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Rationale for JRD for HIS 8 (United States from 1877)

HIS 8 is a general survey course that covers the history of the United States from Reconstruction to the present. One of its central themes is reckoning with the legacy of race and racism in the United States—especially as it relates to Christian contexts. For that reason, it is well-suited to meet the criteria for a JRD course.

JRD CC #2. At present, the syllabus examines a variety of “personal actions, social norms, and systemic patterns involving race and racism in the United States.” Early in the semester, students read excerpts from WEB Du Bois’s *Souls of Black Folk* and discuss his analysis of the 1906 Atlanta riot. They learn about the Indian Wars as a precursor to the spread of US empire. In the second half of class, they take a midterm exploring the racialization of Japanese in WWII as discussed in John Dower’s *War Without Mercy*, before proceeding to the Civil Rights era, where these issues take front and center.

JRD CC #3. A core component of HIS 8 are “flashpoints.” These are role-playing exercises that have students revisit pivotal moments in US history, such as the Hiroshima and Nagasaki, or the passage of the Federal Interstate Highway Act. Each flashpoint provides prime opportunities for students to “model Christlike dialogue” while “confronting challenging or sensitive issues.” While some flashpoints might deal with the issue of race more explicitly than others (e.g. “SNCC and Black Power”), students learn that its importance and relevance is always there.

JRD CC #1. Where the course requires revision is in the first criterion. As a discipline, history tends to work by developing examples rather than engaging in more abstract or theoretical discussions. Any references to “biblically and theologically grounded understandings of justice, reconciliation, and diversity” have therefore tended to be more implicit. To satisfy this criterion, I will revise the research essay component, a major component of the course (worth 30% of their total grade), to have students engage in explicit reflection to “discern their responsibility in the work of justice” by relating what they’ve learned to a civil rights issue in the present day.