

# **Florida Memory Classroom: Florida in the Spanish-American War**

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## **Activity: Structured Academic Debate on African-American Participation in the War**

### **Instructions for Students**

When war between the United States and Spain became imminent in 1898, the African-American community was divided over how to respond. If war were declared, African-Americans would be called upon to participate in the fight. Some community leaders believed this was a good opportunity for African-Americans to demonstrate their loyalty to the United States and their worthiness of equality. Others argued that African-Americans had no business fighting for a government that had failed to protect their rights as citizens.

In this activity, you will analyze examples of newspaper editorials arguing both sides of this debate along with documents describing Floridian attitudes toward black soldiers. Using this evidence, you will defend one side of this debate and then seek to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the opposing side.

Your instructor will divide you into small groups. Your group will then be divided again in half, with each half taking one side of the debate. Once you have been assigned your position in the debate, do the following:

1. Read the documents in the set entitled “African-American Soldiers in Florida.” Your instructor will either give you copies of these documents or direct you to access them on the Florida Memory website. The URL for these documents is:

[floridamemory.com/onlineclassroom/spanish-american-war/documents/](http://floridamemory.com/onlineclassroom/spanish-american-war/documents/)

2. Construct a defense for the viewpoint you have been assigned, using as much documentary evidence as possible to illustrate what you claim.
  - a. Use specific examples where applicable.
  - b. Take into consideration possible strengths of the opposing viewpoint, and deal with these directly where appropriate. This is known as “conceding the point.”
3. Within your group, take turns presenting your arguments, drawing your opponents’ attention to the documentary evidence you are using to support your own views. When it is your turn to listen to your opponents speak, be courteous and attentive, but do take notes and ask questions to clarify any unclear points. Try to identify the greatest strengths and weaknesses of your opponents’ argument.
4. Once both sides have presented their case, take turns summarizing your understanding of your opponents’ views and the strengths and weaknesses of their argument.
5. Identify at least two or three points of agreement and disagreement.
6. Try to reach consensus on at least a few points or determine a method for resolving your differences.