

## **HI 204-01: American Experience II**

### **DEBATE ASSIGNMENT**

Several times throughout the semester, we will conduct in-class debates based on a specific set of readings. Each student will participate in one debate as a member of a team. During every other debate you are expected to turn in a short paper and participate as an engaged audience member.

The goal of this assignment is to put yourself in the place of someone from a different time period and to argue a position based on evidence that would have been available at the time (this will be provided for you). Your task is to argue for the point of view assigned to you, whether or not you believe it and even if you find it distasteful. It is important that we maintain a professional atmosphere and do not let our feelings speak more loudly than the historical evidence.

You will work together as a group to convince the audience that your position is the correct one. Each member of the team must actively participate in the debate and speak in front of the class. You may use visual aides such as Powerpoint but this is not required nor is it always the most effective strategy. We will all work together on a practice debate in-class before we begin the assignments, so you will have a chance to ask clarifying questions.

#### **THE DEBATE:**

- You will be placed in a group and assigned to either the affirmative or negative team. You must work together before class to prepare the presentation of your argument.
- Your task is to put yourself in the mindset of someone from the time. Therefore, you **MUST** rely on the evidence to support your argument and be sure to stay within the appropriate time frame.
- Each team member will be assessed based upon his/her individual performance in the debate as well as the overall performance of the group. This assessment will be based in part on the evaluation forms from the audience. Your participation in the debate is worth up to 150 points.

#### **DEBATE STRUCTURE:**

1. Opening statements by the Affirmative Team (minimum 5+ minutes)  
Opening statements by the Negative Team (minimum 5+ minutes)
  - a. During the opening statements, each team will lay out the main points of their argument. You should carefully explain to the audience why your position is correct and back it up with supporting evidence from the documents assigned for the debate. You must prepare this statement ahead of time and decide the role of each group member.
2. Questioning of the Affirmative Team (5-10 minutes)  
Questioning of the Negative Team (5-10 minutes)
  - a. During this portion of the debate, the audience will ask questions of each of the teams. Audience will be graded on their engagement in this portion of the debate

- as part of their course participation grade. Therefore, it is essential that you are prepared and ask thoughtful questions of the debate team members.
- b. Debate team members may want to strategize ahead of time about some of the likely objections, concerns, or difficulties that the Jury might have with their arguments.
3. Consultation and Discussion (2 minutes)
    - a. Although the teams will have prepared their closing arguments ahead of time, they may wish to adjust them based upon what has been discussed so far in the debate. Therefore, teams will use this time to consult with one another to ensure that their closing arguments are as effective as possible.
    - b. The audience will use this time to begin filling out their evaluation forms.
  4. Closing statements by the Affirmative Team (minimum 3+ minutes)  
Closing statements by the Negative Team (minimum 3+ minutes)
    - a. In their closing statements, each team will make a final plea for their position. The closing statements should reiterate the main points of the argument, highlight the strengths of your position and the weakness of the other position, and generally convince the audience to side with you.
  5. Rendering of the decision
    - a. The class will cast votes based upon which team was most effective and convincing during the debate. In the event of a tie, the Instructor will cast the deciding vote.
  6. Period of reflection and response
    - a. As a class, we will reflect and discuss issues or ideas about the topic that were not fully explored during the debate.

## DEBATE DATES AND TOPICS

### Practice Debate – Thursday February 12 (FIRST POSITION PAPER DUE FOR EVERYONE ON FEB. 19)

Was the World's Columbian Exhibition a good use of public resources?

**Affirmative Position:** The World's Columbian Exhibition was worth the cost and was good for the United States as a whole.

**Negative Position:** The World's Columbian Exhibition was a waste of resources that cost the American people much more than it was worth. We should spend our money on more useful and necessary things.

### Debate 1 – Tuesday March 3 (Position Paper Due for everyone who is not a member of a debate team)

Should the United States focus attention and resources on overseas expansion? Should we become an empire?

**Affirmative Position:** The United States should expand abroad and incorporate new people and regions into the USA.

**Negative Position:** The United States should not expand abroad and should focus our attention on domestic issues.

Debate 2 – Thursday March 26 (Position Paper Due for everyone who is not a member of a debate team)

Should the United States government have supported Japanese Internment during WWII?

**Affirmative Position:** Sending people of Japanese heritage to Internment Camps was an acceptable thing to do given the circumstances.

**Negative Position:** Sending people of Japanese heritage to Internment Camps was an unacceptable response to the circumstances.

Debate 3 – Thursday April 9 (Position Paper Due for everyone who is not a member of a debate team)

Was Loy Harrison legally responsible for the deaths of Roger Malcolm, Dorothy Malcolm, George Dorsey, and Mae Murray Dorsey? Would he be found responsible in a court of law? (Note: We are concerned with proof of his guilt or innocence, not our personal feelings)

**Affirmative Position:** Loy Harrison should be found guilty.

**Negative Position:** Loy Harrison should be found innocent.