**Role Play for Final Assessment:**

*Sierra Leone on Trial*

(full texts @ <https://zinnedproject.org/materials/people-vs-columbus/>

**Who is to Blame?**

Suggested Procedure:

1. In preparation for class, have student answer the question “Who is to blame for the actions in the book?” List all the characters/organizations that the students come up with on the board. Assign students into groups for each character.

2. Students will write ‘indictments’ for their character (provide model for indictments on Columbus)

3. Have students switch groups, and explain that they will defend their new character.

4. Tell students that each of these defendants is charged with murder. Tell them that, in groups, students will portray the defendants and that you, the teacher, will be the prosecutor. Explain that students’ responsibility will be twofold: a) to defend themselves against the charges, and b) to explain who they think is guilty and why.

*One rule:* They may plead guilty if they wish, but they cannot claim sole responsibility; they must accuse at least one other defendant. At this point, students sometimes protest that it’s ridiculous to charge the Taínos for their own deaths, or they may show some confusion about the “system of empire.” Tell them not to worry, that it’s your job as prosecutor to explain the charges. Each group will receive a written copy of the charges against them.

5.Explain the order of the activity:   
 a. In their groups, they will prepare a defense against the charges

contained in the indictments. It’s a good idea for students to write these

up, as they will be presenting these orally and may want to read a

statement.

b. Before the trial begins, you will choose several students, who will be

sworn to neutrality. These people will be the jury.

c. As prosecutor, you will begin by arguing the guilt of a particular

group.

d. Those in the group accused by the prosecutor will then defend

themselves and will state who they believe is guilty and why. [One

option is to require that each group call at least one witness. For

example, in one class, the group representing the characters that they

chose to the stand and asked, “Have you ever seen me before?” No. “Did

I ever kill any of your people?” No. “Did I ever hurt any of your

people?” No. “We have no further questions.”]

e.The jury will then question that group, and others may also question

the group and offer rebuttals.

f. This process is repeated until all the groups have been accused and

have defended themselves. The jury will then decide guilt and

innocence.

6. Ask students to count off into five groups of roughly equal numbers. To get things moving quickly, I like to tell students that the first group to circle up gets first pick of who they’ll represent. Go around to each of the groups and distribute the appropriate “indictment” sheets. Remind students to read the indictment against them carefully and discuss possible arguments in their defense.  As they discuss, I wander from group to group, making sure students understand their responsibilities—at times playing devil’s advocate, at times helping them consider possible defenses. Also, at this point, I distribute a placard and marker to each group so that they can display which role they are portraying. Sometimes students want to see the indictments against the other groups. I encourage them to read these because it will help students develop additional arguments. Also, students may want to use other “evidence.”

7. When each group appears ready—after perhaps a half hour, depending on the class— choose a jury: one member from each group (in a big class), or a total of three students in a smaller class. Publicly swear them to neutrality; they no longer represent the RUF, Army, or anyone else.

8. The order of prosecution is up to you.

9.  After each group has been charged and has made its defense, I ask the jury to step out of the classroom and deliberate. They can assign “percentage guilt,” e.g., one party is 25 percent guilty, another 60 percent, etc. They also need to offer clear explanations for why they decided as they did. As they deliberate, I ask the rest of the class to step out of their roles and to do in writing the same thing the jury is doing