

TAKING SIDES



Clashing Views on Controversial Issues in
American History, Volume II
Reconstruction to the Present

EIGHTH EDITION

Larry Madaras
James M. SoRelle

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American History,
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Present



Eighth Edition

Edited, Selected, and with Introductions by

Larry Madaras

Howard Community College

and

James M. Sofka

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DUSHKIN/McGraw Hill

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To Maggie and Cindy

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PREFACE

The success of the past seven editions of *Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Controversial Issues in American History* has encouraged us to remain faithful to its original objectives, methods, and format. Our aim has been to create an effective instrument to enhance classroom learning and to foster critical thinking. Historical facts presented in a vacuum are of little value to the educational process. For students, whose search for historical truth often concentrates on *when* something happened rather than on *why*, and on specific events rather than on the *significance* of those events, *Taking Sides* is designed to offer an interesting and valuable departure. The understanding that the reader arrives at based on the evidence that emerges from the clash of views encourages the reader to view history as an *interpretive* discipline, not one of rote memorization.

As in previous editions, the issues are arranged in chronological order and can be easily incorporated into any American history survey course. Each issue has an issue *introduction*, which sets the stage for the debate that follows in the pro and con selections and provides historical and methodological background to the problem that the issue examines. Each issue concludes with a *postscript*, which ties the readings together, briefly mentions alternative interpretations, and supplies detailed *suggestions for further reading* for the student who wishes to pursue the topics raised in the issue. Also, Internet site addresses (URLs) have been provided on the *On the Internet* page that accompanies each part opener, which should prove useful as starting points for further research.

Changes to this edition In this edition we have continued our efforts to maintain a balance between the traditional political, diplomatic, and cultural issues and the new social history, which depicts a society that benefited from the presence of African Americans, women, and workers of various racial and ethnic backgrounds. With this in mind, we present seven entirely new issues: *Was it Wrong to Impeach Andrew Johnson?* (Issue 1); *Was John D. Rockefeller a "Robber Baron"?* (Issue 2); *Did Nineteenth-Century Women of the West Fail to Overcome the Hardships of Living on the Great Plains?* (Issue 3); *Were American Workers in the Gilded Age Conservative Capitalists?* (Issue 4); *Did Yellow Journalism Cause the Spanish-American War?* (Issue 6); *Was the United States Responsible for the Cold War?* (Issue 12); and *Was America's Escalation of the War in Vietnam Inevitable?* (Issue 14). Also, for Issue 11, *Was Franklin Roosevelt a Reluctant Internationalist?* the NO side has been replaced to bring a fresh perspective to the debate. In all there are 15 new selections.

A word to the instructor An *Instructor's Manual With Test Questions* (multiple-choice and essay) is available through the publisher for the instructor using *Taking Sides* in the classroom. A general guidebook, *Using Taking Sides in the Classroom*, which discusses methods and techniques for integrating the procon approach into any classroom setting, is also available. An online version of *Using Taking Sides in the Classroom* and a correspondence service for *Taking Sides* adopters can be found at <http://www.dushkin.com/usingsides/>. For students, we offer a field guide to analyzing argumentative essays, *Analyzing Controversy: An Introductory Guide*, with exercises and techniques to help them to decipher genuine controversies.

Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Controversial Issues in American History, Volume II is only one title in the *Taking Sides* series. If you are interested in seeing the table of contents for any of the other titles, please visit the *Taking Sides* Web site at <http://www.dushkin.com/takingsides/>.

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INTRODUCTION

The Study of History

Larry Madaras
James M. SoRelle

In a pluralistic society such as ours, the study of history is bound to be a complex process. How an event is interpreted depends not only on the existing evidence but also on the perspective of the interpreter. Consequently, understanding history presupposes the evaluation of information, a task that often leads to conflicting conclusions. An understanding of history, then, requires the acceptance of the idea of historical relativism. Relativism means that redefinition of our past is always possible and desirable. History shifts, changes, and grows with new and different evidence and interpretations. As is the case with the law and even with medicine, beliefs that were unquestioned 100 or 200 years ago have been discredited or discarded since.

Relativism, then, encourages revisionism. There is a maxim that “the past must remain useful to the present.” Historian Carl Becker argued that every generation should examine history for itself, thus ensuring constant scrutiny of our collective experience through new perspectives. History, consequently, does not remain static, in part because historians cannot avoid being influenced by the times in which they live. Almost all historians commit themselves to revising the views of other historians, synthesizing theories into macrointerpretations, or revising the revisionists.

SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT

Three predominant schools of thought have emerged in American history since the first graduate seminars in history were given at the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore in the 1870s. The *progressive* school dominated the professional field in the first half of the twentieth century. Influenced by the reform currents of Populism, progressivism, and the New Deal, these historians explored the social and economic forces that energized America. The progressive scholars tended to view the past in terms of conflicts between groups, and they sympathized with the underdog.

The post–World War II period witnessed the emergence of a new group of historians who viewed the conflict thesis as overly simplistic. Writing against the backdrop of the cold war, these *neoconservative* or *consensus* historians argued that Americans possess a shared set of values and that the areas of agreement within the nation’s basic democratic and capitalistic framework were more important than the areas of disagreement.

In the 1960s, however, the civil rights movement, women’s liberation, and the student rebellion (with its condemnation of the war in Vietnam) frag-

mented the consensus of values upon which historians and social scientists of the 1950s centered their interpretations. This turmoil set the stage for the emergence of another group of scholars. *New Left* historians began to reinterpret the past once again. They emphasized the significance of conflict in American history, and they resurrected interest in those groups ignored by the consensus school. In addition, New Left historians critiqued the expansionist policies of the United States and emphasized the difficulties confronted by Native Americans, African Americans, women, and urban workers in gaining full citizenship status.

Progressive, consensus, and New Left history is still being written. The most recent generation of scholars, however, focuses upon social history. Their primary concern is to discover what the lives of "ordinary Americans" were really like. These new social historians employ previously overlooked court and church documents, house deeds and tax records, letters and diaries, photographs, and census data to reconstruct the everyday lives of average Americans. Some employ new methodologies, such as quantification (enhanced by advancing computer technology) and oral history, while others borrow from the disciplines of political science, economics, sociology, anthropology, and psychology for their historical investigations.

The proliferation of historical approaches, which are reflected in the issues debated in this book, has had mixed results. On the one hand, historians have become so specialized in their respective time periods and methodological styles that it is difficult to synthesize the recent scholarship into a comprehensive text for the general reader. On the other hand, historians know more about the American past than at any other time in history. They dare to ask new questions or ones that previously were considered to be germane only to scholars in other social sciences. Although there is little agreement about the answers to these questions, the methods employed and issues explored make the "new history" a very exciting field to study.

The topics that follow represent a variety of perspectives and approaches. Each of these controversial issues can be studied for its individual importance to American history. Taken as a group, they interact with one another to illustrate larger historical themes. When grouped thematically, the issues reveal continuing motifs in the development of American history.

ECONOMIC QUESTIONS

Issue 2 explores the dynamics of the modern American economy through investigations of the nineteenth-century entrepreneurs. It evaluates the contributions of post-Civil War entrepreneurial giants. Were these industrial leaders robber barons, as portrayed by contemporary critics and many history texts? Or were they industrial statesmen and organizational geniuses? Matthew Josephson argues that John D. Rockefeller is a key example of a monopoly capitalist who utilized ruthless and violent methods in organizing the oil industry. More favorable and representative of the business histo-

rian approach is the interpretation of Ralph W. Hidy and Muriel E. Hidy. Rockefeller, they argue, possessed an extraordinary mind, a penchant for detail, foresight and vision, and an ability to make decisions. They conclude that Rockefeller was among the earliest organizational innovators and that he standardized production and procedures and created a large integrated industrial corporation.

POLITICAL REFORMS AND THE STATUS QUO

Issue 5 assesses the nature of urban government in the late nineteenth century. Focusing on the activities of William M. "Boss" Tweed in post-Civil War New York City, Alexander B. Callow, Jr., discusses corrupting influences on city and state governments and on big businesses. Leo Hershkowitz presents a contrasting viewpoint, emphasizing Tweed's services and benefits to the city. He rejects Tweed's reputation for corruption, suggesting that it is undeserved.

The Progressive movement is examined in Issue 8. Richard M. Abrams attributes the failure of the movement to its limited scope. He maintains that it imposed a uniform set of values on a diverse people and did not address the inequalities that prevail in American society. Arthur S. Link and Richard L. McCormick, however, emphasize the reforms introduced by the Progressives to check the abuses of industrialization and urbanization during the early 1900s.

One of the more timely issues in this book, which demonstrates that history can shed some light on a current political controversy, is Issue 1 on whether or not President Andrew Johnson should have been impeached. Irving Brant takes the traditional view and argues that Johnson treated the 11 defeated Confederate states as legal entities who never left the Union, not as conquered provinces. Johnson favored a more lenient Reconstruction program than his Republican congressional opponents, and he vetoed their policies. Furthermore, Brant maintains, passage of the Tenure of Office Act wrongly nullified the president's constitutional right to fire cabinet members without the approval of Congress. Harold M. Hyman, in response, argues that Johnson deserved to be impeached because he obstructed the Reconstruction policies passed by the congressional Republican majority. However, by the time of the Senate trial, notes Hyman, Johnson had changed some of his obstructionist ways by nominating a moderate as secretary of war and sending to the Senate for ratification the Reconstruction constitutions of South Carolina and Arkansas. Hyman reasons that these actions explain in part why seven moderate senators voted against convicting Johnson of the impeachment charges.

FROM DEPRESSION THROUGH PROSPERITY: 1930-1990

The Great Depression of the 1930s remains one of the most traumatic events in U.S. history. The characteristics of that decade are deeply etched in American

folk memory, but the remedies that were applied to these social and economic ills—known collectively as the New Deal—are not easy to evaluate. In Issue 10, Roger Biles contends that the economic stabilizers created by New Deal programs prevented the recurrence of the Great Depression. Gary Dean Best, on the other hand, criticizes the New Deal from a 1990s conservative perspective. In his view, the Roosevelt administration prolonged the depression and retarded the recovery. Because New Deal agencies were antibusiness, they overregulated the economy and did not allow the free enterprise system to work out of the depression.

Issue 13 deals with the decade of the 1950s. Melvyn Dubofsky and Athan Theoharis stress the global superpower role of the United States and the prosperity of the middle class, which they feel made these years an era of happiness and optimism. Douglas T. Miller and Marion Nowak detect the underlying anxiety in the decade, with shadows of the cold war, communism, and the atomic bomb looming.

Because he was forced to resign the presidency to avoid impeachment proceedings resulting from his role in the Watergate scandal, President Richard Nixon remains a controversial political figure. How will Nixon, who died in 1994, be remembered? In Issue 16, Joan Hoff-Wilson downplays the significance of the Watergate scandal as well as foreign policy accomplishments in assessing Nixon's legacy. Instead, she argues, Nixon should be applauded for his domestic accomplishments, including reorganizing the executive branch of the federal government and implementing important civil rights, welfare, and economic planning programs. Stanley I. Kutler disagrees with these revisionist treatments of the former president, insisting that Nixon was a crass, cynical, narrow-minded politician who unnecessarily prolonged the Vietnam War to ensure his reelection and who implemented domestic reforms only to outflank his liberal opponents.

Following the economic upheavals of the 1970s, created by the Vietnam War and the oil crisis, President Ronald Reagan introduced economic policies based on supply-side economics. The success of these policies is the subject matter of Issue 17. Kevin Phillips focuses on the economic advantages that this approach brought to the wealthy. Alan Reynolds, on the other hand, uses statistics to show that all income groups experienced a rise in income levels during this decade.

THE OUTSIDERS: LABORERS, BLACKS, WOMEN, AND INTELLECTUALS

In the wake of industrialization during the late 1800s, the rapid pace of change created new working conditions for the laboring class. How did laborers react to these changes? Did they lose their autonomy in the large corporations? Did they accept or reject the wage system? Were they pawns of the economic cycles of boom and bust, to be hired and fired at will? Did they look for an

alternative to capitalism by engaging in strikes, establishing labor unions, or creating a socialist movement? In Issue 4, Carl N. Degler maintains that American workers accepted capitalism and the changes that it brought forth. Degler argues that workers wanted to improve their lifestyle with better workplace conditions, shorter hours, better pay, and more benefits. Herbert G. Gutman sees the workers responding to the changing capitalist system in a different manner than Degler does. In the years 1843–1893, says Gutman, American factory workers attempted to humanize the system by maintaining their traditional artisan values. By the beginning of the twentieth century, however, the organizational innovations of John D. Rockefeller and the assembly-line techniques pioneered by Henry Ford had revolutionized American capitalism.

One of the most controversial figures in American history was the early-twentieth-century African American leader Booker T. Washington. Was Washington too accommodating toward white values and goals and too accepting of the political disfranchisement and social segregation that took away the basic freedoms that African Americans earned after their emancipation from slavery? In Issue 7, Donald Spivey argues the case against Washington's ideology and policies, while Louis R. Harlan maintains that there were two Washingtons. Harlan argues that Washington, while publicly assuring whites that he accepted segregation, fought active and bitter battles behind the scenes to advance the political, economic, and educational opportunities for African Americans. Washington, then, was a political realist whose long-range goals of progress toward equality was a practical response to the climate of the times in which he lived.

Issue 15 evaluates the civil rights movement, which has brought many tangible opportunities to blacks and minorities, according to Robert Weisbrot. Tom Wicker, on the other hand, points out that racial equality has still not been achieved and that programs such as affirmative action have been the cause of bitterness and division among the races.

One of the less well known areas of American history is the impact of the frontier on the women who migrated west. In Issue 3, Christine Stansell maintains that women who migrated west in the late nineteenth century lost their networks of family and friends back east and that they were isolated and lonely and often endured loveless marriages on the Great Plains. Glenda Riley agrees that women faced many hardships on the frontier. However, she argues that women rebuilt friendships on the frontier through church gatherings and quilting bee sessions. Also, says Riley, it was no accident that western women were at the forefront of the women's suffrage movement.

The decade of the 1920s had a unique flavor. The role of intellectuals in protecting the values of the era is discussed in Issue 9. William E. Leuchtenburg views the era as one of social and cultural rebellion, whereas David A. Shannon sees these changes as superficial in comparison with the economic expansion that ushered in a culture of mass consumption.

THE UNITED STATES AND THE WORLD

As the United States developed a preeminent position in world affairs, the nation's politicians were forced to consider the proper relationship between their country and the rest of the world. To what extent, many asked, should the United States seek to expand its political, economic, or moral influence around the world?

This was a particularly intriguing question for a number of political, military, and intellectual leaders at the close of the nineteenth century, who pondered whether or not it was necessary to acquire an overseas empire to be considered one of the world's great powers. Many historians consider the Spanish-American war a turning point in American history. In Issue 6, W. A. Swanberg argues that newspaper mogul William Randolph Hearst used the sensational and exploitative stories in his widely circulated and nationally influential *New York Journal* to stir up public opinion and to push President William McKinley into a questionable war. Taking a broader view, Richard Hofstadter contends that the pressures of the 1890s—a major economic depression, labor violence, and Populist unrest—caused a “psychic crisis” in the nation that climaxed with the Spanish-American war.

The role of the United States in World War II is closely linked with President Franklin D. Roosevelt. In Issue 11, Robert A. Divine portrays Roosevelt as a leader whose words were tough but whose actions betrayed his hatred of war. In contrast, William E. Kinsella, Jr., argues that from the time Hitler came to power in 1933, Roosevelt viewed him as an overbearing, aggressive, warlike German whose goal of world conquest would have to be stopped by American military action at the appropriate time.

The United States had barely emerged victorious against Germany and Japan in 1945 when a cold war developed against its former ally, the Soviet Union. Issue 12 tackles the question of responsibility. Thomas G. Paterson blames the United States for exaggerating the Soviet threat to world peace. He argues that the United States, untouched physically by the war and having emerged as the world's greatest military and economic power, tried to reshape the world political and economic structures to meet the needs of American capitalism. John Lewis Gaddis, taking a different position, argues that the power vacuum that existed in Europe at the end of World War II exaggerated the countries' differences and made a clash between the democratic, capitalist United States and the totalitarian, communist USSR almost inevitable.

No discussion of American foreign policy is complete without some consideration of the Vietnam War. Was America's escalation of the war inevitable in 1965? In Issue 14, Brian VanDeMark argues that President Lyndon Johnson was a prisoner of America's global “containment” policy. He was afraid to pull out of Vietnam because he feared that his opponents would accuse him of being soft on communism and that they would also destroy his Great Society reforms. H. R. McMaster blames Johnson and his civilian and military advisers for failing to develop a coherent policy in Vietnam.

CONCLUSION

The process of historical study should rely more on thinking than on memorizing data. Once the basics of who, what, when, and where are determined, historical thinking shifts to a higher gear. Analysis, comparison and contrast, evaluation, and explanation take command. These skills not only increase our knowledge of the past but they also provide general tools for the comprehension of all the topics about which human beings think.

The diversity of a pluralistic society, however, creates some obstacles to comprehending the past. The spectrum of differing opinions on any particular subject eliminates the possibility of quick and easy answers. In the final analysis, conclusions are often built through a synthesis of several different interpretations, but even then they may be partial and tentative.

The study of history in a pluralistic society allows each citizen the opportunity to reach independent conclusions about the past. Since most, if not all, historical issues affect the present and future, understanding the past becomes necessary if society is to progress. Many of today's problems have a direct connection with the past. Additionally, other contemporary issues may lack obvious direct antecedents, but historical investigation can provide illuminating analogies. At first, it may appear confusing to read and to think about opposing historical views, but the survival of our democratic society depends on such critical thinking by acute and discerning minds.

On the Internet . . .



POTUS: Presidents of the United States

This page of the Internet Public Library offers some factual information on Andrew Johnson, the 17th U.S. president, and links to biographies of Johnson, related historical documents, and other resources on the Internet.
<http://www.ipl.org/ref/POTUS/ajohnson.html>

National Women's History Project

The National Women's History Project is a nonprofit corporation, founded in Sonoma County, California, in 1980. The organization provides numerous links to sites on women's history under such categories as The Women's Rights Movement, Politics, African-American Women, and War and Peace.
<http://www.nwhp.org/links.html>

John D. Rockefeller and the Standard Oil Company

This site, created by Swiss entrepreneur François Micheloud, provides a highly detailed history of the American oil industry, with John D. Rockefeller as a main focus. It includes the discovery of oil, the main players in the oil industry, the rise of the Standard Oil Company, the passing of the Sherman Antitrust Act, and the dismantling of Standard Oil, as well as both short and detailed chronologies of the company.
<http://www.micheloud.com/FXM/SO/rock.htm>

Gilded Age and Progressive Era Resources

This page of the Department of History at Tennessee Technological University offers over 100 links to sites on the Gilded Age and the Progressive era. Links include general resources, political leaders, transformation of the West, the rise of big business and American workers, and literary and cultural resources.
<http://www.tntech.edu/www/acad/hist/gilprog.html>

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Professor emeritus of history Alexander B. Callow, Jr., insists that William M. "Boss" Tweed and his infamous "ring" extracted enormous sums of ill-gotten money for their own benefit in post-Civil War New York. Professor of history Leo Hershkowitz argues that Tweed's reputation as the symbol for urban political corruption is grossly undeserved.

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