UNTIED STATES

“A HOUSE DIVIDED AGAINST ITSELF CANNOT STAND.”

—Abraham Lincoln, from Matthew 12:25
Bankruptcy is by no means enough to calve stars . . .

What arguing over money can do is revive old wounds and exacerbate existing tensions.

(Just ask any divorced couple, or group of inheriting siblings, if money, and the lack thereof, or its unequal distribution, ever caused any friction.)

When you can no longer put off hard choices, because you have run out of cash and credit, you tend to have some pretty frank debates as to who is pulling his or her weight in this relationship.

And it turns out, several states, several regions in fact, are a growing burden on all of our taxes.

As favorite programs are cut, more folks may begin to ask themselves: “Why am I footing the bill for these bums?”

Which is why, often, it is the rich regions, not the poor, Nor the ethnically conflictive ones, that untie first.

This debate has raged from Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia to Spain, England, Italy, and Canada. So one might want to begin by asking, who generates much of the wealth within these fifty U.S. states?

And who spends it?

Start with taxes. Some states get far more money back than they pay out . . .
### Who Gets: Who Gives

(Net Tax Benefit 2003)

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Curious that the most productive, high-tech states tend to vote Democratic. The most dole-dependent tend to be hard-line, antigovernment, antispending Republicans.

75% of Mr. Bush’s electoral votes came from Taker states.

76% of Mr. Kerry’s electoral votes came from Giver states.

In the two years leading up to the Bush II reelection, Midwestern politicians tried to outdo each other in generosity to the heartland.

Farm incomes doubled. Federal subsidies increased 40%, to $15.7 billion in 2005. 70% of these subsidies go to the largest 10% of agribusinesses, not to family farms.

Two Stuttgart, Arkansas, groups, Riceland Foods, Inc., and Producers Rice Mill, Inc., have received $800 million plus.
Knowledge generates much of the U.S.’s new wealth. But not a lot of knowledge grows on farms; in fact, it is highly concentrated, in geographic terms.

Using this lens, take a look at the outcome of the last presidential circus. Republicans and assorted Bushies like this map. . . .

But not as much as they like this map . . .

(Just a few small blue patches if you look at it by country.)
While Republicans cover the most land surface, they do not generate most of the knowledge.

There is a significant difference between where technology, knowledge, and money is generated and where it is spent.

On average, it takes about 3,000 Americans to generate one U.S. patent. The states where it takes fewer people tended to vote Democratic. The opposite was true in Republican states.
If money was the only thing to fight about, the only major cleavage, one would not dare contemplate the idea of an UNTIED States of America.

But there are other fundamental differences.

It is sometimes hard to understand just how divided the U.S. is by just looking at red states and blue states.

When accused of being a "Liberal," the publisher of the *New York Times* responded: "What we saw play out in this election was urban vs. suburban-rural, not red state vs. blue state"... "We are from an urban environment; it comes with the territory."  

**Many of the cities on the East and West Coasts 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...
Some creative folk understood these trends and posted this map on
the Internet just after the 2004 election.

It spread like wildfire because it reinforced existing prejudices, on both sides.

Especially after February 2005, when Canada’s Parliament began
debating gay marriage and the prime minister gave a strong
speech in favor of the measure.

After the 2004 election, Immigration Canada reported
daily inquiries from the U.S. increased from 20,000
per day to 115,000.5

The divisions that lie within the UNTIED States are more
complicated than this map indicates, of course. When you break
out elections county by county, there is a lot of blue within the red,
and vice versa.

Mississippi is among the Reddest of the Red States.
But Winstonville, Mississippi, voted 228 to 14 for Kerry.
Mound Bayou voted 1,073 to 92 for Kerry.

That is not the problem. The problem is that many of these divisions
have been gerrymandered, ossified.

(Often by mutual consent of reelection-seeking congress folk.)
There are very, very few really competitive seats.

In 1976, Carter vs. Ford, 26.8% of voters lived in landslide districts (60% + for one candidate). In 2000, Bush vs. Gore, 45.3% lived in landslide counties. In 2004, less than one in fifty congressional races was for real . . .

As districts gerrymander with ever more precision, people tend to hear the same opinion over and over, from their representatives, from their neighbors.

Prejudices, half truths, and accusations against the “others” are reinforced daily, weekly, yearly. Of the 3,140 counties contested during the Bush-Kerry election, only 65 were won or lost by less than 1%. Some claim turnover in congress is now lower than it was in the Soviet Politburo.

In the 2004 general election, only four House incumbents were defeated.

It is not just the political process that divides. Media is becoming ever more of a business, targeted toward its specific audience’s most treasured beliefs.

Politics and media reflect, and reinforce, deep-rooted divisions. Many folks are simply not on the same page, literally.

After putting aside Harry Potter . . .

During 2003 and 2004, two books dominated best-seller lists. Both use adventure-novel formats and various derring-dos by unlikely heroes to get across their point.

They both had to do with religion . . .
The Da Vinci Code portrays a profoundly corrupt church.8

The Left Behind series portrays a profoundly corrupt society because not enough pay attention to the church.9

Most of the folks who live near me, in the People’s Republic of Massachusetts, have read Da Vinci.

But they had never heard of the second series.

Because I travel a lot, speak to various audiences, and cannot pass by a bookstore without stopping . . .

I began to see large displays of the Left Behind series in places like Northern Kentucky, Kansas, rural Illinois, South Carolina, parts of Florida. After reading a couple of the books, I got more interested in this phenomenon and began asking questions.10

During each talk I gave, I would put up the two book covers and ask people if they had read these books. Usually a large percentage of the audience had read one, but almost never the other.

And usually people were shocked when told how many copies the other book had sold.

By May 2004, The Da Vinci Code had sold more than 7.3 million copies.

By February 2005, the twelve volumes of Left Behind had sold more than 70 million. . . .
We are, according to many, in the midst of the final battle between good and evil.

The Rapture folk take the daily news and place it in the context of the imminent end of the world. Here are some of the headlines they had during the last week of February 2005:

**Rapture-Ready News**

*If therefore thou shalt not watch I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.*

(Rev. 3:3)

- A Third Intifada?
- Iran Nukes Would Trigger Regional Proliferation.
- Russian Nuke Theft "Has Occurred."
- Fury as Pope Links Abortion to Holocaust.
- World Must Act on Bird Flu or Face Pandemic.
- California Braces for More Wicked Weather.
- U.S. Prepares for Germ Attack.
- Pope Declares Democracy "Godless."
- Pope Calls Gay Marriage Part of the "Ideology of Evil."

(Want to see today’s news? Surf over to http://www.raptureready.com/.)

P.S. After you read the day’s rapture news, scroll down to the "Bible Based Truth Section.” Here you see:

"Your Final, Final Warning: This Time We’re Serious."

(So, for God’s sake, send in your donation NOW!)

One can understand how the crowd that comes home to watch *Sex and the City* may not overlap a lot with the *700 Club* crowd . . .

(Although *Desperate Housewives* seems to be a common theme in Red and Blue states.)
A computer programmer called Valdis Krebs looked at the books Amazon recommends to anyone who buys one of their books.

(People who bought this book also purchased . . .)

Krebs found there is virtually no overlap in reading material between the left and right.11

The only point of overlap? Books on Arabs, e.g., Bernard Lewis’s *What Went Wrong?*

American households still watch eight hours of TV per day, but usually different channels in different rooms. No more togetherness on the family couch to watch Uncle Walter (Cronkite).12

Candidates and pundits often reinforce these divisions to increase ratings and motivate their base.

Forget about whether these authors are on the right or left; just reflect on the divisive nature of these titles.13

*Weapons of Mass Distortion*
*The Death of Right and Wrong*
*Stupid White Men*
*Slander*
*Rogue Nation*
*Deliver Us from Evil*
*Tales From the Left Coast*
*Fanatics and Fools*
Regardless of which side you are on, you have to recognize that these are fundamental differences in how many folks see the world. . . .

And they are growing ever more polarized.

These are not divisions that have to do with who the specific presidential candidates are in any given year.

Presidential campaigns mirror underlying cleavages.

Right now there is enough space and money to keep everyone more or less happy and somewhat apart. But it could be a very different story going forward . . .

Despite these divisive trends, many will surely take an absolutist position.

How dare you question the very integrity of my country!!!

Expectorating arguments veiled in the most compelling nationalist rhetoric and righteous indignation . . .

Some of which echoed in the halls of the old Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, East Germany, and Franco’s Spain . . . or old boys clubs in Imperial France, Germany, and Britain for that matter.

So let me be clear.

It is not my wish or desire . . .

That the U.S. have fewer stars in its flag.

But it is not my choice.
It is a choice of citizens.

Globally, autonomy and untying are increasingly common options.

Hiding divisions,
wishing them away,
pretending they do not exist,
does not eliminate the underlying rot.

(And rot eventually leads to the dissolution of even the proudest and strongest of states.)
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.14

And you should continuously remind yourself just how often citizens end up supporting alternate myths.

(Edmund Burke: "Commonwealths are . . . artificial creations . . . arbitrary productions of the human mind.")15

It has been shown time and again that it is easy to make many out of one.

Just ask the Romans about their old Empire . . .

Citizenship is buying into a national brand.

Brands and countries both strive to "create loyalty beyond reason."16

Country: A brand, an idea, sometimes so powerful that one may be willing to sacrifice one’s life, and even the lives of one’s children, for that brand.

But when brands promise one thing and deliver another, When they disappoint or hurt their consumers, They erode, they lose support.

Old brands are removed from the supermarket shelf. . . . Old countries are removed from maps. . . .

Marketing professors, like NYU’s Scott Galloway, argue:

You have to evaluate a country brand With no malice, with no mercy
If leaders promise a lot and deliver ever less . . .
Or even worse if they lie . . .
The brand is in trouble.

As the Brits like to say: “Mind the Gap.”

Sometimes the gap between what is promised and what is real grows so broad, the whole country myth becomes unsustainable.

Then you can watch a country disappear, live, on CNN.

Remember this flag?

Everything it stood for disappeared in eleven months.
East Germany disappeared into another sovereignty, into an old rival, after forty years of relentless indoctrination.

Not even the toughest opponents of the German communist regime wished to eliminate the country.\textsuperscript{17}

But all it took was a chink in the Berlin Wall; the process became unstoppable.\textsuperscript{18}

The day after the Berlin Wall was breached, Bulgaria, too, ousted its "supreme leader."

**Turns out, in many countries, few wanted to be there;**

**There was little to support the country’s symbols and myths.**

You have to be careful to keep your promises, especially when it is a matter of life and death . . .
Many Americans are more than willing to defend their country. Thousands volunteer for the Navy, Army, Air Force, Special Forces. They put themselves in harm’s way, volunteer to fight, perhaps to give up their lives. Despite this, when they are abroad, one of the first things many do is begin checking off dates. They know exactly how many days they have left in the country. Often they reenlist . . .

But what is important is that it is their choice.

So it is really delicate when a country, when a government, breaks its pact, breaks its promise. When government unilaterally extends tours of duty in war zones for tens of thousands . . .

As has now happened, time and again, in Iraq. Given that 40% of soldier’s in Iraq are “weekend warriors” with families and careers, many feel cheated, lied to.

Not surprisingly, National Guard recruitment is down 30%.19

The danger is that eventually, if promise and reality diverge too much . . .

Grandchildren may decide it is not worth the effort
To defend the same symbols, beliefs, flags,
And borders of their grandparents.

("A nation is the desire of many individuals
to do great things together.")20

After all, even the United States, once upon a time, lost seven stars. Then the rebel flag grew again until thirteen had joined.21
Some countries, despite ongoing massive challenges, have successfully rebranded. The U.S. has been masterful at changing, restructuring, rebuilding. Even India, often a pit of poverty, caste prejudice, and ethnic-religious strife, is now successfully selling “smart, English-speaking people, at a great price.”

India now sells engineering consulting in Germany. . . .

China, not exactly a democracy, nor a rich country, has convinced itself and the world it is well on its way to resurrecting its historic role as the world’s Middle Kingdom.

The United Kingdom brand, once upon a time the most storied and powerful in the world, is now but a shadow of its former self.

Turns out the sun did set on the empire . . .

It has taken decades of restructuring and pain to get the country moving again.

(Meaning former downtrodden, pitiful Ireland has a higher GDP per capita than the UK.)

Meanwhile, the U.S. brand, despite its overwhelming military power, economic dominance, educational and cultural hegemony, is in trouble globally.

It seems a brand which garners ever less respect, sometimes even within.

In 1991, George Bush I had a 75% approval rating among Germans and 72% among Russians.

In 2004, George Bush II had a 14% approval rating among Germans and 28% among Russians.

In this context it is interesting to see how different U.S. regions brand themselves. . . .

One has to remember that the U.S. is a really young country.

But a lot of territory has already changed hands.

Many flags have flown over large parts of the present-day U.S.

“Six flags over Texas” is not just an amusement park. It is a political reality. . . .

Spain (1519–1685), France (1685–1690), Spain (1690–1821), Mexico (1821–1836), Republic of Texas (1836–1845), Confederate states (1861–1865), and USA (1865–).
Autonomy, even untiring, is not a completely alien and abstract concept in the U.S.

It was not that long ago that: “We the delegates of Texas, in convention assembled, have passed an ordinance dissolving all political connection with the Government of the United States of America . . .”

Perhaps no flag other than the stars and stripes will ever fly over Texas . . . Or perhaps not.

As of 2004, should you move to Texas, you could get a new license plate. Its motto:

“Texas: It’s Like a Whole Other Country”

(Indeed . . .)

There is more emphasis on state history in Texas than in any other state.

Fourth graders and seventh graders spend a full year on the state’s history. As of 2003, Senate Bill 83 required all public school students to also recite the Texas Pledge of Allegiance:

"Honor the Texas flag. I pledge allegiance to thee, Texas, one and indivisible."

Being a "Texian" is a continuous state of mind. It is ingrained from childhood. It is nontrivial.

The feeling of “better off alone” is reinforced daily through a variety of “Lone Star” symbols and myths.

The State Flag . . .

Gov. Rick Perry explained the new Lone Star quarter: “This quarter will remind all of the proud and rich history of the state that was once its own sovereign nation.”

And do not forget Lone Star Beer: “The National Beer of Texas.”

(Sadly, not everyone loves Texas. Gen. Phil Sheridan once said: “If I owned Texas and Hell, I’d rent out Texas and live in Hell.”)
Polls taken during Gov. George Bush’s campaign showed that 42% of Texans would be in favor of untying, if they could maintain a confederated status with the United States.

Sovereignty is not an abstract notion for fringe groups, like the "Republic of Texas"; they claim a sovereign country that includes pieces of the "old Texas," parts of Oklahoma, Kansas, New Mexico, Colorado, and Wyoming.27

I am not predicting, or promoting, untying Texas.

But I do want you to reflect on the fact that even compact and tight historical units like the British Isles and Spain can suffer surprising challenges from rich regions.

And so, too, someday, might the U.S.

Like Texas, Alaska has sat on the fringes and reinforced its better-off-alone attitude. . . .

Alaska’s history, as a part of the U.S., is not very long. Through 1741, maps of the North Pacific tended to peter out around northern California. Then a Russian empress sent an expedition to "discover" the Aleut’s "great land."30

(Al-a-aska is larger than the next three largest U.S. states combined, stretching a distance the equivalent of from Atlanta to San Diego.)

Until October 18, 1867, the official maps of Alaska were Russian.29
Baron Eduard de Stoeckel, Russian ambassador to the U.S., negotiated the sale of the territory, for $7.2 million.

Many thought Secretary of State William Seward paid way too much. (Seward was a busy little imperialist who dreamt of a vastly expanded U.S. “He also wished to acquire Alaska, Canada, Greenland, Iceland, Mexico, Darien Island, Hawaii, the Danish West Indies, Santo Domingo, Haiti, Culebra, French Guiana, Tiger Island, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and St. Bartholomew. . . . He even devoted serious consideration to the new location for the capital of this far-flung empire, deciding on Mexico City as the most strategically placed site.”)30

Cynics had several nicknames for the Alaska purchase:

"Hyperborean Solitudes, Seward’s Folly, Seward’s Iceberg, Walrussia. ”31

It was so hard to get real news from so far away that one could report the totally false.

Agapius Honcharenko began printing the Alaska Herald without ever setting foot in Alaska.32

Had a single senator changed his vote, Alaska might not have become a star in the flag.33

Most of Alaska’s population was indigenous. They were not exactly respected . . .

In 1885, the aptly named Governor Swineford reported that his district had 49,900 inhabitants: whites, 6,500; practically white creoles, 1,900; civilized natives, 3,500; wholly uncivilized natives, 35,000.34

The Organic Act of 1884 provided that: “(Indians) shall not be disturbed in the possession of any lands actually in their use or occupation or now claimed by them.”

Guess how long that was respected . . .

A lot have come, taken, left bitter feelings behind. Discovery became a free for all in which species after species was slaughtered.

The sea cow and the speckled cormorant soon became extinct.35

However, in a small serving of just deserts, the 1884 act failed to specify how anyone could acquire land. This was “reserved for future legislation by congress.”
Nobody bothered to fix Alaska’s real estate folly for almost three-quarters of a century, which led to many outright land grabs and massive discrimination.

In 1942, Nathan Margold, solicitor of the Department of the Interior, argued:

“Original occupancy establishes possessory rights in Alaskan waters and submerged lands, and that such rights have not been extinguished by any treaty, statute or administrative action.”

But it is hard to claim land if you are not a citizen. And until 1924 natives could become citizens only “if they severed all tribal relationships and adopted the habits of a civilized life.”

Finally, Minook, born of Russian father and Eskimo mother, sued for citizenship. Judge James Wickersham granted the request; not the end of the story, of course . . .

In 1945, when an antidiscrimination bill was being debated in the Alaska Senate, one opponent argued:

“The races should be kept further apart. Who are these people, barely out of savagery, who want to associate with us whites with 5,000 years of recorded civilization behind us?”

But legal ambiguity and past wrongs can come back to bite, decades or centuries later.

Through 1954, congress had yet to find the time to legislate under what conditions Alaskan Indian lands could be sold.

This implies most land titles were invalid . . .

Soon native populations began claiming one-third of Alaska for their exclusive use.

Of course claiming and getting are not the same. One suit was thrown out because the native’s attorneys were “not approved by the Secretary of the Interior.”

The natives did not go away.

Suits mounted; soon natives were claiming 380 million acres, more than the total land mass of the state.
While the claims were outstanding, it was hard to drill for oil.

The energy-hungry federal government initially settled for a payout of $1 billion and 44 million acres.\(^4\)

We might expect to see increasing demands for autonomy and self-governance, and not just among native Alaskans. Many Alaskans have felt exploited by a faraway capital.

“Alaska has been cursed . . . (by) absentee landlordism where the people who control the resources of the country do not reside in the country and have no interest in it.”\(^4\)

It took eighty-nine years of stewing, petitioning, and begging for Alaska to become a state.

There were heated debates over whether the territory should become one, three, or four new stars.\(^1\)

On November 6, 1923, those living in southeastern Alaska voted to secede from the territory and become a separate state within the United States.

The vote was 1,344 in favor and 89 opposed.

Feds did not care what Alaskans or Hawaiians wanted. Democrats and Republicans kept blocking each other’s attempts to make one territory a state but not another.

Finally President Eisenhower signed the bill admitting Alaska.

He signed the bill in private, wary of the reaction of his fellow Republicans.

And it was not just Republicans who were deeply unhappy.

So were some Alaskans, some of whom can make the Lone Star Texas seem downright neighborly.

“(Using) the term ‘Outside’ to designate any place except Alaska has been common for a long time.”\(^4\)

Even today local government is far away;
You cannot drive to Juneau, the state capital.
You have to either fly or take a boat.
A new star was not a great celebration . . .

In the 1980s, Joe Vogler founded the Alaskan Independence Party (AIP).

In 1990, AIP candidates won the governorship and lt. governorship. AIP became one of the few successful third parties in the U.S. Joe Vogler was murdered in 1993. The debate faded, for a while . . . 45

It is easy to forget that U.S. history is littered with threats and attempts to untie. 46

New Englanders threatened untying at least four times. Southerners also threatened to secede over the following issues:

- Jackson’s tariffs (1828).
- American Indian’s rights (1820s and ‘30s).
- And over slavery, leading to the Civil War . . .

And, in fact, the U.S. has lost several potential stars already.
Notice any particular pattern in these flags?

Care to guess why each of these flags is red, white, and blue and contains a star or two?

The U.S. tried very hard to keep the Philippines.

1901 sedition laws in the Philippines led to prison and/or death for those advocating independence.

"Pacification" may have killed up to one million natives.

But, unlike Puerto Rico, there was no offer of citizenship for these "savages." Nevertheless, the U.S. kept large military bases, Clark and Subic Bay, and actively intervened in Philippine politics until it was kicked out in 1992.

Panama was never formally annexed. Its inhabitants never became U.S. citizens.

But the U.S. did carve the country out of Colombia in 1903, to protect the canal. The U.S. remained the key employer and de facto kingmaker in a country governed by the U.S. military and the canal for eighty-five years.

(And when all else failed, the U.S. simply threatened or intervened: 1903, 1918, 1921, 1925, 1941. . . .)

On January 9, 1964, when students dared attempt to raise their country’s own flag, inside a high school within the canal zone, U.S. troops killed twenty-three people.

In 1989, just before the U.S. invaded to oust General Noriega, the country’s new president was sworn in, not on sovereign Panamanian territory, but on a U.S. military base.

Through 2000, the country was literally cut in two, by a ten-mile-wide canal zone. The currency was, and remains, the U.S. dollar. Many in congress are still furious Carter dared "give up U.S. territory."
Then there is Puerto Rico; it became a territory in 1902, elected its
first governor in 1950, became a commonwealth in 1952. . . .

Yet those born on the island are merely
statutory citizens of the U.S.

In legal terms, this means the U.S. Congress can unilaterally declare
Puerto Rico, and its inhabitants, independent and no longer part of
the United States.49

(Bye, bye. Nice knowing you for a hundred years . . .)

Think about this for a minute, much as various neocons might wish to
do so, they cannot yet legally revoke the citizenship of the inhabitants
of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

But they can cast off the Commonwealth of
Puerto Rico with a simple majority vote.

This is a curious form of democracy, indeed—kind of reminds you of
the bumper sticker “Liberty and Justice for All. Offer not available in
some areas. (Prices subject to change.)”

The mayor of San Juan, Puerto Rico, claims: "Puerto Rico
is a Hispanic country with ties of citizenship to the American
country."50

(U.S. citizenship was granted through the Jones-Shafroth Act,
in 1917, so Puerto Ricans could be drafted into WWI.)

Yet the relationship between island and mainland remains
schizophrenic at best.

(The Supreme Court ruled that Puerto Rico is
“foreign in a domestic sense.”)

In one poll among Puerto Ricans, 62% considered Puerto Rico,
rather than the U.S., their nation. But if forced to choose a
citizenship, 54% would become Americans.51

A vote on Puerto Rican vs. U.S. citizenship is not an abstract
concept. In 1998, after a very contentious debate, the U.S. Congress
passed HR 856 . . . by one vote. This bill allowed Puerto Ricans to
choose statehood, independence, or the status quo.

Given the option of statehood, Puerto Ricans said,
thanks, but no thanks.

(Just as they did in 1967 and 1993.)
So the U.S. continues to compete against its own citizens in a broad range of events.

In 2001, a bitterly disappointed Miss USA, one of five finalists for the modestly titled “Miss Universe” contest, lost to Puerto Rico’s Denise Quiñones. During the 2004 Greek Olympics, the NBA dream team got slaughtered, 92–73 in its first game, by Puerto Rico.

(Stunning given that NBA/Olympic teams had a 24 W–1 L record.)

One none-too-subtle sportscaster reacted by asking: What do you make of the Americans getting knocked around by a fake country?

It is not that the U.S. did not try, very hard, to annex P.R. (Before 1952, those flying a Puerto Rican flag were arrested.) Yet Puerto Rico remains a complicated, multiracial, Spanish-speaking isle.

It is full of blancos, blanquitos, rubios, trigenos, morenos, mulatas, indios, negritos, prietos, jabaos . . . .

But almost half of all Puerto Ricans live on the U.S. mainland. Many of these English-speaking nuyoricans, who are returning to the island to retire, favor the U.S.

It is not clear whether Puerto Rico will someday be a star gained or a star lost.

Statehood would be neither easy nor smooth. Some Republicans worry that this would likely add two (D) senators and several (D) congressmen. So one might expect a series of hurdles such as meeting minimum economic growth targets, more English in schools, federal taxation, and cuts in local government.

Guam remains in a similar limbo. It could, someday, claim statehood.

One-third of their land lies behind U.S. military checkpoints. Its quasi-U.S. citizens are allowed to send representatives to the U.S. Congress. And sometimes, in committee, not in the general session, these representatives are even allowed to vote. But if and only if their combined votes are not enough to overturn the committee’s vote. In other words, the vote counts if, and only if, it makes no difference.

American Samoa (“an unorganized, unincorporated U.S. territory”) is another odd place. Great football. In 2002, every PAC-10 team recruited at least one Samoan, not to mention the more than twenty-eight NFL players . . . which makes a Samoan forty times more likely to get to the NFL than the average American.
In 1986, another U.S. territory was cut loose, Micronesia. And some cynics even dared accuse the U.S. of a divide-and-conquer strategy, just because it took an inhabited land area smaller than Rhode Island and carved it up into four different political entities.

The U.S. Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas, the U.S. Free Associated Republic of the Marshall Islands, the U.S. Free Associated Federated States of Micronesia, the U.S. Free Associated Republic of Palau.

These "countries" are now independent and free. Hurray! Yet they maintain a Compact of Free Association with the U.S. (And, until recently, they received the highest level of per capita U.S. aid.)

The U.S. controls their defense and foreign relations. And any citizen of Palau, Micronesia, or the Marshall Islands is free to work in the U.S.

Noncitizens with quasicitizen rights?
The Northern Mariana license plates still read "USA."

**Those who live on these islands have "undetermined" citizenship.**

Perhaps one way to figure out whether this region might add a star to the flag someday, is to ask your friendly CIA.

"Under U.S. administration as part of the UN Trust Territory of the Pacific, the people of the Northern Mariana Islands decided in the 1970s not to seek independence but instead to forge closer links with the U.S. Negotiations for territorial status began in 1972. A covenant to establish a commonwealth in political union with the U.S. was approved in 1975. A new government and constitution went into effect in 1978."

**Confused? So am I. . . .**

These are citizens . . . except they cannot vote for any U.S. presidential candidate. They retain local control over immigration, customs, labor, and taxes. But U.S. district courts have jurisdiction. Meanwhile, the Chinese are building up trade and tourism, and could soon become more important to these folks than the U.S. is.

Closer to home? The U.S. Virgin Islands . . . perhaps another star someday?
The bottom line is that minor legislative changes
(Just defining the legal status of nations that are
already within the U.S. border)

Could someday add five or more stars,
or turn them loose. . . .

By now I hope you agree with me that "U.S. citizenship" is a
little more layered and complicated than it may seem at first.

There is a zoo of citizenships within the U.S.

How well the U.S. is able to sell its model,
its values, its myth on the periphery today
may be a harbinger of what could occur within
the core tomorrow.

But even though you can see the fraying edges of empire on the
periphery, it is still really hard to see what could soon lead to
significant untying in the core of the U.S.

But it is not impossible.
Think Britain, Spain, Italy, Canada.

There remain deep historical fault lines within the greater and
within the core of today’s United States of America. They are
by-products of an occasionally brutal history of conquest and
modernization.

Given that there are still many wounds.

It is key not to assume continuity.

Today is the time to mediate conflict.

Before it is someday too late.
Decisions and policies put in place today will determine what the flag and border look like fifty years out.

In an era of ever fewer heroes, decreasing institutional legitimacy, and ever greater political polarization, might you at least want to ask . . .

What might strengthen or even expand the borders of a country?
And what could weaken them and cause them to contract?

So even though flags, borders, and anthems are delicate subjects . . .

Please try not to get too defensive or angry.
Let’s you and I have a conversation. . . .

There is plenty of space on the pages that follow for you to comment, add, cross out, agree, disagree, and question.

Let’s have an honest debate over what makes a country stronger.

And what can make it weaker.

Not just a discussion about trends . . . but also about consequences.

(And let’s try to find some answers, before a flag or border suddenly gets altered, here or next door.)