

[*The Untied States of America: Polarization, Fracturing, and Our Future*, Juan Enriquez, Crown, 352 pages]

One Nation, Divisible

By Peter J. Lynch

“HOW MANY STARS, do you think, will be in the U.S. flag in fifty years?” This is the question posed by Juan Enriquez in *The Untied States of America*. If the fault lines in American society widen, will cities, states, or entire regions decide they would be better off charting their own course under a banner other than the Stars and Stripes? As Enriquez suggests, the outcome remains far from certain, but not for the reasons he thinks.

The CEO of a biotech venture-capital firm, Enriquez likens citizenship to “buying into a national brand.” That word “buying” is key. Much like Thomas Friedman, he insists that, for the sake of competitiveness in the global marketplace, America ought to be a place where the world’s best and brightest can come to strike it rich—those who perhaps aren’t as gifted but will work hard picking fruit, building McMansions, slaughtering animals, and washing dishes are invited too. That’s right, only by filling the country with all manner of unassimilated foreigners whose primary allegiance is to the Almighty Dollar can we prevent it from becoming “untied.”

It’s doubtful that Enriquez actually believes this nonsense, since he acknowledges that English-speaking Americans born in America don’t have as much in common with one another as they once did. In fact, people in the blue states “have a lot more in common with Canadians than they do with those living in red states. They are, in general, wealthier, more liberal, more secular, pay more taxes, believe in some government ...” He illustrates this disconnect by comparing the hugely successful *Da Vinci Code* to the equally popular *Left*

Behind series; yet how many people have read both? When you can’t relate to your fellow countrymen because they listen to talk radio instead of NPR, watch Fox News not CNN, and shop at Safeway rather than Trader Joe’s, the odds are not good you’ll identify with those who listen to “El Zol,” watch Telemundo, and shop at the Latin American grocery.

These differences—while superficial—are nevertheless indicative of more serious divisions in the American body politic. What Enriquez doesn’t seem to notice is how these divisions become exacerbated by the close quarters necessitated by the unitary political system. Witness the ferocity of the abortion, stem-cell research, or intelligent-design debates. This is in part due to the fact that almost everything is now a national issue. There was a time when the Kansas Board of Education could make decisions for the schoolchildren of Kansas without input from the Upper East Side. Not any more. The situation creates the perfect recipe for resentment of one’s fellow citizens, particularly in light of the correlation between geographic and ideological proximity these days. Hatred of George W. Bush on the coasts and in big cities, for example, can transform into blanket animosity toward the Middle American yokels who foisted him upon the entire country.

To Enriquez’s mind, any tension in America is attributable not to this phenomenon but to the Neanderthals who refuse to “buy into the national brand,” which presumably entails climbing aboard the globalist, open-borders, multilingual bandwagon. For someone who unquestionably regards himself as a tolerant person, he doesn’t have a lot of patience for those who feel their way of life is threatened by the brave new world’s “knowledge economy” that so excites him and his colleagues in the biotechnology field.

Anyone with a strong metaphysical inclination that influences him beyond the cozy confines of his chosen house of worship also needs re-education in matters American, according to Enriquez. He claims the United States was better

off when it “made science its dominant religion.” What a remarkable statement. In one sentence, the author makes his readers question his understanding not only of science and religion but history as well. Enriquez sees the unfortunate, heavy-handed politicking surrounding the premature death of Terri Schiavo at the insistence of her husband as evidence of an attempted theocratic plot perpetrated by hypocrites giving lip service to the sanctity of life. After all, President Bush signed off on the execution of a lot of criminals in Texas, and Bush’s fellow Texan, Tom DeLay, “allowed his father to die in 1988 after a similar tragedy” to Mrs. Schiavo’s.

Eventually, if a sizable segment of the American population persists in its mossbacked ignorance and fails to embrace every dubious scientific fad and Third World immigrant wholeheartedly, its more enlightened neighbors might begin to consider whether remaining tied to it is in their best interest. Enriquez realizes that the Northeast will most likely lead the drive for secession or devolution. Drawing on examples from across the globe, he shows that the impetus for devolution arises most often in wealthier regions, such as Northern Italy, Biafra, and Slovenia, whose inhabitants view their poorer, less sophisticated countrymen as dead weight. Although he overlooks the Second Vermont Republic movement, profiled by Bill Kauffman in the Dec. 19, 2005 issue of *TAC*, he does mention secessionist agitation in antebellum New England and that today Northeastern states pay far more into the U.S. Treasury than they get in return. However, it is not entirely outside the realm of possibility that, at the other end of the ideological spectrum, the people of a deeply God-fearing red state—maybe Utah or Alabama—will some day try to sever their ties to an increasingly godless federal government carefully scrubbed of the values they hold dear.

Secession may seem a somewhat drastic measure, and it really is. A vastly simpler solution can be found by restoring an aspect of American government

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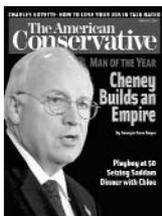
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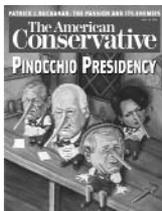


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established by the founders that has fallen into disuse. Writing only a few years after World War II, Garet Garrett speculated that the masses' opposition to U.S. involvement in the conflagration prior to Pearl Harbor proved to the elite that they must conduct the country's foreign policy without any regard for the wishes of *hoi polloi*—or the Constitution. Something similar has happened with states' rights. Since a number of states misused their sovereignty to ensure blacks and whites remained separate and unequal, the federal government usurped many of the powers traditionally reserved to the states. The states' rights cause is now dismissed as unsuited to modern-day America, and anyone who makes a case for it is accused of secretly longing for a return to Jim Crow.

This is a shame because a truly federal system would solve a lot of the problems described by Enriquez. Arguing in support of this position, columnist Walter Williams wrote:

The best thing the president and Congress can do to heal our country is to reduce the impact of government on our lives. Doing so will not only produce a less divided country and greater economic efficiency but bear greater faith and allegiance to the vision of America held by our founders—a country of limited government.

The United States has not grown too big and unwieldy for its own good. Its government has. Instead of fighting each other tooth and nail for control of the federal government, why not simply restrict its powers to their traditional, and more importantly constitutional, level? States need not declare total independence; they just have to insist on their rights as semi-autonomous political entities—rights that they utilized once upon a time. This approach is not without its disadvantages, but it presents a viable middle course between the federal Leviathan's unconstitutional consolidation of power and a complete separation of uncertain amicability.

Curiously, Enriquez discusses neither the devolutionary option nor the constitutional debate over the possibility of secession or nullification, which would have been helpful seeing, as the last time Americans tried to dissolve the political bonds that kept them in the Union hundreds of thousands of them died violent deaths. Apparently he takes it for granted that, unlike in 1861, Washington will now let a state or even states secede peaceably, a very improbable prospect given the imperious nature of the contemporary American presidency. Ask the people of Iraq or Serbia how respectful our leaders are of the sovereignty of independent countries, even ones half a world away.

In the final pages of *The Untied States of America*, Enriquez imagines how the newly inaugurated female winner of the 2008 presidential election will approach her new job. He concludes that, in order to keep the United States from unraveling, she will embrace a vague set of policies eerily reminiscent of Bill Clinton's "Third Way" hokum, keeping in mind "one overarching priority: Make it unrewarding and uncomfortable for anyone, in the mainstream, to promote untying." It is a disappointing end to a disappointing book. All the same, Enriquez should be commended for tackling the subject at all. Traditional conservatives and libertarians can take heart that a moderately liberal establishment figure has written a book that recognizes the current path of the United States as inherently unsustainable, not because of some administration's ultimately peripheral environmental or trade policy but due to a more deep-rooted dysfunction of the American political system itself. Of course, moderately liberal types and their mania for centralized power bear much of the blame for that dysfunction in the first place. At the very least, Juan Enriquez has shown that perhaps a few of them are starting to grasp that something is rotten in these United (for now) States, and it's a bigger problem than George W. Bush. ■

Peter J. Lynch writes from Arlington, Virginia.

[*Our Endangered Values: America's Moral Crisis*, Jimmy Carter, Simon and Schuster, 213 pages]

Counsels of A Liberal Ex-President

By Chip Pitts

TO READERS of this magazine, Jimmy Carter may seem like the last person to whom one should look for moral leadership or foreign-policy guidance. And he admits that he is a better ex-president than he was a president. Critics perceived President Carter's leadership as vacillating between self-righteousness and timidity, political mismanagement of some issues and micromanagement of others. These faults were all on display at times during the Iranian hostage crisis.

In his post-presidential life, however, Carter has been a man who has put his faith into action. Not only has he written a series of books on the subject of "living faith," but he has regularly taken up his hammer to build homes for the poor—with Habitat for Humanity—among other good works.

Our Endangered Values is Carter's 20th book and the first that is overtly political. In it, Carter breaks with tradition to censure his most recent successor. As the unifying conceit for the book, Carter inveighs against a new, more intense fundamentalism that he says is taking over both religion and politics and melding them to the Republic's detriment. Note that this is not the classic Christian fundamentalism historically so prevalent in the South and which still may be found in small towns in Georgia, Arkansas, Alabama, or Louisiana, where there's a church on practically every street corner and people still visit each other when they're sick, make most important decisions locally, and cherish virtues including honesty, thrift, humility, and a healthy

skepticism about those in power, especially politicians. That may be a vanishing world, but it's where Carter still lives.

Carter's ethical and religious beliefs inform and take precedence over his political affiliation, and readers may be surprised to find that they agree with him on more than they might expect. For example, Carter disapproves of both abortion and homosexuality; like Vice President Cheney, he opposes gay marriage but would support states allowing civil unions for homosexuals. Carter reminds us, too, that adultery, fornication, and divorce are sins, and argues for a consistent respect for life, which, to be sure, for him means not only opposition to abortion but to the death penalty. Whether agreeing or disagreeing with Carter's specific positions, opponents and supporters alike will recognize that his faith is sincere and deep.

For that reason he distinguishes traditional religious and moral values, which he wants to conserve, from the sort of politicized fundamentalism he finds so disturbing. Instead of the church on every corner, he sees increasing polarization and vituperation.

INSTEAD OF **HONESTY, THRIFT, AND HUMILITY**, HE SEES **DUPLICITY, PROFLIGATE GOVERNMENT SPENDING, AND ARROGANCE**.

Instead of localism, he sees centralization. Instead of honesty, thrift, and humility, he sees duplicity, profligate government spending, and arrogance. The phenomenon may be illustrated by a somewhat shocking but humorous quote Carter includes in the book, though apparently not said in jest, from his co-religionist Pat Robertson: "You say you're supposed to be nice to the Episcopalians and the Presbyterians and the Methodists and this, that and the other thing. Nonsense. I don't have to be nice to the spirit of the Antichrist."

"Omen V: The Episcopalians"? Some other denominations may have teased Episcopalians for considering the Ten Commandments to be the Ten Sugges-

tions, but few associate them with the Antichrist.

Let's say, however, that you disagree with Carter on this and other points. Why bother reading his book? Because if Carter is right, this new and more virulent fundamentalism and its spillover effects are insidiously jeopardizing not only the basic American values that have provided the framework for this country's unparalleled prosperity and success: they may also be threatening the security and future of America itself.

Carter's argument to this effect is most compelling in his chapters dealing with foreign policy, human rights, and pre-emptive war. In his Farewell Address, Carter said, "America did not invent human rights ... human rights invented America." And this insight has deep roots. The Declaration of Independence was triggered by the litany of tyrannical abuses by King George, including "general warrants" under which British customs officials would enter colonists' homes at will to collect taxes and customs duties, violating the sanctity of an English subject's home that had existed from time immemorial. Unlike the British during the Revolu-

tionary War, George Washington refused to execute prisoners summarily. Similar ideals are reflected in America's founding documents, including the guarantees in the Constitution and Bill of Rights for limited government, protection for the Great Writ of Habeas Corpus, due process of law, and equal protection of the law. From the outset, this historically unique commitment to individual rights has granted the United States the competitive advantage of enormous magnetic appeal, part of what Harvard's Joseph Nye and others have termed "soft power."

Yet, Carter argues, the world has watched as these values have been casually disregarded by the current