



THE WEBB'S WORLD **DISCUSSION**

History is not an enterprise for individual competition and achievement. History is a communal discipline in which the entire global body of historians pool their information, insight and curiosity to attempt to find and refine at least the broadest perceived truth about the past and to persuade their colleagues of its possible validity. That is why historians place such an emphasis on citations - giving credit to those who have come before and contributed to this ongoing struggle, and to identify the sources of alleged data.

When the discussion takes place I will ask for a volunteer to begin and then I will proceed to take notes. I will speak only twice - once half-way through to give my perceptions of how the discussion is going and what other routes might be explored, and once at the end to offer my evaluation and perception of how it went and how you might improve the next one.

You will then tear out a 2"x2" piece of paper and give yourself a numerical grade. The easiest way is to grade both for listening and speaking and then average them. I will collect them, revise them as I see fit, and show them to you the next day. Naturally, if you are dissatisfied with the revised grade you should tell me immediately and I will consider your reasoning.

Silence is not an option. To draw in shy people, ask them for their specific opinion of a point under discussion. A monitored discussion is the opposite of a debate! It is not competitive! I subtract points if you are dominating the discussion, and if you are withdrawing or waiting to be invited.

The mind of a single human being is a pitifully inadequate instrument. Only by collaboration, sharing, probing, questioning and cross-checking have we survived as a species. One may rely on passion and rhetorical skill to aid in persuasion, but once this becomes aggressive it misses the point entirely. Similarly, a dominator often does not sense that she is dominating and it is the responsibility of others to politely and laughingly point this out. Again, nudging those who are silent is equally in order.

You will be surprised at the degree to which your collective minds can refine, articulate, and clarify the issues being discussed.