

The Next Civil War: Dispatches from the American Future by Stephen Marche (Avid Reader Press, 2022)

An Introduction to the Immediate Future of the United States

- opens with: "The United States is coming to an end. The question is how. Every government, every business, every person alive will be affected by the answer."
- cites hyper-partisan politics, environmental degradation, and widening inequality as causes
- says we are currently living in that opening chapter of a history book on the subject of civil wars, the one about the lead-up to the conflict
- government is failing to have peaceful transition of power and failing to be effective or responsive to the people
- in each chapter this book takes one inciting incident and imagines how it will play out, inspiration coming from the book *The Effect of Nuclear War*, which was the basis for the miniseries *The Day After*
- discusses how being a Canadian has given him a somewhat outsider perspective
- says that Trump is, at most, a symptom of the division that was already present and if he hadn't won the election "all the forces profiting toward the fall of the Republic would be no less powerful than they are right now"
- the forces: the hyper-partisanship, the bifurcation of the country into blue and red, the violent loathing for the federal government, the economic unsustainability, the incipient crises in the food supply and urban environmental security, the rise of the hard-right anti-government patriot militias
- "American liberals in the major cities retain a kind of desperate faith in their country's institutions that amounts nearly to delusion. Americans have taught themselves for 250 years that their country, in its ideals and systems, is the solution to history. It is tough, under those conditions, to accept being just another of history's half perpetrators, half victims."
- discusses Obama's keynote address of 2004 in which he said "There is not a liberal America and a conservative America -there is the United States of America" and says this was a fantasy – "There is very much a red America and a blue America. They occupy different societies with different values, and their political parties are emissaries of that difference."
- says that party politics is mainly just a distraction at this point, the government is stuck in a self-defeating loop of doing things the old way when "The problem is not who is in power but the structures of power. The US system is an archaic mode of government totally unsuited to the realities of the twenty-first century. It needs reforms to its foundational systems, not just new faces."
- the US has never faced an institutional crisis quite like the one it is facing now: the American people no longer trust journalists, the government, or the judiciary: "Inside the ruins of the old order, bright flames of pure rage are blossoming."
- "This book is a warning. Civil wars are total wars laced with atrocities, fought not between professional soldiers but between populations. Insurgent conflicts are wars of meaning, conflicts in which the ideals and communal vision of a country have rotted away. The nature of war against insurgents is so vicious exactly because meaning is at stake: When you are fighting for freedom and your soul, what won't you do?"
- the forces tearing America apart today have been lurking underneath the surface for decades, if not from the very beginning of the country
- the crisis has already arrived, only the inciting incidents are pending
- "Before the first civil war, nobody saw the catastrophe coming, but the moment it started, it was inevitable. Events today appear chaotic and confusing from close up, but if you look behind the

fury, it's not hard to perceive their direction. Inertia and optimism are powerful forces. It's so easy to pretend it's all going to work out. It's easy to obsess over the immediate chaos, too, over what spark might engulf the whole country in sudden flames. Nobody wants what's coming, so nobody wants to see what coming. At critical moments in history, the future stares us right in the face. We can never manage to look it in the eye."

-“Right now, elected sheriffs openly promote resistance to federal authority. Right now, militias train and arm themselves in preparation for the fall of the Republic. Right now, doctrines of a radical, unachievable, messianic freedom spread across the internet, on talk radio, on cable television, in the malls. Right now, radical Americanism crave violent resolution to its political fantasies. Right now, the faith in democracy has shattered.”

-foreign governments need to prepare for an authoritarian America that is a much less stable superpower with many different centers of power

Note: Each chapter lays out a hypothetical scenario in sections, peppered with reports of things currently happening that give this scenario credibility. These notes start with a summary of the story then the points given as support, separating them in a way the book does not do.

Dispatch One: The Battle of the Bridge

The Scenario: Due to the fact that the infrastructure of the US is in bad need of repair, a bridge that is the mainline to a southern town gets worn down and the Federal Highway Administration and the EPA decide that it needs to be shut down until it can be repaired, forcing the residents to travel to further away bridges. The sheriff of the town does a very public demonstration of reopening the bridge and calling people to hold it from the intrusion of the feds. Militia forces mount on one side of the bridge and the president calls in the army to occupy the other side. After a period of intelligence gathering and working out legal logistics, the army, under the leadership of a person named ‘The General,’ eventually takes out the militia but then they are stuck with the impossible issue of trying to hold order on American soil and not only in this small town but across the nation where there is quite a bit of support for the sheriff.

-‘The General’ in this scenario is based on a real person who has developed plans for ‘full-spectrum operations in the homeland’ to answer various possible uprisings that might occur, and when this, along with his identity, was found out some anti-government patriots took out billboards against him in his neighbourhood and there was concern for his safety (the way this plays out is based on one of his plans)

-goes over how the right wing is preparing for civil war, with mainstream elected state and federal leaders and media outlets talking about how the Republic is collapsing and calling on those listening to be ready for armed uprising

-‘The Sheriff’ is based on various sheriffs across the country who have formed themselves into groups such as the Constitutional Sheriffs and Peace Officers (about 5,000 members) and believe that it is the sheriff's duty to resist government abuses, which comes from the doctrine of interposition –“standing in the way” of federal government getting too big

-The Sheriff makes for good entertainment and controls the channels of mainstream media and the internet in ways that the military and government does not do, mainly because he feeds into the anger that has been building for years

-the internet has pumped up moral outrage without the adjoining “empathic distress” that comes from interacting with the other within a face-to-face civil society, which leads to dehumanization, which is one reason why this period is significantly different from those in the past

- goes through the make-up of the American Hard Right, saying that they are made up very different groups that are united in being “anti-government patriots” and their hatred for government (who they believe is destroying the true America) is how they express their love for their country
- this core belief expresses itself in hundreds, if not thousands, of ways that are constantly changing and don’t make coherent ideological sense, so pretty much any idea can be adopted to fit into the mix
- “Rather than following one coherent ideology, or series of ideologies, the hard right offers a buffet of sensibilities.”
- underneath the opposition to the government is the reflection of lost white privilege in the US
- the bipartisan Center for Strategic and International Studies concluded in 2020 that far-right terrorism has significantly outpaced terrorism from any other source, making up two thirds of all attacks in 2019 and over 90% of all attacks for the first part of 2020
- there has been a rise in accelerationism: the desire to hasten a civil war by inciting violent chaos
- one small group in this mix, the sovereign citizen group who refuse to file taxes because they believe that the federal government has no authority to operate and is trying to make slaves of Americans, make up 300,000 people when the Weather Underground, at its peak was a couple thousand people, Black Panthers membership got up to as high as 10,000 (the sovereign citizens regularly kill dozens of people a year and are listed as the FBI’s top domestic terrorist threat)
- the sovereign citizens have one basic principle of the federal government being illegitimate and this can bring in variety of different theories as to why, from the fourteenth amendment being anti-constitutional to the belief that the government is run by reptilian aliens
- “The resistance movement to the United States is broad and deep and violent. It is intellectually incoherent but ferociously devoted. This is essential to understand: the incoherence is part of the appeal. The lack of coherent or stable ideology means that the knowledge is esoteric, the world illuminated by a hidden meaning known only to the initiated. When you don’t have an explicit ideology, a practice, you can’t be blamed for the effects of that ideology. If you call yourself a Nazi, you have to embrace the history of Nazism. But with fast-moving conspiracy theories wrapped in satire, you get all the advantages of belonging to a tribe, with none of the responsibilities.”
- many anti-government leaders have moved into government and are calling for revolt from within
- talks about attendance at a number of Prepper’s Conferences, where bulk food rations are sold alongside guidebooks such as *Prepper’s Armed Defense* and people fantasise about a world without authority when self-defence determines survival
- the most popular items for sale at these events are guns at the very top, followed by t-shirts and flags with slogans like “Don’t Tread on Me” and “Black Guns Matter”
- the general message of the keynote speaker at one conference is that Americans no longer have freedom, they are slaves owned by the government with nothing that the government can’t take away, asking how far the attendees are willing to be pushed
- discusses the far left reaction possible reaction to the bridge incident, saying that it will lead to protesters being seriously hurt (similar to the Freedom Riders) but will be weak and back down
- the far left has a much less developed consciousness of resistance and a far less developed fantasy of interposition, and their most recent protests (Occupy Wall Street & Black Lives Matter) have not gained much official political support
- discusses the hard-right infiltration of law enforcement, making federal government much less likely to call on them to help keep civil order
- usually the feds would need either the legislator or the Governor of the state to request military assistance but when neither or forthcoming, the President would have to use section 333 of Title 10 US Code, which allows a president to use armed forces if something is hindering the execution of

the laws of the state and country and the freedom of the people within when the state government is unable, fails, or refuses to protect individual rights and rule of law

- the military being called in takes an army of soldiers as well as an army of lawyers to avoid giving further feed to the anti-government sentiment, a SCRAG (senior civilian representative of the Attorney General) having the lead on the operation, and they hamper attempts to gather intelligence on the militia members and actions
- the military is also not well suited to playing the information game with the media, which has already been seen in Afghanistan and Iraq
- the heart of the problem is that the army is facing enemies who are fellow citizens, entitled to rights that they say they are willing to die for even at the very extreme definition of them
- discusses the increase in gun purchases and gun violence, highlighting the world's biggest gun show for general consumers, where AR-15s (assault weapons) are the most popular seller and there is a surge in popularity for any item that it is looking like the government might ban
- points out that while the hard right is well armed, even with military grade weaponry, and is well trained, it is no match for the US military
- the problem is not ability to use force, it is the need to be restrained and have all the legal ducks in a row in order to support their actions as legitimate
- "The conflict will obey the logic of reality television rather than revolution. The more defiant the Sheriff, the higher his engagement numbers. The most extreme opinions, the most vivid conspiracies, the most spectacular threats, gather the most attention. It will be in nobody's interest to find common cause or to explore ways out."
- when the Sheriff turns to using the word 'sovereignty' to indicate what he is fight for, the military strikes and take out the militia but they cannot legally occupy the area and the movement is too widespread for them to control

Dispatch Two: Portrait of an Assassination

The Scenario: A non-descript male with a vague look of misery in his eyes, just one of the many troubled young men in America assassinates the President. He faces life options that are less than what his parents had and has very little hope for the future. The internet provides plenty of explanation for the pain and hopelessness that he feels, mainly focuses on blaming others. He stewes in his failure and idealism and is a man-boy who dreams of a destiny he feels is owed to him.

- discusses the age we are living in of 'lone-wolf terrorism,' individuals who are fed by the hyper-partisanship, the rage and loathing of everyday American politics and who translate violent speech into violent action
- the US has a strong tradition of political assassination (far more than any other democratic nation) because US presidents are "living symbols of national unity that no other country possesses – icons as executives" and it is seen as the fastest way to bring about abrupt change
- the willingness to become an assassin tends to come from a lack of sense of belonging or attachment along with a desire to transcend, to be historic in some way
- for some, political ideology is a way of making sense of petty personal experience, make it seem to be a part of something greater than personal failings or bad luck
- online radicalization starts with social alienation: "Social alienation comes with anger at their lot in life. It always starts with some kind of grievance, and the contrarian viewpoint will often provide an explanation, a very clean, very convenient explanation for why they are feeling that way"
- discusses the rise of negative partisanship (the hatred for the other that causes you to vote for anything but them) in the US (see article saved)

-the problem with using negative partisanship as a strategy to gain votes is that you don't have to be anything other than not them, so it encourages politicians to bicker with one another, and the electorate follow suit and bicker with each other

-it's all about identity politics

-“According to Pew Research, 58 percent of Republicans view Democrats “very unfavorably,” up from 21 percent in 1994, and 55 percent of Democrats view Republicans “very unfavorably,” up from 17 percent in 1994. There are 41 percent of Democrats and 45 percent of Republicans who now believe the opposing party is “a threat to the nation’s well-being.” But even those numbers fail to capture the emotional depth of the hatred between Republicans and Democrats. In 1960, 5 percent of Republicans and 4 percent of Democrats said they wouldn’t want their children to marry a member of the other party. By 2010, it was half of Republicans and a third of Democrats. Differences of opinion have hardened into a siege mentality on both sides, leaving behind questions of policy or effective leadership. The dominant question of American political life isn’t what you stand for but what you stand against.”

-studies have shown that violence rises in a society the more that an underclass peacefully approaches economic and political equality, the overclass grows more violent and resentful over their loss of comparative superiority

-says that, with the current level of hyper-partisanship, there will be no period of unity after a presidential assassination, that will be protest and collective violence

-the institutions of the US have lost their legitimacy: congress has popularity numbers below 10 percent, the presidency is not decided by popular vote, congressional districts are manipulated, the senate is extremely unrepresentative of the vast majority, and the Supreme Court no longer represents transcendent interest of national purpose, it's just a collection of partisan hacks like the rest of the US government

-“Hate builds out of hate. Despair cascades. The rage out of which the Assassin will come is building, feeding on itself. The feeling of impotence and loss is by no means limited to one side or the other of the political spectrum. Nobody, or almost nobody, escapes the desperate trend. The parties have become consumed with defeating their opponents rather than building the country. Because of the domination of faction, government has separated from the business of policy.”

Dispatch Three: The Fall of New York

The Scenario: After a financial collapse and several years of drought in a row, a massive hurricane takes out New York City. Since 88.3 percent of the world’s foreign exchange pours through New York, this causes massive financial depression. There is a wave of climate change refugees fleeing the coastal cities into the interior.

- “Right now, at this moment, wherever you happen to be, you live in a period of cheap food and safe cities in an orderly world. The cheapness and the safety and the order cannot last. The systems by which we go about our lives, and which we take for granted, are growing more threadbare. America’s paralyzed and half-legitimate government won’t be able to respond with adequate measures. The radical instability will have political consequences. Climate crises and mass inequality have been preludes to civil war and to revolution everywhere—Europe, Africa, South America, Asia—and they’ll be preludes to crisis in the United States as well. But the consequences of the new instability transcend politics. Over the next fifty years, American lives are destined to become much more precarious. Some lives will shatter.”

- economic and environmental instability are what the US military calls ‘threat multipliers’ – destabilizing forces that brew underneath the surface: there are three principal threat multipliers facing the US today – economic inequality, drought, and property vulnerability
- “Inequality and climate change will cause the disasters that ordinary Americans are going to feel most acutely. They already do. But to address these problems requires massive, concerted political action, both domestically and internationally. And the United States can’t even convince its citizens not to drink at bars during a plague. Democracy—as a system balancing the rights of individuals with the interests of the state—contains inherent limits on collective action: the American political system, with its structure of checks and balances, was never designed to deal with collective crises. In its current state of hyper-partisanship, the US government is effectively paralyzed. One of democracy’s deepest flaws is that no one gets elected for catastrophes they’re going to prevent.”
- the stress that Covid visited on democracy and the economy was a test of what is to come, and the American government failed in their response (US had the highest death rate of any country with more than 5 million people and a GDP of at least \$25,000 per capita): “Failure to listen to scientists and failure to act on their insights have consequences. And, in the case of Covid, the science was clear, the cost of action was low, and the consequences were direct. Compared to the crises that are coming, Covid was nothing. Covid has been like an easy pop quiz before a punishing final exam.”
- every society in human history with levels of inequality like those in the US today has descended into war, revolution, or plague, no exceptions
- inequality lessens social cohesion because the bottom 99 percent don’t have incentive for any buy in to the system, especially if that system is asking them to make economic sacrifices during a downturn in an economy that didn’t benefit them in the upturn
- discusses how much medical issues put a strain on people who are already struggling
- while climate change models are basic fact, it is and will happen, what is unknown is how we will react: How will nations and states mitigate climate change? How will communities adapt? What are the limits of adaptation?
- the drastic weather conditions and drought brought about by climate change will cause food availability to drop and food prices to soar, further stressing economic inequality
- innovation has and will occur but that can only take you so far (it’s not possible to innovate out of not having water)
- even the slightest spike in the price of other commodities, like gas, leads to unrest everywhere
- the increase in harsh weather conditions puts a great deal of our buildings at risk of significant damage and destruction, breaking any insurance model for pay outs
- over forty years, Category 5 hurricanes have increased by 300 percent globally
- when cities fail to be able to provide services due to damage to infrastructure, those who can leave the city (taking with them the tax dollars needed to rebuild), leaving behind the poor and vulnerable
- it is well known that the depression helped bring on the rise of fascism
- “The systems that keep us alive are ghostly, invisible. When they’re gone, we won’t even be able to say with any certainty what we’ve lost.”

Dispatch Four: The Outbreak of Widespread Violence

The Scenario: An outbreak of insurgency attacks and military response that polarizes the population and eradicates basic freedoms.

- “America is one spectacular act of political violence away from a national crisis.”

- it is not necessarily the scale of the event that matters, it is the perception of it, and if the country feels like it is out of country, the government has to respond
- brings up the Jan 6 attack on the Capitol, saying that it was loosely organized and possessed little political support, but imagine if it had been more (45% of Republican votes say they support the assault on Washington)
- “The United States is particularly vulnerable to terrorist spectacle. September 11 was an act of significant destruction, but its iconic status, the meaning it took on in the American consciousness, was outsized. The resonance of September 11 in public life caused the United States to enter two failed wars and to continue those wars long after any national or global interests were being served. A domestic September 11 would create the same irresistible momentum. A serious assault on the political symbols, a sense that the nation, as a body, could be under threat, would inevitably provoke the impetus for revenge and the hunger for order.”
- “The United States would not respond rationally to an assault on the Capitol. It would not manage to find a considered policy broadly supportive of the goal of restoring peace to the country and reducing tensions within its sectarian fronts. The underlying tensions in the country are too strong, the sense of threat too developed. If history is any guide, the reaction would be oversized. It would be violent. It would be controlling. It would be vengeful.”
- discusses attempts that have been foiled in the past few decades, attempts that included nuclear bombs
- to deal with domestic terrorism, the US government will have no choice but to try to control arms, the movement of people, and hate speech
- “The United States has been involved in counterinsurgency conflicts for over fifty years. It has never learned enough to avoid the first trap: the violence that imposes order to control violence produces more violence and more disorder. The means of counterinsurgency are in direct conflict with their ends: You cannot reach pacification by murdering people. Over and over again, the methods of control generate chaos.”
- the government strategy that is currently in place is to hold area and attempt to deradicalize people, but that is unlikely when they are taking away their most basic rights
- “The false premise of counterinsurgency is that you can change the minds of people through force. Wars of counterinsurgency are wars of perception. You can’t murder your way to any perception other than that you’re a murderer.”
- insurgent conflicts is a lot about the audience, they insurgents and counterinsurgents are engaged in competitive narratives, the insurgents have their narratives of grievances, goals, and justifications for actions, the counterinsurgents need a strategy to address that
- “You will be the audience. You yourself will be the battleground of the conflict. The war is over your feelings about the war. You will begin on one side or the other. Stories will accumulate. Soldiers will fill the street. Flags will hang out of windows. You will feel that the other side is all terrorists and they will feel that you are a terrorist. As they already do.”
- in the case of insurrection or insurgency, it isn’t military might that matters because you can’t punish people out of hating you, it just increases it
- the point is to make the insurgency unpopular with the local people, it is all about politics
- “The solution to the next civil war will be the solution to the crises America already faces. The military at best could provide the space that the United States currently possesses to negotiate its problems. If America cannot solve these problems now, why would it be able to solve them after widespread violence?”

Dispatch Five: The End of the Republic

The Scenario: A section or various sections of the US secede from the Union.

-“One way or another, the United States is coming to an end. The divisions have become intractable. The political parties are irreconcilable. The capacity for government to make policy is diminishing. The icons of national unity are losing their power to represent. The threat multipliers from economic and environmental sources are driving an underlying tribalism that is shredding the ability of the political order to respond to threats against its own stability. The Constitution is becoming incoherent. One possible conclusion is violence. The other is civilized separation. At this point, disunion is among the best-case scenarios for the United States.”

-secession is not a failure for the US, countries change and there doesn't have to be violence, it just “requires political courage and the ability to face hard truths”

-peaceful secession is a very difficult matter that would have many different issues that would need to be decided on (splitting of national debt, pensions, military, citizenship, etc.) and the current state of politics doesn't make such civil discussion likely

-one big problem with the US going the way of peaceful secession is that there usually needs to be some sort of ethnic or regional cohesion, ideological identities do not create regional unity

-there has been a general division between blue and red states, which generally also runs between urban and rural, with each having their own versions of America to adhere to

-this division has caused both sides to feel like if they lose an election then they are being ruled over by a foreign power and that the president is not legitimate (Obama is from Kenya, Trump is not my President)

-this has caused both sides to turn from depending on the federal government to be a source of unity and turning to secure more power at the state level

-“And if you imagine a miraculous political figure emerging from the American middle to fulfill the by now cliché political imperative to ‘unite, not divide,’ the bad news is your dreams have already come true. There was a president who preached unity and hope. The other side insisted he was a Kenyan and brought a man who denied his citizenship to power. Significant portions of the United States believed that their government was controlled by a foreign power, as a significant number of Americans came to believe that Russian interference was the primary explanation for the election of Donald Trump. Biden in power has changed nothing. He is most effective insofar as he has abandoned bipartisanship rather than restored it.”

-people are already making decisions on where to live based on their political identities, which has been coined as ‘the big sort’ by journalist Bill Bishop

-goes through the separatist movements in Texas and California and discusses how serious they really not (not that much right now)

-points out that under the constitution, secession is illegal since, according to the Fourteenth Amendment, a state cannot make a law that deprives anyone of their rights as an American citizen

-goes through the mechanics of what secession could look like, starting with recognition of nation status by the UN, which could be undone by a home-state veto (US vetoing it)

-“The fact that there is no established legal mechanism for separation in the United States—that there is in fact a massive counter-mechanism in the Constitution—is paradoxically what makes the idea of separation so dangerous. If the right to secession was determined by facts outside the text, then facts outside the text can determine it again.”

-the weird thing about separatists in the US is that they still love the idea of America, and they talk within the language of protecting what America is: “They are living their original national contradiction to the full—patriotic treason and treasonous patriotism. These are movements grounded in a sense of loss. Separatists in America love America, and their love has emerged in the

most twisted possible form: They have devoted themselves to the basic proposition that America is no longer possible in the United States of America.”

-discusses Richard Spencer and his move to make an ethnic group as the base for a new nation, a white nation protected from encroachment of other ethnicities, a fundamental desire to be around their own kind (own kind being defined as family and ethnic group, instead of location or education status or any other unifying factor)

-discusses DeRay Mckesson, Black Lives Matter leader, and his work to push back against a system that is unfair to so many people

-“There was that word again: ‘overcoming.’ Richard Spencer and DeRay Mckesson are not comparable human beings. One belongs to a movement based on the fundamental stupidity of racial pride and celebrates genocide. The other is looking for social justice and equality under the law. But, between them, you can see the cleaving, the unsettling, of the United States. They both want to overcome America in all its glorious, ludicrous contradiction.”

-politics of the left and the right are turning in to be about ethnicity

-argues that splits happen when people no longer have a shared identity, and the mechanism of identity is symbolism: “And the symbols that once unified the States are crumbling everywhere.”

-discusses how the Civil War was never really concluded and how the South has been trying to win by politics what it could not win by force of arms, the fight over the symbols of the confederacy (statues, etc.) is about which side really wins in the end

-the central problem is that unifies America is the identity of freedom and equality while at the same time being a country that enslaved people and made them a less equal group

-“Inconsistency, not racism, is the American bugbear.”

-another symbol that has lost its meaning is the overly worshipped Constitution, which the framers believed needed to be regularly updated

-“The legitimacy crisis that has infected the American political system can’t be resolved with an election. It’s not a question of political choices, this president or that president, this party or that party. People are losing faith in the basis of the government of the country. They’ve already lost faith in their political class. They’ve nearly lost faith that government can be an instrument of policy. They’re starting to lose faith in their history. Faith may sound like a vague and arbitrary foundation. But ultimately faith in its own reality is the substance of any nation.”

-if the US is to survive, it needs a new Constitutional Convention

-“*The History of the Fall of the American Republic*, author still unborn, will no doubt recognize who and what to blame: the nihilistic hyper-partisanship of Newt Gingrich; Bill Clinton allowing China into the WTO on the mistaken assumption that capitalism and democracy were inevitably linked and that the American middle class would rise on the world’s swelling tides; Bush v. Gore; the suspension of civil liberties in the aftermath of September 11; the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq; the explicit rejection of the “reality-based community”; the Tea Party; Citizens United; Obama’s failure to unify on immigration and health care; Mitch McConnell’s decision not to consider the appointment of Merrick Garland; the presidency of Donald Trump. And there are thousands upon thousands of politicians who put private and party interests ahead of the interests of the institutions, who developed contempt for government in and of itself and rode contempt to power. Apportioning blame makes for a satisfying game. It’s a kind of retrospective partisan politics. Blame misses the point. Blame hides the underlying structural weaknesses.”

-if states or regions were to separate off from the US, they would still be sizable and prosperous

-“Disunion could be liberation. Even without the possibility of a violent civil war, the current state of permanent conflict in the United States makes basic policy more difficult to enact and life harder for its citizens. These four new countries would not be anywhere near as powerful as the current

iteration of the United States of America, but they would probably be saner, more normal. It's also worth acknowledging that a grand thing would be lost if the United States disunited. The American experiment was, at its core, a statement of radical faith in the power of openness to difference. It offers a fantastic piece of dialectic, the permission for contradiction"

-the founders believed that disagreements would ultimately lead to deeper truths: "Argument, not conclusion, was the hope of the future. Everyone was entitled to their opinion, and those opinions would not be fixed. It is the essence of equality: to be a human among other humans, entitled to an opinion. Jews and Hindus and Christians and Muslims would coexist. Nobody could have a monopoly on truth. The simple grandeur of this basic proposition is its faith in human nature, expressed politically. It has never been rivaled."

-America is the epitome of holding opposing ideas in mind at the same time as well as a willingness to reflect and to embrace the new

-"Even if breaking up is the sensible option, even if it's better for ordinary Americans, let's be clear about the stakes here. If the American experiment fails, and it is failing, the world will be poorer, more brutal, lesser. The world needs America. It needs the idea of America, the American faith, even if that idea was only ever a half-truth. The rest of the world needs to imagine a place where you can become yourself, where you can shed your past, where contradictions that lead to genocide elsewhere flourish into prosperity. Now that America is ceding its place of authority, the source of its power is becoming clear. The American empire was built on the story it told itself. It was an empire built, in perhaps its ultimate contradiction, on the belief in self-determination. And now that its story is crumbling under the weight of its contradictions, the world will miss it."

Conclusion: A Note on American Hope

-America has always been distinguished by its adherence to hope

-"None of the crises described in this book are beyond the capacity of Americans to solve. It would be entirely possible for the United States to implement a modern electoral system, to restore the legitimacy of the courts, to reform its police forces, to root out domestic terrorism, to alter its tax code to address inequality, to prepare its cities and its agriculture for the effects of climate change, to regulate and to control the mechanisms of violence. All of these futures are possible. There is one hope, however, that must be rejected outright: the hope that everything will work out by itself, that America will bumble along into better times. It won't. Americans have believed their country is an exception, a necessary nation. If history has shown us anything, it's that the world doesn't have any necessary nations."

-says that the US has a spirit of frankness in the way that they talk with each other in a way that other nations do not, one that gets at the heart of their belief in themselves as a citizen rather than a subject

-the US needs to recover its revolutionary spirit: "The crises the United States now faces in its basic governmental functions are so profound that they require starting over. The founders understood that government is supposed to work for living people rather than for a bunch of old ghosts. And now their ghostly Constitution, worshipped like a religious document, is strangling the spirit that animated their enterprise, the idea that you mold politics to suit people, not the other way around. Does the country have the humility to acknowledge that its old orders no longer work? Does it have the courage to begin again? As it managed so spectacularly at the birth of its nationhood, the United States requires the boldness to invent a new politics for a new era. It is entirely possible that it might do so. America is, after all, a country devoted to reinvention."