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1. Vincent Harding, 1865: Beautiful, Cruel Year of Transition in the Black Struggle for Freedom 2

In lyrical prose, Vincent Harding describes how the former slaves, with the protection of federal black soldiers stationed in the conquered Confederacy, defined and exercised freedom for themselves. They sought political rights, self-reliance, economic security, and independence and protection from their former masters. In response, ex-Confederate whites enacted infamous black codes that placed severe restrictions on the freedmen. By acquiescing in such oppressive laws and adopting a blatantly lenient Reconstruction policy, President Johnson proved a dismal failure at a time when "the best future of a nation required great vision, courage, humanity, and strength."

2. Eric Foner, The Checkered History of the Great Fourteenth Amendment 19

The leading historian of Reconstruction traces the dramatic history of the Fourteenth Amendment from its beginning to the present day and finds that its original intent, to protect the rights of the freedmen and guarantee the equality of all before the law, was abandoned in the era after Reconstruction. It then became an instrument to protect corporations. The noble vision of the original framers would not become a reality until almost a century later, when the United States Supreme Court became more concerned with protecting the oppressed than with guarding the rights of corporations.

II. CONQUEST OF THE WEST 29

3. Robert M. Utley, Sitting Bull and the Sioux Resistance 30

This is a knowledgeable and insightful portrait of the great holy man and warrior of the buffalo-hunting Lakota. Sitting Bull's life serves as a window to what happened to the Plains Indians when they collided with a rapacious, acquisitive invader with superior military power.

4. Dee Brown, Women First Won the Right to Vote in the American West 44

Thanks to the efforts of irrepressible Esther McQuigg Morris, the first woman in the world to hold the office of justice of the peace, Wyoming enfranchised its female citizens in 1869, more than fifty

years before the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified. Dee Brown describes how the Wyoming suffragists overcame a wall of male opposition and how their victory opened the way for women to vote in Colorado, Idaho, and Utah before the end of the nineteenth century.

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5. **Robert L. Heilbroner, The Master of Steel: Andrew Carnegie** 56

Heilbroner offers a splendid portrait of the man who embodied the spirit of the Gilded Age perhaps more than any other tycoon of the period. Carnegie not only created but advocated and celebrated industrial power. He even argued that evolution produced millionaires. Yet he also acted on his own self-proclaimed sense of duty and gave away most of his huge fortune during his lifetime.

6. **David McCullough, The Brooklyn Bridge: A Monument to American Ingenuity and Daring** 69

One of our foremost historians tells the remarkable story of the Brooklyn Bridge, "the proudest symbol of America's greatest city." The bridge was more than a technological achievement. It was an example of the changing urban landscape. It was also the triumph of a family whose dedication to building the bridge made it a reality. This brilliantly written piece discusses the disparate labor force that built the bridge and helped make New York City the largest, most diverse, and most vibrant city in America.

7. **David Boroff, A Little Milk, a Little Honey** 74

Boroff's picture of the Jewish immigrants who landed in New York is so graphic that readers can see them, hear them speak, and smell the food they ate. He not only captures the immigrant experience but also explains the influence of the Jewish immigrants on the United States and the country's influence on them.

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This is a superb portrait of a true American heroine, Ida Tarbell, one of a group of talented young journalists who worked at *McClure's Magazine*. Her series of articles focused public attention on the monopolistic and often illegal practices of the giant Standard Oil Company. John D. Rockefeller called her "Miss Tarbarrel," and Theodore Roosevelt believed that she was one of those infamous muckrakers, more interested in filth than the truth.

Tarbell ignored those insults. Eventually, her tenacity and willingness to make personal sacrifices resulted in a federal antitrust suit against the ignoble Rockefeller and his mighty Standard Oil Company.

9. David R. Kohler and James W. Wensyel, America's First Southeast Asian War: The Philippine Insurrection 99

The authors show how American involvement in the Filipino insurrection of 1898–1902 grew out of the Spanish–American War and the U.S. bid for empire. They also draw significant parallels between the Filipino insurrection and the war in Vietnam six decades later.

V. CURRENTS OF THE PROGRESSIVE ERA 113

10. Edmund Morris, Theodore Roosevelt, President 114

Theodore Roosevelt's personality was similar to his dessert plate, which, says Edmund Morris, was filled with "so many peaches that the cream spilled over the sides." TR's Pulitzer Prize-winning biographer uses that personality to point out the importance of personal qualities in shaping the conduct and careers of historical figures.

11. Sean Dennis Cashman, African Americans and the Quest for Civil Rights 128

This is a spirited account of the first stirrings of "the Negro protest movement" in the early years of the twentieth century and of the powerful figures—Benjamin Trotter and W.E.B. Du Bois, among many others—who spearheaded it. Cashman pays particular attention to the formation of the NAACP, the fierce debate between Du Bois and Booker T. Washington over the black predicament, and the great black migrations from the South to the northern urban ghetto.

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12. Paul Fussell, "Hell Cannot Be So Terrible": Trench Warfare on the Western Front 144

The trench warfare in Europe during the Great War was unbelievably brutal, thanks to barbed wire and the murderous machine gun. A Second World War veteran and military historian describes in graphic terms what it was like to fight and die in the terrible trenches and No Man's Land between them in what, until then, was the most monstrous conflict ever fought.

- 13. Thomas A. Bailey, Woodrow Wilson Wouldn't Yield** 156
Wilson's dream of a world free of war ended in a crushing defeat when the United States refused to join his League of Nations. Diplomatic historian Thomas A. Bailey deftly describes how the clash between Wilson and Henry Cabot Lodge, combined with the sentiment of the times, caused America to reject both Wilson's League and the idealism that produced it.

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- 14. Roderick Nash, Henry Ford: Symbol of an Age** 166
Henry Ford introduced the first car built for the common person—the Model T—and his technique of assembly-line production revolutionized American technology. His mass-produced cars not only made Americans more mobile but also created a culture of leisure. According to Nash, the key to Ford himself was his ambivalence: he looked forward and backward at the same time, defending his technology while extolling the values of the era it supplanted.
- 15. Sara M. Evans, Flappers, Freudians, and All That Jazz** 175
This provocative journey into the tumultuous 1920s examines the decade from a woman's perspective. The flapper was young, white, urban, middle-class, and wanted to flaunt her sexuality in ways that made her elders blush. But most young women were not flappers, and they reflected their mothers' values more than they wished to admit. Many "working girls" wanted luxuries like makeup and the latest fashions, but their ultimate goal was to become a "wife-companion" to a loving husband. Beauty pageants pitted women against each other and destroyed the "sisterly bonds" that had helped achieve so many progressive reforms. A rising tide of racial and religious tension kept women of color, mainly Mexican immigrants and African Americans, poor and unliberated.

VIII. LONG DARK NIGHT OF THE DEPRESSION

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- 16. T. H. Watkins, Under Hoover, the Shame and Misery Deepened** 194
Eight months after President Hoover proclaimed that poverty in America was almost eliminated, the country plunged into the worst depression in its history. Textbooks explain in detail the economic reasons for the crash of 1929 and the ensuing Depression, but none captures the human suffering and the failure of early relief efforts better than Watkins's prize-winning *The Great Depression*, a companion to the popular PBS television series, from which this selection is excerpted.

**17. David M. Kennedy, Strike! Labor's Historic Drive
to Unionize 208**

This is a story filled with passion and violence. It recounts the drive to unionize industrial workers during the Great Depression. Kennedy examines the significance of the massive sit-down strike at the General Motors plant in Flint, Michigan. He describes how Roosevelt's New Deal programs encouraged the formation of unions. Blue-collar workers loved the president, "the only man we ever had in the White House who would understand that my boss was a sonofabitch." Union leader John L. Lewis breathed fire into the labor movement, realized that the millions of workers outside of craft unions needed protection from an often callous management, and once threatened to "bare my bosom" if the National Guard fired on his striking comrades.

IX. A WORLD AT WAR

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**18. Doris Kearns Goodwin, Franklin and Eleanor: The Early
Wartime White House 228**

An eminent and prolific historian takes us inside the White House on the eve of America's entry into World War II. With insight and sensitivity, Goodwin describes the complex personalities and backgrounds of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt and introduces us to a diverse cast of characters who visited and befriended them. We learn how two extraordinary people gained strength of character through adversity. By sheer willpower, Franklin triumphed over an attack of polio that crippled both legs. His ordeal gave him "a greater sympathy and understanding of the problems of mankind." For her part, Eleanor had to overcome the terrible hurt of her husband's infidelity. By doing so, she found "new avenues of fulfillment" and became the most influential first lady in American history. When Pearl Harbor plunged the nation into war, the president's remarkable partnership with Eleanor would serve him well in the perilous years ahead.

19. William J. vanden Heuvel, America and the Holocaust 255

This provocative selection makes it clear that the American government knew about Hitler's death camps for European Jews and other prisoners and the dreadful "Final Solution" to "the Jewish question" as early as August 1942. Many critics argue that Roosevelt should have bombed the hideous gas chambers at Auschwitz and the railroad tracks leading to that murderous prison. The author contends that "mainstream Jewish opinion was against the whole idea." It is "abhorrent" to contemplate the number of helpless concentration camp prisoners that Allied bombs would have killed. Inmates already loaded into cattle cars would have

perished from thirst and heat while waiting the “few days” the Germans needed to rebuild damaged track. Roosevelt believed that the best way to save Jewish lives was to win the war as swiftly as possible.

X. THE BOMB

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20. Robert James Maddox, *The Biggest Decision: Why We Had to Drop the Atomic Bomb* 272

One of the most controversial events of the Second World War and the entire century was the decision of the Truman administration to end the costly Pacific war by dropping atomic bombs on Japan. Drawing on all available facts, Robert James Maddox demolishes the “myths” of those who argued, and still argue, that the bombs need not have been dropped. Maddox concludes that they were indeed necessary to end the war: the Japanese army, which ran the country, was preparing to fight to the last man, woman, and child, and the bomb was the only way to bring Japanese leaders to their senses and force them to surrender.

21. Fletcher Knebel and Charles W. Bailey II, *Hiroshima: The Victims* 284

The previous piece argued that dropping the atomic bomb was necessary to end the Pacific war. By implication, this selection argues against the use of the bomb, by recounting what it did to its victims, the ordinary people of Hiroshima. Knebel and Bailey describe from ground zero the atomic explosion at that luckless city and recount the experiences of several people who somehow lived through the fireball of destruction. The personal details that inform this sensitive account make the unbelievable imaginable.

XI. PERILS OF THE COLD WAR

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22. David McCullough, *Harry Truman: “One Tough Son-of-a-Bitch of a Man”* 302

Truman’s best biographer brings the tough little man from Missouri brilliantly alive in this warm and sympathetic portrait. McCullough shows us how Truman’s personality and character—his no-nonsense bluntness, honesty, determination, courage, sense of history, and love of people—affected his decisions and made him an effective president despite his flaws and mistakes. McCullough argues that Truman’s most difficult decision was to enter the Korean War, that his worst mistake was the sweeping loyalty oath test he instituted for federal employment, and that he was at his best when the

Soviets blockaded West Berlin and Truman saved the city through a spectacular airlift.

**23. Michael R. Beschloss, Eisenhower and Kennedy: Contrasting
Presidencies in a Fearful World 318**

A leading political historian evaluates two presidents who were exceedingly different in personality and background. One chief executive had a grandfatherly image while the other exuded youthful energy. During both of their administrations, America remained relatively prosperous and free from deep entanglements in Vietnam. Eisenhower's "demerits" were mainly in the domestic arena, where he failed to attack Joseph McCarthy or promote civil rights. Kennedy's "Camelot" days were glamorous, but troubled by Cold War confrontations in Cuba. The assassination of the young president in Dallas limited his administration to just a thousand days. Beschloss concludes that "we will never know" whether Kennedy would have withdrawn American military "advisers" from Vietnam, persuaded Congress to pass the civil rights bill, or accomplished his other goals.

**24. Larry L. King, Trapped: Lyndon Johnson and the Nightmare
of Vietnam 331**

In this brilliantly written portrait, a native Texan and former member of Johnson's political staff perfectly captures the president's Texas roots, aggressive and complex personality, unique style, and gigantic conflicts and contradictions. Johnson's nadir was the war in Vietnam. American involvement in the war had begun under Truman and continued through the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations. But it was Johnson who Americanized the conflict, sending in powerful United States military forces to prevent South Vietnam from falling to the Communist North Vietnamese and the Vietcong, who were fighting to unite the country. For Johnson, the war in Vietnam became personal. It involved his Texas manhood. Frequently crude and often plagued with insecurities, Johnson agonized terribly over a war he never wanted to fight and could never win.

XII. A NEW BIRTH OF FREEDOM

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**25. Stephen B. Oates, Trumpet of Conscience: Martin Luther
King Jr. 350**

Martin Luther King Jr. has been almost as obscured by myth as Abraham Lincoln and George Washington. Here Oates recreates the flesh-and-blood King from the dust of history. The selection traces King's intellectual and spiritual development that culminated in his philosophy of nonviolence; seeks to explore his personality,

including his human flaws, with empathy and understanding; and assesses his accomplishments as an internationally acclaimed spokesman for the civil rights movement and the protest against the Vietnam War.

26. Marcia Cohen, Betty Friedan Destroys the Myth of the Happy Housewife 363

This is the extraordinary story of how a brilliant and educated woman was transformed from a 1950s wife, “homemaker,” and freelance journalist into the author of a seminal book, *The Feminine Mystique*, which challenged long-held assumptions about the restrictive role of women in society, galvanized millions of female readers, and led the way to the modern feminist movement.

XIII. THE SEVENTIES

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27. Otto Friedrich, “I Have Never Been a Quitter”: A Portrait of Richard Nixon 380

This is a sparkling account of the first American president ever to resign his office. Friedrich describes Nixon’s painful and impoverished early years, which shaped him into an angry, ambitious man for whom winning was everything. He rocketed to national and international fame as “the world’s No. 1 anticommunist,” as one biographer put it, and yet as president he won remarkable achievements in his dealings with the Soviet Union, Communist China, and Communist North Vietnam. But the Watergate scandal, described here with admirable lucidity and fairness, brought Nixon’s presidency tumbling down.

28. Nicholas Lemann, How the Seventies Changed America 394

Lemann challenges the popular view of the 1970s as the “loser” decade, a ten-year hangover from the excesses of the 1960s. Lemann places the importance of the seventies in the “realm of sweeping historical trends” that anticipated the 1980s: among them, the centrality of oil and Islam in geopolitics and a fundamentally individualistic American culture that no longer cared about communitarian ideals.

XIV. THE END OF THE COLD WAR

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29. Peter Schweizer, The Man Who Broke the Evil Empire 406

Schweizer argues that President Ronald Reagan helped bring about the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. Reagan and a few close advisers devised “a strategic offensive designed to attack the fundamental weaknesses of the Soviet

system,” and it was remarkably successful. The plan involved a huge defense build-up that capitalized on Soviet shortcomings in high technology and a rollback of Soviet power in Eastern Europe by encouraging underground efforts to overthrow Communist rule there and by imposing economic sanctions on the Soviet Union itself.

30. Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., Some Lessons from the Cold War 415

One of America’s most eminent historians discusses six critical errors of the United States and the Soviet Union that helped cause and sustain the Cold War. Stressing the importance of the perception of events in understanding the past, Schlesinger shows how exaggeration and misunderstanding on the part of both countries escalated Cold War tensions, once to the very brink of nuclear holocaust.

XV. FROM THE TECHNOLOGICAL REVOLUTION TO MODERN TERRORISM

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31. Walter Isaacson, Bill Gates: Enigmatic Genius of Microsoft 424

We are living in the midst of a technological revolution whose historical significance has already surpassed that of the Industrial Revolution. The advent of the computer is perhaps the most important technological achievement of all. Among other things, the computer has revolutionized how we communicate, gain access to information, wage war, and conduct business and countless other operations. This selection is an intimate portrait of “one of the most important minds and personalities” of the computer era: the Harvard dropout and fiercely competitive computer wizard who built Microsoft into a “near monopoly” in the field of desktop computer systems and software. By the late 1990s Microsoft had a market value of \$160 billion, and Bill Gates had become the richest person and most famous businessman in the world.

32. John Lewis Gaddis, The Lessons of September 11 440

Gaddis discusses the lessons of September 11 from a historical perspective. Focusing on the post-Cold War decade, he explains how the failures and shortcoming of American foreign policy created anti-American feelings in much of the world. The events of September 11, he warns, thrust us into a new era that is “bound to be more painful than the one we’ve just left.”