

BLUEPRINT for a NEW AMERICA

Can We Save the World's Most Admired Republic?



KARL ALBRECHT, PH.D.

FOREWORD BY

MAJOR GARRETT

SR. WASHINGTON CORRESPONDENT

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Karl Albrecht, Ph.D.

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Introduction: Why I Wrote this Book

Think of an old house – one you’ve lived in for a long time. You grew up there. Your memories, your experiences, your joys, and your sorrows all connect to this comfortable – if slightly dilapidated – old homestead.

And now, you’ve inherited the old place. While you love it and cherish it, you also realize that it needs some improvements. Years of fixing and patching and painting and scrubbing and scraping have kept it habitable, but you know that the time has come to modernize it. It needs remodeling.

Now you face the very personal question: How can I modernize it and still keep its essential character – the things I love and value about it?

By analogy, that question confronts all Americans as we accept responsibility for the future of the Republic we’ve inherited. Do we content ourselves with continuing to live in the same old house, and neglect its upkeep? Or do we take seriously our responsibility for its future?

Let’s all acknowledge that we live in an *axial age* – a big-time turning point in the life of the great American Republic. We’ll get the republic we deserve, and we’ll bequeath whatever remains of it to our children and their children.

This book represents an attempt to set out, in a fairly organized way, the possibilities we can see for the New America. I've chosen the metaphor of the blueprint, and the related metaphor of remodeling, to emphasize the crucial need to marry the old and the new in an organized and intelligent way.

We'll sketch the blueprint in terms of *ten key building blocks* that a successful republic needs. In each of these ten remodeling categories, I'll attempt to spell out the need for change and identify some interesting options for improving the way the Republic can meet the challenges.

As a management consultant with a thirty-year career in studying successful leaders and successful enterprises, I assess the main problem we face in rethinking our republic as a basic and profound *lack of vision and imagination*. Without visionary leadership, I see us as collectively sleepwalking into a very dangerous future.

Our electoral process has given us a long parade of mediocre thinkers – some less mediocre than others – who have occupied the White House and the Congress. We seem to systematically eliminate the people with the big ideas and bold solutions. We seem to prefer demagogues, charmers, hero figures, populists, and those who pander to our fears, phobias, and self-interests.

Does my declaration sound a bit extreme? Good. In this book, *I invite you to think extremely*. I want you to look beyond the old thinking and the old cliches, and connect the dots that most others don't even see. George Bernard Shaw declared, "Some men see things as they are and ask, Why? I dream of things that never were and ask, Why not?" In this book, we take the second path.

Would you like a simple and telling example of this woeful lack of imagination in the way we operate our Republic? Try this one: Why, if we claim we want all citizens to vote in national elections, have we always held elections on a

weekday – a Tuesday – when most employed people have to work at their jobs? Why don't we hold elections on a Saturday, for example, and make it a national holiday? The reasons might have made sense 100 years ago, but they hardly make sense now. Why haven't we changed this rule? Because, collectively, *we just didn't bother to*.

I only ask that you, the reader, approach this journey with an open mind. As difficult as it can seem at certain times and certain points in this exploration, I ask you to suspend your judgment – *all the way to the end of the reading journey*.

Let's think of this journey into republic-building as a short course in *system thinking*.

As with any system, the various subsystems of the republic must fit together in a special way. Understanding how one solution works can depend on understanding how another one fits together with it. Please get the whole picture before you give in to the temptation to shoot down any one piece of it. Let's judge all of the innovations presented here against the perspective of the overall concept for the new Republic.

You'll discover, as you read, that I like to use our history as a starting point for thinking about our future. I have good company here: the ancient Chinese philosopher Confucius reportedly advised: "If you would divine the future, first study the past." And, brother Mark Twain offered, "History doesn't repeat itself, but it often rhymes."

So, in many cases, I'll offer a short flashback to the relevant stories, episodes, and events that have brought us to our present reality. I hope you'll find some of these little historical brain snacks interesting in their own way, and more importantly that you'll see how they might inform our understanding of the big questions in front of us.

Enough talking. Let's roll up our sleeves and get to work.

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