

Hist 15

Reading and Participation Guide

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“American history is longer, larger, more various, more beautiful, and more terrible than anything anyone has ever said about it.” –James Baldwin



Reading Guide: Instructions for the Textbook

I've tried to choose a textbook for you that is not simply a compilation of dates (as some students eloquently put it: "a list of one damn thing that happens after another"). However, textbooks are always going to have an element of that. They are a summary or a survey, an overview of a large time period; and I assign it so that we all have the same basic knowledge as the starting point for the much more interesting analysis that we will do after you read the textbook. I want to make sure that you all have the same basic understanding of the major "who," "what," "when" and "where." After that, I will show you how to do something interesting with it—how to use, analyze, and interpret it. But, to get there, you first need to understand how to read a history textbook. There's a ton of information in each chapter, and it's really easy to get overwhelmed and frustrated (not to mention bored). This reading guide will help you focus on the important concepts, which will help you do well on the quizzes. First, you need to **Conceptualize** what the author is doing, and then you need to develop a system for **Taking Notes**. Both of these efforts will help you digest, comprehend, and understand the information you are reading. Below is a quick outline of the instructions I give you in pages 3-5.

OUTLINE OF INSTRUCTIONS

Conceptualize p. 3-5

- I. What is history?
- II. Complicated is Good!
- III. Visualize/Organize

Taking Notes p. 6-7

- I. Warm Up
- II. Read
- III. Fill in Outline

Quizzes p. 8



CONCEPTUALIZATION

I. What is history?

The most important thing for you to understand as you read the textbook is this: The significance of an historical event is not simply that it happened. The significance of that event is *why* it happened and the *effects* it had. History suddenly becomes much more interesting when you study the why and effect. And once you grasp this basic concept, it helps you follow a history textbook much more easily.

So what is the study of history? First, it is the study of CHANGE! If nothing ever changed, there would be nothing to distinguish past from present. What else is the study of history? An ANALYSIS of this change; again it's not just a study of what this change was, but rather a study of *why* this change took place and what *effect* it had.

How did the author of your textbook decide to breakup the text into particular chapters covering a certain expanse of time? By writing a chapter that covers the years 1920-1929, for example, the author is making a claim that there was some sort of significant change that makes this time period different from the years before and after. In this chapter the author will explain *what* that change was, *why* it happened (the cause), and the *effect* it had (consequences).

II. Complicated is Good!

How to think about “change,” “why,” and “effects” in a more complex and sophisticated way:

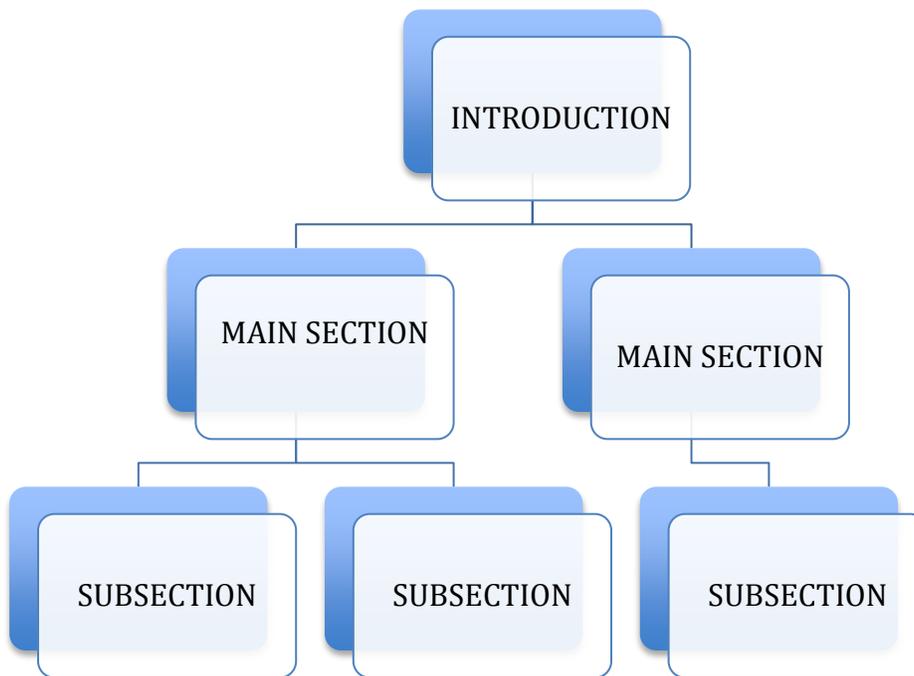
1. A **change** can be a non-tangible, non-concrete, abstract thing; it can be a change in attitudes, beliefs, or ideas. It doesn't have to be an “event” in the traditional way that we think of a war, presidential election, etc.... It can be helpful to ask yourself “what happened?” instead of “what changed?”
2. There will sometimes be conflicting **whys/causes**—historians sometimes disagree on why things happened so your author might present a couple possible options. Make an informed decision about which one is most convincing.
3. A good historian will be able to spot the ways in which certain events have different **effects/consequences** on different kinds of people. Be sure you note who was affected differently and why they were affected differently. An event/change/circumstance is going to have different consequences for different kinds of people. Duh, right?! This seems like a simple concept, but you might be surprised by the interesting analysis that we are going to draw from *comparison and contrast exercises*.

[CONTINUED: CONCEPTUALIZATION]

III. Visualize and Organize

Visualize how the chapter is organized into sections; using the pattern described above for “change, why, effect” is really helpful! The following two pages are my attempt to help you visualize the textbook organization:

The author divides your textbook into 3 sections: **Introduction, Main Sections, and Subsections.** It will look like this, but usually with 4-5 Main Sections per chapter, and many Subsections underneath each Main Section:



*Start by asking yourself what the *PURPOSE* of each section is. What does each section *do*? How does it fit in with the other sections? Make the sections talk to each other as you are reading! This is where it is helpful to think about my “zooming in and out” example from the 2nd day of class (I used the example of Google maps, and how a close-up versus big picture perspective can give you a very different understanding of a place).

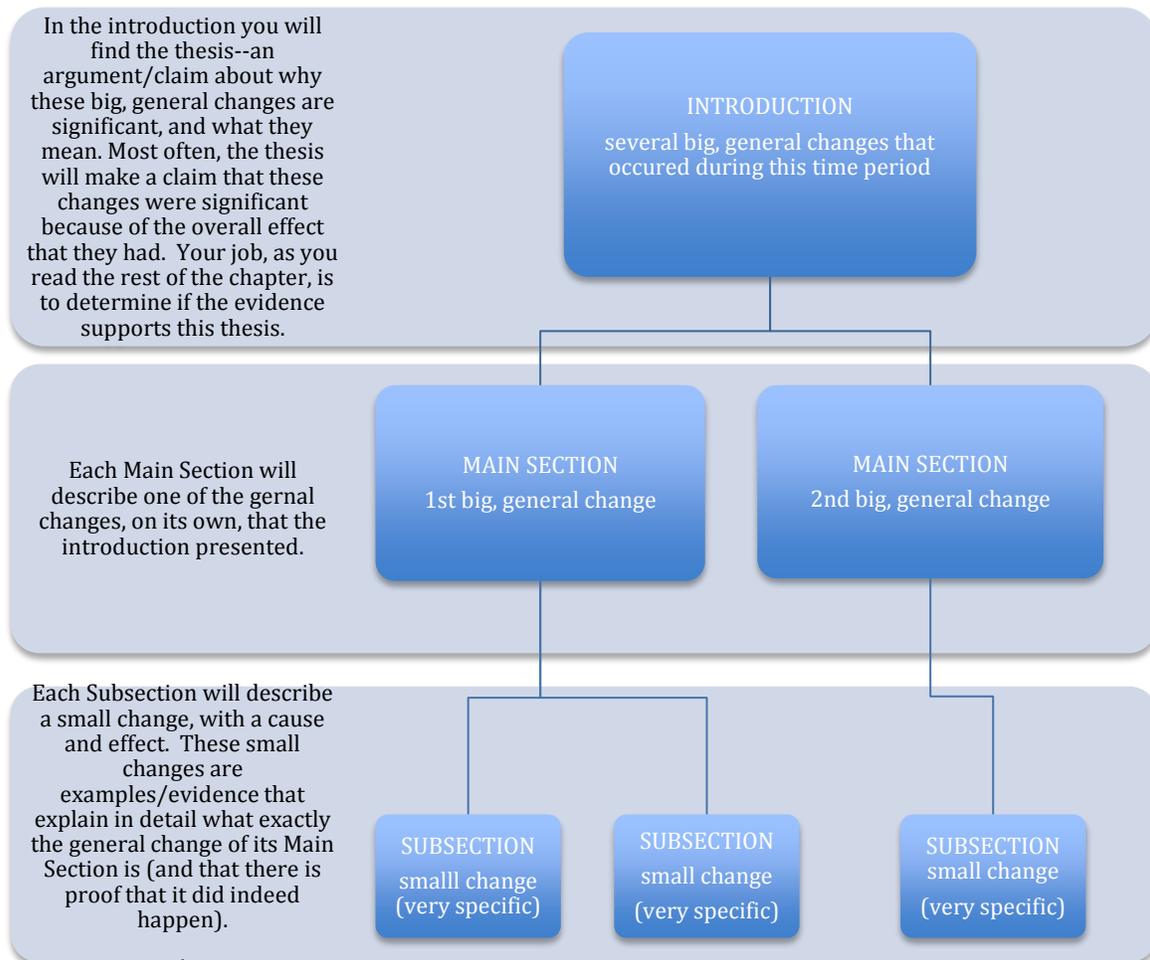
Intro: Zoomed Out! Big picture, general, abstract changes

Main Section: Zoom in a bit! Each of the changes introduced in the intro will be described one by one.

Subsections: Zoomed In! Small-scale, very specific changes that explain/add up to the general change describe in that Main Section

[CONTINUED: CONCEPTUALIZATION]

*The introduction reduces a big, complex time period down to a couple main changes that sound fairly abstract, and you'll find yourself doubting and asking for evidence to convince you that this thing happened; throughout the chapter you're going to look for the cause and effect of those main changes, but as you do this you're going to encounter smaller-scale, little changes that focus on very specific details, with their own specific set of causes and effects. Always think about how these smaller changes are helping to build you to a better understanding of the biggest, most general, overarching changes of the chapter.



*Sometimes a small-scale change is very obviously supposed to be a specific example that proves/illustrates that the overall, general change, (which sounded pretty abstract when described in the introduction) did indeed take place. Other times, a small change might not seem at all related to a general change; however, if you keep reading and you look at several of the small changes together, you will realize that they add up to illustrate something different than any of them could on their own. This is where it is important for you to remember to zoom in *and to zoom back out* as you are reading.

TAKING NOTES

Warm Up:

1) Read the introduction to the chapter:

This is the very first section, and the author will usually give you some sort of “hook” that pulls you in—an intriguing story, person, event, etc... that illustrates a central topic of the chapter: the topic will always be related to what the major changes were that affected peoples lives during this era. The thesis will make an argument about what the most important change of this time period was, and why it matters, why it was significant.

2) Make an Outline:

- a:** In your own words, summarize the main change(s) and the thesis. Pay attention to whether the author is explaining one major change, or if the author introduces several changes—if it is several changes, pay attention to whether theses changes have similar causes and effects, or different causes and effects.
- b.** Write down the beginning and end dates covered by this chapter and *constantly* keep these dates and the thesis in mind as you are reading.
- c.** Flip through the chapter and get a sense of how it’s organized by writing down the Main Section Headings and then the Subsection Headings. Carefully read through the headings once you’ve written them down, and see how much of the story you can already piece together before you start reading.

Fill in Outline/Take Notes:

Start with the first Main Section of the chapter, complete the instructions below, and then move on to the next Main Section and start the process over again. (The words below that are in **bold** are concise instructions that you can apply to any Main Section in any chapter. The words that are not bold go into further detail and tell you how specifically you practice the instructions for the very first Main Section that you will read this semester, which is in Chapter 20.)

1. Write down the title of the Main Section; make a guess about what general change this section will describe (look at the topics described in the introduction for hints). Reassess your answer as you read each subsection. Look at the title of the first Main Section in Ch. 20, “The Business of America.” Scribble down a quick provisional description of the change you think will happen, and revise this as you read all of the Subsections under “The Business of America.”

2. As you read the Subsections, pause at the end of each one and do the following:

- a. Define the change in the Subsection. Choose one specific piece of evidence that you think best illustrates what this change was.** The first subsection in Ch. 20 is entitled “The Decade of Prosperity;” this pretty much gives away the topic (the “change” described is this section is a shift to a period of economic prosperity); but the author is going to have to give you key pieces of evidence to convince you that this was indeed a

change to greater prosperity—increased incomes, more people owned cars, etc... You choose one piece of evidence that you find the most compelling and briefly describe this in your notes.

b. Explain one cause for why this change took place. You're still working with the subsection, "The Decade of Prosperity." The author will explain why this became a more prosperous decade, and if there are multiple explanations, you choose the one that you think is most important. (If the author does not explain "why" in this particular Subsection, make sure to look for it in the following Subsections.)

c. Explain one effect that this change had. So, you've established that the major change was more prosperity, you've identified a cause for why this prosperity occurred, now look for the author's explanation of one effect of this prosperity. How did the prosperity change things in America? Did people live differently? Did politics change, were people happier? Did the prosperity affect everyone? Were there any negative effects? If the author explains that there were different effects for different people, choose one example that you think is a good comparison and contrast. (If the author does not explain an "effect" in this particular Subsection, make sure to look for it in the following Subsections!)

3. After you have taken notes on all the subsections, **in your own words, summarize the overall general change of this Main Section, what the cause this change is, and what the effect of this change is; If you cannot answer the "cause" and "effect," look for the answer in the Main Sections before or after this one.** After you have read and taken notes on all of the Subsections under the Main Section "The Business of America," look at each of your Subsection summaries together. Now that you have multiple, detailed examples, what does the big picture look like?

4. Finally, once you have completed the above process for the entire chapter, **look at all of the Main Section summaries together. What is the final, big picture that you can only see if you look at all of the Main Sections together?** Sometimes, you might find that a cause for a change is such a complicated thing to explain that the author will use an entire Main Section to explain a cause, or an entire main section might be the explanation of an effect. Sometimes you might find that two different Main Sections explain how the effect of a major change was very different for two different groups of people.

Quizzes:

Quizzes on the textbook reading will have 5 questions, worth 2 points each for a total of 10 points. You will only have a quiz on the textbook reading on days for which I assign that particular reading from the textbook.

The questions are short answer; I expect a couple of sentences that highlight a main point—you do not need a full paragraph. You will receive one point if your answer is in the right “general vicinity” and 2 points if it is exactly correct (with the right specific example and enough detail).

For the first couple of quizzes this semester, I will ask you questions directly relating to the instructions in this reading guide; in other words, if you make notes for the chapter according to this guide, you will do very well on the quiz. I will then gradually show you how to use the reading guide and apply it towards the normal kinds of questions that will show up on the regular quizzes for the rest of the semester.

Reading Guide: Instructions for Course Reader

This covers something new or more complex/detailed than what we've read in the textbook, but it falls within the same time period. The main difference is that it's much heavier on the analysis: it makes an argument about meaning and significance in a way that your textbook does not. Just like with your textbook, we need to first **Conceptualize** what the author is doing, and then you need to develop a system for **Taking Notes**. Both of these efforts will help you digest, comprehend, and understand the information you are reading. Below is a quick outline of the instructions I give you in pages 7-10.

OUTLINE OF INSTRUCTIONS

Conceptualization (p. 10)

- 1) Identify the Problem
- 2) Fix the Problem
- 3) Interpret the Fix

Taking Notes (p. 11-12)

- 1) New Story
- 2) Reinterpretation of Old Story

Quizzes (p. 13)



CONCEPTUALIZATION:

In order to justify writing and publishing a new book or article, historians have to demonstrate that their work does something that no other historian has done. In the beginning of their article, the historian will identify some “problem” with what scholars have previously said about the topic, and then they will explain how they are going to fix that “problem.”

1) Identify the “problem”; Usually it is a mix of the following two things:

a: incorrect arguments/assumptions made by historians

Why? -lack of evidence

-misinterpreted evidence

b: unexplored aspects of a topic/story/theme/event

Why? - no one has bothered to, or thought of, asking the right questions, and this causes them to overlook the importance of certain evidence (even when its right in front of them)

2) Fix the “problem”; Usually by a mix of the following two things:

a: analyze new evidence or reinterpret old evidence

b: ask new questions, which sometimes leads to new evidence or to a reinterpretation of old evidence

3) Interpret the fix: Analysis

Analyzing new evidence or asking new questions will lead to a new outcome/conclusion (which is stated in the thesis) and this provides the reader with a new interpretation of the MEANING of history.

So what prompts an historian to search for new evidence or ask a new question in the first place? This is where it can get really interesting! (If you’re not already interested.) Think about this, and we will discuss it as we progress this semester.

TAKING NOTES:

The two formats that are the most common and that will mostly cover the articles you are going to read are the following: It's either a *New Story* or a *Reinterpretation of an Old Story*. Decide which it is, and make an outline as you read that covers everything in **bold type**.

I. NEW STORY

1) INTRO:

The historian will start out by quickly familiarizing you with a specific event or series of events that are largely unfamiliar to most readers. So this mostly falls into the category of 1b on the previous page. The “problem” is that no one has thoroughly explored this story, so the author will *not* explicitly talk about what other historians or scholars have written about this.

- Who are the “cast of characters” or important individuals in the story?
- What is the basic theme/topic/phenomena/development, and what is the time period that the author introduces?

2) THESIS

The historian will then make a claim about what new thing this story “says”—**what does it mean, what implications can we draw from this story? Why is it important to know this story? What assumptions about this time period do we have to change, now that we know this story?** This will usually be a fairly brief statement, called the thesis statement. The rest of the article will attempt to give evidence that supports the claims made in the thesis.

3) BODY

The historian will then tell the story in more detail, usually organized into sections. At the end of each section, they will sum up what these details are and (most importantly) tell you what these details mean (their significance) and how they support the thesis. In other words, the historian is organizing the evidence in a logical sequence and then interpreting the evidence for the reader. This is building up the evidence, bit by bit, into an analysis.

- What is the essential evidence and how does the author use it to support the thesis? Pay attention to how the author organizes the body of the article into different sections/topics; have one piece of evidence for each section/topic.

4) CONCLUSION

The historian will then conclude by summarizing all the evidence, and then perform one last act of interpretation: **when you have all the new pieces of evidence together, what do they mean? How should we “use” this story?**

II. REINTERPRETATION OF OLD STORY

1) INTRO

The historian will start out by quickly reminding you of an event or series of events that are largely familiar to most readers. So this mostly falls into the category of 1a on the previous page. The “problem” is that historians have made incorrect interpretations about these events, either because of a lack of evidence or because they misinterpreted the evidence.

-what is the of the new evidence and sources (if applicable) that the author introduces?

-what is the old evidence and sources (if applicable), and how does the author believe they were misused or misinterpreted?

2) THESIS

The historian will then make a claim about what this new or reinterpreted evidence “says”—**what does it mean, what implications can we draw from the evidence? How does this new evidence or reinterpretation change the familiar story? Why is it important to retell this story?** This will usually be a fairly brief statement, called the thesis statement. The rest of the article will attempt to explain in further detail the evidence that supports the claims made in the thesis.

3) BODY

The historian will then explain the evidence in more detail, usually organized into sections. At the end of each section, they will sum up what these details are and (most importantly) tell you what these details mean (their significance) and how they support the thesis. In other words, the historian is organizing the evidence in a logical sequence and then interpreting the evidence for the reader. This is building up the evidence, bit by bit, into an analysis.

-What is the essential evidence and how does the author use it to support the thesis? Pay attention to how the author organizes the body of the article into different sections/topics; have one piece of evidence for each section/topic.

4) CONCLUSION

The historian will then conclude by summarizing all the evidence, and then perform one last act of interpretation: **when you have all the new pieces of evidence or reinterpreted evidence together, what do they mean? How should we “use” this reinterpreted story?**

Quizzes:

Quizzes on the course reader will have 2 questions, worth 5 points each for a total of 10 points. You will only have a quiz on the course reader on day for which I assign that particular reading from the course reader. I expect a full paragraph or two for each question (in other words, more detail than the quizzes for the textbook).

Basic Comprehension of the Article: 2 possible points

-Your response might not be completely accurate, but it demonstrates that you did read the article and that you understand the basic thesis.

Accuracy of your response: 5 possible points

-clearly identify the correct answer, in your own words.

Thoroughness of your response: 3 possible points

-You not only identify the correct answer, but you explain the evidence that supports the answer, you provide a couple of examples, and you explain the significance to the information within the context of the article's thesis.

For the first couple of quizzes this semester, I will ask you questions directly relating to the instructions in this reading guide; in other words, if you make notes for the chapter according to this guide, you will do very well on the quiz. I will then gradually show you how to use the reading guide and apply it towards the normal kinds of questions that will show up on the regular quizzes for the rest of the semester. In addition, on Blackboard next to where you find each Course Reader article, you will also see a list of several review questions that will help you focus on the important parts of each article.

Participation Guide: Instructions for Participation Points and Discussion Quizzes

Take a couple of minutes to think about your past experiences in school. Most of you have probably experienced all of the following three situations: 1) You were in a class in which students didn't get to express their opinion or talk about the subject with each other; 2) You were in a classroom in which there were one or two really opinionated students who dominated the discussions and no one else had a chance to contribute; 3) You were in a class in which the teacher encouraged discussion but none of the students wanted to talk. Awkward!

In order to avoid all of these scenarios (which are no fun and not conducive to learning), please read my tips on why good discussions are important; then read my instructions on how to earn participation points by contributing to good discussions and how to prepare for quizzes that will assess how well you followed the discussion.

OUTLINE OF INSTRUCTIONS

Why Participate in Discussions? (p. 15)

- I. The Purpose of Good Discussions
- II. What Makes Discussions Unproductive

How To Participate in Discussions (p. 16-18)

- I. Preparation while Reading
- II. Move Outside of Comfort Zones
- III. Contributions in Class
- IV. Quizzes



WHY PARTICIPATE THROUGH DISCUSSIONS

What purpose does good discussion in the classroom serve?

1) Overall:

- keeps your brain active
- teaches effective social interaction; improves communication skills (including *listening*); teaches double tasking (thinking about what others are saying as well as your own response at the same time)

2) Coverage of reading:

- oral review of info; explaining out loud is best way of reinforcing, and it's more effective in a room of other people who've read the same thing and can confirm, deny, complicate the information

3) Analysis:

- playing off of each others ideas; this is always more productive (or at least adds a new dimension that you can't get on your own)

What purpose is discussion in the classroom not intended to serve?

- It's not a chance for you to show off knowledge; do that on quizzes, exams, papers; it's okay for you to *be quiet* even if you *do* know the answer. Your brain can actively stay engaged by quietly answering the question to yourself.

- It is *not* intended to provide every student with sufficient time to share every thought in his or her mind (no matter how relevant). If you have more you want to say, engage with friends, classmates, or me outside of class time.

HOW TO PARTICIPATE

1) Prepare While Reading:

1. Do the assigned reading and “digest” it according to my instructions in the Reading Guide. This will prep you for handling any of the “factual” based discussion questions I throw at you.
2. Make it personal. As you are reading, think about what decisions/choices you would have made if you were in the place of the historical characters. Think about what motivated these people, and whether you can understand or even sympathize with their choices and the circumstances that shaped their worlds.
3. Think about the contemporary relevance of each topic that we study. Why does it matter to us, today, to know this information? What difference does it make? Make an argument for *why* it’s important to know this history. Also, look for examples in the news, popular culture, media, etc... that might help illustrate something important about the history that we are discussing.
4. Practice “Zooming In and Out” and “Compare and Contrast”; these are two exercises that I will explain the first two weeks of class. But, you can start practicing now by comparing the textbook and course reader; think about how the course reader article complicates, contradicts, or further illustrates a point that was covered in the reading from the textbook. Be prepared to talk about why it is or isn’t helpful in better understanding the time period we are covering that week, and how it might relate back to previous topics covered earlier in the semester.

2) Push Yourself Outside of Your Comfort Zone

*If you are shy:

- remember that other people are more concerned about themselves, and often very quickly forget anything you say or do.
- failure and imperfection are not going to ruin your life; these can be the biggest learning experiences of all. Remember that people who act the most confident are often trying to mask deep insecurities. The fact that you are willing to admit of and make visible your insecurity will actually make you more capable of working through it.
- true friends will respect you even more for making yourself vulnerable, for “putting yourself out there” and for trying new things even if you fail.
- if you have done the reading, if you are paying attention to what other people in the classroom are saying, and if you have a question or comment that is relevant... it does NOT matter if you are “wrong.”
- your worth, your value as a human/student in this classroom does not derive from your ability to be perfect or to already know the answer to everything. Your value derives from your willingness to engage with the subject matter, to be compassionate with others, and to try out new ideas.

*If you find yourself dominating the discussion/unable to keep quiet:

- Think about whether or not what you’re going to add is productive; does it fit with the flow of information? Are you going off on broad tangents? Are you talking just for the sake of hearing yourself talk? Is the information really appropriate for the classroom, or

[CONTINUED: HOW TO PARTICIPATE]

would it be better shared later with friends (or classmates outside of the classroom)? Are you inappropriately dominating the conversation?

-Remember that you are not the teacher; nothing will turn off your fellow classmates faster (in other words they will simply stop listening to what you have to say) than if you take this pose.

-Do you speak up a lot in class because you find your mind wandering if you don't constantly stay vocally engaged? Then your job is to learn how to stay engaged by listening to other people. Your friends will be very appreciative of you learning this skill.

-Whenever I ask a question, pause for a few moments before raising your hand; you already have a good sense of who in this classroom does and does not have a hard time with public speaking; be considerate of those who struggle with this. There are things they do well that you do not; you can learn from one another.

-Do NOT feel compelled to speak up just for the sake of earning points. If you have nothing useful or relevant to say, it is much better to remain quiet. It will be very, very obvious to me and every other person in this classroom if you did not do the reading or have nothing significant to say. Just opening your mouth and expelling words will not earn you any more points than remaining silent. Remember that the ultimate goal of classroom discussion is for us all, as a collective group, to advance our knowledge. The points are simply there to serve as a motivation—they are not the ultimate goal.

3) Contribute to Discussions during Class:

(The following points are also listed on the syllabus, but useful to remember here as well). To earn 5 points for daily participation:

1. Contribute two substantial pieces of commentary (analysis) to discussions each week.
2. Contribute three pieces of factual info that you can add when we are reviewing the details of the reading each week.
3. Contribute substantially and energetically to any small group discussions or written activities in class.

Tip: Remember that when you contribute to our class discussions, it's okay if you are wrong, just make sure that you are prepared to share what it is that makes you believe what you do, or why you answered the question the way that you did. It's often very helpful to start from a mistaken premise, because we can work from there towards a more productive or correct answer and talk about *how* to get to the right answer.)

4) Prepare for a possible Quiz the next class period:

As we discuss each day, take good notes on the discussion in preparation for a quiz the next time we meet. (Quizzes on the in-class discussions will cover the discussion that occurred in the *preceding*—most recent/previous—class period.) You are allowed to use any notes that you (yourself) took. To prepare for the discussion quizzes, make sure your notes will enable you to do the following:

- 1) Summarize the **main** concepts that I introduced and emphasized through the discussion questions the previous class.

[CONTINUED: DISCUSSION QUIZZES]

- 2) Summarize and react to the commentary of **2** of your classmates; describe the commentary of one classmate that you agreed with (and explain why), and describe the commentary of one classmate that you disagreed with (and explain why). Always be prepared to explain whether your understanding of something changed over the course of our discussion, and why or why not.
- 3) Summarize the **main** concepts and evidence that I explained in the Case Study for the previous class. (I will introduce you to what a “Case Study” is during the 1st and 2nd weeks of the semester.)

The discussion quizzes will be formatted and graded in the same manner as your course reader quizzes.
