Resources.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

FOR ROBERT DAHL

DEMOCRATIC VISIONARY

CONTENTS

Preface ix

PART I. THINK IT OVER

1. Imagine 3
2. The Holiday 17
3. From Thought-Experiments to Real Experiments 40
4. Cycles of Virtue 75
5. Extending the Paradigm 97
6. What Price Deliberation? 120

PART II. DELIBERATION AND DEMOCRACY

7. The Problem of Mass Democracy 149
8. Responsible Citizenship 173
9. Fearful Asymmetries 188
10. Alternative Futures 206

Appendix A. Estimated Costs for Deliberation Day
(with Eric Tam) 221

Appendix B. The Iowa Experience 229

Notes 233

Index 270

PREFACE

We have been friends for almost thirty years. And looking back, this book builds on conversations that began in the good old days when we were young Yale professors in search of truth and light. But the disparate threads all came together in 1999 on a walk around Jim Fishkin's house in Austin, Texas. Within the space of an hour, we began to see how Deliberation Day might unify our separate efforts to imagine new forms of legitimacy that might sustain democratic government in the twenty-first century.

The next four years involved the exploration of many bright ideas that turned out to be dead ends. As time marched on, the clouds began to clear amid the ceaseless exchange of e-mails between Ackerman in New Haven and Fishkin in Austin.

But there is nothing like face-to-face conversation to get things really moving—and the book made great progress during the spring of 2002, when both of us were fellows at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences in Palo Alto, California. Many thanks to Doug McAdam, Mark Turner, and the entire staff for sustaining this oasis.

During the long hard slog, Ackerman's ongoing work was given unstinting support by Dean Anthony Kronman of the Yale Law School. Ackerman was also given the priceless opportunity to undertake a systematic revision by the Center for Advanced Study in Budapest, where he served as a fellow during the fall of 2003. His work was also greatly enriched by some fabulous Yale graduate students from the law school,

the political science department, and the economics department: Rebekka Bonner, Michael Durham, Ethan Leib, Luis Madrazo, Jon Michaels, and Julie Chi-hye Suk. Eric Tam's work on the costs of implementing Deliberation Day was so sustained and ingenious that we mark him out as a coauthor of the appendix that summarizes our findings.

Fishkin would like to single out his principal empirical collaborator Bob Luskin for innumerable insights that inform this book throughout. He would also like to thank all the members of the Special Project on Deliberative Public Opinion at the Center for Advanced Study, 2002–3. In addition to Bruce Ackerman these include Henry Brady, Jane J. Mansbridge, Shanto Iyengar, Paul Sniderman, Kasper Hansen, David Brady, Norman Bradburn, Roger Jowell, Christian List, Richard Brody, Larry Lessig, Russell Hardin, Roberto D'Alimonte, and Guillermo O'Donnell. Pam Ryan, Director of Issues Deliberation Australia, also offered key insights. Special thanks to Neil Smelser, then director of the center, who first suggested the special project, and to Bob Scott, then associate director, who helped bring it to realization at the center.

Thanks are due to the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, its president, Paul Brest, and Senior Fellow Smita Singh, for their support of several of the projects discussed here. Fishkin is also grateful to the Renee B. Fisher Foundation for support that allowed him to bring some of the scholars together at the center, and to the University Research Institute at the University of Texas, for support of his ongoing work.

Finally Fishkin would like to thank two senior advisers who have long served the Center for Deliberative Polling at the University of Texas, and, more recently, the new Center for Deliberative Democracy at Stanford. Dan Werner, president of MacNeil/Lehrer Productions, and Dr. Charles E. Walker, a former deputy secretary of the treasury, provided the essential insights and encouragement that transformed an academic idea into a reality.

An early version of this argument was published in article form, both in *Philosophy, Politics, and Society*, volume 7, *Debating Deliberative Democracy* (Blackwell, 2003) and in the *Journal of Political Philosophy* (June 2002). The authors are grateful to both publications and especially to the late Peter Laslett and to Robert Goodin for their thoughtful reactions.

PART

I

THINK IT OVER

1

IMAGINE

Deliberation Day—a new national holiday. It will be held two weeks before major national elections. Registered voters will be called together in neighborhood meeting places, in small groups of fifteen, and larger groups of five hundred, to discuss the central issues raised by the campaign. Each deliberator will be paid \$150 for the day's work of citizenship. To allow the rest of the workaday world to proceed, the holiday will be a two-day affair, and every citizen will have the right to take one day off to deliberate on the choices facing the nation.

If Deliberation Day succeeded, everything else would change: the candidates, the media, the activists, the interest groups, the spin doctors, the advertisers, the pollsters, the fund raisers, the lobbyists, and the political parties. All would have no choice but to adapt to a more attentive and informed public. When the election arrived, the people would speak with a better chance of knowing what they wanted and which candidates were more likely to pursue the popular mandate.

Deliberation Day is a new idea, but it builds on a host of smaller experiments involving ordinary citizens deliberating on public issues. In many different forums, in different cities and countries around the world, citizens have gathered together for experiments in serious and balanced public discussion. Many of these experiments have proved remarkably successful,¹ but we will focus on one particular method of citizen consultation, the Deliberative Poll. Because the Deliberative Poll is designed as a social science experiment,² it provides the best evidence for

the viability of our proposal. Since one of us, Jim Fishkin, has spent the past decade of his professional life designing and observing Deliberative Polls on a wide variety of issues, we can use these social scientific experiments with a solid understanding of their strengths and limitations. We are also in a position to make cautious generalizations of Deliberative Poll results to the rest of the population. In most other citizen forums, it is far less clear how the participants are selected and how their individual opinions are affected by the process.³

A Deliberative Poll is a survey of a random sample of citizens before and after the group has had a chance to deliberate seriously on an issue. The process begins by selecting a representative sample from the population and asking each person a set of questions on the issue raised at the Deliberative Poll. This initial survey is the standard sort conducted by social scientists doing public opinion research. The respondents are then invited to a specified place for a weekend of discussion. A small honorarium and travel expenses are paid to recruit a representative sample.

In preparation for the event, the participants receive briefing materials to lay the groundwork for the discussion. These materials are typically supervised for balance and accuracy by an advisory board of relevant experts and stakeholders. On arrival, the participants are randomly assigned to small groups with trained moderators. When they meet, they not only discuss the general issue but try to identify key questions that merit further exploration. They then bring these questions to balanced panels of competing experts or policymakers in larger plenary sessions. The small groups and plenary sessions alternate throughout the weekend. At the end of the process, the respondents take the same questionnaire they were given on first contact.

These typically reveal big changes in the distribution of citizen opinion. When ordinary people have the chance seriously to consider competing sides of an issue, they take the opportunity to become far more informed. Their considered judgments demonstrate higher levels of knowledge and greater consistency with their basic values and assumptions. These experiments demonstrate that the public has the capacity to deal with complex public issues; the difficulty is that it normally lacks an institutional context that will effectively motivate it to do so.

Our design for Deliberation Day builds upon the practical experience developed at these polls. Our new holiday will require important changes in these time-tested formats. The participation of tens of millions of citizens will require a rethinking of the deliberative process from the ground up. Nevertheless, the experience gained through the polls provides a precious source of guidance for Deliberation Day, as does statistical analysis of the data generated at these experiments.

Deliberative Polls and other microprojects in deliberative democracy provide us with some confidence in the basic feasibility of our proposal. Time and again these real-world exercises have defeated cynics who deny that ordinary citizens have what it takes to think through complex public issues. These sessions don't degenerate into shouting matches or slug-fests. They reveal that ordinary citizens are remarkably good at productive interchange—hearing out spokespersons for different sides, and changing their minds on the basis of new arguments and evidence. Ordinary men and women *can* function successfully as citizens. The challenge is to design institutional contexts in which they are effectively motivated to exercise this competence in productive collaboration with their peers.

But why can't people simply organize themselves, without the assistance of a new civic holiday and its associated social engineering? After all, we don't live in a civic vacuum. Sustained conversations do take place in countless settings—from the breakfast table to the coffee break at the office to the meeting at the neighborhood church or union hall. And their intensity and frequency do increase during election campaigns. But the social context that motivates public deliberation is usually lacking, and the resulting levels of public information are disappointing.

Facts are facts. If six decades of modern public opinion research establish anything, it is that the general public's political ignorance is appalling by any standard. As one influential researcher concludes, "the political ignorance of the American voter is one of the best-documented features of contemporary politics."⁴ And another: "The verdict is stunningly, depressingly clear: most people know very little about politics, and the distribution behind that statement has changed very little if at all over the survey era."⁵

To pick just a few examples: At the height of the Cold War, a majority of the American public could not correctly answer whether the Soviet

Union was in NATO.⁶ While the public reliably supported efforts to protect West Berlin during the Cold War, most Americans did not know that West Berlin was surrounded by East Germany! And as the country considered possible war with Iraq in January 2003, half the public thought that Iraqis were among the 9/11 hijackers.⁷

Other recent work makes the same point. In its comprehensive study of voter involvement in the 2000 election, Harvard's Shorenstein Center quizzed a random sample on their knowledge of the issues just before they went to the polls: "[We] asked respondents to agree or disagree with twelve issue statements—six that addressed Gore's positions and six that concerned Bush's. On the average issue, 38 percent correctly identified the candidate's position, 16 percent incorrectly identified it (an indicator that a third or more of the correct answers were also mere guesses), and 46 percent said they did not know."⁸ A majority was able to identify *only one* of each candidate's stands correctly—with 58 percent saying that Gore favored a prescription drug benefit and 52 percent saying that Bush favored "a large cut in income taxes" (and some of these people were only guessing).⁹ These dismal results are not restricted to the United States. To take just one example, when the British public was recently asked whether Britain had a written or an unwritten Constitution, a quarter said "unwritten," a quarter said "written," and half said "don't know."¹⁰

In a systematic overview of survey questions asking factual questions about politics of the American public, Michael Delli Carpini and Scott Keeter found that

Only 13 percent of the more than 2,000 political questions examined could be answered correctly by 75 percent or more of those asked, and only 41 percent could be answered by more than half the public. Many of the facts known by relatively small percentages of the public seem critical to understanding—let alone effectively acting in—the political world: fundamental rules of the game; classic civil liberties; key concepts of political economy; the names of key representatives; many important policy positions of presidential candidates or the political parties; basic social indicators and significant public policies.¹¹

This is not to say that the mass public is clueless or that it is incapable of dealing with complex political matters. Our position is quite the contrary. When the public is given good reason to pay attention and focus on the issues, it is more than capable of living up to demanding democratic aspirations. And even when it is not paying much attention, it does have some crucial information bearing on its voting decisions¹² and it is resourceful at making use of limited information.¹³ Nevertheless, this information is very limited indeed, leading to large mistakes in mass assessments of the basic problems facing the nation and the nature of the solutions offered by competing candidates.

There is a further problem. Data reported by conventional public opinion polls often exaggerate the public levels of awareness. As Philip Converse of the University of Michigan demonstrated years ago, many of the opinions reported in polls probably do not exist.¹⁴ Phantom opinions or “non-attitudes” are reported by polls because respondents almost never wish to admit that they do not know, even when offered elaborate opportunities for saying so. Hence they pick an alternative, virtually at random.

George Bishop and his colleagues at the University of Cincinnati dramatized this point in their study of attitudes toward the so-called “Public Affairs Act of 1975.” Large percentages of the public offered an opinion even though the act was fictional. The *Washington Post* more recently celebrated the “twentieth unanniversary” of the nonexistent “Public Affairs Act of 1975” by asking respondents about its “repeal.” The sample was split, with half told that President Clinton wanted to repeal the act and half that the “Republican Congress” wanted its repeal. The respondents apparently used these latter cues to guide their answers, without recognizing the fictional character of the entire episode.¹⁵

Even when respondents have actual opinions, they are often “top of the head,” merely reflecting an impression of sound bites and headlines, and highly unstable.¹⁶ The “public opinion” described by the standard poll is rendered even more problematic by the refusal of many people to respond to the pollsters’ inquiries. Nonrespondents may be disproportionately less well-informed—so the surveys of respondents present a misleadingly optimistic picture, even as they reveal widespread ignorance about the elementary facts of political life.¹⁷

Some argue that citizens can function effectively without the kinds of specific knowledge called for by most survey questions. What is really important is for voters to place candidates or political parties in the broader framework of a basic liberal-conservative dimension. Yet Robert Luskin has shown that the American public does a terrible job on this task as well. Once corrections for guessing and nonresponses are introduced, surveys show that the American public does slightly worse in locating the parties' positions than it would do if it proceeded by flipping a coin.¹⁸

None of this is really controversial. Indeed, the past generation of political economists has gone to great lengths to explain why voter ignorance is only to be expected.¹⁹ Acquiring and analyzing information is a time-consuming business. Time spent on public affairs competes with time acquiring information on more personal matters—like the price and quality of cars or houses. In these cases, each of us suffers a direct cost for ignorant decisions—I may buy a lemon unless I am careful to analyze options ahead of time. In contrast, nobody pays a price for voting ignorantly since the outcome of a major election never hinges on a single ballot. (Even *Bush v. Gore* isn't an exception!) As a consequence, it may well be "rational" for individual voters to remain ignorant about public matters. They can then reserve all their time analyzing information on cars, houses, and other matters of personal consumption—where the sanction for ignorant decisions is felt directly. This point doesn't depend on whether voters are public-spirited citizens. Even if they are deeply concerned about the nation's future, their individual votes still don't make a difference, and so there isn't an instrumental reason to make their choice a well-informed one.

We do not endorse the cynical conception of instrumental rationality that often motivates the expositors of the theory of "rational ignorance." Most residents of Western democracies recognize that they have a responsibility as citizens to take the public good seriously. Nonetheless, the political economists are on the right track in explaining why Westerners do such a terrible job fulfilling these responsibilities.

And things are getting worse, not better. Most Americans continue to rely principally on television to follow the campaign, and yet the networks increasingly treat politics as a marginal matter. In 1992 nightly newscasts

carried 728 campaign stories during the general elections, averaging 8.2 minutes per show; in 2000 there were 462 stories, averaging 4.2 minutes.²⁰ More broadly, the proportion of news coverage devoted to public affairs has diminished from 70 percent in 1980 to 50 percent in 2000.²¹

Despite our present infatuation with the Internet, the rising forces of technology threaten to exacerbate the consequences of civic privatism. We have a public dialogue that is ever more efficiently segmented in its audiences and morselized in its sound bites. We have an increasingly tabloid news agenda that dulls the sensitivities of an increasingly inattentive citizenry. And we have mechanisms of feedback from the public, from viewer call-ins to self-selected Internet polls, that emphasize the intense commitments of narrow constituencies, unrepresentative of the public at large.

Add to this the powerful new forces unleashed by modern polling techniques, and we are confronting a serious problem indeed. Earlier generations of politicians might have wished to exploit the ignorance and selfishness of voters, but they labored under certain technical disadvantages. They were free to read newspapers, talk to cronies, attend community functions, weigh letters from constituents, and canvass opinion informally through local political organizations.²² But without scientific random sampling and the modern art of survey design, they had a hard time getting an accurate picture of public opinion. They could not penetrate the hearts and minds of ordinary Americans to learn *precisely* which combinations of myth and greed might work to generate support from key voting groups. In the absence of good data, even the most cynical politicians sometimes were obliged to consider the good of the country.

But over the past few decades, this uncertainty has been dissolved by the scientific study of public opinion. The entire point of “focus group” and public opinion research conducted during campaigns is to discover the power of different images and slogans to motivate voters. These studies proceed in an exceedingly fine-grained fashion. Politicians “pretest” their positions with focus groups, constantly modifying them to increase their appeal to marginal voters. Within this high-tech environment, James Madison’s great hope that legislators would filter out ignorant and selfish impulses seems hopelessly old-fashioned. Campaigns can now aim to spin a precise message that will snare a majority.

Focus group research is followed up with the scientific marketing of candidates by sound-bite specialists. Sloganeering and flag-waving have been important in American politics from the beginning. Nevertheless, we have been making a great leap forward into a brave new world. Candidates nowadays really are being sold like commodities. Commercial norms have completely colonized the norms for political “advertisements.” Techniques for selling a Lexus or a pack of Marlboros are simply carried over to sell the president. The idea that principles of deliberative democracy might require, for example, that no “advertisement” last for less than five minutes would be dismissed out of hand by the highly paid consultants who take their cue from Madison Avenue. The search is on for ten-second sound bites that hit “hot-button” issues discovered through focus group research.

Matters are made worse by the failure of campaign finance reform.²³ The new techniques cost lots of money. Given the current financial imbalance, the invisible hand of the political marketplace is leading us to the plutocratic management of democratic forms. But the basic problem would not go away even if we managed to equalize the financial playing field. This might lead to the redistribution of sound bites and hot-button issues, not the creation of a deliberative democracy.

Our anxiety is not new. Eighty years ago, Walter Lippmann was already remarking upon the phantom character of public opinion in the modern world and despairing at its consequences for democratic life:²⁴

The private citizen today has come to feel rather like a deaf spectator in the back row. . . . He does not know for certain what is going on, or who is doing it, or where he is being carried. No newspaper reports his environment so that he can grasp it; no school has taught him how to imagine it; his ideals, often, do not fit with it; listening to speeches, uttering opinions and voting do not, he finds, enable him to govern it. He lives in a world which he cannot see, does not understand and is unable to direct.²⁵

Lippmann’s response to this dilemma also turned out to be prophetic. He did not call for a reconstruction of institutions to encourage more

active and informed citizenship. He counseled us to lower expectations about democracy, and learn to live with the status quo.

The canonical case for lowered expectations was provided by Joseph Schumpeter in *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*.²⁶ As the Nazis rose to power in Germany, Schumpeter moved to America, but he was understandably skeptical about the democratic majority's capacity to engage in an ongoing process of public reason. He continued to endorse democracy, but for more humble reasons — its capacity to disrupt political elites and thereby prevent tyranny. However ignorant it may be, the democratic majority is a notoriously fickle beast: it may well place Tweedledum into the presidency as a result of the brilliance of his smile or his passion for apple pie, but the next election may find the majority backing Tweedledee for equally frivolous reasons. So long as the Ins are randomly ousted by the Outs, the powerful will find it far harder to oppress the rest of us. Although the disruption of tyranny is a worthy goal, it is a far cry from the democratic vision of ordinary Americans taking control of their own fate after due deliberation.²⁷

The mainline of democratic theory has, in any event, moved beyond Schumpeterianism to embrace a pluralist conception of American democracy that seems downright optimistic, if only by comparison. On this pluralist view, the secret of the system is the wide variety of interest groups constantly pressuring politicians to achieve satisfactory public outcomes. Though individual voters may be ignorant, their organized groups are looking out for their interests — bargaining with one another, and with politicians, to get the results that roughly correspond to the public interest. Rather than merely exposing elites to almost random electoral shocks, American democracy achieves a certain form of popular responsiveness through relentless interest group pressure.²⁸

This is hardly enough to satisfy the partisan of deliberative democracy. Interests don't count under pluralism unless they can organize, and many groups find this difficult — especially those with broad concerns dealing with matters like environmental integrity and social justice. Even more fundamentally, citizens don't get much of a chance to criticize and redefine the interests asserted in their name by group leaders. Serious democrats should insist on something more than a system of elite wheeling and dealing. Ordinary citizens have the fundamental right to determine

the broad direction of public policy through electoral decisions made on the basis of popular deliberation.

But this democratic dream seems to shatter against the hard facts with which we began. Given the notorious failure of Americans to take the time and trouble for the hard work of citizenship, isn't talk of popular sovereignty so much hot air?

Not necessarily. As we shall see, Deliberative Polls and other microexperiments establish that ordinary people *are* perfectly willing to take up the task of citizenship within appropriate settings. Perhaps the problem lies not so much in each individual's failings but in a collective failure to organize our elections appropriately.

Speaking broadly, we have been passive as the massive technological forces of the late twentieth century have transformed our electoral practices before our eyes. This contrasts sharply with nineteenth-century attitudes toward election reform. During the declining decades of the 1800s, American elections were conducted in a way that also made talk of popular sovereignty into a joke. In those days voters did not cast secret ballots but marked their preferences in plain view of party bosses—who paid off the faithful in cash and kind, and meted out retribution for any show of independence. It was the introduction of the secret ballot from Australia, not any sudden burst of civic virtue, that served to remedy this sorry situation. Once each voter went behind a curtain, it was no longer possible for leaders to identify who should be rewarded with a turkey for his loyalty and who should be denied all further patronage for his independence. A system that seemed hopelessly corrupt achieved a more credible democratic standing through intelligent institutional reform.

Deliberation Day raises a similar possibility. By all means, let us take citizens as they are, and not as starry-eyed versions of democratic theory wish them to be. It still isn't obvious that the invisible hand of the political marketplace has encouraged ordinary people to make good use of whatever civic virtue they possess. Is the time ripe for another innovation, like the secret ballot, that channels the invisible hand of political interests in a more productive direction?

Maybe not. The secret ballot promised a neat technological fix to the problem of vote buying then afflicting American democracy. Simply by drawing a curtain around the booth, each citizen managed to insulate

himself from a host of corrupt incentives. Our current problem isn't amenable to a magical technological solution. Granted that a majority of voters are woefully ignorant and readily manipulated, is there any guarantee that Deliberation Day won't make the problem worse? What is to prevent the new holiday from degenerating into a protototalitarian system forcing Americans into "political education" centers to hear spokesmen for the government brainwash them into "the truth"?

Even without the dreadful experiences of the twentieth century, it would be silly to make light of such fears. Nevertheless, we don't really think that creeping totalitarianism is a serious problem in the contemporary West, and it won't be hard to create safeguards that make such extreme fears entirely unrealistic. The real challenge is to design a format that has a reasonable prospect of enabling millions of ordinary people to engage in constructive dialogue rather than destructive shouting matches. We hope to convince you that this too is a manageable problem, and that the collective effort is well worth the distinctive contribution that Deliberation Day would make to our democratic life. In making the case, we emphasize problems as well as solutions, and we are careful not to claim too much for our proposal. Even if successful, it would constrain, but not eliminate, the dangers posed by civic privatism.

The question is not whether Deliberation Day measures up to some unattainable ideal but whether it deserves serious consideration as a constructive response to the sound-bite politics that will otherwise overwhelm us. This question cannot be answered until we develop our proposal in a sustained way. We shall be presenting you with a reasonably detailed framework, but in a distinctive spirit. If anything like Deliberation Day were to come into being a decade or two from now, it would look quite different from the holiday described in this book. But only by confronting a host of real-world design issues can we give you a sense of the practical promise and moral choices involved in the project. We shall succeed if our own sketch prompts counterproposals, leading to further improvements in the format. The ongoing dialogue would give further substance to our basic claim: Deliberation Day is no mere pipe dream, but a realistic response to a serious problem.

This is an essay in realistic utopianism. We do not underestimate the serious political obstacles that block acceptance of anything like Delibera-

tion Day. As the sorry story of campaign finance reform teaches, these roadblocks will be substantial. But their existence should not be allowed to deflect us from a deeper problem. Though liberal ideals of democracy are currently ascendant, triumphalism has provoked self-congratulation, not political imagination. Westerners have been content to offer up present practice as if it were an adequate model for the world.

This is a serious mistake. Liberal democracy is a relative newcomer on the historical stage—very much a work in progress even in those few countries with established traditions. Short-term roadblocks should not prevent vigorous exploration of the horizon of realistic possibilities.

So join us in a thought-experiment, and let us see where it leads.

Perhaps a roadmap will prove useful. In Part I we aim to convince you that DDay is an entirely practical idea; if we fail here, there is no need to read further. But if we succeed, it makes sense to move on to Part II, where we explore DDay's relation to democratic theory in general, and to the American tradition in particular.

The next two chapters go together. In Chapter 2 we describe the new holiday: Is there a future for civic celebration in the twenty-first century? If so, how should DDay be organized to make democratic deliberation a social reality in the lives of ordinary citizens? In Chapter 3 we compare our proposed format for DDay with the real-world experience accumulated in the Deliberative Polls. The DP data show that ordinary citizens are willing and able to engage in constructive dialogue, and that deliberation makes a very real difference in citizens' understanding and in their ultimate decisions on the merits. In shaping our concrete proposal for DDay, we have relied heavily on the protocols developed at the DPs. But for a variety of reasons, our proposal departs significantly in some respects. We consider the most important differences in turn and conclude that they do not seriously undermine the hopeful implications of the DP studies.

Chapter 4 opens the next stage in the larger argument. There we show how DDay will revolutionize the methods of governing and campaigning that increasingly dominate the democratic world. Once sitting presidents and prime ministers have to face the voters on DDay, they will no longer rely on the latest poll when making key decisions. Pollsters

who measure “top of the head” opinion can no longer serve as reliable guides to the judgments reached by voters after a full day’s discussion. *Government by pollster* will be replaced with *government by responsible politician*—a representative whose motivations are a bit closer to those postulated by Madison and other creators of the modern system of democratic government.

Campaigning will also be different. While ten-second sound bites will remain on the airwaves, they will now compete with longer “infomercials” designed to anticipate the case the candidates will make on Deliberation Day. A politician who relies solely on TV sound bites risks losing millions of voters on DDay. He will also lose precious momentum as the campaign moves down the homestretch from DDay to Election Day. No sensible politician would accept such a risk.

There is no need to exaggerate. DDay won’t end the politics of charisma or demagogic appeals to fear and hate; but it will keep in check some of the darker forces facilitated by our present technologies of communication and shift the balance toward a more deliberative politics. And that is not nothing.

In Chapter 4 we make the systemic case for DDay by considering how the new holiday would change the incentives confronting candidates as they run for the presidency and as they govern from the White House. In Chapter 5 we extend this presidentialist paradigm to a variety of other electoral contests—including the distinctive modifications required to adapt DDay to multiparty contests characteristic of parliamentary systems throughout the world. We also consider how rising Internet technologies will open up new DDay possibilities over the next generation or two.

But we conclude Part I on a less visionary note. Without indulging futuristic fantasies, how much would it really cost to implement DDay in the here and now? In Chapter 6 (and an accompanying appendix) we consider both the big-ticket items and the variety of other expenses required to run and administer Deliberation Day. When citizens are called to do jury duty, they receive a modest daily stipend. Should DDay participants receive more, or less, or nothing? How costly would it be to prepare schools and other civic centers for citizen deliberation? And so forth.

Our estimates suggest that DDay is entirely affordable—in terms of real economic resources, it would be one of the least significant programs in the federal budget. But in terms of democratic values, the gain will be inestimable. We can't provide any assurance, of course, that our experiment will succeed. But without continuing experiments, it is hard to see how democracy will remain a flourishing enterprise in the twenty-first century.

Or so we will argue in Part II.

2

THE HOLIDAY

Deliberation Day will be a serious holiday. We will reserve two days for the deliberative exercise, with half the citizenry invited each day. This will allow the other half to continue working — permitting basic services to continue while maintaining the civic focus essential to a serious collective conversation. Some employers may compel their labor force to ignore their civic obligations, but they will do so at their peril — any such demand will be subjected to heavy penalties.¹ This won't deter all violations, but it will suffice to make them exceptional.

While citizens are guaranteed a day off, nobody will force them to participate in Deliberation Day activities. They are perfectly free to catch up on their sleep or go to the movies. But if a citizen chooses to spend the day in a civic discussion on the issues raised by the forthcoming election, he or she will receive a stipend of \$150 as compensation.

As we shall show, all this is perfectly doable. The question is whether it is worth the effort.

An answer requires us to reflect on the present state of our national holidays. Speaking broadly, they have disintegrated into occasions for shopping sprees, ski weekends and sunbathing rituals. Is there still a place for civic celebration in America?

A thoughtful answer depends in part upon the design of the new holiday. How to create a format for collective deliberation that can make a serious contribution to democratic life? As we shall explain in succeeding chapters, our concrete proposal builds on existing experience with Delib-

erative Polling and other microexperiments in political conversation. But this experience takes us only so far. It is one thing to organize an exercise for five hundred citizens in a Deliberative Poll, quite another to create a plausible framework for tens of millions to engage in the thoughtful practice of self-government. A host of fascinating questions arise, and we expect others to resolve them differently.

Nevertheless, it is important to aim for a concrete proposal. If we are to convince you that Deliberation Day is not merely a utopian dream, we must confront the series of mid-sized trade-offs required to translate democratic ideals into political realities. Our efforts to resolve these practical trade-offs are ultimately less important than our effort to define them. This will not only provoke others to propose better formats. It will make some progress toward defining the ultimate questions: Is Deliberation Day sufficiently valuable and practical to warrant serious consideration as the next generation defines its political agenda? Or does this exercise in institutional design suggest that Deliberation Day can't work and that we should resign ourselves to a politics of media hype based on the Madison Avenue manipulation of focus groups?

Do Civic Holidays Have a Future?

Broadly speaking, our secular holidays are generated by four logics. Some honor great men: Washington, Lincoln, and Martin Luther King Jr. Some, great events: the discovery of America, the declaration of independence, the sacrifices of war. Still others, great causes: Labor Day is an obvious example, but Martin Luther King Day is a tribute to the triumphs of the civil rights movement. And finally there are holidays that serve as signals for celebratory rituals: Thanksgiving Day signals an occasion for families to gather for celebration, and New Year's Day for friends to come together and look forward to better times ahead.

Different holidays have suffered different fates over time. Great men lose much of their inspirational quality as their concrete historical struggles become lost in the mists. During the early decades of the Republic, Washington's Birthday was a day of great rejoicing—exceeded only by the Fourth of July.² Now it has been merged with Lincoln's Birthday into a generic Presidents Day, principally celebrated by massive bargains

offered at malls throughout the nation. Great events suffer similar disintegration: the struggle that we call World War I was originally known as “the Great War,” and the participants marked its ending by creating Armistice Day as a national holiday. But other great wars have put the first one into perspective, and the original holiday has been transformed from a celebration of peace into a celebration of Veterans Day. Memorial Day, originally created to honor the Civil War dead, has fared better, since it can readily be generalized to remember soldiers killed in all wars. Nevertheless, its civic meaning has greatly declined in national life. Independence Day has fared a bit better—fireworks still blaze, and some may take a moment to reflect on the meaning of Jefferson’s Declaration, but it’s fun in the sun that matters most to most. The movement holidays have also sustained themselves to a degree, thanks to the continuing interest of concrete social groups in celebrating their achievements. (The conversion of Armistice Day to Veterans Day exploits a similar logic.)

Martin Luther King Day is still a youngster, but all the others suffered terrible erosion over the twentieth century—and not only because of the ravages of time. At the root of their decline are two forces: the rise of mass-marketing and the transportation revolution.³ During the nineteenth century, many Americans’ idea of a good time was simply to take a day off and listen to local orators celebrate Independence Day while enjoying the music of a local band and the glory of a military drill.⁴ But this prospect pales in comparison to the pleasures of a day at the beach. Though it is a bare shadow of its former self, Independence Day has not suffered as badly as some others. At least it is still celebrated each year on July 4, while the dates of others shift about from year to year to create three-day weekends for the convenience of the skiing or swimming public.

Lest one suppose that this process is inexorable, consider the different fate of holidays of the fourth type—the ones that mark out concrete communal rituals, notably Thanksgiving and New Year’s. Thanksgiving provides an especially revealing example because, unlike New Year’s, the celebration does not invite a great deal of commercial activity. Americans may find it difficult to believe but, except for Canada, this holiday is unknown elsewhere. Families throughout the world gather together from time to time, but not for a common day of thanksgiving that sets the day apart as a communal event. While the holiday is rooted in the nation’s religious