



The Thirteen American Arguments: Enduring Debates That Inspire and Define Our Country

Howard Fineman

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Howard Fineman is one of our best-known and most trusted political journalists. Mixing vivid scenes and figures from the campaign trail with forays into four hundred years of American history, Fineman shows that every debate, from our nation's founding to the present day, is rooted in one of thirteen arguments that—thankfully—defy resolution. It is the very process of never-ending argument, Fineman explains, that defines us, inspires us, and keeps us free. At a time when most public disagreement seems shrill and meaningless, Fineman makes a cogent case for nurturing the real American dialogue.

Shouting is not arguing, Fineman notes, but often hot-button topics, media “cross-fires,” and blogs reflect the deepest currents in American life. In an enlightening book that cuts through the din and makes sense of the headlines, Fineman captures the essential issues that have always compelled healthy and heated debate—and must continue to do so in order for us to prosper in the twenty-first century. *The Thirteen American Arguments* run the gamut, from issues of individual identity to our country's role in the world, including:

- **Who is a Person?** The Declaration of Independence says “everyone,” but it took a Civil War and the Civil Rights and other movements to make that a reality. Presently, what about human embryos and “unlawful enemy combatants?”
- **Who is an American?** Only a nation of immigrants could argue so much about who should become one. There is currently added urgency when terrorists are at large in the world and twelve million “undocumented” aliens are in the country.
- **The Role of Faith.** No country is more legally secular yet more avowedly prayerful. From Thomas Jefferson to Terri Schiavo, we can never quite decide where God fits in government.
- **Presidential Power.** In a democracy, leadership is all the more difficult — and, paradoxically, all the more essential. From George Washington to George W. Bush, we have always asked: How much power should a president have?
- **America in the World.** Uniquely, we perpetually ask ourselves whether we have a moral obligation to change the world—or, alternatively, whether we must try to change it to survive in it.

Whether it's the environment, international trade, interpreting law, Congress vs. the president, or reformers vs. elites, these are the issues that galvanized the Founding Fathers and should still inspire our leaders, thinkers, and citizens. If we cease to argue about these things, we cease to be. “Argument is strength, not weakness,” says Fineman. “As long as we argue, there is hope, and as long as there is hope, we will argue.”

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