

The Debating Game

Student Name _____ Date _____

The Debating Game: The Senate and the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill

You have just been magically transported back to November 1922. After you become reoriented, you realize you are now a member of the United States Senate. This august body is preparing to debate the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill, which was passed by the House of Representatives a few months earlier. You quickly discover that this is a highly emotionally charged issue; Senators on both sides of the aisle are passionate about whether or not the federal government has the constitutional authority to enact this bill. Your job is to prepare a speech that will be delivered as part of the floor debate about the anti-lynching bill. Of course, the Dyer Bill was killed before it ever made it to the Senate floor, but this will not stop us from having some good-natured historical fun.

In order to do this, you will need to help each other research the history of this bill. Each of you will be assigned a document written by one of the participants in the anti-lynching campaign to summarize for the class. This summary, which should also include a brief biographical sketch of the document's author, should be approximately two or three paragraphs in length (typed, double-spaced). It will be due at the beginning of class on _____. When you are not presenting your findings, you should be taking notes on what your classmates are saying. These notes will be very useful as you prepare your speech.

List of Participants in Anti-Lynching Campaign:

1. President Warren G. Harding
2. Attorney General H.M. Daugherty
3. Guy D. Goff, Assistant Attorney General
4. James Weldon Johnson, NAACP Secretary
5. Walter White, NAACP Assistant Secretary
6. Moorfield Storey, NAACP President
7. Senator William Borah (R)
8. Senator James W. Wadsworth, Jr. (R)
9. Congressman Burton French (R)
10. Congressman Meyer London (Socialist)
11. Congressman Edgar Ellis (R)
12. Congressman Andrew J. Volstead (R)
13. Congressman John Sandlin (D)
14. Congressman Thomas Bell (D)
15. Congressman Patrick Drewry (D)
16. Governor Robert Carey (R-Wyoming)

Once everyone has the opportunity to present his/her summary to the class, your instructor will assign you a state and a political affiliation (Democrat or Republican). The goal is to have the class mirror the composition of the Senate in the 1922. Before you begin the writing process, you will have some time to elect a majority or minority leader and caucus with other Senators from your party in order

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to plan a strategy for the floor debate. Your speech should be approximately three pages (typed, double-spaced). It will be due at the beginning of class on _____.

You should plan to deliver an abridged version of your speech during the floor debate. The majority or minority leader is responsible for making sure that the debate runs smoothly and stays within the required time limits. Although it is important that every Senator gets the opportunity to express his or her opinion, it is also crucial that the party articulates its position on this issue clearly and succinctly. Senators will have the chance to query each other as long as they stay within the parameters of acceptable parliamentary procedure. Everyone should be taking notes during the Senate debate since this material could appear on a free response essay test about American society in the 1920s.