

# 2016 Final Round Ballots

## Travis Cram

This debate was won by the affirmative from Harvard. Such a definitive sounding statement belies a close and well contested debate. The final round itself was excellent in many regards. High quality evidence was featured by both teams (every card referenced in the final rebuttals was from a PhD or PhD candidate), and appropriately highlighted. Cross-examination played a pivotal role for both, Quaram's questioning of the 1AC and David's of Quaram being the two highlights. The latter may even be the best illustration for how Harvard was ultimately victorious. This debate also points up new sites for innovating or rethinking how to prepare for and execute in debates of this genre (I believe it has earned genre status...). I will highlight such areas as I discuss the decision in greater detail.

Before doing so, I would like to highlight another reason this debate was truly excellent: its capacity to produce doubt. Debate as an activity both demands and breeds confidence. Indeed, the ability to train students to draw conclusions and give voice to their convictions is one of debate's core virtues. Yet it is also important to consider the virtue of doubt. Debate places us into contact with such a volume of different intellects and ideas that the certitude it trains us to inhabit should itself be questioned. If a career in debate has taught me anything, it is that I know very little and am skeptical of those who claim to know much. The 2016 final round has several moments that call contemporary practice into doubt by pointing past the boundaries of our knowledge/practice, suggesting new questions to struggle over in future contests. What is the relationship between ontological claims and an epistemic basis for evaluating them? Regardless of sequencing, can they ever be kept apart? How does one navigate the metaphysical, historical, or empirical without recourse or reference to the other two? How do the conventional evaluative criteria of "policymaking" inhibit debates where both sides converge on prioritizing "knowledge production," and what would an alternative criteria look like? How does the activity's Americanness shape contestation, especially when America increasingly serves as the debate's object of criticism (or target for destruction)? This debate also suggests fruitful rethinking at a very practical level. Questioning the case debate and the 1NR in "one-off" rounds, asking whether critique alternatives create more problems than they solve, or appreciating how even minor rhetorical choices can strongly shape the understanding of an argument are just a few examples. The larger point of this tangent: I encourage students to closely study this debate not only as an exemplar or template (although do that as well!), but as a challenge to innovate beyond.

Harvard won this debate for three major reasons. First, they won that methodological pluralism, when paired with a commitment to specific historical rigor, is the most effective means for shaping responses to contemporary facets of anti-blackness and military imperialism. Second, they also illustrated that this method is capable of informing specific choices about how to challenge these larger structures in the context of the Persian Gulf (and that a reduction in presence would likely mitigate the force of such structures). These two aspects are clearly interrelated, and Harvard won the first through robust defense and strong debating, but the second largely through some inadequacies of the negative at applying evidence. Third (and most crucially), Harvard won important defensive arguments that eroded the foundation for Kansas' strongest strategic elements. Specifically, they were able to produce sufficient doubt against Kansas' claim that alternative futures in an anti-black world are not possible. Harvard did so at several mutually-reinforcing levels, producing a relatively high degree of confidence that their method was not only an effective set of tools for challenging military presence, but also

offered the potential to improve the theorizing of how to challenge racial rape and anti-blackness in a domestic context.

### Overarching Considerations

That short synopsis does not give proper credence to what Kansas accomplished in this debate. At the conclusion of the final rebuttals, either team had gotten well ahead of the other on different parts of the debate. Kansas was outperforming the affirmative on two crucial issues. First, Harvard struggled to consistently respond to the idea that the quotidian monstrosities that constitute the domestic sphere provide the very basis of coherence for American foreign policy and the international system writ large. Harvard's decision to treat this as a "tradeoff" or opportunity cost question never adequately grappled with the full implication of this claim: IR itself is nothing more than a mirror of the violence that constitutes the home. Moreover, Kansas did an excellent job illustrating this dynamic in the cross-examination of the 1AC. In response to the question of (paraphrasing) "what words do we use to express insecurity in IR?", Harvard (I believe it was David interjecting into Hemanth's cross-examination here) blithely responded with a list of adjectives: "devious, sneaky, etc." The words presented were a strong fit for what Quaram was fishing for: a nexus of terms that commonly stem from a vocabulary of criminality or dereliction. Although David backtracked with an example from IR realism that did not stem from this register, it made it all the more curious that the initial terms suggested played so strongly in Kansas' favor while also not emanating from the affirmative's "theory home." This was a defining cross-examination moment for me; it was effective proof of concept for how the issues Kansas was highlighting were not questions of sequencing or tradeoffs, but seeded into the very terms Harvard used to make sense of the world.

Harvard, however, had a few other crucial areas where they were in control throughout the debate. The affirmative particularly excelled at narrating how I should assess and think through different questions, as well as making reasoned arguments for what the vital thresholds were for the negative's criticism. Although I did not witness any ground-breaking new content or lines of attack from the affirmative compared to debates I have judged in the past, Harvard was doing an excellent job of drawing out the implications of various stock arguments. The best illustration of this occurs throughout the "is change in the world possible?" debate. By drawing connections between small battles that they were winning and the larger theoretical underpinning of the criticism, Harvard was able to erode some of the areas in which Kansas was ahead. The affirmative was also extremely successful at problematizing the linkage between the ontological/metaphysical foundation of the criticism and its epistemic basis for assertability. The best illustration of this is David's cross-examination of Quaram. Two minutes are dedicated to this question. The question unfortunately got the better of Quaram. Equivocality was a contributing factor; David's use of the phrase "evidence" created ambiguity, leading Quaram to reference "evidence as cards," rather than "evidence as reasons for believing." This facilitated references back to specific cards or theoretical presuppositions. The problem for Kansas was twofold. Not only did it rob them of precious time to establish a defining answer to one of the debate's central questions, it strongly helped to illustrate Harvard's case (both their attacks of the criticism and the value of their method).

Despite the praises I have just sung about this particular cross-examination period, I do not believe it was terminal by any means for Kansas. Kansas excelled for much of the block on establishing the significance of their primary link arguments and the 1AR was more effective at pushing many pieces

of strategy rather than applying a smaller sub-set of issues and comparing them back to specific negative arguments. However, the pieces were not effectively drawn together in the 2NR. Rather than repeating or amplifying various link arguments, Quaram would have been helped by recognizing where Kansas was ahead and drawing out the full implications of how winning one or two questions complicated Harvard's strategy, thus directing more resources towards more important questions (such as the epistemology debate).

### Decision Components

There was remarkably little disagreement on framing questions in the 2NR and 2AR. Although there had been prior contested "role of ballot" claims, tacit agreement emerged that the core question of this debate was about the building of theory to inform political practice. In this regard, the question of the Persian Gulf was rendered ancillary. At most, it seemed to operate as the benchmark by which to measure various theoretical claims by either team. Although this did not hurt Kansas in the traditional sense of conceding the case and being outweighed by its impact, it certainly helped Harvard by enabling them to provide more specific analysis for how conflict, military presence, and critical theory could (or should) operate in contexts other than in the United States. Harvard also had strong evidence in this regard, notably their Wright, Day, and Jones cards. This was compounded by Kansas' decision in the block to not scrutinize the content of the 1AC more closely, looking for areas where the affirmative was in such a haste to be "pluralistic" that they smuggled in a few too many hegemonic foundationalisms. I do think that Kansas won an important sub-question within the framing debate, however: a robust link to the affirmative would likely be sufficient to take-out or turn the case. Kansas pulled far ahead in the 2NC on the general mechanics between theory and policy performance; if the affirmative is unable to theorize violence in a manner that accounts for the intimate sphere, then they are more likely to export such violence later (the negative's hamster wheel analogy). I emphasize the provisional rendering of that statement, however. I do not believe Kansas succeeded in winning that Harvard was unable to theorize in such a manner.

Kansas had mixed success with their link arguments. The scenario planning arguments (and their attendant truth questions concerning the historical foundation of American military presence in the gulf) were by far the weakest in both evidence and application. The Singh evidence was a strong history of American involvement in the Middle East, but seemed to only touch on the question of scenario planning through a brief mention of "war-gaming." It was not apparent what about this description of geopolitics the affirmative would either disagree with or be held accountable for defending. I also think Harvard's Barma scenario planning evidence was much stronger and had a stronger connection between what the evidence described in reality versus how the arguments were deployed in this debate. The Jones evidence from the negative was stronger than Singh at the level of a claim, but had little in terms of reasoning in the evidence or extrapolation by the negative. It clearly raised the question of whether the affirmative took a demand for "policy-relevance" too far (not patently clear to me, although their Bryant evidence may have crossed this threshold), or how that shuts down their permutation or pluralism arguments.

Harvard was also ahead in explaining these arguments in the context of the Middle East. This is also the area where the lack of discussion or counter-description by the negative about the forces that shaped the contemporary Persian Gulf were most troubling. The Lowe evidence needed greater detail to argue that slavery constitutes the terrain and space/place of the Middle East. The evidence undoubtedly

supported the argument that it is the founding truth of American history, but the evidence's discussion of colonialism in "Africa, Asia, and the Americas" was simply too brief to support the overarching claim the negative sought (while also lending credence to the limitations of the negative's theory). The negative needed more to warrant why "American history" was an adequate placeholder for the history and drivers of life in the Persian Gulf. I can think of many reasons why such a reading is warranted (Anglo-colonialism and the British/American connection through British colonialism in Iran, the Cold War and Shah/coup/revolution nexus, American involvement in the Iran-Iraq war, the 1991 and 2003 invasions) as well as why it is not (a claim to be the *raison d'être* of the Persian Gulf's political and social life is itself a supremely American statement...). I do believe the negative would have profited from engaging the affirmative on the terrain of history and working their evidence a bit more in seeking to apply it to the region. This may be a reason for teams such as Kansas to rethink their approach to the case, opting for a strategy that seeks to create greater fusion between the activity of theory-building and the active application of criticism to the case. I have some thoughts on how this might be done in the advice section below.

The far stronger set of links was the intimate violence argument. I do think this is an area where Kansas was doing an exceptional job of debating beyond their evidence by articulating mechanisms through which "intimate violence" can set the terms and boundaries in IR. The James evidence (along with the Sharpe evidence) delineated between spheres of violence and supported the 2NC and 2NR spin that the violence of captive reproductivity was not recorded in the social archive. Moreover, the 2NC did an excellent job establishing the texture and character of this link and there was relatively little pushback in the 1AR, where Hemanth opted to resolve the link at the level of competition/uniqueness (is there a real trade-off) and the epistemology debate. This was a mistake in a few ways. As I outlined above, sizing this up as a typical trade-off or focus question did not adequately respond to how Kansas had consistently made this argument. Additionally, arguing that "no theory can explain all" was insufficient when the 2NC was executing well on "this theory does explain this." In other words, Kansas had critiqued aspects of the affirmative in a way that certainly crossed the threshold for proximity/specificity that Harvard had demanded (the realm of the intimate providing the very terms by which we think about security, thus reinforcing those terms).

The futurity argument seemed to merge with the intimate violence discussion by the end of the debate. Kansas was also debating much better than their evidence on this question. The 1AR did not adequately address the spin that the starting point must be altered to forefront captive reproductivity because otherwise there was no historical record to read and the violence of the social would continue to accumulate against those marked for dereliction. This provided the negative with a good deal of purchase against Harvard's opportunity cost spin, but there was never a direct comparison between the relative risks of this argument versus the affirmative's methodological pluralism advantage. I also do not think the negative won that the affirmative ascribed to a progressive narrative in the strong or teleological sense the Dillon evidence assumes. On face, the applicability of Dillon to Barma is weak and much more work by the negative was needed to really set the hook on a futurity link alone.

Kansas squandered the above gains in a few ways. First, the 2NR succumbed to Harvard's labeling of the argument as a trade-off or opportunity cost by debating it as such throughout large portions of the speech. I'll call this the rhetorical rope-a-dope. Debaters should be cognizant of their labels and terms and never let the opposition dictate those terms, as they can strongly shape argument understanding. Second, Kansas' shortcomings at controlling the methodology and epistemology debates

eroded the full power of this link. Kansas failed to clash with the method components of the affirmative. Harvard's Barma evidence is not resolved through the scenario planning debate. That evidence was excellent, well explained, and resonates closely with how Harvard has explained their affirmative. The Bleiker evidence was weaker (it is a literature review of someone else's work and relatively thin on reasoning or examples), but unaddressed by Kansas.

The intersection of the negative's intimacy argument and the affirmative's method contention is the crux of the debate, yet more could have been done by either to push the needle in their favor. I wish Harvard explained which salient factors in the context of the Persian Gulf drop out of the negative's perspective and which unique factors the affirmative adds to the pot. Here, I think the affirmative largely profited from the sufficiency of the 1AC and a lack of scrutiny by the negative. The Barma evidence, and Harvard's use of it, helped them remedy this deficit as well by providing them with a credible argument for how the manner in which they have constructed their claims can correct for cognitive biases that otherwise go unchecked. I wish Kansas explained why the missing record of captive reproductivity invalidated the value of methodological pluralism (or revealed Harvard's pluralism to be a false one). That either requires more specific debating of the case earlier (I do think the first half of the 1AC struggles to pass the test of trans-foundationalism their Bleiker evidence establishes) or more dot-connecting in the 2NR. For example, while reproductive captivity is not in the Archive or public memory (in the big sense), it no doubt persists and exists, begging the question of why Harvard's method is incapable of interacting with it when applied in different contexts. The intimate violence argument clearly implicates Harvard's methodology arguments, but I am left after the 2NR not understanding the specific ways that is the case.

Despite winning important components of the central link and impact arguments, Harvard prevailed in two ways: the permutation and the epistemology debate. Before addressing the permutation, I will very briefly address the alternative. Kansas elected to bank much of the 2NR on a framing that privileged link filters over a concerted effort to resolve the entire case. In many ways, the alternative was unnecessary given the broader contours of the debate. While I am unclear of what the alternative can and cannot accomplish after the 2NR, the 2AR did not make it a salient issue either, opting instead to attack the underlying method that produces the alternative as a political choice. I am not chastising either team by bringing this up, but rather suggesting that the traditional frame of "can the alternative provide uniqueness to the links" may be more limiting or distracting depending on how the 1AC frames the initial terms of the debate.

As for the permutation itself, Kansas faced a two-fold deficit. First, the 2NR was far too rushed on this question. There are simply insufficient resources dedicated to hashing out the mechanics of the permutation. Second, the 1NR was also structurally light on many of the procedural links and disadvantage links. I did not understand the specific severance argument in the 1NR and it was not clearer at the end. Decision calculus or a specific link to the cruel optimism argument were also very light. While I thought the 1AR was mistaken in not spending more time on this argument (or the argument for how history gets weaponized against Black debaters), the 2NR (ideally the 1NR) needs to draw out their implications. What does it even mean to win a "cruel optimism disadvantage" and how does that translate into a cost that exceeds the affirmative benefit when the broader issues in the debate have already transcended the heuristic of "policymaking" that the argument relies on? In other words, how do choices that are made about how to frame an opponent out of the round not also consign such micro-disadvantages to irrelevance? I also have larger doubts about whether achieving a

clean procedural kill or a large disadvantage on the permutation would have altered the broader terms of the debate. Harvard has already positioned themselves so that the affirmative's method, if well defended, becomes the framework: I should prioritize flexible, pluralistic methodologies that prioritize specific, historical rigor. If the affirmative wins that they are a good example of that framework and not an opportunity cost with other approaches, it is difficult for the negative to achieve any strategic benefit even if a formal permutation or new advocacy is precluded.

The permutation is secondary to the defensive in-roads Harvard made through the epistemology debate. Let me first set aside an irrelevant argument: Pascal's wager. This is present in both the 1AR and 2AR and on my flow, but is severely underdeveloped and made far too quickly for me to adequately grasp. Had this ever been a serious focus, Harvard may have been in for a rough ride. It might be better to act as if anti-blackness were ontologically immutable; a pessimist is either proven correct or pleasantly surprised. At best it seems like a parlor trick and at worst invites a fairly embarrassing cross-examination. In this debate, my response would be that I simply prefer not to bet.

I have already discussed the primary area where Harvard pulled in front of the relationship between epistemology and ontology. This goes beyond one potent cross-examination, however. Harvard had solid evidence that established a critical lens for how I should scrutinize competing claims to theorize anti-blackness that called into question the specific manner in which Kansas has shaped their criticism. As mentioned above, I think the Wright, Jones, and Day cards were particularly good. Moreover, Kansas' engagement with this debate in the block and the 2NR was relatively thin, bordering on concession at times. The evidence offered to either support or indict these components of the affirmative were not very good. The 1NR Wilderson argument did not seem on-face applicable to the specific manner the affirmative was deploying their case (a question of basic dot-connecting for why the affirmative was the diasporic claim to knowledge the evidence described). The 1NR Sexton evidence, although not worked with much in the 2NR, also addressed colonialism only in the American context. The issue was compounded by the examples offered throughout the debate. Harvard was able to control how I should read the statistics or grounds advanced by Kansas, such as the micro-debate over what it means that more black men are killed in 2016 than during slavery. The irony here is that Kansas may not even need to resort to such examples in order to make their claim. It was also troubling that Kansas did not offer much in terms of international examples, opting instead for domestic ones. This reinforced the affirmative's evidence that grounding one's analysis in the Middle Passage limits the capacity to theorize anti-black violence in different global contexts. Kansas' most compelling argument (and the one that gives me the most pause) was that positive historical examples of Black political agency are ultimately weaponized against those who resist anti-blackness. I was surprised that this did not play a larger role in the 2NR. It provides solid support for why one should emphasize ontological critique, even if such critique cannot exhaust or account for all contravening counter-examples, because the ethical work of destroying anti-blackness takes priority. Otherwise, those who benefit from white supremacy are able to argue that the exception somehow disproves the rule. This was a missed opportunity by the negative. Moreover, Harvard was more effective at highlighting the stakes in this debate, specifically drawing out connections to larger theoretical premises the negative relies on and explaining how those supports were weakened.

Ultimately, Harvard outperformed Kansas on the central question in any debate that centers around methodology: how does a scholar, critic, or activist build and test competing theoretical explanations? Articulating (and then winning within) such a framework played an outside role in this debate. Although

it did not invalidate the truth of the criticism in any a priori sense, it seeded skepticism towards the negative's core arguments (particularly those required to generate competition). The big lesson for those studying this debate is that the most decisive set of arguments (for at least my ballot) were fundamentally defensive in nature, did not rely on asserting the priority (temporal or otherwise) of the case or the criticism, and also was risky in its own right. After all, establishing a true framework for decision-making (rather than the self-serving silliness that is called "framework" in many other debates) exposes one to the risk that they can be invalidated on their criteria (or "hoisted on their own petard" in the parlance of Scott Harris). Such argumentation is more difficult and complex, but a place where debates such as this should turn to more often.

### Looking forward

In conveying my judgment, I have tried to be thorough and fair, providing a level of analysis deserving of the debaters' efforts. I would like to thank the individual students as well as their programs for the honor of allowing me to evaluate a debate of such import. Sherry, Dallas, and the Harvard coaches have consistently produced some of the very best that debate has to offer. Scott, Brett, and the University of Kansas' debate program has a very important place in my heart, as my own career and success would not be possible without the Jayhawks.

I would also like to close with some kind words and advice to the four students who participated in this final round. David, you were a joy to judge (when you were older and less obnoxious...) and one of the most talented, engaging debaters I have had the pleasure of working with. I admired the earnestness and respect with which you treated ideas and approaches to argument that diverged from your own preferred practice. I hope I see more debaters who exhibit that trait. I have no advice for you because you are old... Good luck!

Hemanth, I have only judged you a handful of times but much of what I said for David is true of you (perhaps more so, as you seem to be young and not obnoxious...). It is hard to give advice to a champ who has a few more times at the plate, but I'll offer this for the 1AR: stop extending, start comparing. You are very skilled at executing your own strategy and placing a great deal of pressure on the 2NR, yet there should have been more additive work to add to what the 2AC had already established, as well as clearer engagement with 2NC link characterizations.

Quaram, I have never judged a debater three times in the span of two days that showed a nearly limitless capacity to improve and elevate their game between every debate. There were moments where the skill on display was astonishing (and moments when youth bested you...). I greatly appreciate the artful mix of levity, self-deprecation, and stone-cold seriousness that you bring to your debates and am very confident you will reach even higher than this level. My advice for you is two-fold: cross-examination and theory-building. There are manifold lessons within David's cross-examination of you. First, cross-examination carries great weight in debates concerning critical theory and knowledge production. It is the only time in a debate where the debaters cannot duck behind powerful evidence. It is the "proof-of-concept" opportunity where critique or knowledge-production are not objects to be argued over, but activities to be done. Second, it suggests that debaters and coaches should rethink what it means to "control" a cross-examination period. I see many debates where questioning is an exercise in silencing one's opponent, monopolizing air-time, and asking small questions about single cards, disconnected from the bigger questions in the debate. David's cross-examination suggests that more is gained by listening, letting one's opponent inflict damage on themselves, and accounting for an

opponent's answer in subsequent questions. Finally, this debate demonstrates theory's power as well as its limitation. Theories excel at explanation and, by implication, rationalization. Good theory can generate an answer to a question, but debaters should study on the question of what makes for good theory. The problem is compounded when debaters conceptualize the purpose of cross-examination as a time for explaining "their argument." The phrase "our argument is" appears in countless debates I judge (this one included) and it obscures far more than it clarifies because it invites students to repeat generalities rather than defend the smaller components that comprise their position.

Sion, I do not know you well other than judging you in this year's NDT elimination rounds. I will say I hope to know you better as I greatly enjoyed evaluating your debates. Even from my small sample size, it is clear you possess the strength of explanatory clarity: dissolving a concept or sub-debate into readily understood terms. My biggest advice for you (and other 1NRs who find themselves in one-off critical debates) is to get a tighter handle on stock questions you are typically tasked with (such as the permutation) and then attack the 1AC at a level of depth and detail that may not be possible given the prep constraints of the 2NC. In this genre of debate, 2NCs are relatively effective at establishing a baseline of link applicability (showing the judge where the ill-advised ideological commitments are lurking), but the 1NR has the opportunity to work through the case at two important levels: first, how does the 1AC leave ideological space where the replication of "intimate violence" chains out or becomes warranted within the terms of their worldview and; second, how does the affirmative fail their own methodological benchmarks and smuggle a disavowed foundationalism into their picture of the world? Perhaps some would object that the 1NR is too late for this, but I am not sure affirmatives can argue that methodology should be a central consideration in the 1AC and then object to unpacking that strictly on strategic grounds... 1NRs with six minutes of perm arguments and additional link evidence have a window of diminishing returns. The same moves can be accomplished in three minutes, with the upshot of a much weaker affirmative case and far more difficult 1AR.

Thank you,

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# Jason Regnier

## Overview

Congratulations to both Harvard and Kansas, and thank you for letting me be a part of the event. This was an overall excellent debate, with moments of brilliance. Both of you are teams that I respect and admire greatly. Harvard, it has been a pleasure judging you over the course of the year. You are very good at what you do. Hirn and I were in a season long battle to see who is your biggest hack (he won, but not by much). Kansas, this is only our second round together – and I've voted against you both times – but your star shines brightly. You bring an intellectual ferocity and clarity of purpose to debate that is humbling. I hope that I have many more opportunities to interact with those of you who will be continuing on with debate in the future.

It is a weird thing, writing a ballot that is supposed to tell a coherent linear narrative of a decision concerning a debate that was itself hardly linear/narrative – especially writing it, as I am, days after the round actually occurred. I chose to not rewatch any parts of the debate before writing this ballot, so it is based entirely on my (not terribly great) memory and my (also not terribly great) flow. Hopefully, this reconstruction is not too revisionist of the thoughts that were actually going through my head the other night at 2am (while on my third 5-hour Energy of the day).

## The Short Version

Speaking purely in technical terms, the 2NR was spread too thin and did not adequately establish a framing for an overall decision calculus that highlights which issues they perceived to be the important ones. There were a lot of good arguments, but the 2NR did not connect the dots in a way that formed a coherent story. And while there were persuasive areas of offense for the negative, there were also a few key affirmative arguments that weren't adequately handled.

In more substantive terms, I think that the affirmative played significant enough defense against the critique to maintain a reasonable advantage to the method of scholarship that they produce while also winning fairly sizeable offense against the alternative to the negative's position. Specifically, the affirmative's form of scenario planning is a mechanism to challenge the cognitive biases that are the basis of different forms of domination (particularly colonialism/eurocentrism in this context) and to enable the formulation of possible paths to alternative futures. And while the negative has some solid arguments that components of the affirmative could risk replicating anti-black thought, the affirmative punches some holes in the larger theoretical edifice of pessimism that the negative is using to explain the structure of anti-blackness. Combined with the affirmative's argument about methodological pluralism, this makes it difficult for the negative to establish a strong enough impact to weigh against the affirmative. Finally, the affirmative is also ahead at the end of the debate on some their offense suggesting that the negative's position will result in political fatalism and fails to seize opportunities for material change.

## The Long Version

I began my decision by trying to figure out who wins the debate regarding whether anti-blackness operates at the level of ontology or the socio-historical. There were several moments in the debate

when I was leaning toward the negative on this question, but in the final rebuttals, the 2AR does a better job using their evidence to pull ahead. In particular, the Day '15 evidence and the Winant '15 evidence are used quite well by the 2AR to argue that, although anti-black racism continues to be endemic today, antiracist politics have been successful at achieving significant changes over the course of history. While the Winant evidence makes the historical argument, the Day evidence bolsters the position further by indicting the epistemological ground by which the negative would lay claim to its very knowledge of the ontological.

While the negative obviously has several cards from earlier in the debate that clash, I think perhaps one thing that hurts the negative here is though they are arguing against employing the sociological as the site of analysis, they nevertheless had a tendency to return to empirical/historical justifications to ground their theory. They allowed themselves at times to get caught up in a debate over empirics that may be just a distraction. For example, in the CX of the 2AC, Sion mentions the fact that more black people die today than in the past. Herman's answer is that populations are larger so raw numbers are misleading and you have to account for per capita rates. This exchange is not helpful for the negative because it implies that the quantity of deaths is a pertinent question for understanding the structure of anti-blackness. I suppose it is conceivably possible for the negative to use empirics to win the ontology claim, but my sense is that strategically this is an all or nothing issue. Either you need to invest the time to prove "no progress has happened," or you need to sublimate the very distinction between progress & no progress by shifting the level of analysis. Personally, I would guess that the latter is more strategic, but this requires the negative to do a bit better job developing the warrants that operate in the ontological register. Drawing out the reasoning in the Hartman '09 and Wilderson '03 evidence would be a good place to start, but it also might take another card or two.

Now, I can see that the negative is trying to outline how their theory accounts for historical contingencies, but the pieces of this story don't entirely come together – specifically, to account for the notion of progress, not just change. I would really like to see more discussion of this Dillon '13 evidence because I think that it draws a rough outline for the negative to recontextualize the affirmative's claims of progress. In particular, the distinction it draws between "time as passing" versus "time as accumulation" throws a wrench in the affirmative's linear progressive view of history. The negative can argue that even if the affirmative's Winant evidence is in some sense true, it still misunderstands how time works – i.e. while it may be true black people might have money and rights that they lacked in the past, this does not mean that the anti-black violence of the past has been "surpassed" because the violence of the past is actually accumulated and present in the present. Unfortunately, although the 2NR does extend the Dillon evidence, I just do not think that the negative does the work to draw this explanation out (and I also think that the highlighting/cutting of the Dillon evidence could maybe be redone to better highlight the warrant/explanation for this claim – I found myself having to really fish for the argument in the unhighlighted and ununderlined portions of the card). I can certainly look back on my flow and find this argument in the 2NR, but it was not until a lot of post-round reconstruction that what the negative was trying to say here really clicked for me.

There is one aspect of this part of the debate that that I thought the negative was quite persuasive on (and that the affirmative did not have a terribly great response to), which is that historical progress – true or not – is weaponized against black people to shut down critiques of the status quo. I thought about this argument for a long time because it operates somewhat independently of the rest of the position and can be offense even if the affirmative wins that it is descriptively true that progress has

happened. In the end, I decided that the negative does win that this argument is true. However, a couple of things prevent it from becoming enough to win the entire debate. I will discuss below some of the affirmative's offense that I ultimately decided outweighed. However, I will also briefly mention that this argument would have been more powerful if I could have located it in a good piece of evidence. It is a very smart analytic – smart enough even to win some debates on its own – but would be made stronger with a card. If the negative was in fact basing it in a piece of evidence, then it was not clear to me which one it was.

Coming out ahead on the ontological/sociological debate is not on its own necessarily enough to vote for the affirmative, but they also successfully connect it with a couple areas of offense.

First, the affirmative is doing a lot with their scenario planning arguments that the negative just does not quite handle. The main area of offense for the negative in the 2NR against the scenario planning stuff is that it will “exported” in a violent way onto others. However, the affirmative's evidence already starts one step further in the argument. The affirmative's Barma '16 evidence says that scenario analysis challenges people's pre-existing mental maps that are constrained by cognitive biases, and that it can be a way of imagining alternative future worlds. The affirmative also uses their Jones '04 evidence to connect this directly to issues of domination and oppression. It argues that the primary explanation for oppression is flawed knowledge (and it synergizes with the affirmative case quite well in talking about eurocentrism and colonialism), which the affirmative argues scenario planning would help to remedy. The Jones evidence's claims about knowledge also indirectly connects quite well with their use of the Day evidence mentioned above (on the epistemological flaw in afro-pessimism).

I think the scenario planning debate is definitely winnable for the negative. It is just a matter of more effectively using the evidence that you have in the debate and attending more specifically to the claims the affirmative is trying to draw out. The key claim to challenge is that anti-blackness (or any form of domination, really) is the result of inadequate objectivity of knowledge. The negative should be viciously mocking the affirmative's Jones evidence. The idea that oppression would be solved if people just “had their facts straight” is patently absurd. This evidence actually says that our ethical relations with people should be secondary to the objective facts. Besides pointing out the obvious ways in which seemingly “objective science” can and has been used to enable radical forms of racism and other forms of domination, the negative can also point out significant flaws in the argument even if we take the evidence at its word that objectivity is possible. For example, what if science were to objectively determine that one culture or race of people were – with all the weight of factual truth – actually less intelligent or “rational” or more predisposed to murder or more likely to carry diseases or disabilities? What then? If ethics is secondary to objective knowledge, what would such findings entail politically? The obvious answer is eugenics. Jones assumes that despite placing ethics secondary to knowledge the knowledge that we gain will necessarily confirm our preexisting ethical frame that oppression is bad. The Jones evidence also almost seems to assume that there is some vast and intentional conspiracy to falsify information in order to justify domination. Though this may indeed sometimes occur, it is not the core of the problem. The real problem is that people really believe it – white parents really think when they do not want to send their kids to a predominantly poor black school that they are acting on the basis of objective information about criminal activity and academic achievement.

There are parts of the underutilized Singh '03 evidence that are quite good and could help you here, especially the parts that talk about antiracist politics and multiculturalism (though, I will say that I am

not sure how philosophically consistent some of this card is with afro-pessimism). It's not really about scenario planning per se, but I think that the negative can more effectively use it in the debate to help challenge some of the assumptions behind the affirmative's scenario planning argument. Additionally, I think it could be leveraged against the affirmative's use of the Bleiker '14 evidence on methodological pluralism. As it is, though, the substance of the Singh evidence is barely mentioned in the debate. The negative's Jones '09 evidence does not seem terribly applicable in this situation; it appears that it would be more relevant if the affirmative had made a big framework argument.

The second area of offense that the affirmative is winning is against the alternative to the critique. The affirmative leverages their Marriott '12 and Lester '12 evidence very well. In particular, the Marriott card becomes a real problem for the negative because not only does it bolster the Winant and Day evidence mentioned above, but it is also a direct indict of one of the negative's authors (Wilderson) and it makes an impact argument against the alternative. The Marriott evidence became particularly persuasive since the negative did not spend much of any time discussing how the alternative functioned or what path it charted to something that we could call "solvency." As a result, the affirmative almost completely controlled the spin on what voting negative would look like (fatalism, despair, sentimental moralism, reification of blackness as a void, replicating the conditions for anti-black violence). This fatalism turn to the alternative, specifically, is what persuasively weighs back against the "history is weaponized" argument that I said above that I thought the negative is winning. Additionally, the affirmative's Lester evidence, while using not entirely sound reasoning, does say what the affirmative says it says. Even if the negative were to successfully challenge the coordinates of humanism, this could just as easily end up producing the very same kinds of violence that they ascribe to humanism itself. While I saw the negative trying to link out of this turn, I could not really follow their reasoning. I do think, however, that a couple of well-worded analytics could probably be enough to beat the Lester evidence (its definitions of what counts as humanism and anti-humanism are highly suspect).

There is one area of the debate that I struggled with quite a bit. I fundamentally do not think that the affirmative ever really deals with what is at times the most central part of the negative's position – that antiblackness is operationalized in moments of intimate or interpersonal violence. The negative's Sharpe '10 and James '13 cards are focused on the question of intimacy and psychic violence. The affirmative's attempt to use Johnson '05 and Grossberg '10 here is woefully unresponsive. Johnson is just an abstract description of how the Lacanian drive works – it is not clear how this is an answer that at all applies to this affirmative. Grossberg (who, incidentally, is probably indicting the very kind of thinking that Johnson is using to describe drive) is just making an argument about the overgeneralization of "affect" into a catch-all analytic category. Neither of these things answers the negative's argument about how anti-blackness functions through intimacy.

However, while I thought about this portion of the debate for a long time and I do think that the negative spends a fairly significant amount of time developing it, I could not bring myself to vote here because I could not find a way to link it up with the rest of the threads of the debate in a way that could resolve the issues that I have discussed above. I think part of the problem may be that for me it appears as if this is almost an entirely distinct argument package from the rest of the critique. There are times that the negative is debating afro-pessimism from a sort of meta-theoretical/structural perspective, and then they shift gears to discuss the concrete arena of intimate/interpersonal relations. How I should understand the connections between these registers in my decision calculus is never particularly clear. For example, I could imagine a 2NR that placed the intimacy argument front and center, and then

filtered the relevance of all the other issues in the debate through it. This would allow the negative to perhaps sidestep some of the broader questions about historical progress or scenario planning in the abstract, and instead focus the decision on the level of the specificity of the affirmative's performance and the psychic effects of invoking things like the anti-black state in the "debate space."

Finally, I am sympathetic to the negative's claim that the way that the affirmative articulates the permutation is probably at times intrinsicness. However, the affirmative's use of the Bleiker '14 evidence on methodological pluralism still provides a sort of broad answer to the mutual exclusivity of the critique. I do not know to what extent I vote "on the perm," but I do think that the Bleiker evidence does help to provide some terminal defense for the affirmative even in a world where the negative does win some link arguments. I cannot say how far this defense gets them, but it certainly does tie up nicely with their other arguments about scenario planning and epistemological uncertainty. The negative probably needs to say that methodological pluralism itself is an enabler of whiteness/anti-blackness, and as I mentioned above, the Singh evidence is one resource you have that you can use on this front.

#### Some Thoughts on Techné

Sion: you are already a very good cross-examiner. Cross-ex was easily the highlight of the debate for you. It was a time when your personality and charisma came out. I know that the being the 1N is a thankless job, but I would encourage you to find ways to let more of your personality show during your speeches. You are solid at "getting the job done," but show us that that 1NC and 1NR belong to you.

Quaram: the 2NR is a time for focus and framing. I think that you let yourself get too scattered. Especially against a team that is probably going to outmatch you on the techné of debate, you want to figure out the one or two key issues that you can use to frame the entirety of the judge's decision – those things that all the other arguments in the debate are going to hinge on. Use them to filter out what is relevant and not relevant (ideally to get rid of the best affirmative responses). Maybe it is just the fact that I am trying to remember a debate that happened a couple of days ago, but I feel like the 2NR was too reactive – too much on the affirmative's ground.

Hemant: the 1AR was a model of efficiency. However, there were many times that I felt that there was very little development of the arguments. Obviously, the 1AR is not a time for long fanciful oratory, but some of the arguments were little more than tagline extensions of the 2AC. You did put a lot of pressure on the negative, but I think that it is possible that a different speech from the 2NR could have exploited some of the 1AR's lack of argument advancement.

Herman: you have had an incredibly successful career and accomplished about as much as anybody could hope for. You probably do not need any advice from me right now.

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