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INDEBTED: THE COMPOUNDING POLITICS OF BLACK AND TRANS ARGUMENTATION IN INTERCOLLEGIATE POLICY DEBATE

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This essay studies the emergence and rise of transgender argumentation in intercollegiate policy debate by marking its indebted relation to Black radicalism in the activity. Instead of situating trans argumentation merely as a discordant offshoot of (primarily white and non-Black) feminist and queer arguments, the author argues that trans argumentation is made possible by Black debaters, coaches and judges who innovated (and continue to innovate) techniques and methodologies to theorize and counter anti-Black exclusion. Attending to the intricacies of Black study is critical to reckoning with the disagreements Black studies pursues with white and non-Black trans theory, practice and politics. Instead of clearing its debt, the author argues that trans argumentation should stay with the rhetorical debt of its own emergence by studying lessons from the Black radical tradition and refusing trans trajectories that ultimately separate and distance trans liberation from Black liberation.

Keywords: Transgender, argumentation, intercollegiate debate, trans liberation, anti-Blackness, Black debate

Introduction

Policy has concluded they are conspiratorial, heretical, criminal, amateur. Policy says they can't handle debt and will never get credit. But if you listen to them, they will tell you: we will not handle credit, and we cannot handle debt, debt flows through us, and there's no time to

tell you everything, so much bad debt, so much to forget and remember again. But if we listen to them, they will say, 'Come, let's plan something together.' And that's what we're going to do."

Moten and Harney, "Debt and Study"

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) movements are indebted to Black queer and trans radicals and their corollary, Black queer and trans radicalism(s). I see evocations of debt on protest signs and in op-eds and on social media graphics, all of which argue that the contingent, visible successes of LGBTQ activism, from Pride parades in June to the federal legalization of gay marriage, are owed to the efforts of trans women of color, and most specifically, Black trans women. The rhetorical deployment of indebtedness within LGBTQ activism in the United States should solicit further investigation, not a foreclosure. If the existence of the modern LBGTQ movement is inextricably tied to the revolutionary expenditures of Black trans people, how should we narrativize this horizonal state of indebtedness? What does this debt demand of non-Black queer and trans theory and political organizing? What exactly is owed? And lastly, how can non-Black queer and trans people attend to this debt in ways that exceed and challenge schemas of neoliberal gratitude and labor recognition? My interest in these questions stems from my experiences mediating on similar ones as a white trans person in intercollegiate policy debate who forwarded queer and trans arguments in a rhetorical landscape of Black radical invention and anti-Black backlash. Similar to the advent of trans political movements and studies, the inception of trans argumentation in collegiate debate is entangled with Black radical thought and praxis. Trans argumentation's techniques and tactics are dovetailed with Black resistance.

This essay investigates and contextualizes the emergence, rise and reception of transgender and gender non-conforming argumentation in intercollegiate policy debate by marking its rhetorical debt to Black radicalism. Writing with scholars mobilized within debate rounds, I begin by introducing intercollegiate policy debate and then, the unfolding field of trans argumentation. After, I pull out several important sites of disagreement at a variety of junctions between Black, non-Black trans, and Black trans intellectualism(s) to demonstrate not only the richness but necessity of argumentation that refuses to isolate Black and trans concerns, politics and theories. These insights hold resounding consequence for those in and out of the activity alike. In "We Got Issues: Toward A Black Trans*/Studies," Treva Ellison, Kai M. Green, Matt Richardson and C. Riley Snorton (2017) name the repressed and disavowed knowledges that

inform the genealogy of trans studies. The erasure of the impact of Black radical movements, Black studies and Black feminism(s) in trans studies resembles queer theory's occlusion of women of color feminism(s) as an intellectual terrain theorizing racialized gender and sexuality prior to queer theory's emergence (Ferguson, 2005; Hames-García, 2011; Ellison et al., 2017). Rather than repress trans argumentation and scholarship's indebtedness, I seek to embrace it and call for non-Black trans argumentation and scholarship to attend to Black study and gravitate towards the compounding politics found between Black and trans intellectualism(s). Such an attention elucidates latent and overt investments in anti-Blackness that non-Black trans politics often maintains and opens intellectual space that would otherwise be obstructed if trans politics and studies refuse meaningful engagement with Black radicalism. I situate these intellectual conversations within the larger argumentative climate and the construction of Black radical invention (and the use of "personal experience") as an undebatable threat to the activity and call for the necessity of insurgent contestations despite efforts to eradicate argumentative dissent. I posit that the intersection of Black and trans scholarship invites radical transformations in how we think, debate, act, organize and ultimately, live.

1

Competitive intercollegiate policy debate is a dialogic forum where participants stake out harms in the status quo and propose advocacy for political change on an annual resolution.[1] Debate is a process of intellectual engagement and contestation; from the perspective of an educator, it is a vital teaching tool that allows students to practice how to forward, negotiate and respond to disagreement. In each two-hour debate, four debaters present and rigorously test an

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[1] Though there are other competitive academic debate formats, this paper is primarily concerned with the high school and intercollegiate cross-examination debate format, also known colloquially as "policy debate." On the collegiate circuit, students compete at a number of seasonal invitationals and compete at the National Debate Tournament (NDT) and the Cross-Examination Debate Association (CEDA) national championship. It should be noted however, that similar concerns and conflicts also appear in other formats that share participants with and are deeply influenced by argumentative techniques of the cross-examination debate format, such as Lincoln-Douglas debate and National Parliamentary Debate Association (NDPA) debate.

affirmative case and responding negative positions. At the conclusion, an adjudicator decides in favor of the affirmative or negative team based on argumentative interaction and development while providing feedback and a reason for decision (RFD). For decades, thousands of students competing for their college debate teams have generated a sense of intellectual community within the activity and find themselves indebted to the folks that not only make tournaments possible, but also to their opponents who return weekend after weekend with new affirmative cases, improved responses, and formidable innovations to the customs of argumentation itself. Coaches and scholars have written extensively about the rich histories of intellectuality and innovation in intercollegiate policy debate where disagreements in and out of competition shape the formation of the activity (Branham, 1989; Broda-Bham, 2002). With six to eight debates in a tournament and sometimes up to ten tournaments per school year (and a community dedication in disagreement outside of competition that informs in-round deliberation), collegiate debate is a capacious and expansive site of rhetoric animated by pedagogical commitments to argumentative refinement and critical thinking. Simultaneously, scholars have studied significant racial, classed, and gendered disparities that exist across the activity and pursued a number of solutions to combat exclusions, including the creation of committees such as the Cross-Examination Debate Association (CEDA) Commission on Women and Minorities and the development of non-profits such as Urban Debate Leagues and the Women's Debate Institute (Stepp 1997; Giroux, 2006; Schwartz-DuPre, 2006). Unfortunately, the activity of intercollegiate policy debate cannot be chronicled without analyzing the monumental shift, and resulting intellectual rift, in the activity emerging as a result of the efforts of Black people in the activity working to critically theorize and uproot white supremacy and anti-Black racism that challenges the narrative of intercollegiate policy debate as a site of mutual indebtedness committed to excavating injustice.

At the turn of the 21st century, debaters and coaches from the University of Louisville introduced a variety of alternative debate practices and methodological approaches internal to competition to challenge Black exclusion and increase "meaningful Black participation in Intercollegiate Policy Debate" (Dillard-Knox, 2014, p. 4). Disputing the idea that anti-Blackness in the activity would be resolved by increased access alone, the squad that would come to know itself as the University of Louisville Malcolm X Debate Society upended the idea that incremental Black inclusion into the activity and the state operates as a panacea for institutionalized white supremacy and anti-Blackness. Rather, these student-scholars argued that stylistic protocols, adjudication preferences, evidentiary standards and the constructed limits of

contestation that the traditional model of debate pursues should not be determined as fixed, pre-determined truths of the community, but rather should be rigorously subjected to contestation, in and out of debate rounds. Drawing out the realities of racism, classism, sexism, and homophobia in and out of the activity, student-scholars from the University of Louisville Malcolm X Debate Society vocalized the necessity of applying the community's values of harm investigation, critical thinking, and argumentative innovation to violence endemic to the United States, and called community members to investigate the ways in which structural violence transpires within institutional communities, including debate. While many white and non-Black debaters and coaches claimed to agree about the realities of racism, sexism, homophobia and classism in the activity, they disagreed with the way that the Malcolm X Debate Society argued, urging the community to reject Louisville's innovations and the methodological use of personal experience in debate because, they argued, it breeds community frustrations, isolates allies that would otherwise support anti-racist projects, and its overall *difficulty* to debate could lead to debate's demise (Zompetti, 2004). Despite the activity's historical emphasis on skill creation over argumentative content, many community members have, in a variety of fashions, refused to extend such appreciation for innovation, critical thinking, and attention to the pressing harms of the status quo to Black radical argumentation and advocacy, instead requesting that criticism(s) of debate regarding racial, classed and gendered violence be saved for out-of-round forums or conversations between rounds. Many folks staunchly against Louisville's methodologies have chosen to leave the activity as a result of white and non-Black paranoia, hatred and fragility towards Black radical scholarship, and the aggravated participants that remain frequently leverage similar, albeit slightly reformed, criticism(s) in round against argumentation indebted to Louisville's critiques and techniques.

Despite the fact that competitive debate is widely regarded as an activity comprised of primarily left and liberal-leaning intellectuals allegedly attending to racial, gender, and classed exclusions, intercollegiate debate today is at an impasse that is so strong that debates between the styles of debate construed as "traditional" and "critical" are commonly referred to as "clash of civilizations" debates. Shanara Reid-Brinkley and Tiffany Dillard-Knox write extensively about the impact and backlash that debaters from the University of Louisville and Black debaters who use their argumentative methodologies have received, and continue to receive, from the broader debate community (Dillard-Knox 2014; Reid-Brinkley, 2019). Reid-Brinkley (2019) observes that within the community disagreements that unfolded in response to Louisville, many agreed

with the abstract goal of increasing meaningful Black participation in debate but disagreed with the means by which Louisville debaters achieved such an objective, with some community members going so far as to describe Louisville's argumentation as anti-educational. These critics of the Louisville team argued that Louisville's methodologies, and in particular their confrontational tone and oppositional rhetoric, were anti-intellectual disruptions to the activity's adherence to social norms of civility and decorum and thus collapse the foundational imperatives of civic and civil engagement.[2] For instance, after four Black competitors made it to the final round of the CEDA national championship in 2014, the champions and finalists received an onslaught of YouTube comments and forum posts disparaging the final round while deploying racial slurs against the competitors to such an extent that CEDA released a statement alongside the hashtag #IsupportCEDA4 to mobilize the debate community to their defense (CEDADebate, 2014). While many of these comments came from those unfamiliar with the activity, littered amongst them were former competitors lamenting about the good ol' days before the alleged ruination of the activity.

While the University of Louisville Malcolm X Debate Society elevated and refigured critical arguments, the origins of critical debate predate Louisville's efforts to meaningfully increase Black participation in debate. When students began to introduce arguments that critiqued United States legal reform in the 1980s (for instance, arguments in defense of socialism, anarchism, or the establishment of a world government), a segment of the community began to argue that "fashioning new societal blueprints or utopias" should be disallowed because such arguments diverge from an *a priori* assumption of real-world policy-making that social change should be brought about through a process of incremental improvements of existing institutions, and they therefore argued that the community should accept the nation-state policy-making frame as *fait accompli,* an accomplished fact (Katsulas, Herbeck & Panetta 1987, p. 99). This a priori assumption of debate's policy-making frame underlies the distinction between "traditional"

[2] The accusation of Black student-scholars surpassing the permissible standards of confrontation is notable given that debate has always been, and by its nature is, confrontational and oppositional. Accusations of hyper aggression are often discussed by feminists in the activity (for instance, the way in which people perceived as women are told that they are bitches while people conscribed as men are rewarded for aggression). Black feminists in the activity challenge deracialized readings of gender and aggression in favor of an intersectional lens to theorize the permissible standards of aggression, confrontation and antagonism.

policy debate and modes of argumentation that challenge the incremental policy-making framework which continues to accrue names: critical debate, kritikal debate (to denote German philosophical influence), performance debate, progressive debate, alternative debate, method debate, modern debate, and revolutionary debate. These names reference a loose set of argumentative approaches that generally share a commitment to reject the a priori reformist policy-making framework (and the idea we should assume that political structures are irreversible with no option but to accept them) alongside its corresponding ideal of "tabula rasa" adjudication that requires participants to "assume the role" of objective, blank-slate, institutionally-authorized power brokers in order to neutralize subjective influence in political deliberation. Critical argumentation propagated from early calls for socialism and anarchy to a wide variety of advocacies that deploy the questioning-practices of critical theory. Some variations of critical argumentation that build off of challenging the presuppositions of the *fait accompli* model are referenced by a primary authorship (including, but not limited to: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Agamben, Bataille, & Deleuze and Guattari), while other critiques are described by an overarching concept or theory to be used or critiqued (for example: normativity, statism, capitalism, anthropocentrism, security, & psychoanalysis). For each of these criticisms, there are a variety of argumentative structures deployed, methodological questions posed, and alternative solutions offered; but they all in their different ways, ask their opponents to interrogate the disciplining function and frame of the *fait accompli* model and imagine alternative political blueprints for arguing, learning, teaching and mobilizing in and out of debate rounds.

Even though many coaches were frustrated by the breach of the policy-making frame in the early histories of critical debate, these frustrations elevated in intensity when the University of Louisville Malcolm X Debate Society began to specifically challenge anti-Black racism within the activity and develop alternative research methodologies to attend to white supremacist dogma. While anxiety concerning approaches to political change was initially instigated by the introduction of primarily Eurocentric, anti-statist critical theory, the introduction and competitive success of Black radical argumentation that questioned institutional anti-Blackness within intercollegiate policy debate brought this conflict between revolutionary (commonly disparaged as "utopian") and reformist (commonly referred to as "instrumental") political approaches to a head in the early 2000s. Louisville introduced innovative scholarly methods for political interrogation like the three-tier methodology that prioritized personal experience and organic intellectuals alongside professional and academic experts, rather than the singular privileging of

the latter (Dillard-Knox, 2014, p. 19). While the introduction of arguments such as socialism and anarchism generated conflict in the deliberative forum, for a number of white and non-Black debaters and coaches, the entrance of anti-Black racism and the deployment of Black experiential vantage points within debate competition threatened to undermine the entire possibility of political deliberation. This faction believed that introducing experiences of racism in competition violated the norms of tabula rasa that hold that questions of identity (or, "the personal") should be checked at the door. As one coach put it, arguments involving the personal are a "dead-end" and do "nothing but breed frustration, victimage, and displacement of more lofty efforts" (Zompetti, 2004, p. 34, 35). Implicitly and explicitly, opponents made "slippery slope" arguments regarding the rise of Black intellectualism, including by warning those in the community of the "seductive" nature of Louisville's methodological practices (Zompetti, 2004, p. 33). The contemporaneous construction of Black radicalism as unfairly seductive and isolative elucidates a dilemma of relationality.

Louisville's argumentative innovations were, and continue to be, regarded as destructive and dangerous because they challenge the hegemonic procedural norms developed over time in the second half of the 20th century. Nick J. Scuillo (2019) explains that the differentiation between "traditional" and "non-traditional" policy debate (especially as it concerns the "non-traditional" style of "performance debate," which refers to an approach to argumentation that forefronts the performative and embodied elements of rhetoric) is a racial history repeatedly normalized by white and non-Black participants to belittle arguments that call into question policy debate's (constructed) stylistic norms and frameworks. A substantial number of white and non-Black debaters and coaches insist that the use of alternative evidence (including, but not limited to, poetry, music, and personal testimony) fails to meet the threshold for what constitutes legitimate argumentation, and thus is better understood as "performance" and *not debate* (Scullio, 2019, p. 310). Instead of describing their own model of debate as reformism debate, or *fait accompli* debate, these teams, coaches, and programs position their hegemonic style of debate as (unmarked) policy debate which, over time, has naturalized the widespread belief that the *fait accompli* model must be secured against alternative modes of argumentation (and the debaters,

coaches, and programs which are retroactively attached to such argumentation) in the name of maintaining tradition, fairness, and the activity's future itself.[3]

The posturing of Black argumentative innovation as threatening to the existence of policy debate encourages the widespread use of a new argument intent on (re)figuring the debate community's history and future according to an idyllic past of "fair and equitable" contestation that allegedly occurred prior to the emergence of critical debate. "Framework" asks judges to vote against teams that fail to uphold the hegemonically constructed policy-making paradigm as an *a priori* fairness concern of their ballot. Even though policy debate is widely regarded as uniquely meritorious, educational, and competitive because of its ability to undermine dogma through the submission of all ideology, norms, and truth claims to in-round argumentative skill (and to such an extent that a key competent of the format's value lies in the ability for debaters to *debate about debate's procedures*), framework argues that one stylistic invention internal to competition must be upheld for the activity to function. Black students *debating* about the anti-Blackness of the activity's colorblind norms and procedures is positioned as a step out of bounds.[4] Critical teams problematize framework's demand that all students deploy the invented technique of "fiat" (often described as a "magic wand") that concentrates debates on the question of whether or not the government *should* rather than *would* enact a certain policy, especially given that framework connotes critical models of argumentation as being unfairly wishful and "utopic."[5] Framework,

[3] For example, Jenny Heidt's (2003) "Performance Debate: How to Defend Yourself," disparages performance debate for inciting serious fairness issues because performance debate challenges the rules of debate in-round. Heidt argues that the increasing popularity of affirmative advocacies that forgo the (hegemonically constructed) practice of policy-making encourages "alien-sounding" critical theories that will "leak down" to high school competitors, which "bodes ill" for the future of the activity (Heidt, 2003). Heidt's article title is noteworthy in itself for the way it does not offer argumentative tips to defend a particular (constructed) approach to debate, but rather provides tips to defend *yourself*, as if performance debate is not merely a method of inquiry but an attack on the *existence* of traditional policy debate's defenders.

[4] Opponents staunchly against critical arguments in debate fail to recognize how Black argumentation, and the modes of argumentation that emerge in its wake, are using debate's benefits to undergo argumentative analysis and mobilize movements change.

[5] "Fiat" in cross-examination debate refers to a debate technique by which debaters assume that a governmental policy advocated by either the affirmative or the negative has hypothetically already been enacted in order to center debates around a cost-benefit analysis of the effects of the policy rather than its

and the vision of debate that it coheres and defends, is *intentioned* insofar as it takes an unchanging stance that modes of advocacy that ask us to consider alternative definitions and conceptions of the political are unpredictable, undebatable, and threatening to the futural coherence of both the activity and its participants no matter how many rounds it is advanced within. From the vantage point of *fait accompli* framework arguments, the generative contributions of Black scholarship are illegible.

Speaking on the larger crisis of debate within broader U.S. civil society and rhetorical studies but demonstrative of the current conflicts of intercollegiate debate is Amber E. Kelsie's (2019) critique of "stasis," which analyzes the manner in which Blackness and anti-Blackness ground debate's (im)possibility. Kelsie argues that in order to retain and secure the "appropriate" parameters of debate, white and non-Black stakeholders must disavow the violence of their argumentative practices by framing Black arguments and debaters as hostile combatants despite the generative innovations Black study offers to both Black and non-Black argumentation. Kelsie's work further suggests that though other argumentative "extremists" (for example Kelsie refers to white nationalists on the right) may be drawn into equivalence with Blackness under accusations of incivility and illiberalism, even that equivalence is an anti-Black technique for disavowing the generative powers of Black argument in order to secure civil debate's parameters. Similarly, though critical debate in its entirety is now often regarded as debate's demise, understanding how and why requires attention to the anti-Black animus that facilitates the homogenization of diverse trajectories of scholarship and argumentation into debate's "threat." The rhetorical deployment of debate's impossibility and inevitable extinction illustrates how the futurity imperative of framework racially instills the prioritization and reproduction of a particular horizon of debate's future over its underside, despite claims of race-neutrality. As Kara Keeling poignantly articulates, "From within the logics of reproductive futurity and colonial reality, a black future looks like no future at all" (Keeling, 2009, p. 578). Insider efforts to preserve "real" policy debate depend on reproductive, settler colonial and anti-Black logics of futurity that work to stabilize civil society from the radical, subversive and inventive practices of Black radicalism. What cannot be interrogated in the *fait accompli* model are the conditions that irrevocably inform

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likelihood to actually happen in the current political milieu. The foreclosure of consideration of the possibility of a given policy's implementation in the status quo is often part of what critical debate problematizes in favor of a consideration of the socio-political theories, action, or praxes that can be taken up by actors in local or grassroots environments.

the world's ordering, including the United States federal government, and the intimate effects of power in the sphere of the "personal." The obliteration of dissonant argumentation is also the perpetuation of a hegemonic mode of articulation, an acceleration of the *right* kind of debate and its corresponding, unquestioning, concession to the dominant style of law, order and tradition. In turning away from the liberal parametric grounds of predicted political deliberation, Black scholars and non-Black scholars willing to attend to, rather than repress, Black radical argumentative invention, are generating a compounding richness of contestation against a backdrop of accusations that position this argumentative depth and breadth as debate's end point.

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The University of Louisville Malcolm X Debate Society cracked open creative, intellectual space for thousands of students that come through the hallways of policy debate in their wake and take up not only Louisville's tools but their commitment to change. For critical teams, theorizing debate in and out of competition is of steep importance because as participants, we are living in and out of debate competition. Politics and policy are not experienced at a distance but are rather profoundly ensnarled with the neighborhoods, families, jobs, and schools around us that shape who we are and how we act. Like many in the activity who stick around past our competitive years, I am confident that my participation in policy debate as a critical debater and now coach shapes and alters my political commitments, intellectual pursuits and support networks for the better. And while the sentiment that debate makes us better people is a common one, the full weight of this utterance is often under investigated and left unsung. For me, critical debate very clearly taught me to call into question the world around me and the one I act within. But perhaps even more importantly, critical debate taught me to call into question myself. Near impossible to cloak in conversation, debate is a reference point I always seem to return to when describing who I am and how I got here. One common recital that I use to express my debt to debate is in what we call my coming out story: in short, debate is where I not only met out and proud LGBTQ people but large swaths of feminist, queer and eventually, trans argumentation that over time, prompted the internal and collective work I needed to do around gender and sexual assignation in order for my own queer practice and gender non-conforming sense of self to emerge. But like others in the community that I've spoken with, my coming out story is not as linear or cohesive as such a recollection may make it appear to be—most importantly, because my pathways to queerness and transness cannot be separated from the larger conversations I

participated in that propagated critical analysis regarding the enduring logics of racial, gendered and classed oppression both in the United States and across the globe. In particular, I am indebted to Black radical thinkers in the activity, who as competitors and judges, continually asked me to think at more depth and with more breadth about the operations and logics of white supremacy, racial capitalism, settler colonialism and anti-Blackness in and out of conversations about gender and sexual violence. These debates pushed me to theorize and respond to my white settler status and position. Over the four years in which I competed in collegiate debate, I typically had at least one round each tournament that really pushed me to study the mutual constitution of racial and gendered violence and called for me to apply these critical insights and interventions to the political analysis and action my debate partner and I were forwarding. Going back to the drawing board between tournaments to hash out impasse (and read together), my partner and I figured out new responses and progressed as scholars, albeit not always linearly. I grew alongside, but also because of, my opponents every time we asked each other to ruthlessly face the accumulating violent realities of the status quo and press against solutions and trajectories that ultimately reinscribe asymmetric conditions of life and death.

Critical argumentation is an argumentative constellation and all critical arguments in the 21st are indebted to Black radicalism in the activity. And whether or not individual debaters recognize it, all critical arguments compound on one another. One set of arguments in the expanse of critical debate is what I will be describing here as trans argumentation. Trans argumentation is not static nor complete—it is continually unfolding in the classroom spaces of intercollegiate policy debate. Trans argumentation's edges are jagged and its history holds complexities that shape the methodological choices of this essay. For instance, many times trans argumentation is not posted online in full transparency due to the risks of outing students that are running it in round, which also influences whether or not students want their debate rounds to be recorded. Furthermore, what is *recognized* as trans argumentation is racialized: Black critiques of gender imposition often are not optically situated within the vein of trans criticism, despite theorizing dualistic gender normativity and working to uproot violence against gender deviance. Wrestling with these questions, I have chosen to speak of trans argumentation broadly in terms of the conversations, questions, positions, interventions and strategies it often pursues instead of isolating a singular debate or debate duo as a case study to survey the field. At the core of trans argumentation is the idea that trans people are not merely a singular counterpoint to trans-exclusionary feminism or queer theory or but rather deserve foregrounded political attention, in

particular to the ways in which surpassing the permissible limits of gender is scripted as a threatening deception and being identified or identifying oneself as trans accrues surveillance and attack. As I explain, in some instances this means that white and non-Black trans arguments end up isolating transphobia from other vectors of violence, namely white supremacy, settlement and capital accumulation. These veins of trans criticism foreclose on their debt to Black radicalism. But as I proffer, trans argumentation has and can instigate modes of argumentative relationality that compounds on and with Black intellectualism(s) to assemble alternative political blueprints and challenge the limitations of single-issue frames.

Trans argumentation, like most trans scholarship and study, wrestles with its own subject matters, definitions, and limits. A key characteristic of trans argumentation is the problematization of the prevailing conception that there is a fixed, isolatable and identifiable population of transgender subjects and that the terms trans/transgender/transsexual, when used as self-descriptors, retain universal meanings. Trans argumentation queries: what is violence against gender transgression and what does it mean to face it and perpetuate it? How do we reckon with the fact that gender outlaws hold a variety of perspectives, politics and experiences? What does it mean to be cis and aspire to cisness? How can gender transition teach us about political transition? What trans pedagogies should we pass down (and up and across)? Why do so many people adhere to embalmed gender and sexual scripts that in so many ways, work to dictate and control our words, bodies and actions? How do trans phenomena assist us all in rethinking what is construed as impossible? These questions guide political and social demands against trans disenfranchisement and themselves are entangled with the questioning practices of Black radical criticism. Trans arguments present legal analysis of the reverberating consequences of criminalization of cross-dressing, sodomy and prostitution in and out of the United States. Trans argumentation presents negative criticisms and affirmative cases that ask their opponents to encounter and respond to trans pedagogies, theories, writings, poems, manifestos, films and music. In order to engage in this mode of study, trans argumentation turns back to the archive to present trans figures and collectives, such as the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR) spearheaded by Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera, and trans insurgencies against police and corporate repression such as the 1959 Cooper Do-Nuts riot, the 1965 Dewey's Sit-In, the 1966 Compton's Cafeteria riot, and the 1969 Stonewall rebellion (Stryker, 2008). Analyzed in round, students debate about the ways in which the collectives and insurgencies of trans political organizing should be analyzed and regarded. Instead of positioning trans insurgency in an isolated

vacuum, debaters committed to interdisciplinary analysis situate trans resistance amid the civil rights movements of the 1950s and 60s. This includes the unintentional omission and intentional sacrifice of trans people from emerging feminist, lesbian and gay movements that in their own ways are also indebted to Black radicalism whether it with tactics (consciousness-raising and sit-ins) or slogans (gay is good).

Dean Spade's (2011) *Normal Life: Administrative Violence: Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of Law*, Eric Stanley and Nat Smith's (2011/2015) *Captive Genders: Trans Embodiment and the Prison Industrial Complex*, Tourmaline, Eric Stanley and Johanna Burton's (2017) *Trap Door: Trans Cultural Production and the Politics of Visibility* and publications from *Transgender Studies Quarterly* are a few of the genre's go-to sites for inspiration, knowledge and evidence. Debaters engaged in trans argumentation may also turn to trans international relations theory to develop arguments and strategies regarding United States foreign policy and the international order (e.g., Shepherd & Sjoberg, 2012). Drawing heavily from trans studies, trans argumentation offers to debate a variety of strategies for socio-political change, including alternatives that go by the name: "trans rage," "black trans magic," "trans kinship (t4t)," "trans care," "wildness," "gender hacking," "trans nihilism," and "transfeminist killjoy" (See Preciado, 2013; Cowan 2014; Halberstam, 2019; Malatino, 2020). These advocacies take up critical argumentation's defiance of the *fait accompli* policy-making paradigm in favor of fashioning alternative blueprints for political change, drawing parallels between gender imposition and the determination of the nation-state policy making form as irreversible, accomplished facts of life and debate, respectively. Trans strategies are directly influenced by Black radical invention in the activity—for instance, trans rage directly uptakes an anti-civil ethos fostered by Black competitors. Moreover, instead of putting aside what is intimately close to us (like gender) as a precondition for debate, trans argumentation entails student-scholars mapping patterns of lived experience in both debate and the world. Misgendering, misnaming, airport security pat downs during travel, violent bathroom experiences at tournaments, social isolation, and dysphoria are a few of the violence(s) experienced by trans people in the activity that shape their participation. Instead of privatizing these conversations as only appropriate outside of debate rounds, debaters

situate these experiences within debates to argue for the necessity of investigating structural violence(s) in both political advocacy and the community.[6]

Trans argumentation disputes the white supremacist, cisheteronormative blueprints of gender and sexuality that inform socio-political practices, values, institutions and pedagogies. It examines the disciplining formation of normative gender terms, categories and pairs (such as male and female, man and woman, masculine and feminine, father and mother, son and daughter) and their consequential effects on not only those construed, positioned and identified as gender deviant but those read and determined as gender conforming. Instead of taking the inherited terms of gender at face value, trans argumentation questions the reach, role, and impact of dualistic gender imposition and in most of its iterations, works to theorize the relation between cisheteronormativity and the systems and logics of anti-Blackness, capitalism, settler colonialism, ableism, and fatphobia (although, these are also sites of disagreement from opposing competitors). Trans argumentation is deeply influenced by broader public controversy, social movement, and academic scholarship. It questions the scripts about gender variance proposed by doctors, family members, media-makers, legislators and non-trans scholars writing about trans people, and it also examines narratives put forward by trans people themselves. Psychological diagnoses of gender identity disorder, legal deployments of trans panic defense, the medical phenomena of trans broken arm syndrome, the provision of medical intervention as the apex of

[6] Relevant to the controversy regarding the use of personal experience in debate is the controversy of the use of personal experience in academic writing about competitive debate. In person and on social media, debaters and coaches antagonistic to Black scholarship have advanced the argument that debaters reading evidence written by Black (and contingently, non-Black) scholars who also coach debate is tantamount to cheating. These accusations are particularly leveraged against those that are attempting to name patterns of violence in the activity. Explicitly, these arguments construe Black coaches as cheaters, presuming that they can have no scholarly investments for writing about debate outside of the competitive success of their debaters. Implicitly, they exemplify how anti-Black racism halts the exportability and expandability of deliberative debate. The position in debate that Black radical argumentation kills the benefits of the activity alongside the accusation of coach interference demonstrate the anti-Black limits of critical thinking in the activity by regulating critical thinking about anti-Blackness as an impermissible limit. Debate cannot elide racial violence, class push-out, sexual predation, homo/transphobia, and ableism because they situate people's histories with debate and thus, deserve theoretical attention and scholarly care.

trans euphoria, and the born in the wrong body narrative are a few of the pressing sites of investigation within the vein of trans criticism. Trans argumentation investigates generational, linguistic, class, and racial differences that complicate unifying under the banner of trans community and political struggle. Practitioners of trans argumentation include out and proud trans people, soon-to-be trans people, stealth trans people, gender-questioning people, cis people of trans experience, cis people of queer experience, and others confronted with the weight of hegemonic gender imposition who demonstrate a shared commitment to its demise. Instead of forwarding the slogan that trans lives are not up for debate as an end point to deliberation, trans argumentation dwells with those down to create dissent against the modern sex/gender system and the ways in which it perpetrates mass intimate violence.

To examine the rise of trans criticism, it is important to survey a number of arguments recognized as precursors. In the 2000s and early 2010s, many of the most popular queer and feminist arguments developed from readings of Lee Edelman's (2004) *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, José Esteban Muñoz's (2009) *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, lesbian separatism, feminist security studies, feminist psychoanalysis, Kimberle Crenshaw's legal theory of intersectionality, and Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. As a high schooler interested in feminist critique, the first arguments I encountered about trans people were challenges to queer and feminist trajectories for reinscribing gender essentialist dualisms and transphobic exclusions, which continues to be a rich site of study for students-scholars in the activity today navigating the importance of feminist insights on sexual violence and queer critiques of reproductive futurism while staunchly refusing the occlusion of trans people within these analytic lenses. For instance, in and out of competition community members continue to debate about the Women's Debate Institute's trans inclusion policy to parse out the dilemmas of woman-exclusive (and now, "woman-centered") spaces.[7] These arguments emerging from trans perspectives contest feminist theories and projects for maintaining and reassigning gender imposition by elevating one side of the dualistic sex/gender system while keeping its over-arching imposition in place. Due to the vigilant work of its

[7] In 2015, a group of trans students (including myself) publicized concerns regarding the Women's Debate Institute's cisgender politics. As the story goes, someone defending the Women's Debate Institute from its critics called one of us a "mean trans." We began using the language of mean trans as a self-descriptor in our own digital spaces to challenge demands for civility that trans people experience when we advocate for change.

proponents, trans argumentation over time really began to stand out as its own field of study by calling on the community to take seriously the social, discursive and material harms that trans people face, not only in feminist spaces but in broader society. Even as the field may push back against transphobia within queer theory and projects of feminism, it is common for trans argumentation to take up and expand upon themes and concepts found in queer and feminist argumentation including thematic(s) of reproduction, temporality, family, kinship, intimacy, sociality, interiority, domesticity, privacy, labor and the home. In my reading, trans argumentation maintains an indebted despite ambivalent relationship to lesbian, gay, and feminist argumentation and activism in the activity. But what often goes unmarked with the exclusive placement of trans argumentation as a discordant offshoot of (primarily white) queer and feminist forerunners is trans argumentation's rhetorical debt to Black radical thought, and in particular, Black queer feminism. For example, the impact of intersectionality on trans argumentation should not be downplayed: trans critique takes up Black feminist calls not to evacuate social significance from identity categories but rather to problematize the conflation and ignorance of intragroup difference and map out the overlapping convergences of race, gender, class and sexual subordination (Crenshaw, 1991). Yet despite Black feminism's proliferating impact, Black feminist scholarship is most commonly spatially positioned solely within the canon of Black argumentation even when it directly disputes biological determinism (e.g., Combahee River Collective).

Part of my choice in my deployment of the frame of rhetorical debt is that the relation that I am describing between trans argumentation and Black radicalism involves both how arguments are made internal to competition and how judges and opponents give trans arguments a particular weight because of the efforts of Black students and coaches in the activity. Trans arguments are preceded by and positioned vis-à-vis Black argumentation. The University of Louisville Malcolm X Debate Society's call to theorize, instead of run away from, the enduring effects of white supremacy, including the ways in which power can replicate itself within liberal projects of reform, advises the establishment and shape of trans argumentation and influences how arguments coming from trans perspectives are received, from Black and non-Black competitors alike. Techniques often found in trans argumentation, such as the deployment of personal experience and organic intellectuals that challenge institutional authority and expertise, and the foregrounding of embodied collective solutions rather than disembodied state reforms, point to the ways in which trans argumentation's practices are influenced by Black innovation.

Trans arguments may introduce self-written or already published poetry or music to give performative texture to their audiences as a rhetorical device. Furthermore, trans argumentation picks up the Louisville squad's practice of using conceptual metaphors to challenge narrow interpretations of the topic that might render certain spectacular violence(s), such as the possibility of nuclear war, legible, while rendering quotidian and systemic racialized, gendered and classed violence(s) illegible. For instance, when debating a topic concerning weapons of mass destruction, Louisville debaters reformulated normative and institutional definitions of the topic wording by using Dead Prez lyrics to redefine police forces, landlords, and governmental negligence with respect to the AIDS epidemic as weapons of mass destruction against Black and gay communities (Reid-Brinkley, 2008, p. 103). Not only does this example clarify the kind of inventive thinking propagated by Black thinkers in the activity, it demonstrates the epistemic linkages that members of the University of Louisville Malcolm X Debate Society were making in the early 2000s between systems of oppression that prefigure the derivative intellectualism(s) that occur in its wake. Black radicalism practices a "speculative mutuality," where debt scatters in every direction (Moten and Harney, 2010, p. 4).

The over-arching and racialized impasse over "traditional" and "critical" modes of argumentation contextualizes trans argumentation's varied reception. There are those in the community who take the student-scholars engaged in trans argumentation seriously and meaningfully engage trans criticism(s) by preparing responses and counters. At the same time, there are those that disparage it as another instantiation of inherently individualistic, identity-focused argumentation that threatens the future of the activity. Efforts to foreclose Black radical argumentation and the larger constellation of arguments indebted to Black radical invention contour the recognition and growth of trans argumentation. Moreover, disparagements against queer and trans argumentation are often deployed to repudiate Black argumentation and thus, critiques of queer and trans argumentation can provide further evidence of how anti-Blackness subtends the divide between traditional and critical argumentation in debate. For example, it has been common for coaches and debaters to evoke gender and sexuality arguments as an emblematic reason for why debate should not tolerate critical argumentation to counterbalance claims that the community divide over form is inherently racialized. Responding to a 2012 forum discussion about the importance of considering a resolution that does not adhere to the policy-making framework is coach Scott Elliott who calls for the community to "imagine a world," where debate tolerates the inclusion of "personal politics": he gives the example of a defense of

reproductive rights that includes a narrative of sexual violence, followed by, "Or, how about, 'I personally am resolved that homosexuals deserve equal rights. I am gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender [pick one], and my dad called me bad names when I came out of the closet.....your turn to go negative'" (Elliott, 2012). How should we read the ways in which arguments about gender are targeted by the same naysayers to black argumentation? I pose that we should not understand rhetoric such as Elliott's as a demonstration that queer and trans argumentation is targeted with the same intensity, or in the same way, as Black argumentation. Rather, the racialized coding of critical debate in the 21st century has to inform how we read disparagements of queer and trans argumentation. These criticisms unjustly oversimplify critical arguments and cohere around the myth that only minoritarian populations possess experience with (and in other words, are the only ones shaped by) the systemic forces of race, class, gender and sexuality. Here, queer and trans argumentation is pointed towards as undebatable, and debate's end point, because of gender's alleged attachment to the personal—clarifying the white and cisgender imperative that race and gender are private concerns not fit for public deliberation, instead of disavowed but always already publicly debated phenomenon that have long shaped the modern public sphere. While Elliott's comment does not mention Black argumentation by name, it is clear from an insider vantage point that the multiyear long disagreement over Louisville's argumentative inventions subtends Elliott's 2012 forum post. Elliott's disparagement evokes Joseph Zompetti's (2004) fear that argumentation emerging from raced and gendered vantage points operate as trump cards that leave those outside (in this case, white, cisheterosexual people) with nothing to say. Once again, these coaches and scholars publicly assert that they agree that racism, classism, homophobia and transphobia are problems in and out of the community but they disagree with the ways in which students break the stylistic protocols of the *fait accompli* model and tabula rasa framework. These coaches and debaters call incessantly for judges to "hold the wall" against critical modes of argumentation and the ways in which they create a "slippery slope" to debate's demise.

Coaches and scholars continue to refigure their criticism(s) against the emergence and rise of critical scholarship in the wake of the University of Louisville's Malcolm X Debate Society. But at the core of these criticism(s) is an unwillingness for those that benefit from, instead of endure, the prolonged and complex violence(s) of racist and gendered violence to be implicated as agents in the production of such violence, in and out of debate rounds. And on top of this is an unfluctuating dismissal of criticism(s) attempting to map out institutional violence.

For example, coach Michael Greenstein argued in 2014 that the bedrock of policy debate is at risk because the activity is being overtaken by debaters who "accuse other students, coaches, and even entire institutions of being racist and/or sexist" (Greenstein, 2014, p. 70). Greenstein's argument, articulated in various fashions by those who share his viewpoint, postures that student-scholars investigating interpersonal and institutional racism and sexism are risking debate's future. In this example, gender-based argumentation is proximately tied to Black argumentation. Coaches and debaters cite feminist, queer, and trans argumentation as a way to disbar anti-racist critique and provide cover against accusations that the divide is uniquely rooted in anti-Black racism. Attacks on queer, trans and feminist argumentation become a technique to congeal the anti-Black animus integral to the contemporary fault lines between traditional and critical debate. The move to invoke race and gender arguments as a homogenized threat that is overtaking debate not only works to delegitimize structural criticism(s) but to conjure the idea that there is not important work to be done in understanding, and responding to, the ways in which categories of race and gender interact, impact each other and inform institutional policy. To deny harm investigation of invisibilized and quotidian violence is to maintain the establishment and rule of power that grants safety to some on the backs of others. Non-Black scholars in the activity ought to parse out the ways in which anti-Blackness informs the argumentative atmosphere of intercollegiate policy debate and pursue theories and political strategies that reckon with the force anti-Blackness. It is essential that non-Black trans argumentation attend to its Black debt and create insurgent contestations that subvert the reach and grasp of state power, including the ways power manifests within ourselves and our relational networks. Repayment of debt is both undesired and an impossibility. Trans argumentation and political organizing must stay with the insistent force of Black radicalism, forging trans social infrastructures that bloom creativity and rebellion while dispersing institutional scrutiny and political practice against anti-Blackness. Responding to violence against trans people necessitates attending to racial formation, including its operation within anti-trans backlash *and* trans organizing. Debating in and at the edges and overlaps of institutional violence is an essential component of debt work.

3

In his book, *We Demand: The University and Student Protests*, Roderick Ferguson forwards that one of the central, long-standing aims of conservative forces is to keep progressive folks from turning back to our work (Ferguson, 2017, p. 96). Attacks on critical debate, including

their (re)visioned forms, are insidious maneuvers that attempt to incentivize turning away from the richness of critical imagination and intellect. The faction of policy debate working to disavow and eliminate the comradeship of critical debate—and especially critical arguments concerned with identity formation—renders our arguments as conspiratorial and amateur. And yet the undercommons perseveres with planning. This section foregrounds a few of the profound insights I've learned from practitioners of Black argumentation both as a competitor cultivating trans argumentation and as a judge adjudicating rounds where the affirmative and negative introduce affirmative cases and disagreements at the juncture of Black and trans argumentation. As a reminder, critical arguments are not one-off speeches: argumentation in collegiate debate is debated for eight speeches and three cross examination questioning-periods. Disagreement unfolds between four debaters and it is witnessed by a judge in the audience. Argumentation also leaves the debate round; it occurs on social media sites, forums; it is discussed over chats in servers, in hallways and on hotel balconies. But the central meeting ground for competitors is the debate round itself, where students prepare for tournaments by researching each other's arguments to improve their counters. Facing each other, students pursuing the intersection of Black and trans scholarship come to tournament after tournament with a dedication to theorize the enmeshment between anti-Blackness and transphobia and mark the limitations of political agendas that fail at reckoning with the mutual constitution of anti-Black and cisheteronormative violence. The debates happening under the designation of Black and trans argumentation are iteratively pushing fields of scholarship often held as distinct, all while undergoing policy analysis and forwarding calls for political advocacy. A critical component of critical debates that include Black argumentation is scrutinizing the difference that Blackness makes; in other words, to takes seriously how, as Jennifer DeClue puts it, "the vector of blackness bends, shapes, and refracts violences that circulate through the brutality of gender production, the myriad traumas of sexuality, the virulence of class stratification, and the occlusion of black needs around ability and care" (DeClue, 2020, p. 43). Weaving Black queer, trans, and feminist theories I've encountered in competitive debate to bolster my reading of trans argumentation, my intent here is to sketch key research questions and refutations at the cross points of critical argumentation, including interventions into non-Black trans political avowal of institutions reliant upon the enforcement of anti-Black violence. The following questions emerge at the heart of these debates: how must we all respond and reckon with the enmeshed logics of racialized gender and anti-Black transphobia to meaningfully support Black trans people? What are the relational ties between Black and trans radicalism(s)? How do single-issue movement frames and the politics of respectability

circumscribe the subversive potential of Black and trans movements? How have non-Black trans politics, and non-trans Black politics, occluded Black trans concerns? What is the political, social and economic relationship between transphobia and anti-Blackness? Can we really say that we've tackled transphobia without battling anti-Blackness or vice versa? And if Blackness irrevocably shapes lived experience, how should non-Black and non-trans proponents of Black and trans argumentation grapple with the lived experience of non-Black and non-trans subject position?

One of the refigured criticisms against critical debate posits that students shouldn't struggle through the dense theory that critical debate can deploy. I counter that students stumbling through theory is actually incredibly enriching because 1) young students experience harms that high theory investigates and 2) debate is practice and students must practice theory to grow as scholars and advocates. Critical debate fosters an atmosphere that calls on students to prepare for unpredictable circumstances and practice responding in real time. In my first year of collegiate debate, I competed on a legalization topic that included a research area focused on the legalization of prostitution. Centrally, the topic involved debating about the difference between legalization and decriminalization strategies. Putting together an affirmative case about prostitution-free-zones, my partner and I challenged the binarization of sex and gender and the exclusion of trans ideas and perspectives in scholarship about sex work. We called for ourselves, opponents and judges to unlearn transphobic and anti-sex work sentiments that tolerate and legitimize violence against trans sex workers (and those perceived as such) and turned to the rhetoric of queer and trans sex workers to pull out rich criticism(s) of the state and its police forces that regulated legal labor markets rely upon. Opponents deploying Black queer and trans feminism(s) questioned our affirmative and whether or not our case, including but not limited to our evidence, reckoned with the vector of anti-Blackness that underpins the political histories of prostitution and trafficking criminalization (e.g. Mann Act, a.k.a. the White-Slave Traffic Act of 1910) and underpins threat constructions of deviant sexuality particularly in regards to capital. From a multitude of angles, opponents contested our discursive strategy and its ability to uproot the lived conditions of Black sex workers which kept us returning to argumentative revision and transformation between tournaments. Our theories of cisgender privilege and of the modern sex/gender system were challenged, alongside the way in which we were recognizing the scope and stakes of the sex work debate. That year we debated about the political and social conditions of necropolitics, the historical and modern emergence of whorephobia and Eric Stanley's theory of overkill (Stanley, 2011). We struggled through dense theory as 18-year-old student-scholars

forwarding disagreement derived from Black and trans studies. These debates set me up to handle fervent opposition and practice mobilizing intersectional sex work advocacy that attends to intragroup difference. At the time, I felt but could not articulate the entanglements between Black and trans argumentation and why I, as a recently out trans person and critical debater, felt isolated from white and non-Black coaches and judges in the community I once esteemed for running the arguments I pursued on the legalization topic. Yet, simultaneously counter to this isolation, it was Black judges and opponents, and non-Black community members committed to uprooting the depths of structural violence, that were taking seriously the work my partner and I were attempting to do in regards to transgender livability by offering us meaningful feedback and response to push our work forward. I live in debt that I do not seek to clear.

In a similar vein of critiques of carceral feminism and homonationalism, policy debate provides a site to study assimilation and incorporation of trans advocacy. If in certain moments trans argumentation is situated proximately to Black argumentation as an inappropriate and "undebatable" deployment of identity politics, in other instances, non-Black trans argumentation is distanced from Black argumentation by community members who point towards quick-fix community solutions that work to redress and alleviate the various harms, obstacles, and difficulties trans participants face in the activity. In short, a number of community practices have sought to redress the perceived grievances made within trans argumentation: many debate squads now consider trans students in matters such as air travel and bathroom access, work with trans students dealing with bureaucratic paperwork, ask students for affirmative consent regarding rooming arrangements, and correct misnaming and misgendering of transgender people in debate. Furthermore, the technological software that generates debate pairings now allows students to (optionally) let their judges and opponents know their pronouns before a debate round begins. In addition, many debate organizations now highlight queer and trans competitors during Pride month and other spotlight social media campaigns to demonstrate diversity, equity and inclusion in the activity. In some ways, these are changes myself and other trans debaters have gestured towards as ways the community can support trans people in the activity, albeit diluted. However, even as I extend appreciation for many of these practices, I question the way these maneuvers function in the larger landscape of Black exclusion, which includes Black trans exclusion, in the activity. Because trans argumentation in large part emanates from the practices of Black radicals and in most instantiations is working to impart interdisciplinary analysis, the isolation of transphobia from anti-Blackness in the creation and support of trans agendas waters down the

radical lineages and potential of trans political movements to wage intersectional, revolutionary struggle. Trans-inclusive tinkers and visibility efforts attempt to appease rowdy mobilizations of queer and trans radicalism(s) and are discursively conditioned on trans activism settling down (civilizing) for a crumb of trans tolerance. Debate organizations and teams providing "visibility" to queer and trans competitors while pursuing the excavation of Black intellectualism(s) (and its compounding constellations) from debate rounds is a manifestation of anti-Black homo- and transnormativity.

As trans political movements gain public visibility in the last decade, it is necessary to evaluate divergences in trans thinking instead of proposing a unified, essentialist trans position oriented towards assimilation and incorporation. Instead of calling for trans inclusion as a response to trans exclusion (within police forces, military troops, workforces and corporate roundtables), students in collegiate debate are troubling attempts to assuage trans radicalism with liberal reforms that ultimately, keep the machinations of anti-Black violence going. As Juliana Huxtable (a former policy debater herself) notes in an interview with Che Gossett, "visibility is being used to sabotage actual engagement with real questions of structural negligence and discrimination and violence" (Gossett & Huxtable, 2017, p. 44). Raising conversations on social media to ask what increasing meaningful Black trans participation would look like (note the deployment of Louisville's frame of *meaningful* participation) and forwarding these disagreements in round, Black trans competitors have pointed towards not only the necessity of synthesizing the operations of anti-Blackness and transphobia but also noted the structural exclusion of Black trans people from the University, a dearth of financial support for Black trans competitors in the activity, anti-Black, transphobic, fearmongering regarding Black trans educators as high school coaches alongside the widespread exclusion of Black people in debate, regardless of gender identification or experience. Moreover, student-scholars point towards the lived realities of police presence and surveillance at tournaments (in and out of bathrooms) that target Black students on college campuses. The narrative arc of academic debate becoming more "trans inclusive" coheres itself only if you separate trans concerns from Black concerns and transphobia from anti-Blackness. As Che Gossett poignantly articulates, "Blackness ruptures trans representability, respectability and visibility" (Gossett, 2017, p. 185). Trans progress is made legible when we scope the problem of transphobia in certain ways but not others: for instance, concerns of bathroom access, pronouns and names certainly effect many trans people, but because they effect white trans people they can become enveloped in projects of transgender

exceptionalism, where value accrues to Western nation-states and institutions that can incorporate deracialized transgender concerns, while maintaining colonial settlement and anti-Blackness (Aizura, 2016, p. 201). Even as Black competitors and coaches value trans insights into bathroom access, pronouns and names, they often ask their opponents to push the purview of trans concerns from a focus on trans visibility and recognition to the systemic impacts of incarceration, homelessness, deportation, police violence and the racial wealth gap on top of epistemological, axiological and ontological investigations into the racial formation of gender categories and terms.

At the juncture of Black and trans intellectualism(s) in intercollegiate policy debate, Black and trans interests' compound upon each other. One of the central conversations at the meeting point of Black and trans argumentation is a challenge to the isolation of gendered violence from anti-Blackness. Debates centralizing Black and trans argumentation insist on nuanced theorizations of gender's function in the anti-Black and settler colonial modern world order we live in. Responding to the rise of white and non-Black transgender (studies, politics, and argumentation) is a Black trans insistence on naming the anti-Blackness of non-Black trans politics that separate the imposition of gender normativity from its colonial and anti-Black function and formation. Black trans scholarship reframes Black and trans debates to trouble the isolation of anti-Blackness from gender and sexuality practices that subject all Black people to the violence(s) of racialized gender. For Matt Richardson and Enoch Page, theorizing violence against Black trans people is a necessity when responding to state practices such as medicalization, incarceration, militarization, and immigration because these processes are underwritten by anti-Black transphobia, and the ways in which "sexual and gendered Blackness is constructed as oppositional to the Western nation-state's codes of civility" (Richardson & Page, 2010, p. 71). Richardson and Page posit that the embodiment of power and authority necessary to configure white mastery and the divisions between the civilized and uncivil required the standardization of emotion and the sequestration of "inappropriate" behavior behind stoic walls of privacy (p. 65). As the first section of this paper alludes, a number of the arguments made against the model of debate indebted to Louisville emerge from non-Black anxieties over Black oppositional tones and confrontational rhetoric that are ultimately, cloaked demands for rational civility within anti-racist advocacy. Demands for civility and the proper cleavage of questions of "the personal" and "identity" from political movements reproduce anti-Black, transphobic conceptions of political engagement and movement-work. These interventions demand that we

change more than a single policy, they demand we alter *everything*, including the way in which we argue and mobilize in the public sphere.

Because Black and trans argumentation challenges tabula rasa adjudication schemas and norms of decorum that ask debaters to set aside personal experience as a precondition of debate, Black competitors ask white and non-Black debaters and coaches to attend to the ways in which whiteness and non-Blackness are vantage points that shape white and non-Black people's experiences, ideas and advocacies. In other words, Black argumentation breaks the fourth wall by asking non-Black debaters to interrogate our own racial modifiers in relation to the other identities we may hold, including transness. Louisville debaters pressed their white opponents to not merely name but actually confront white privilege and the hegemonic power relations whiteness secures. In a 2004 debate between Emory's Allen and Greenstein and Louisville's Jones and Green, Emory makes a statement of privilege as a response to Louisville's argumentation. Louisville debater Liz Green questions what statements of privilege do if Emory's politics are still perpetuating the system that caters to these power relations (Reid-Brinkley, 2008, p. 122-123). This argumentative technique of calling white scholars to attend to not only white privilege but the way in which whiteness corresponds with comfort and acceptance of the status quo's institutions, foregrounds that the actors and benefiters of white supremacy and anti-Blackness must address racialized power dynamics, even when white and non-Black people experience marginalization based on gender, sexuality, nationality and class. Augmenting these criticism(s), debaters introducing Frank B. Wilderson III's (2010) *Red White and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* alongside other Afro-pessimist arguments offered the analytic of 'position' instead of 'privilege' in the early 2010s.[8] Instead of theorizing "race," "gender," and "class" as independent identities that converge, Afro-pessimism theorizes anti-Blackness as "the grounds upon which genres, as subcategories of the subject, are produced and enacted" (Douglass & Wilderson, 2013, p. 118). Deployed in debate, Afropessimist arguments ask debaters to reckon with white and non-Black subjecthood as positionalities of the human and contingently human. For instance, debaters apply Patrice Douglass's critique of the Women's March and the conceptual framework of woman of color feminisms to trans activism and trans of color feminisms to mark an erasure of the "antagonistic relationship Black genders hold with the

[8] I recommend reading Frank B. Wilderson III's meditation on the introduction of his scholarship in debate in his book *Afropessimism,* pages 327-328.

structuring paradigm of gender," and forward that theory "has the potential to provide a lens to think through and across the division of degraded existence and the status of complete dispossession" (p. 114, 118).

In the context of trans arguments, Black debaters reading evidence from Afro-pessimist scholars pushes non-Black trans scholarship to theorize differences between degraded existence and complete dispossession and contests the capacity for non-Black trans political solutions to attend to Black suffering. Attempting to discern the relationship between anti-Blackness and transphobia, this trajectory of Black argumentation introduces scholarship that examine the role of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and chattel slavery in the formation of gender assignation, presentation, expression, and existence (Sharpe, 2016; Gossett & Hayward 2017). Challenging the omission of anti-Blackness in trans analyses, Black radical scholars in the activity argue that the imbrications of anti-Blackness and anti-transness in the contemporary landscape of Black and trans death necessitates theorizing *in the wake* of the transatlantic slave trade (Sharpe, 2016; Snorton, 2017). In "Waking Nightmares," Zakkiyah Iman Jackson argues that no gender and sexual practices Black people perform can prove black humanity because "blackness serves as an essential template of gendered and sexual 'deviance,'" foregrounding that "the lives of black people of all genders are structured in the context of antiblack existential negation" (Jackson, 2011, p. 360: 358). Student-scholars in debate working with Afro-pessimism presence Saidiya Hartman's call to theorize "gender formation in relation to property relations, the sexual economy of slavery, and the calculation of injury" (Hartman, 1997, p. 97). These arguments are deployed to challenge trans theories and agendas that occlude anti-Blackness in its entirety, include anti-Blackness as an afterthought, or only theorize anti-Blackness as a magnifier for violence without theorizing *why* Black trans people experience intensified violence in relation to non-Black trans people. As Meredith Lee articulates, white trans people must refuse to evoke anti-Black trans violence while leaving Black trans people's Blackness in the position of the unthought, for example, in articulations of the violent attack against, and resulting incarceration, of CeCe McDonald (Lee, 2017). These insights push trans criticism(s) to consider how Black radical inquiries, and especially Black radical feminist inquiries, have been decoding the impact and role of gender and sexuality prior and concurrently to dominant genealogies of transgender thought

while being demarcated out of the lineages of trans studies itself.[9] Concurrently, Black trans criticism(s) impels the Black radical tradition to attend to its Black trans occlusions and debt.

Another rich site of study within debates deploying Black and trans argumentation are disagreements regarding gender categorizations, including the emergence and use of the terminology of cisgender. For certain instantiations of trans critique, speaking of cisgender people as a defined category illuminates a set of unmarked advantages of those that do not describe themselves as transgender. Cisgender arguments may arise like the following: if trans people are associated with deception and fraudulence, cis people benefit from not having their gender repetitively questioned. This argument presents cisgender people as an essential category that may include a variety of experiences, but overall maintains a set amount of privilege awarded for staying on the same side of the gender they were assigned. Black interventions into trans scholarship argue that taking seriously the role of anti-Blackness in gender formation troubles the distinction between transgender and cisgender people that mainstream trans politics assumes. In a similar vein to Cathy Cohen's critique of white and non-Black queer politics mapping heterosexual privilege onto Black people that are already regulated as gender and sexually deviant, Black arguments critique white and non-Black trans conceptions of cisgender and theories of cissexism (Cohen, 1997). Black debaters often press into non-Black trans arguments by asking: What is cisness if anti-Blackness structures what it means to be properly gendered? How do cisgender theorizations interact with Hortense Spillers' argument that Black flesh is "ungendered" (Spillers, 1987)? These arguments may cite Che Gossett and Savanah Shange's problematizations of the imposition of a transgender/cisgender binary onto Black people, alongside Dora Santana and C. Riley Snorton's critical interrogations regarding the dangers of mapping "cis passing privilege" onto Black people (Gossett 2017; Shange, 2019; Santana, 2017; Snorton, 2009). As these arguments explain, non-Black deployments of cisgender as a unified classification fail to examine the way in which the sexual practices and gender expressions of all Black people are not only questioned but often marked as suspicious, fraudulent and improper. In a similar vein, Black trans inquiries break open conceptions of transgender as a set identity and gender as an internal truth. As Dennis Childs (2015) argues, the conception that everyone has a

[9] I want to thank Zakiyyah Iman Jackson for an office hours conversation in 2018 about anti-Black circumscriptions of trans studies. Speaking through conversations I was having in debate with Dr. Jackson assisted me greatly in thinking through parallels between trans argumentation in debate and trans studies in the university.

set gender and sexual identity is a vexing project when theorizing Black life because sexual violence and coerced gender and sexual roles are de facto elements of the plantation and its afterlives (Childs, 2015, p. 123). Arguments that pursue this mode of questioning are mobilized in debate to press against a trajectory of transgender politics that believes that transgender and cisgender are a clear and divisible dichotomy and furnishes a rigorous demand for Black trans study amid a sea of white trans politics that conceptualizes gender and sexual identities as predetermined, biological truths. And yet, even as these critiques are made, debaters are working to articulate the violence that accrues to those who cross gender and sexual assignation and attend the precise, experiential vantage points and experimental politics of Black trans people.

In addition to theoretical interventions, the question of parasitism emerges in debates between Black and non-Black trans participants. One of the earliest critiques of the Malcolm X Debate Society—that is still leveraged against contemporary Black scholarship—is that Black radicalism overemphasizes racial formation and occludes attention to concerns of class, gender, sexuality, nationality and ability. And yet, as David K. Peterson notes, Black intellectual insurgency had an "energizing effect on feminist, anti-capitalist, animal rights and radical queer activism and scholarship" in debate, leading to community efforts to provide vegan meals at tournaments, fund scholarships, amplify attention to women and LGBT participation and increase accessibility for disabled debaters. Peterson also explains that in many cases, "Black students were on board with each of these initiatives but few were on board with them" (Peterson, 2014, p. 200). The pushback against a perceived over-emphasis on Blackness in debate evokes the long-standing parasitism of non-Black social movements riding the coattails of Black liberation movements for political momentum while leaving behind the "insatiable demands and endless antagonisms" of Blackness (Wilderson, 2007, p. 7; see also, Bassichis and Spade, 2014). White and non-Black queer and trans parasitism occurs in and out of debate, for example in social justice movements that proclaim that LGBTQIA concerns are the next civil rights issue, in leftist queer and trans organizing that forgo deep analysis of anti-Blackness as an enduring force within queer and trans spaces, and in theories of gender and sexuality that occlude both Black gender analysis and Black criticism(s) of mainstream queer and trans advocacy. As Che Gossett argues, "all too often, the ongoing black freedom struggle is seen as past and, therefore, becomes the absent presence that ghosts and haunts political imagination and social movements" (Gossett, 2017, p. 184). The innovations of Louisville at the turn of the 21st are not a past history to anecdotally recall and move on from; these innovations are lived in the present by contemporary

debaters inviting a mode of contestation that refuses to cede Black radicalism to racist anxieties about the activity's preservation. White and non-Black trans scholars in and out of debate should gravitate towards the compounding political force of Black and trans radical theory and action instead of their isolation.

Even though the majority of argumentation surrounding transgender livelihood recognizes that Black trans people experience intensified violence, white and non-Black trans scholars often struggle to destabilize how we envision trans political horizons in respect to Black trans life. In "Trans Necropolitics," C. Riley Snorton and Jin Haritaworn (2013) argue that the social and physical deaths of transgender women of color in general—and Black trans women in specific—circulate as raw material for the generation and ascendancy of respectable transgender subjectification symbiotic with the death-making techniques of the United States empire including but not limited to: border fortification, gentrification, neoliberal capitalism, incarceration and the war on terror. For instance, it is in the fight for gender identity as a federally recognized protected category, surveilled and indexed by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), that Black trans deaths are rhetorically mobilized within mainstream LGBTQ agendas. Whereas critiques of global neoliberal feminism and homonationalism explicate the compatibility of feminist and LGB campaigns with sovereign interests, Snorton and Haritaworn challenge how dominant transgender vitalities and socialities are rarely called to attend to their active complicity with anti-Black and colonial necropolitics and are rather falsely analogized and equivalized as multicultural diversity's constitutive outside, rendering trans synonymous with subalternity. Instead of fighting for murderous inclusion into anti-Black and settler colonial regimes reliant on disposability and killability, Black and queer-of-color trans theory queries what a transgender politics and theory that pushes against the necropolitical formulas that dominant transgender frameworks can offer (Snorton & Haritaworn 2013; Haritaworn, Kuntsman & Posocco 2013). With a (secondary) lift of the transgender military ban and an increasing number of transgender police officers and CEOs working to align transgender interests with the operations of racial carceral capitalism, it is pertinent to ruthlessly interrogate the choices (gender and otherwise) offered by Western modernity and examine the pitfalls of access, conditions of inclusion, and restraints on radical imagination that transgender nationalism demands. These debates are occurring in the classroom spaces of intercollegiate debate. At the cross points of Black and trans scholarship in the activity there are compounding interventions and strategies building off one another to generate and strengthen affinities and pedagogies by using debate as a meeting ground

to hash out disagreements both internal to the activity and in real time organizing work. Critical debate helps its participants tease out disagreement, enact alternative horizons of political engagement, and call into question ourselves and the socio-legal atmospheres in which we live and act within. Refusing "trans-inclusive" necropolitical solutions opens up political space for alternatives to exhale. Debate is a practice and the lessons we learn from singular rounds and competitive seasons do not "spill out" in a singular set direction—they seep and scatter, and they also stay with us. All debate careers end but the lessons can reside. Non-Black scholars must study the lessons found within the Black radical tradition and attune to frequencies of resistance that destabilize trans compatibility with anti-Black paradigms of safety, security and stasis. Alternatives are blooming in the undercommons of the polis that instantiate modes of shared dissonance that uproot asymmetric arrangements of debt in favor of a debt web that facilitates actions of collective care. Black trans planning proliferates; Black trans livability depends on us all.

Conclusion

Intercollegiate policy debate is an activity many of us participate within as a means to study together. People join debate for a number of reasons, but we most often stay in the activity because of the friendships we make along the way. According to Fred Moten, friendship is when we "gather together intermittently to try and figure out a way out and to overturn it" (McGough & Moten 2017, p. 77). Debaters indebted to the methods of the University of Louisville Malcolm X Debate Society are attempting to gather in this activity we call intercollegiate policy debate to try and figure out a way to overturn the violent arrangements of power we find in and out of the activity. And yet, it has been made clear by a faction of the community that some participants have little interest in figuring out the full complexities of the oppressive practices that solidify and sanction premature death, preferring instead to corroborate the institutional, parametrized grounds of civic engagement and liberal reform as predetermined and uncontested truths. As the radical thinkers of collegiate debate forward, the deadly conditions that we live in require affirming the inventive, rebellious and subversive practices exemplified by Louisville, developed and expanded by additional Black competitors and coaches, and proliferated in the constellation of critical trajectories that ask competitors to contend with the enduring forces of power and oppression. It is my hope that this essay sparks renewed debate at the cross points of Black and trans argumentation and is not received as an endpoint. Deliberating about the differences

between Black, trans, and Black trans perspectives and advocacy, students engaged in modes of critical argumentation indebted to the University of Louisville are parsing out the problematics of single-issue political frames and challenging each other to theorize at a deeper level of study and advocacy work. In some ways, non-Black trans scholars in academia and competitive debate struggle to articulate and grapple with our indebtedness to Black radical argumentation. Bearing this in mind, I've argued that non-Black trans scholars must compound upon and with Black (trans and non-trans) intellectualism(s) to attend towards and embrace our debt. As I have argued, the celebrated success that trans argumentation receives in the activity must be troubled by anti-Black antagonism(s) that dismiss Black radical politics and criticism(s) in favor of neoliberal "trans-inclusive" tinkers and visibility efforts that calcify global structures of white supremacy and anti-Blackness that generate premature death for Black (trans and non-trans) people.

Ultimately, trans argumentation must contend with Black scholarship and study to analyze the ways in which anti-Blackness conditions gender, even transgender community, politics and practice. Such contentions should destabilize trajectories of transgender politics that separate trans histories from Black histories and concerns of transphobia from concerns of anti-Blackness. Trans studies, in and out of competitive debate, ought to invigorate, and not refuse, disagreement regarding the difference that Blackness makes when theorizing trans livability and intercede political maneuvers of trans visibility that provide cloaked coverage for settler and anti-Black institutions, epistemologies and practices. For white and non-Black trans competitors, the work of Black radical thinkers in debate has in so many ways made possible what we think of today as trans argumentation. It is not enough to merely express gratitude and move along on our merry way towards incorporative recognition and assimilation. Rather, debt is an invitation to radical transform how we theorize gender non-conformity, enact trans political struggle and live with ourselves and each other. Speaking on unrepayable debt, Billy-Ray Belcourt proposes that "maybe the onus isn't to sputter out in the ruts of the abstract, of the textual, but to live in a manner that cites those dear to the heart" (Belcourt, 2020, p. 14). One of the lasting residues of debates occurring at the intersection of Black and trans theory is the imperative that we should not accept the sacrifice of segments of our communities to secure the lives of others. We have to dream bigger by fashioning new blueprints and daring to imagine futures made invisible and rendered impossible. Black trans argumentation cultivates radical imaginaries that subvert the logics of the status quo instead of assuming that the institutions and categories we are given are an accomplished fact. Refusal to accept the status quo is an unending project, a task that is often

bigger than what may originally be mapped out. Indebted to those in pursuit of such plans, I am thankful that one of the key lessons of Black and trans argumentation is that what is assigned doesn't have to be accepted.

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