A SOCIAL OR POLITICAL HERO?

A STRUCTURED ACADEMIC CONTROVERSY (SAC) with JOSHUA L. CHAMBERLAIN

The Controversy: Is Joshua Chamberlain viewed as a hero because his deeds led to a great military and political victory during the American Civil War. Or, was he a hero due to the fact that his character and life story were valued in 19th century American society?

Side A
“Chamberlain was a political hero and was worth remembering because he helped a Union victory at Little Round Top during the Battle of Gettysburg.”

Side B
“Chamberlain was a social hero because of his interesting life story and his strong sense of honor.”

STEP I. Reading and Preparation (“30 Minutes).

a. Using the articles below, find evidence to support your team’s side of the controversy. Make sure to support your position in 2-3 well-written, evidence-based statements that cite from the texts provided.

Document List for Side A:

Document List for Side B:
- Document A: Letter from Joshua L. Chamberlain to Governor [Israel] Washburn, Brunswick, July 14, 1862 (Adapted).

STEP II. Position Presentation (“10-15 Minutes).

a. Side A clearly presents their position using supporting evidence from the texts.

b. Side B restates to Side A’s agreement.
c. Side B presents their position using supporting evidence from the texts.

d. Side A restates to Side B’s agreement.

STEP III. Building Consensus (~30 minutes).

a. Abandon original roles.

b. Build consensus regarding the controversy (or at least clarify where your differences lie). In collaboration with your peers, and using supporting evidence, craft a statement of consensus that works to reconcile both elements of the hero controversy.

Consider the following questions as you craft your statements:

- What type of hero was Joshua Chamberlain?
- Which pieces of evidence were most useful in this exercise and why? Which sources were less useful?
- What other questions do you have about sources and ideas encountered?

Record Consensus/Agreement Statement Below:

STEP IV: Wrap-up (Time remaining).

a. Whole-group sharing of consensus/agreement statements

b. Open conversation about the exercise, lessons learned, historical thinking, etc.

STEP V: Making Sense of it all (Homework/Out-of-Class).

- In a well-written paragraph, provide your own position about what kind of hero Joshua L. Chamberlain’s was. In your mind, why was Chamberlain considered to be a hero? Do we know of any modern Chamberlain-like figures? Do you think that our ideas of heroism have changed today? Why or why not?