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Larry Madaras, James M. SoRelle. *Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Controversial Issues in American History; Vol. I: The Colonial Period to Reconstruction.* Guilford, Conn: McGraw-Hill, 2001. xvii + 408 pp. $31.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-07-243095-0.

Larry Madaras, James M. SoRelle. *Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Controversial Issues in American History; Vol. II: Reconstruction to the Present.* Guilford, Conn: McGraw-Hill, 2001. xvii + 412 pp. $31.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-07-243080-6.

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Increasingly, historians in higher education are publishing compilations of scholarly articles and sets of primary sources that do more than simply present relevant examples of a particular historiographical trend. Two notable contributions within the last few years include Irwin Unger and Robert R. Tomes, *American Issues: A Primary Source Reader in United States History*, and Francis G. Couvares, et al., *Interpretations of American History: Patterns and Perspectives: >From Reconstruction* (Seventh Edition). These works are refreshing and welcome additions to our understanding of the professional study of history. Presently, such books frequently focus on specific "problems" in United States history while drawing students' attention to the varying and conflicting interpretations of those problems. More to the point, emphasis in such volumes has also shifted toward the encouragement and development of critical thinking skills and the understanding that the study of history is more than a recitation of dates, names, and places. *Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Controversial Issues in American History* seeks to join these and other publications with the stated goal of creating "an effective instrument to enhance classroom learning and to foster critical thinking" (pp. i); unfortunately, the editors have failed to achieve this goal, and this reviewer cannot recommend the publication to instructors of general survey courses in United States history.

Taking Sides follows its previous editions by arranging U.S. history in a chronological format, beginning with white, European colonization and ending with the Clinton presidency. Each volume covers United States history in a manner familiar to instructors of United States history survey courses. The editors have divided Volume I into four parts: Part I examines Colonial Society; Part II reviews the Revolution and the New Nation; Part III discusses Antebellum America; and Part IV concludes with Conflict and Resolution. Volume II comprises three parts: Part I deals with the Industrial Revolution; Part II debates the nature of U.S. society's Response to Industrialism; and Part III wraps up the two volume set with The Cold War and Beyond. Each part opens with an annotated list of relevant web sites for further reading and a summary of the historical issues under consideration. Each Issue opens with a question that requires a yes or no answer followed by the responses from two noted historians in the field. For example, in Volume 1, Part 2 (Revolution and the New Nation), Issue 7 asks, "Was the American Revolution a Conservative Movement?" Carl N. Degler responds in the affirmative with a selection from *Out of Our Past: The Forces that Shaped Modern America* (1970) and Gordon S. Wood counters in the negative with a selection from *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (1991).

Despite this traditional and rather unimaginative chronological format, *Taking Sides* is set up as a teaching tool with the avowed intention of providing instructors in United States history survey courses with a valuable and innovative companion to their standard history texts. The editors first introduce the reader to the an Issue with a fine, but brief, summary of the historical context that is essentially a historiographical essay that sets the stage for the debate to follow. They end each Issue with an equally fine, and also brief, postscript that summarizes the argument and presents the reader with a bibliographic essay of further readings. The annotated list of web sites should prove to be a useful tool to ambitious students wishing to track down further readings and primary sources. A review of the web sites for the most part

shows them to be of high quality and scholarly. The editors begin each volume with a brief introduction of different schools of thought that generally describes history as a fluid and ever morphing profession and stresses the analytical and interpretative nature of historical study. This introduction should be useful to students with little background in various historiographical traditions. This concept of "historical relativism" is the bedrock of *Taking Sides* and teaches students that historiography "changes and grows with new and different evidence and interpretation" (xii). This acceptance of shifting interpretations and points of view, the editors insist, "in a pluralistic society allows each citizen the opportunity to reach independent conclusions about the past" (xvii).

The postscript does an excellent job clarifying the authors' arguments and explaining their scholarly backgrounds. For example, Volume I, Issue 14, asks, "Have Historians Overemphasized the Slavery Issue as a Cause of the Civil War?" To answer this important question, the editors present selections from Joel H. Silbey, a partisan of quantitative analysis, and Michael F. Holt, a supporter of more traditional methods of analysis and a critic of Silbey's "ethnocultural school." Whereas Silby rejects the traditional method of selecting quotes from newspapers and contemporary actors in favor of computer analysis of voter statistics, Holt rejects quantitative analysis as too black and white and a methodology that fails to answer questions involving the subtleties of human nature and politics. The debate between the two not only presents contrasting ideas about a controversial subject but also examines two distinct historical methodologies that the editors summarize nicely in the postscript. What better way not only to teach students about a particular subject, but also to introduce them to one face of a very multifaceted profession? The postscript also provides a bibliographic essay that brings the reader up-to-date on more recent scholarship on the issue. This inclusion is important, since the editors have selected many articles that are dated, suggesting that they have missed some groundbreaking ideas in recent years.

Does *Taking Sides* achieve the goal of fostering the development of critical thinking skills? I believe the answer is no. As a pedagogical tool, the two-volume set makes an admirable effort but ultimately falls short of the goal. To be sure, the point-counterpoint format certainly makes clear that the study of history is an interpretative process rife with conflicting arguments. Left alone in this way, however, a student could conceivably walk away from *Taking Sides* thinking that professional historians spend their time in useless squabbles. To avoid such a calamity, a work such as *Taking Sides* should flesh out critical thinking as a complex cognitive process. For example, nowhere do the editors really define critical thinking or offer instructors any lesson plans or suggested teaching methods. Neither does *Taking Sides* assist the student in examining how authors of the various articles have analyzed and interpreted primary sources and selected the most useful for their arguments. Indeed, in most cases, the editors have omitted the notes and citations, making it impossible for a student to examine sources and judge for themselves the strength of the author's analysis. The Preface does direct instructors to the publisher for a general guidebook to instruction and offers a web link to the publisher's web site. Unfortunately, a review of the web site reveals it to be brief and superficial, offering little help. In the end, any text with the stated goal of developing critical thinking skills must incorporate guidance in the form of definitions, lesson plans, and methodological alternatives; otherwise, works such as *Taking Sides* really do not depart that far from the old compilations of stodgy, scholarly articles, and fail to achieve their stated goal of facilitating the development of critical thinking skills.

Another question to ask is whether or not the subject content of *Taking Sides* offers a unique and innovative companion to general history texts. Unfortunately, the standard demarcation of U.S. history into pre- and post-1865 eras fails to mark *Taking Sides* as something exceptional and different. What is needed, I believe, is a volume of articles organized around important themes and problems in American history that not only help students to gain more in-depth understanding but also allows them to discover how history is relevant today. Although the editors have included interesting discussions in the areas of women's history and African-American history, left almost completely out of the dialog are Native American, environmental, labor, urban, immigrant, and local/regional histories. For example, Volume II ignores Labor's dramatic role in shaping United States society in the twentieth century by challenging the most basic abuses and dysfunctions of industrial capitalism. Instead, the editors offer readers two weak articles in Volume I that answer whether or not American workers in the Gilded Age were conservative capitalists. Understanding the history of labor in the United States helps students recognize the antecedents to labor's struggles today. Similarly, Volume II glosses over the Progressive Period by asking, "Did the Progressives Fail?" Not only is this a simplistic question, but the two articles offered in response are 20 and 30 years old, thereby missing ground breaking ideas by scholars such as Martin Sklar and others that suggest the Progressive era was actually

a conservative movement designed to reconcile American society to the new realities of corporate capitalism. The relevance here is obvious when one considers multinational corporate efforts to "globalize" the economy and international efforts to rationalize that process through such organization as the World Trade Organization and others. Finally, rather than a discussion on the nature of the Clinton administration in the 1990s, would not a debate on the environmental wars of the decade prove far more relevant and interesting to today's college student? Certainly, one could effectively argue that concerns for the environment had a far more potent impact on policy decisions and politics in the previous decade than Clinton's oval office philandering.

In general, I found many of the articles either limited in their scope or too narrow in their interpretation. Of particular frustration were the articles in Volume I, Part II, "Revolution and the New Nation." In the last twenty years, historians in this field of historiography have produced some rather earth shattering interpretations. Scholars such as Edward Countryman, Alfred F. Young, and Gary B. Nash have brought to the fore ideas of class, race, and gender that strongly challenge the old notions that the colonial ruling class was motivated by ideological altruism or that the common people blindly followed their lead. Instead of an excellent article from any one of these sources, the editors give us a selection from Degler that is over 30 years old! Gordon Wood's 1991 article supporting the radical nature of the American Revolution is much more recent but offers too many generalizations, ignores compelling evidence of class, debt, and the privileges of the commercial elite. The editors' failure to provide more relevant and challenging examples of scholarship in this very important area of historical study calls into question the soundness of their other selections. Similarly, Volume II, Part 2, Issue 10, "Was the New Deal an Effective Answer to the Great Depression?," really fails to highlight more dramatic and relevant challenges to traditional interpretations of the Roosevelt administration. Gary Dean Best's "Pride, Prejudice and Politics: Roosevelt Versus Recovery, 1933-1938" reads like a business public relations piece. Such an inclusion is particularly galling when one remembers that the editors have excluded any selection on labor's response to the New Deal or the role of the radical left in challenging the prerogatives of the state and corporate capital during the Depression. Unfortunately, Roger Biles's piece in juxtaposition to Best offers little more understanding of the New Deal than the usual few pages in a general history text, hardly a fitting counter-argument to Best's pro-corporate slant.

In summation, I cannot recommend *Taking Sides* for use in general United States history survey courses. Despite the editors' admirable efforts in some areas, they fail to address too many significant and important pedagogical and content needs. Given their stated goal of producing a work conducive to instruction of critical thinking skills, the editors of *Taking Sides* provide no definitions or methodological aids that would guide students and instructors. Moreover, *Taking Sides* relies on the old and tired demarcation of United States history into pre- and post-1865 volumes, effectively preempting the publication's ability to address serious historiographical subjects that are traditionally ignored by such works. Finally, many of the editor's selections fail to achieve their goal of creating an effective point- counterpoint presentation of the issues, either because the articles are too broad or narrow or because they are too dated and miss more recent and significant scholarship.

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