

Question 4

Sir Stamford Raffles is often credited as the true founder of modern Singapore, having “transformed Singapore from an obscure fishing village to a great seaport and modern metropolis”. To commemorate his legacy, a statue of Raffles was erected by the Singapore government to acknowledge British colonialism as part of the country’s history. As we are now living in the post-colonial era, however, many citizens do not see the need to commemorate this, especially since most of them did not live in the colonial era. Thus, I would agree with the standpoint that the Raffles statue should be taken down for good.

Firstly, the statue should be taken down due to the possible standpoint that citizens recognise Sang Nila Utama as the true founder of modern Singapore, instead of Sir Stamford Raffles. While Raffles had first landed in Singapore in 1819 that helped shape Singapore to what it is today, Sang Nila Utama had already stepped foot in the country as early as 1299, founding the nation as the Kingdom of Singapura back then. It is important to recognise the story behind how the Malay prince first landed on the land known as Temasek before renaming the land as Singapura. This is especially true considering that the indigenous people in the country were Malays, and it would be a better idea to credit more of Singapore’s history to its geographical neighbours rather than to British colonialism. The introduction of the Singapore Bicentennial in 2019 also acknowledges this, citing that not many Singaporeans knew about the existence of Sang Nila Utama, believing that Raffles was the true founder instead. Given that the Singapore government would want its citizens to better understand Singapore’s history especially

before 1819, it would be in its best interest to remove the statue instead, to avoid over-acknowledging Raffles' influence in Singapore's history.

Secondly, the statue should be taken down to avoid misinterpretations that Singapore is still being influenced by British colonialism. While Singapore is no longer a British colony, it still establishes a diplomatic relationship with the United Kingdom, forming various trade and political partnerships between the two countries in the process. Furthermore, Singapore is also a part of the Commonwealth, where many of the member nations are former British colonies. Member nations of this political association enjoy exclusive diplomatic partnerships with one another to boost each other's economies. However, having the Raffles statue being erected still in Singapore may give an impression that the country still acknowledges the former British empire as its benefactor. This is certainly not the case in today's context, especially if Singapore wishes to be seen as an independent nation, it should be recognised as an equal to a country such as the United Kingdom, and not as an underling of the latter. As such, removing the statue would help to avoid that misconception.

Thirdly, by removing the statue of Raffles, I believe that this would truly signify Singapore's growth from an economic beneficiary in the colonial era to an economic powerhouse in the modern world today. As mentioned in the article attached to this question, Singapore has transformed into a global trading port, experiencing volumes of economic growth every year. While Singapore used to benefit as a trading hub in the past largely due to British rule, the country can now take the next step and help its

neighbouring countries to prosper economically together through mutually beneficial trade partnerships. Singapore's status as an independent and prospering nation can indeed potentially promote the economic growth of the entire Southeast Asian region as well, filling in the shoes of its previous colonial ruler. Thus, removing the statue could be a symbol of Singapore finally emerging from its previous colonial ruler, in order to step up as a strong economic power moving forward.

To sum up, while Raffles did set the precedent for Singapore to eventually prosper as an economic trading port, it is not necessary for his statue to remain erected in our soil. To many of our ancestors, the colonial era may signify long bouts of hardships and poverty, especially under the rule of the British, which may contribute to local sentiments that the statue is not necessary. Furthermore, almost all Singaporean citizens in our society today did not actually live in the colonial era, making it difficult for them to personally relate to Raffles and his rule back in the 1800s. Therefore, I believe that it is indeed essential for the statue to be eventually removed, so that we can move forward from being recognised as merely a former British colony and write the next chapter in our history as a growing economic power.

Question 6

In 1961, the Women's Charter was passed in Singapore Parliament, with the intention to improve and protect the legal rights of women in Singapore. While it was initially designed to ensure greater equality in legal matters such as marriage and housing, this Act has left behind a legacy by inspiring more similar initiatives to be set up in Singapore, including the formation of AWARE to further promote gender equality. Given how the roles of the two genders have evolved throughout the course of our history, I strongly support the idea of including the Women's Charter as one of the ten featured objects in the future iterations of this module.

For starters, we should first understand why this Act was introduced in the first place. During the colonial era in Singapore, females were confined to the role of housewife and caregiver, given the traditional religious and socio-cultural norms at that point of time. An example of this would be the membership system in the Singapore Recreation Club, with females only being allowed to register as members in 1956 (73 years after the club's founding) to participate in its various sporting and social activities, which were initially only catered to men. In contrast, males were seen to be the more dominant gender especially due to the prevalence of polygamy, reiterating the stance that women were indeed inferior to men at that point of time. Later in the colonial era, the British government introduced the Chinese Protectorate, which mainly focused on protecting women from illegal prostitution. While this only served to preserve the basic human rights of women in the country, this was an acknowledgement that more can be done for women to be treated more equally to men. In a sense, introducing the Women's

Charter could be seen as a step forward from the Chinese Protectorate, as it no longer merely focuses on basic human rights of women, but rather to introduce more legal rights in favour of women, especially in important aspects such as housing, marriage and children.

While the introduction of the Women's Charter was indeed successful in eventually banning polygamy by the 1960s, there was a declining interest in sustaining this women's rights movement afterwards, as its introduction had already achieved its main purpose and there was no incentive to further promote gender equality at that point of time. As a result, an all-male Parliament was eventually formed from 1970 to 1984, with patriarchal policies being introduced once again. These included the announcement of a quota to restrict female medical students, as well as the compulsory offering of home economics as a subject for lower secondary girls. Such acts eventually led to the formation of AWARE in 1985, which set to undo such discriminatory policies against women and promote greater gender equality once again. The introduction of AWARE was indeed a big success, making use of its vision to provide support on various problems largely faced by women, including domestic violence, sexual assault, single parenthood and workplace harassment. As such, I believe that the Women's Charter, as well as its accompanying history of emphasising the importance of gender equality in the long run, should indeed be an object for this module, so that students recognise its value especially in today's ever-changing society.

With regards to which current object should be replaced in favour of the Women's Charter, however, I believe that the Sound Blaster should be removed as an object of the module. Given the more economic nature of the topic, I feel that the idea of discussing a Singaporean invention does not fit as well as the other objects, especially when this is a module offered by the Department of History in the National University of Singapore.

If we were to look back at all the other objects that were taught in this module, be it an artefact from the pre-colonial era (Singapore Stone), a club established during the colonial era (Singapore Recreation Club), or modern objects such as the Kallang Roar and the movie 'I Not Stupid', what they have in common is that they have played a significant role in Singapore's history, and have contributed in forging the Singaporean identity in the process. Looking at the 'I Not Stupid' movie for example, it has established a legacy of revamping the current educational system, proving that such filmmaking can be influential in establishing Singapore's history as a progressing society if done right.

While I recognise and applaud the efforts of Sim Wong Hoo and how his innovation of the Sound Blaster technology had contributed to our economy, I feel that this invention is not unique enough to be recognised as an 'object' of Singapore's history. Such advancements in technology are less distinguishable between the different countries in our global economy, especially with many people around the world possibly having the misconception that these inventions largely only occur in larger countries such as the USA and China. In summary, this invention does not seem as impactful in influencing

Singapore's history compared to the other objects, which explains my decision to exclude this object in favour of the Women's Charter if possible.

To conclude, the story of the Women's Charter and the subsequent formation of AWARE should indeed be included as an object in this module. This has taught us the importance of supporting the movement of gender equality, as well as the consequences of not sustaining such movements in the long run. I believe that this is an important lesson that Singaporeans can learn from, especially with the rising prevalence of women in our local workforce, including those in professional, managerial, executive and technical professions, which is a testament of the changing gender roles in our society today.