



Thoughts from Linda:

**The Untied States of America**  
*Polarization, Fracturing, and Our Future*

Juan Enriquez  
2005

“United we stand; divided we fall.”

That simple but profound phrase coined by Abraham Lincoln via a paraphrase from Biblical sources inspired this book, titled The Untied States of America. Untied is the opposite of ‘united.’ As defined in the introduction, it means: “1. To loosen or unfasten; 2. A situation resulting from the uncomfortable feeling, beginning in 2000 and intensifying in 2004, that many people from large chunks of the country don’t understand their fellow citizens and vice versa. Additional definitions include 3. The historical fact of life in much of the world—Europe, Asia, Africa—as gaggles of new nations form and disband and finally, 4. the subject of a book published in 2005 by Juan Enriquez focusing on the *untying phenomenon*, with a larger purpose of starting a dialogue between citizens about what people who love their country should think about and do to prevent untying.”

I first heard Juan Enriquez speak at a PopTech Conference in Camden, Maine, in 2007. He was mesmerizing then as a speaker and his topic, of the many ethical choices awaiting us in the future, was intriguing. Today he is all over YouTube with Ted talks and has also written several other books. While written in 2005, with a few name and date substitutions, it could have been written in 2022.

He is, in many ways, a ‘renaissance man’ focusing today on teaching and business ventures. He is the Founding Director of the Life Sciences Project at Harvard Business School and his work has been published in Harvard Business Review, Foreign Policy, Science, and the New York Times. He is well-recognized as a leading authority on the economic and political impacts of life sciences. He is chairman and CEO of Biotechonomy LLC. Fortune magazine profiled him as “Mr. Gene,” and he was asked

by the Van Heyst Group to co-organize the life sciences summit commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the discovery of DNA.

This book is interesting to read for many reasons. I appreciate his primary question and the exploration of how a nation could become, in fact, 'untied.' Secondly, his writing style is unorthodox, and the book reads with a staccato rhythm as he hits his themes and uses different type fonts for emphasis as well as compelling photos to illustrate his points. Finally, he ties together financial, cultural, and political drivers from a historical perspective, showing how much there is to learn about the transformation of sovereign nations, including how they can change and dissolve. In fact, reading it is like listening to a Ted Talk.

It is divided into eight sections, and the titles of each tell you where he is going: *How Dare You? Untied States, Technology and Religion's Brutal March, Excuse Me...I Was Here First, Borders Bounce: Do You Habla Espanol? Democracy + Open Borders = Four Mexicos, Europe and Its Discontents (What Is A Country, Anyway?) and Like Your Flag? Want To Keep It?*

In his first chapter, he tackles the question: "Could it ever happen here?" and explores the tenuous nature of any organization where the economics do not support the activities of that structure...whether it is a family, a company, or as he notes, a nation. He was quite prescient in calling out the key elements that ultimately resulted in the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, writing this in 2005. He mentioned a few salient points: "The US spends a lot more than it earns. It has done so for years. This is not sustainable. From time immemorial, the last thing a government does...It drives the nation to bankruptcy. You cannot spend 5% to 6% more than the country earns every year without serious consequences."

He continues to take you on a journey of discovery that imagines just how easy it could be for the United States to look quite different over the next fifty years. For example, he notes the number of states that have already suggested the idea of succession and mentioned several regions of the country that have promoted the same ideas. He shows that throughout the developing world, it is often the regions that have the resources to be richer that usually attempt to leave first, such as Biafra, which holds much of the oil of Nigeria, and Katanga, which has the copper in the Congo, and Chiapas which has an abundance of Mexico's gas, timber, and hydropower. He mentions how politicians in Northern Italy would like to cast off the South, how parts of Belgium's rich Northern area want to eject the French region, and how Scotland has already attempted to leave the UK. His key point is that "Nowadays it is not that hard

to dissolve, or split, a country. Flags, borders, and anthems are delicate. They are real. But, they are also myths... *(definition of myth: the way things are, as people in a particular society believe them to be).*"

As he points out, we may not pay so much attention to or contemplate this possibility in the United States since we have been pretty stable in the Western Hemisphere. We've not generated any true new borders since 1910. And yet, he contends this thinking may be short-sighted, asking the question: "How many stars do you think, will be in the US flag in fifty years?" After reading this book, I find that a tough question to answer, considering the many divisive elements we all experience in our culture today.

Countries fragment regularly on the planet, often driven by historical factors such as race, ethnicity, language, culture, and colony of origin. Looking globally, he notes that of the 193 countries today in the United Nations, there were only 50 such members in 1950. He reminds us that some of the atlases of the 1700s look similar to maps we see today, especially in Europe and Africa.

His second chapter deals with the United States, and he presents a compelling argument that takes the potential for division beyond the pure economics of the situation. In this chapter, he explores the red and blue United States but takes us beyond the more traditional dialogue of what we read and hear in our political discourse of today. He explores the differences in where knowledge and money are generated versus where they are spent. For example, he notes that, on average, it takes about 3,000 Americans to generate one US patent. And the states where it takes fewer people, tend to vote Democratic while the opposite would be true for Republican states.

Subsequent chapters explore immigration, native Americans, and their own sovereignty within the US, as well as dynamic forces driving the 'untied possibilities' in both Canada and Mexico. He illustrates the divisions in Mexico and the real potential of the 'four countries' of Mexico. He compares Central Mexico to a 'compact Poland,' Northern Mexico to Chile, Maya Mexico to Tunisia, and Southern Mexico to Ecuador in a very informative section. He is careful to point out that he is not advocating for Mexico to split, nor is he saying that would be a good outcome. But rather, he wants to make sure that all concerned understand the very real possibilities.

He encourages open discourse about what he sees as a distinct possibility in Canada and the United States, saying, "Country splits often become irreversible long before they are recognized de facto and de jure. So, if you love your flag, your country, you

have to be honest enough to recognize a country is a temporary myth, sustained, supported, and strengthened by people like yourself...And, you should continuously remind yourself just how often citizens end up supporting an alternate myth." As Edmund Burke, the 18th-century British statesman, economist, and philosopher, said, "commonwealths are...are artificial creations...arbitrary productions of the human mind." Basically, citizenship is "buying into a national brand." And Enriquez points out that "when brands promise one thing and deliver another, when they disappoint or hurt their consumers, they erode...they lose support."

This book is a most interesting read and reveals numerous attention-deserving examples for any serious American (or North American!) to explore. He tackles the entire concept of the nation-state and what it means to be sovereign. As he concludes, he notes, "I am not promoting, nor am I predicting, fewer US states, or a gaggle of Canadas, or four Mexicos within a decade (remember that would have been by 2015.) Like you, I do not seek or want great countries to break up.

But 50 years is a long time.

One hundred years is close to the half-life of the US and Mexico. As he says, "Untying is like an avalanche. A few snowflakes accumulate atop a mountain. Each storm piles on more snowflakes until you get great, compact slabs, and cornices grow unstable overhangs. The whole mountain crashes. "

"If you know what you are looking for, you can sometimes prevent avalanches by releasing pressure in specific spots. When politicians lose the ability to talk to many of their colleagues, when many of your fellow citizens come to represent evil, it will get harder and harder to work together to overcome the inevitable challenges that all countries face."

He did write this book with the desire to start a serious debate, one that points out that throughout history, all nations untie. He urges a discussion of the seemingly impossible and hopes that with knowledge comes power and motivation to do something about it.

You will not be disappointed in this thought-provoking and informative book. It is even more timely now than in 2005 and deserves our full attention.