Wise 11 [Wise, T. (2011). *White like me: Reflections on race from a privileged son: The remix*. Soft Skull Press. //cohn]

Debate would become for me in high school what theatre had been in middle school: a place to put my energy and also an escape from the craziness that was my home life. The idea of throwing myself into an activity that allowed me to travel, to get away from home at least two weekends a month, was more than a little appealing. I was sure by now that my father was not going to kill my mother, so I didn’t fear leaving them alone, and mostly I just needed a break from the fighting and the drinking. There have always been debaters of color, and indeed, my high school’s top debater when I arrived was a black senior, James Bernard. James, who would attend Harvard Law with Barack Obama several years later—and would be one of the founders and first publishers of the hip-hop magazine The Source—taught me a lot about debate as well as activism, the latter in his capacity as one of the key players in the Nashville Youth Network: a loosely-knit coalition of teens energized around a number of issues of relevance to young people at the time. But despite James’s debate prowess, the activity was, and still is, extraordinarily white, not merely in terms of its demographic, but also in terms of its style, its form, and its content at the most competitive levels. **Debate literally exudes whiteness and privileges white participants in a number of ways.** On the one hand, there is the issue of money. Debaters, in order to be nationally competitive, require funding: either a school with a huge budget to pay for trips to national tournaments, or families that can swing the cost of sending their kids away for three days at a time, often by plane, for the purpose of competing. I had neither, but between what minor help my parents could offer and the money I made working twenty hours a week sacking groceries at a local market, we managed to make it work. Then there are the summer debate camps, which even in the 1980s cost about fifteen hundred dollars, and which run for three to four weeks. Those who can afford to go to these get a huge jump on the competition. In fact, I don’t know of any nationally competitive team whose members didn’t attend at least one camp during the previous summer. During the summer before my junior year, my family was unable to afford to send me to a debate institute, and being unable to go set me back considerably, in terms of my own skills, for several months at the beginning of the tournament season. It took me most of the first semester to catch up to the other national-circuit debaters who had been at the camps learning technique and the year’s topic backwards and forwards, all with the assistance of college coaches and top-notch research facilities. **Obviously, given the interplay of race and socioeconomic status in this country, blacks, Latinos, American Indians, and Southeast Asians (all of which groups have much higher poverty rates than whites) are woefully underrepresented in the activity, relative to their numbers in the student population. But the cost of debate is hardly the only thing that causes the activity to be so white.** The substance of the arguments made and the way in which the arguments are delivered also tend to appeal to whites far more readily than to people of color for whom the style and substance are often too removed from the real world to be of much practical value. Those who haven’t seen a competitive debate (particularly in the most dominant category, known as policy debate) may be inclined to think that such a thing is a deep discussion of some pressing issue. But if that is what you expected, and you then happened into a debate at one of the nation’s top tournaments and watched any of the elimination rounds (those involving the top sixteen or thirty-two teams, typically), you would think you had walked into a world of make-believe. Even if you could understand a single word being said, which is unlikely since the “best” debaters typically speak at lightning speed (and I was among the biggest offenders here, able to rattle off five hundred words a minute), you still wouldn’t really understand what was going on. The terminology is arcane and only of use in the activity itself—terms like topicality, counterplan, permutation, infinite regression, and kritik. The purpose of competitive debate is essentially to speak faster than your opponents so they will “drop” one of your arguments, which you will then insist to the judge is the most important issue in the round, warranting an immediate ballot in your favor. Just as critical, debaters are to make sure that whatever the topic, their arguments for or against a particular policy must be linked to nuclear war or ecological catastrophe, no matter how absurd the linkage. So, for example, you might claim that your opponent’s plan to extend the retirement age will contribute to global warming by keeping people in the workforce longer, thereby increasing consumption levels, thereby increasing energy expenditure, thereby speeding up climate change and the ultimate end of the world. **Though one can theoretically learn quite a bit from debate, especially during the research phase of the operation, the fact remains that superficiality, speed and mass extinction scenarios typically take the place of nuanced policy analysis, such that one has to wonder how much the debaters really come to know about the issues they debate at the end of the day.** Learning is always secondary to winning, and for the sake of winning, debaters will say virtually anything. My own debate experience serves as vulgar confirmation of this maxim. On the one hand, I ran cases (which in debate terms means the primary position taken by the affirmative team upholding the year’s formal resolution) calling for cutting off weapons sales to Venezuela, and also for the restoration of voting rights to ex-felons: positions with which I agreed. On the other hand, I also ran cases calling for a program that would employ all poor folks who were out of work to build a missile defense system (possibly the most ridiculous idea ever advocated in a debate round), and for reinforcing the nation’s water reservoirs against poisoning by terrorists. Although the idea of protecting soft targets from terrorism might make sense, the evidence we used to make our case was almost exclusively from the most disgusting of anti-Muslim, right- wing sources (and this was in 1985 and 1986 mind you, long before 9/11). I am still taking extra baths to wash off the ideological stench of having read evidence in debate rounds from people like Michael Ledeen or Daniel Pipes (the latter of whom would, several years later, post highly critical comments about me on his website, so I guess the feeling is mutual). When we were on the negative side, I would argue, among other things, that poverty should be allowed to continue because it would eventually trigger a glorious socialist revolution (which isn’t even good Marxist theory, let alone a morally acceptable position), or that civil liberties should be eradicated so the United States could transition to a society in which resource use was limited by force, family size was strictly controlled, and thus planetary destruction averted. **These kinds of arguments, it should be noted, were hardly mine alone: they were absolutely typical on the national debate circuit, and they still are.** The reason I call this process a white one is because whites (and especially affluent ones), much more so than folks of color, have the luxury of looking at life or death issues of war, peace, famine, unemployment, or criminal justice as a game, as a mere exercise in intellectual and rhetorical banter. For me to get up and debate, for example, whether or not full employment is a good idea presupposes that my folks are not likely out of work as I go about the task. To debate whether racial profiling is legitimate likewise presupposes that I, the debater, am not likely to be someone who was confronted by the practice as my team drove to the tournament that day, or as we passed through security at the airport. In this way, competitive debate reinforces whiteness and affluence as normative conditions, and makes the process more attractive to affluent white students. Kids of color and working-class youth of all colors are simply not as likely to gravitate to an activity where pretty much half the time they’ll be forced to take positions that, if implemented in the real world, might devastate their communities. **Because debaters are encouraged to think about life or death matters as if they had little consequence beyond a given debate round, the fact that those who have come through the activity go on to hold a disproportionate share of powerful political and legal positions—something about which the National Forensics League has long bragged—is a matter that should concern us all.** Being primed to think of serious issues as abstractions increases the risk that the person who has been so primed will reduce everything to a brutal cost-benefit analysis, which rarely prioritizes the needs and interests of society’s less powerful. Rather, it becomes easier at that point to support policies that benefit the haves at the expense of the have-nots, because others whom the ex-debaters never met and never had to take seriously will be the ones to feel the damage. Unless debate is fundamentally transformed**—and at this point the only forces for real change are the squads from Urban Debate Leagues and a few college squads of color who are clamoring for different styles of argumentation and different evidentiary standards—**it will continue to serve as a staging ground for those whose interests are mostly the interests of the powerful**.** **Until the voices of economically and racially marginalized persons are given equal weight in debate rounds with those of affluent white experts (whose expertise is only presumed because other whites published what they had to say in the first place), the ideas that shape our world will continue to be those of the elite, no matter how destructive these ideas have proven to be for the vast majority of the planet’s inhabitants.** Privilege makes its recipients oblivious to certain things, and debate, as an activity, is one of its many transmission belts—one that I was able to access, to great effect, in my life. Lucky for me that I went to a school that offered it, that I had parents who somehow managed to help me afford it, and that its game-playing format wasn’t yet a problem for me, ethically speaking. Lucky for me, in other words, that I was white.

Conquergood 02 [Conquergood, Dwight. (2002). Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research. TDR/The Drama Review, 46(2), 145–156. doi:10.1162/105420402320980550 //cohn]

In even stronger terms, Raymond Williams challenged the class-based arrogance of scriptocentrism, **pointing to the** “error” and “delusion” of “highly educated” people who are “so driven in on their reading” that “they fail to notice that there are other forms of skilled, intelligent, creative activity” **such as “theatre” and “active politics.”** This error “resembles that of the narrow reformer who supposes that farm labourers and village craftsmen were once uneducated, merely because they could not read.” **He argued that “the contempt” for performance and practical activity, “which is always latent in the highly literate, is a mark of the observer’s limits, not those of the activities themselves**” ([1958] 1983:309). Williams critiqued scholars for limiting their sources to written materials; I agree with Burke that scholarship is so skewed toward texts that **even when researchers do attend to extralinguistic human action and embodied events they construe them as texts to be read.** According to de Certeau, **this scriptocentrism is a hallmark of Western imperialism**. Posted above the gates of modernity, this sign: **“‘Here only what is written is understood.’ Such is the internal law of that which has constituted itself as ‘Western’ [and ‘white’]”** (1984:161). Only middle-class academics could blithely assume that all the world is a text because reading and writing are central to their everyday lives and occupational security. For many people throughout the world, however, particularly subaltern groups, texts are often inaccessible, or threatening, charged with the regulatory powers of the state. More often than not, subordinate people experience texts and the bureaucracy of literacy as instruments of control and displacement, e.g., green cards, passports, arrest warrants, deportation orders—what de Certeau calls **“intextuation”: “Every power, including the power of law, is written first of all on the backs of its subjects”** (1984:140). Among the most oppressed people in the United States today are the “undocumented” immigrants, the so-called “illegal aliens,” known in the vernacular as the people “sin papeles,” the people without papers, indocumentado/as. They are illegal because they are not legible, they trouble “the writing machine of the law” (de Certeau 1984:141). The hegemony of textualism needs to be exposed and undermined. Transcription is not a transparent or politically innocent model for conceptualizing or engaging the world. The root metaphor of the text underpins the supremacy of Western knowledge systems by erasing the vast realm of human knowledge and meaningful action that is unlettered, “a history of the tacit and the habitual” (Jackson 2000:29). In their multivolume historical ethnography of colonialism/ evangelism in South Africa, John and Jean Comaroff pay careful attention to the way Tswana people argued with their white interlocutors “both verbally and nonverbally” (1997:47; see also 1991). They excavate spaces of agency and struggle from everyday performance practices—clothing, gardening, healing, trading, worshipping, architecture, and homemaking—to reveal an impressive repertoire of conscious, creative, critical, contrapuntal responses to the imperialist project that exceeded the verbal. **The Comaroffs intervene in an academically fashionable textual fundamentalism and fetish of the (verbal) archive where “text—a sad proxy for life—becomes all”** (1992:26). “In this day and age,” they ask, **“do we still have to remind ourselves that many of the players on any historical stage cannot speak at all? Or, under greater or lesser duress, opt not to do so”** (1997:48; see also Scott 1990)? There are many ethnographic examples of how nonelite people recognize the opacity of the text and critique its dense occlusions and implications in historical processes of political economic privilege and systematic exclusion. In Belize, for example, Garifuna people, an African-descended minority group, use the word gapencillitin, which means “people with pencil,” to refer to middle- and upperclass members of the professional-managerial class, elites who approach life from an intellectual perspective. They use the word mapencillitin, literally “people without pencil,” to refer to rural and working-class people, “real folks” who approach life from a practitioner’s point of view.2 What is interesting about the Garifuna example is that class stratification, related to differential knowledges, is articulated in terms of access to literacy. **The pencil draws the line between the haves and the have-nots**. For Garifuna people, the pencil is not a neutral instrument; it functions metonymically as the operative technology of a complex political economy of knowledge, power, and the exclusions upon which privilege is based.

Dillard-Knox 14 [Dillard-Knox, Tiffany Yvonne, "Against the grain : the challenges of black discourse within intercollegiate policy debate." (2014). Electronic Theses and Dissertations. Paper 2161. <https://doi.org/10.18297/etd/2161> //cohn]

CHAPTER VI CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION The important role that Debate has played throughout history in training students to become the nation‘s most prominent leaders and active citizens requires special attention to how these students are trained. **Debate is the training ground for the future movers and shakers of society.** **Therefore,** Debate educators have a responsibility **to ensure that the ways in which these students think about the policy making process is inclusive of a diversity of values, perspectives, and cultures.** Altering the perspectives of debaters during their intercollegiate debate careers could have positive long term effects on the ways they choose to interact with diverse members of the larger society. Debate is no longer an activity mostly comprised of wealthy, white males. Within the last decade and a half, Debate has had an increase in demographically diverse populations. **Thus, it is necessary that Debate has a process for valuing the voices of all of its students.** Just like the interracial debates of the early twentieth century provided Blacks with a platform to disprove stereotypes about Black intellectual inferiority, Debate continues to provide a stage for Black students‘ voices. **However, these students must not be forced to assimilate into the traditional norms of Debate to be considered valuable members of the Debate community**. In order for Debate to continue to be relevant well into the future, there has to be a transformation in the culture of the community. This culture must transition away from a community that holds onto stagnate notions of universalism to one that embraces notions of difference. This process began in 2000 when Dr. Ede Warner, then Director of Debate at the University of Louisville, had a vision to bring Debate to Black students. Successfully recruiting a new cohort of Black students in Debate, Warner found that these students were frustrated with being forced to assimilate into the traditional norms of the activity in order to be successful. The culture of Debate was not inclusive of the values and perspectives of his students. Thus, in order to retain Black students, challenges to the norms and procedures of debate were necessary. Warner and his students were not only successful in challenging traditional norms and procedures but they were also innovative in the successful creation of alternative methods that are most representative of the lives that they experience. The success of this new model of Debate has led to increased tensions and hostilities throughout Debate in what is now called the clash of civilizations. An examination of the clash of civilizations debates is not only necessary for the recruitment and retention of the Black student population but Debate at large. This new model of debate, alternative debate, has been instrumental in the recruitment of other diverse groups, such as: Latinos, Native Americans, disabled populations, and LGBT students. Additionally, the inclusion of different values and perspectives adds another level of training for the future movers and shakers of society. **If debaters are trained to make policy for diverse populations, then understanding the difference in cultures, values and perspectives of these groups is an invaluable experience.** Ultimately, these standpoints are necessary for the growth and development of every member of the Debate community. Unfortunately, the backlash to alternative debate has overshadowed the benefits of including alternative debate for much of the community. Therefore, research on the clash of civilization debates is an essential and timely endeavor. The speech community model of analysis has been a productive model for examining the ways in which the **prioritizing of traditional debate norms and procedures has served to exclude Black discourse, values, and perspectives.** **While it is not always an intentional act of exclusion, the effects can often be just as injurious.** The debate about Debate, that has been ongoing within Intercollegiate Policy Debate, has provided an excellent opportunity to examine how the exclusion of different discourse strategies can ultimately lead to the exclusion of an entire culture, their values, and their experiences. With the recent growth of the Black student population in Debate, the community has been introduced to new methods of debate. As a result of the increased use of alternative methods, the discussions regarding the community‘s best practices have become a site of contention for many of its members. The hostility surrounding the debate about Debate is at an all-time high and the community is split along the lines of stylistic choice. Additionally, this split has also segregated the community along lines of race. The effects of this conflict have left these Black students stigmatized and constantly fighting to be recognized as valuable members of the Debate community. In this regard, the Debate community has failed to become the open and inclusive community that it prides itself on being. Not only are these Black debaters negatively affected, but the entire community risks losing the potential benefits that come from the inclusion of alternative perspectives. This research isolates specific norms within traditional debate. Specifically, the research targets the use of the flow, speed, and line by line refutation. To be clear, it is not the norms in and of themselves but the ways in which **these practices have been used at the exclusion of alternative methods of debate for Black students.** **Traditional debate practices have often been defended, by coaches and debaters alike, as the best method to train debaters in the process of policy making. However**, most of the rationale for this defense depends upon a universal understanding of the purpose of Debate. **There are various factors that determine why each student chooses to participate in the activity and what he/she chooses to get out of the activity. The ontological positioning of traditional debate practices as ―the best‖ inhibits debate traditionalists from understanding the epistemological challenges that these alternative debaters are issuing.** Additionally, a second layer of analysis has been conducted in terms of some of the procedural criticisms launched against alternative debaters from the more traditional practitioners of the activity. These criticisms include the personalization of Debate and the lack of a topical focus. These two criticisms are at the heart of the clash of civilizations debates. The clash of civilizations debates are some of the most productive and educational debates that occur within the Debate community. The heightened tensions and hostilities that come with these debates often overshadow the benefits of these debates. These debates are where values and perspectives clash. Within these discussions, debaters are learning that their way of viewing the world is not the only way to view the world. A lot of times this process is painful. However, this does not mean that the process is not valuable. Learning about different cultures, perspectives, and values only adds to the benefits that students receive as a result of their debate training. Working against the grain, these debaters have managed to persevere and succeed within Debate and their respective careers post-graduation. **The image of the successful debater is no longer only aligned with the goals, values, practices, and traditions of white males as articulated by the study conducted in 1997 by Jack Rogers.** There are now more successful Black debaters within the activity than there have been since the era of HBCUs‘ participation in Debate. There have been a number of historical firsts achieved within Debate by students at various universities since the development of the three-tier process by the University of Louisville:  2004, First time that two African American women won the 1st and 2nd speaker awards at the CEDA National Tournament, University of Louisville  2012, First African American woman to receive an at-large bid (top 16 teams nationally) to the NDT, Emporia State University  2013, First time that two African American, openly gay males won the National Debate Tournament and the first time that any team has ever won both national titles (CEDA and NDT) in the same season, Emporia State University  2013, First time an African American woman has won the National Female Coach of the Year Award for CEDA, University of Louisville  2014, First time that two African American females won the CEDA National Tournament, Towson University  2014, First time that an African American won the top speaker at the NDT, Oklahoma University Additionally, graduates of the first cohort of debaters from the 1999-2000 University of Louisville Malcolm X Debate team have gone on to become lawyers, community organizers, educators, a journalist, a chemist, and a collegiate Director of Debate.