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PART 1 AMERICAN HIGH: 1945–1963 1

Issue 1. Was It Necessary to Drop the Atomic Bomb to End World War II? 2

YES: Robert James Maddox, from “The Biggest Decision: Why We Had to Drop the Atomic Bomb,” American Heritage (May/June 1995) 4


Professor of American history Robert James Maddox contends that the atomic bomb became the catalyst that forced the hard-liners in the Japanese army to accept the emperor's plea to surrender, thus avoiding a costly, bloody invasion of the Japanese mainland. Professor of history Barton J. Bernstein argues that the United States probably could have avoided both a landed invasion of the Japanese mainland and the use of atomic bombs and still have ended the war by November 1945.

Issue 2. Was the United States Responsible for the Cold War? 26

YES: Thomas G. Paterson, from Meeting the Communist Threat: Truman to Reagan (Oxford University Press, 1988) 28

NO: John Lewis Gaddis, from Russia, the Soviet Union, and the United States: An Interpretive History, 2d ed. (McGraw-Hill, 1990) 36

Professor of history Thomas G. Paterson argues that the Truman administration exaggerated the Soviet threat after World War II because the United States had expansionist political and economic global needs. Professor of history John Lewis Gaddis argues that the power vacuum that existed in Europe at the end of World War II exaggerated and made almost inevitable a clash between the democratic, capitalist United States and the totalitarian, communist USSR.

Issue 3. Did Communism Threaten America's Internal Security After World War II? 48

YES: John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr, from Venona: Decoding Soviet Espionage in America (Yale University Press, 1999) 50

NO: Richard M. Fried, from Nightmare in Red: The McCarthy Era in Perspective (Oxford University Press, 1990) 61
History professors John Earl Haynes and Harvey Klehr argue that army code-breakers during World War II's "Venona Project" uncovered a disturbing number of high-ranking U.S. government officials who seriously damaged American interests by passing sensitive information to the Soviet Union. Professor of history Richard M. Fried argues that the early 1950s were a "nightmare in red" during which American citizens had their First and Fifth Amendment rights suspended when a host of national and state investigating committees searched for Communists in government agencies, Hollywood, labor unions, foundations, universities, public schools, and even public libraries.

**Issue 4. Should President Truman Have Fired General MacArthur?**


**NO:** D. Clayton James with Anne Sharp Wells, from *Refighting the Last War: Command and Crisis in Korea, 1950–1953* (Free Press, 1993) 86

Professor of political science John S. Spanier argues that General Douglas MacArthur was fired because he publicly disagreed with the Truman administration's "Europe first" policy and its limited war strategy of containing communism in Korea. Biographer D. Clayton James and assistant editor Anne Sharp Wells argue that General MacArthur was relieved of duty because there was a lack of communication between the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the headstrong general, which led to a misperception over the appropriate strategy in fighting the Korean War.

**Issue 5. Were the 1950s America's "Happy Days"?**

**YES:** Melvyn Dubofsky and Athan Theoharis, from *Imperial Democracy: The United States Since 1945*, 2d ed. (Prentice Hall, 1988) 100

**NO:** Douglas T. Miller and Marion Nowak, from *The Fifties: The Way We Really Were* (Doubleday, 1977) 111

Professor of history and sociology Melvyn Dubofsky and professor of history Athan Theoharis argue that throughout the 1950s, the U.S. economy dominated much of the globe and created a period of unprecedented growth and prosperity for the percentage of the American population that made it into the middle class. Professor of history Douglas T. Miller and journalist Marion Nowak argue that the nostalgia craze, which re-creates the 1950s as a sweet, simple, golden age of harmony, masks the fact that the decade was an era of conformity in which Americans feared the bomb, Communists, crime, and the loss of a national purpose.

**Issue 6. Was Dwight Eisenhower a Great President?**

**YES:** Stephen E. Ambrose, from *Eisenhower: The President, vol. 2* (Simon & Schuster, 1984) 124

**NO:** Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., from *The Cycles of American History* (Houghton Mifflin, 1986) 132
Professor of history Stephen E. Ambrose maintains that Eisenhower was a greater president than his predecessors and successors because he balanced the budget, stopped inflation, and kept the peace. Professor of the humanities Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., argues that Eisenhower failed as a president because he refused to tackle the moral and environmental issues at home and because he established a foreign policy that relied on covert CIA activities and threats of nuclear arms.

PART 2 FROM LIBERATION THROUGH WATERGATE: 1960–1974

Issue 7. Did President Kennedy Effectively Manage the Cuban Missile Crisis? 146


NO: Mark J. White, from The Cuban Missile Crisis (Macmillan Press Ltd., 1996) 153

Theodore C. Sorensen, President John F. Kennedy's special assistant, argues that Kennedy effectively managed the Cuban Missile Crisis via a "carefully balanced and precisely measured combination of defense, diplomacy, and dialogue." Assistant professor of history Mark J. White castigates Kennedy "for the excessive belligerence of his Cuban policies before the missile crisis while praising him for his generally adroit management of the crisis."

Issue 8. Did the Great Society Fail? 162

YES: Charles Murray, from "The Legacy of the 60's," Commentary (July 1992) 164

NO: Joseph A. Califano, Jr., from "How Great Was the Great Society?" in Barbara C. Jordan and Elspeth D. Rostow, eds., The Great Society: A Twenty Year Critique (LB] Library and LBJ School of Public Affairs, 1986) 172

Conservative social critic Charles Murray argues that not only did the Great Society's retraining, anticrime, and welfare programs not work, but they actually contributed to the worsening plight of U.S. inner cities. Joseph A. Califano, Jr., a former aide to President Lyndon Johnson, maintains that the Great Society programs brought about positive revolutionary changes in the areas of civil rights, education, health care, the environment, and consumer protection.

Issue 9. Was Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Leadership Essential to the Success of the Civil Rights Revolution? 180

YES: Adam Fairclough, from "Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Quest for Nonviolent Social Change," Phylon (Spring 1986) 182

NO: Clayborne Carson, from "Martin Luther King, Jr.: Charismatic Leadership in a Mass Struggle," Journal of American History (September 1987) 194
Professor of history Adam Fairclough argues that Martin Luther King, Jr., was a pragmatic reformer who organized nonviolent direct action protests in strategically targeted local communities, which provoked violence from his opponents, gaining publicity and sympathy for the civil rights movement. Professor of history Clayborne Carson concludes that the civil rights struggle would have followed a similar course of development even if King had never lived because its successes depended upon mass activism, not the actions of a single leader.

Issue 10. Was the Americanization of the War in Vietnam Inevitable? 202

YES: Brian VanDeMark, from Into the Quagmire: Lyndon Johnson and the Escalation of the Vietnam War (Oxford University Press, 1991) 204

NO: H. R. McMaster, from Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies That Led to Vietnam (HarperCollins, 1997) 213

Professor of history Brian VanDeMark argues that President Lyndon Johnson failed to question the viability of increasing U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War because he was a prisoner of America's global containment policy and because he did not want his opponents to accuse him of being soft on communism or endanger support for his Great Society reforms. H. R. McMaster, an active-duty army tanker, maintains that the Vietnam disaster was not inevitable but a uniquely human failure whose responsibility was shared by President Johnson and his principal military and civilian advisers.

Issue 11. Has the Women’s Liberation Movement Been Harmful to American Women? 224

YES: F. Carolyn Graglia, from Domestic Tranquility: A Brief Against Feminism (Spence, 1998) 226


Writer and lecturer F. Carolyn Graglia argues that women should stay at home and practice the values of “true motherhood” because contemporary feminists have discredited marriage, devalued traditional homemaking, and encouraged sexual promiscuity. Feminist Jo Freeman argues that in the late 1960s activists challenged the notion of women’s inferior status in society through lawsuits and through “consciousness-raising” sessions to develop egalitarian and liberation values.


NO: Stanley I. Kutler, from “Et Tu, Bob?” The Nation (August 22/29, 1994) 260

According to professor of history Joan Hoff-Wilson, the Nixon presidency reorganized the executive branch and portions of the federal bureaucracy
and implemented domestic reforms in civil rights, welfare, and economic planning, despite its limited foreign policy successes and the Watergate scandal. Professor and political commentator Stanley I. Kutler argues that President Nixon was a crass, cynical, narrow-minded politician who unnecessarily prolonged the Vietnam War to ensure his reelection and implemented domestic reforms only when he could outflank his liberal opponents.


**Issue 13. Did President Reagan Win the Cold War?** 272

YES: John Lewis Gaddis, from *The United States and the End of the Cold War: Implications, Reconsiderations, Provocations* (Oxford University Press, 1992) 274

NO: Daniel Deudney and G. John Ikenberry, from “Who Won the Cold War?” *Foreign Policy* (Summer 1992) 284

Professor of history John Lewis Gaddis argues that President Reagan combined a policy of militancy and operational pragmatism to bring about the most significant improvement in Soviet-American relations since the end of World War II. Professors of political science Daniel Deudney and G. John Ikenberry contend that the cold war ended only when Soviet president Gorbachev accepted Western liberal values and the need for global cooperation.

**Issue 14. Were the 1980s a Decade of Greed?** 296


Political analyst Kevin Phillips argues that President Ronald Reagan's tax reform bills in the 1980s widened the income gap by decreasing the tax burden on the rich and increasing the taxes paid by the middle-income and poor classes. Conservative economist Alan Reynolds asserts that all income groups experienced significant gains in income during the 1980s.

**Issue 15. Should America Remain a Nation of Immigrants?** 316

YES: Reed Ueda, from “The Permanently Unfinished Country,” *The World & I* (October 1992) 318

NO: Richard D. Lamm, from “Truth, Like Roses, Often Comes With Thorns,” *Vital Speeches of the Day* (December 1, 1994) 324

Professor of history Reed Ueda maintains that the sheer magnitude and diversity of immigrants continually reshapes the American character, making America a “permanently unfinished country.” Former Colorado governor Richard D. Lamm argues that immigration should be severely curtailed.
He contends that the most recent immigrants are members of the underclass who are culturally unassimilable and who take jobs away from the poorest citizens in an already overpopulated America.


NO: James MacGregor Burns and Georgia J. Sorenson et al., from *Dead Center: Clinton-Gore Leadership and the Perils of Moderation* (Scribner, 1999) 345

Journalist Lars-Erik Nelson argues that President Bill Clinton is a sadly flawed human being but a reasonably good president whose administration was a time of peace and plenty for Americans. Political scientists James MacGregor Burns and Georgia J. Sorenson et al. argue that Clinton will not rank among the near-great presidents because he is a transactional broker who lacks the ideological commitment to tackle the big issues facing American society.

Issue 17. Is America Entering the Twenty-First Century in a Period of Decline? 360

YES: Paul Kennedy, from "The Next American Century?" *World Policy Journal* (Spring 1999) 362


Professor of history Paul Kennedy argues that Europe and China have the potential to equal or exceed the United States in economic power in 25 years. Gregg Easterbrook, senior editor of *The New Republic*, maintains that in terms of health, wealth, and moral values, life in the United States has never been better for the vast majority of Americans.

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