

2023 NDT Final Round Ballots

Graziano

I was the final ballot in on a 4-1 decision for the negative from Wake Forest. I'd like to first acknowledge the wonderful tournament that the Wake Forest program hosted this year. It was well run, transparent, and made a long week mostly painless. I'd also like to thank both teams individually for asking me to adjudicate for them in the final round of the 77th National Debate Tournament. Wake Forest RT, I think you probably are correct that a lot of other squads counted you out and you both were absolutely brilliant in the semis and finals rounds I watched. Wake, as an outsider getting a glimpse behind the curtain, I'm envious of the ability of your staff to inspire its students to see themselves in their teammates' victory and you should be extremely proud of what was undoubtedly a massive team effort. Michigan PP, your impact on the debate community cannot possibly be overstated. I can't even begin to imagine how incredibly difficult it is to have the consistent success you have achieved, especially when every team in the nation has kept you in the forefront of their thoughts and tournament preparation for the better part of the last 3 years. Rafael, I've been judging you since your senior year at Monta Vista, and I remember even sharing prep between you two and us over at Kent Denver going into the Tournament of Champions. While you dealt a pretty devastating blow to my self-confidence as a coach when we went 3-4 in prelims and you won the whole thing with the same materials and vastly less resources, all I remember is thinking that it couldn't have been won by a nicer and hard-working kid. I'm truly sorry that finals never went your way and I hope you know that debate will forever remember your influence as more than the result of a single debate round. I believe that this 4-1 decision, and particularly my ballot, was decided on a risk of a DA to the affirmative and the permutation. This is separated into a couple core parts and I'll try my best to walk back through my thought process in ultimately deciding to vote negative.

The first major question in this debate was broadly "is the affirmative actually refusing/distinct from the Black Chorus?" I'm not actually sure that they're refusing the Chorus, but they're definitely told that they are multiple times in this debate. The top-level packaging of the argument in both the 2NC and 2NR reiterate that engagement is a "prior question" and that when asked about their relationship to the Black Chorus the affirmative refused to engage – a reference to the CX of the 1NC by the 1AR. While I agree that this CX was mishandled by the affirmative, I'm not entirely sure that I would characterize their position in this debate as anti-Black Chorus. It seems intuitive to me that in a world where I'm rationalizing the 1NC strategy as functionally similar but flipped from Dr. Christina Sharpe's 'Wake Work' (where instead of grieving the ungrievable in death, the negative affirms the interconnections of Black life in a world that tries to rob them of it) that this strategy could be radically inclusive of those who wish to join the call. This is what makes the affirmative's lack of contestation on this claim even more confusing – by collapsing into "vote aff and don't call the cops," "the state doesn't have to be rejected," and "things can get far worse in the future," they're spending time that otherwise could have been spent justifying their inclusion into the alternative. Another way to say this is that the affirmative spends a lot of time saying what they don't do, but not enough time justifying what they did, meaning that a lot of the responses the 2AR leaves us with are defensive in nature. I don't think that this argument is unwinnable for the affirmative but would require a much more robust packing of the benefits of their "model" (policy debate being good, policy education, demands on the state being desirable, etc.) that get a little lost in their defensive counterparts in this debate. By the end of the 2AR it becomes clear to

me that both teams are envisioning the affirmative and negative as distinct entities and that neither team is really reaching across to engage with their opposition, which I think is further proven by the 1AR extension of “permutation affirm both” and turning into the 2AR as “vote aff to fiat the plan and align with the Chorus/vote aff for fiat and not calling the cops at tournaments.”

The second question I spent time resolving is “does winning ballots actually do anything?” I think that this is the part of the debate that the affirmative is the most behind on. Most of the 2AR claims on this end up along the lines of “fairness good/competition not asinine,” “debate is an adversarial game,” and “fiat is redeemable.” While I think asking the affirmative to go tit-for-tat against the specific examples that the negative brings up might be asking too much, I do think it’s concerning that there isn’t direct comparative ink to any of the arguments about Emporia in particular. This is especially concerning when Emporia is both the link and the impact to the negative argument that the affirmative never points out – if it’s true that Emporia winning the NDT was important, it apparently wasn’t important enough to save their program from being totally cut. This is symptomatic of the larger problem the affirmative has when trying to explain what they view the relationship between scholarship, the debater, the speech act, and the ballot is. A lot of this debate felt like one side was arguing that “procedural fairness should determine clash” and the other side was negative. The affirmative pivot from the Cooper 23 card in the 1AC into the McGee 97 evidence by the end of the debate I think proves the inherently defensive pivot this strategy had over time, especially when the tag of the McGee evidence that “debate can’t be more than a game” makes its way into a core 2AR ballot framing section. The more offensive argument here would be that voting negative to exclude iterative, agonistic debate would rob debate of its potential to create opportunities for ballots like Emporia vs. Northwestern. While not the best explained argument from the negative, the points in the block and 2NR that claim “this is the round where we read our advocacy on the negative, engage with us” is rhetorically very persuasive and makes the affirmative fairness arguments alone feel insufficient. Leaving this debate to the judges to resolve is incredibly dangerous for the affirmative because it’s hard to ignore the reactions both in and out of the community in response to the last decade of debate. I’d imagine it’s not too controversial for me to claim here that any YouTube comment section on a debate video with more than 20k views starring debaters who would identify as apart of the Black Chorus would certainly be littered with profane, demeaning, and racist takes against some of the brightest in our activity. The most popular video that I’m aware of at 800k views is an interview with Ameena and Korey, is literally hosted on a channel by a conservative economic pundit and is riddled with comments like “I don’t wanna live in a world where this is considered academic excellence” and “...seeing this is absolutely saddening and proves that my work can always be trumped by affirmative action like this.” The Rutgers Murphy and Nave NDT final has been added and removed several times online because of threats this community made directly to their administration. The example of Emporia SW constantly referred to in this round has comments disabled but historically resulted in many new academic responses and a separatist movement within the community. To leave this issue as a “link” vs. “link defense” issue seems unwise because even if I wanted to grant that to the affirmative that the ballot does nothing, it seems like there is substantial “risk of a link” that the ballot does do something for better or for worse.

The last question I tried to answer was is “Is Black debate dying?” There are two responses I desperately needed if trying to write an affirmative ballot. The first is general uniqueness answers. Although it may seem silly, basic arguments about the state of Black debate go a long way here (things like it’s not declining, participation steady, even potential alt causes to Black participation that the negative

identified like the pandemic.) I think that if there was a substantial push earlier on this question the likelihood of my voting affirmative increases dramatically, especially if paired with the second much needed response – that Michigan PP should not be individually held responsible for the decline of Black participation in college policy debate. It seems untrue and incredibly unlikely to me that Michigan as a program, or the two debaters that represented them, are the reason Black debate is declining in the status quo. I think that a lot of this debate gets wrapped up into the “is the 1AC in, with, or against the Black Chorus” section above and that by not taking a more offensive stance towards uniqueness, or specifically flagging this as irresolvable by specifically a negative ballot instead of just ‘any’ ballot, and instead framing the round behind “we don’t take a stance on this and it’s outside the scope of the 1AC” leaves me with more questions than answers. Both teams rely more on the strength of their term-of-art rather than taking the time to explain how the argument functions in this portion of the flow. The 2NC and 2NR frames the ballot as a question of a “debate and debate,” the 1NR couches these into an explanation of the “captive maternal,” and the 1AR counters with the phrases “ethical localism” and specifically acknowledging individual people being “tokenizing.” I think all three are guilty of inserting phrases and demanding meaning here, and a quick Ctrl+F of the documents prove “maternal,” “token,” and “localism” are not found in any of the evidence read. The closest the affirmative comes to making offense is on this ethical localism argument, but since it’s uncarded and not really extended in the 2AR I have a hard time preferring that over the 2NC/2NR explanation that this is a “debate about debate” which appears clearly in the 1NC and is extended throughout.

These questions were where I spent most of my time decision time. Once I had concluded some of the above thoughts the following became apparent:

1. Black Debate is Dying – there is a uniqueness claim about the status quo that I don’t have a great response to.
2. There is a risk that ballots do things – there is a link to the affirmative, and even if I completely sided with the affirmative on this question their defense never reached the threshold of “terminal.” There independently is an alternative method to solve this link by aligning with the Black Chorus.

I believe it to be the case that this argument then was just a well-disguised disadvantage to the 1AC. They have uncontested uniqueness, minimal defense to the link proper, and an argument that voting negative resolves all offense via solvency. When the affirmative strategy is centered around “debate is a game that has no effect on the outside world or our subjectivities,” I’m left with no choice but to conclude negative on risk of a link in some sort of perverse try-or-die time framing against an affirmative that has concluded there is no tangible or material benefit towards voting for them. This makes voting affirmative impossible and voting negative desirable.

The last thing that I needed to resolve was the permutation. I have the first words of the 2AR as “vote aff to align with the Chorus and not call the police” and the last words as “Black debate isn’t mutually exclusive with the 1AC, it’s still possible to affirm both.” Because of the sheer number of answers packaged into the context of the permutation I’m unsure what a ballot for the affirmative would look without it. I think that this phenomenon in my head is best summarized as “the 2AR went for the permutation without solvency attacks” that made me feel empty-handed when trying to write a ballot in favor of the affirmative. I spent a long time pouring over the justifications that I had for voting affirmative and overall came up with very little to answer the strength of offense the negative had. While I don’t think voting affirmative here was impossible per se, I had a much harder time justifying

that over a negative ballot. While I could easily see some critics checking out on “risk the DA links to the permutation means I vote neg,” I do think that there are other unresolved issues that make the permutation undesirable. In a different debate I think the negative would be better served consolidating their permutation answers into a singular focal point, but I understand why that didn’t happen in this round. First is the “performance means you don’t get a permutation” claim. I have no idea why this is true, or even what the significance of the performance was in this debate, but the affirmative’s 1AR/2AR response of “we embodied our politics through fiat” seems strange and misses the boat on what was essentially just “you aren’t the Black Chorus.” The Role of the Ballot argument isn’t super clear and quickly breaks down into more of the same about what the ballot does or doesn’t do. I think the clearest place the negative is ahead here is the contextualization the 2NR does with the links to the permutation, coupled with the argument “the perm isn’t what you’re doing but how you’re doing it” that establishes some critical distance here. I also had a hard time determining what the distinction between “affirming both” or “doing the 1AC and aligning with the Chorus” was in comparison to the status quo or the affirmative alone. I think I conceptualized this debate almost as the affirmative advocacy being “we’ll do policy debate over here and you do Black debate over there” as an extension of the status quo at best and some form of segregated debate at worst, both of which were less desirable than a negative ballot by itself.

This meant that the Reason for Decision that I uploaded to Tabroom was the following:

“I voted negative on Black debate being worthwhile to engage with. I think the affirmative is definitely behind on some of the core uniqueness claims in this debate that make a ballot in favor of “you do Black debate as long as it's over there” nearly an impossible permutation for me to resolve. I think it's an understatement to say the only way I could ever vote affirmative in this debate is on the permutation, which while probably has some risk of solving some offense, isn't responsive to any of the debates that occurred. I kinda sorta view the permutation as the status quo, with the negative make a uniqueness argument (that Black debate is dying) and a link argument (ballots change things) that mean there's a full blow DA to the permutation. I'm not necessarily sure that the model the negative is arguing for doesn't have conceptual problems - but I know that the affirmative probably links and that there's only a risk that voting negative solves it.”

This was overall a very good and close debate, and I’m truly honored to be asked to be a part of it. Congratulations to Wake and Michigan for an incredible season and for a performance that kept me guessing how I was going to vote until the very end.

While this is normally where the ballot is supposed to end, I did want to discuss some thoughts I had about the content of this debate and the community’s reaction to it. I was post-rounded by at least 3 non-Michigan teams before I had even exited the ballroom, in a debate where I didn’t even give an RFD. Not only were some of these individuals accosting me for reasons they themselves had yet to even hear, but they were also accompanied by disparaging comments towards the other panelists. The sheer amount of anger these individuals had for a decision against a squad they aren’t even associated with was extremely jarring, saying things like “you are the sole reason debate is dying,” “I’m quitting an activity I love because of your decision,” and even “I’m only post rounding you because the other judges are fucking cowards who ran away after the decision came in.” This was not a good look. I also am sure that the Michigan squad would be hurt to know someone reacted this way when Michigan themselves congratulated their opponents and left the room with grace despite having every reason in the world to

be unhappy with the result. The following week resulted in debaters reaching out to students of my program and asking them how I could possibly vote that way and questioned the decision further. The worst part of this is I can't imagine that this is new information to anyone reading this – it doesn't exactly even seem like a secret and if you're so involved in the community you are reading to the end of an NDT finals ballot, you probably already have opinions about styles of debate, the result of the NDT finals round, and the history of decisions that went into the arguments that the negative presented in the debate. I am disappointed and confused by the reaction of the community to these results. In response, I thought it was important that I share some of the experiences that I have witnessed in debate while coaching Black debaters at Rutgers to demonstrate not only what the Black Chorus is, but what it is in response to.

I believe that there is a phenomenon I can only rationalize as our community punishing Black debaters for the "Sins of the Father" – where Black debaters are routinely are rewarded with losses on ballots due to interactions debaters and judges have experienced, seen, or witnessed outside of the round that is currently in front of them. To some degree, it seems like Black debate is still being punished for winning versus Northwestern in NDT finals in 2013. This is the only way I can rationalize any of the following experiences that I've had in debate:

A Black team reading and defending a policy plan text on the Alliance Commitments topic, having the negative read T – USFG against them, and having the judge tell the negative they wish they had gone for it in the 2NR.

- A Black team debating at the NDT, with three white judges on the panel, feeling like they couldn't respond to their two white opponents saying the N-word because they didn't think the panel would take it under consideration. In attempting to learn more about what had occurred (or why the adults weren't called at any point during this debate) one of the critics proceeded to tell me they wished the other team had pretended they didn't say it.
- In a debate with a Black team defending that emancipation never arrives for Black folk, that the 2AC argument that the negative's deployment of the Ericson 2003 evidence proved affirmative uniqueness because it was the 5th edition of book initially published in 1961, was unpersuasive because clearly the revisions had "removed the racism from it."
- In every Black debater I've ever met despising the word "Asinine," because of its frequency of in T debates and weaponization to make Black debaters feel stupid and pointless.
- In Black debaters defending reparations being told "murdering white people was inadequate," because apparently that's what reparations entails.
- In every assumption or microaggression I've seen, like telling Black debaters they "sound like a minstrel show," or "they should make an attempt to be more presentable," assuming that they don't read, or labelling them as hostile when they defend themselves from any of the above.

These are neither "important moments" nor "one-off events" – they are the continued and ongoing reality of what it means to be Black and debate. All these events outwardly bothered me more than Elijah, Willie, Carlos, Devane, Nicole, David, Ryan, Chris, Temitope, or Christal ever showed, but it's not because they didn't care – it's because they couldn't, at risk of making these situations worse. It's a twisted form of privilege that the only white member of the team, the only one who isn't directly harmed by the above examples, is also the only one that the community would allow to be upset at harm happening to its Black debaters. But this is only what the Chorus is singing despite of. I spent

several years in preround prep with this squad and even had the incredible opportunity to spend two weeks abroad with them as part of a debate trip in coordination with iDebate Rwanda last year. While I might not have used the phrase “Black Chorus” to describe these experiences, I do think it’s an apt description of a phenomenon that I can certainly confirm exists. There aren’t places, but people I’ve heard it in:

- In echolocating Devane at tournaments, because he’s busy being a social butterfly and brightening other rooms with his presence but forgot half his shit back at the table we were working at.
- In listening to Nicole whenever she speaks to a crowd, awestruck at her ability to intertwine a command of authority with an invitation for peace to always say exactly what she means.
- In talking through hypothetical arguments late at night with Elijah, knowing I’ll always walk away mind-blown by something I’ve literally never thought of before and thinking I still have a lot to learn about debate.
- In preparing Rutgers teams in preround with Willie, who is certainly one of the most brilliant coaches in the history of this activity and yet hasn’t been given the respect he’s earned. (“MmmHhhmm”)
- In crying on the phone for 2 hours with David when his partner quit, because he’s the single most talented debater I’ve ever worked with and I was sorry we couldn’t make his senior season happen for him.
- In meeting Temitope, and watching you transform from someone super skeptical of the scruffy white man you picked up at the airport into a little sister I’d do anything for. Having the opportunity to support you and David teaching a classroom together is the fullest my heart has been as an educator.

And I know that this isn’t a comprehensive summary of the entirety of the Black Chorus but just the parts that I’ve gotten to listen to. I hear snippets of it through the hallways in between rounds, in the debaters passing on stories of Black victories in debate, and in the silence that surrounds certain people and events that have caused pain in the past. I genuinely hope that Wake Forest was wrong about their uniqueness argument in this debate. The reactions of the community and my experiences in it don’t make me think that they are. I hope this plea involves serious reflection on our own relationships to debate and a reevaluation of what kind of space we should be moving forward. And while I don’t have all the answers on what that looks like or what methods we need to deploy to enact those kinds of changes, I am thoroughly convinced that the first step to doing so is to start listening.

Malsin

Congratulations to Wake Forest RT on winning the 2023 NDT. Your accomplishments this year are incredible, and I hope you are very proud.

Before turning to the decision, I want to say a few words about Kelly and Rafael—the fiercest competitors we faced this year. Kelly, I remember you as a young student at the DDI, and your talent and grit were evident even then. I'm not sure anyone will ever achieve anything as hardcore as earning a First Round debating through the nights in Taiwan. You stepped up to the plate this year, and the results speak for themselves.

I could offer Rafael a lot of compliments about his abilities, and he deserves them all. He is a generational talent who I consider myself lucky to have gotten to judge over the years. I mostly want to say that I don't think anyone can question that Rafael has been the hardest-working student in debate these past few years, and that means a lot to those of us who make debate our careers. Congratulations on everything you've achieved—you earned the hell out of it.

Now, the debate.

This debate was a struggle to judge, because while I firmly believe that there is a role for many forms of critique in the NEG arsenal, I struggle to see the value in a model of debate competition that puts someone like me in a position of arbitrating the debate community writ large or the moments of antiblackness within that community referenced by Wake. Simultaneously, I think that Michigan made a bold strategic call by taking an absolutist position against Wake's argument, one oriented around a stringent framework interpretation that would exclude the NEG position entirely, rather than a substantive push against the NEG strategy. The chosen approach could have worked if the AFF had successfully won the impact comparison debate, but as described below, I did not think they did.

The shortest version of my ballot is that I did not think Michigan won sufficient offense. I think that the NEG is winning that this is a debate about debate, and that their vision of debate is on-balance preferable to the AFF's for its implications on the debate community. Both teams agree that we are comparing and evaluating "models" of debate, and I think Wake has both offensive reasons that the NEG model is good as well as a robust set of arguments against the AFF's offense in favor of their model, while I think the AFF does not win adequate offense either for their model or against the NEG's.

The 2AR goes for a framework argument and a permutation. The implication of winning the framework argument isn't clearly articulated by the end of the debate, but I can surmise that it would mean evaluating the debate through the lens of the 2AC interpretation (imagine hypothetical policy implementation of the AFF plan). Obviously, if this is to be the frame for evaluation, the AFF would win, since the desirability of the plan is not litigated in this debate, so the plan is presumptively a good idea. The problem is that I don't think Michigan wins a net-offensive reason that this must be the way we think about this debate in light of some macro-arguments about the debate community that I think the NEG is winning. I also don't think Michigan wins (or really goes for) an offensive reason that the NEG's model of debate is problematic/bad.

The primary argument I think Wake wins is a sort of "try or die" assessment of debate writ large (phrased primarily as a "uniqueness" argument). We hear repeatedly about the dearth of Black women in the community and about the loss of numerous debate programs. The ballot allegedly "resolves" these issues by embracing the legacy of Black debate in the symbolically meaningful NDT finals. Even if I have some skepticism about the ballot's ability to achieve those ends (and I certainly do), the truth of the community's shrinking size and its representational problems make it difficult to say that we should do nothing about these issues in the absence of a bigger push from the AFF about the method by which we go about this. I also think Wake is winning that they have a better "spillover" claim for the implications of voting NEG than Michigan does for voting AFF. The 2NR says that these 5 ballots represent a commitment to the community, and the AFF never really responds to this framing. The NEG's impact arguments are associated with the ways in which the community could be more inclusive and sustainable.

The first impact argument that Michigan goes for in defense of their framework interpretation is fairness. It's difficult for fairness to outweigh an impact claim about the very foundations of the activity, and the 2NR explicitly says that if there is no community there can be no fairness or clash. I don't have a 2AR response to this argument, which essentially inverts the "procedural fairness first" paradigm. I do have the 2AR saying that a negative ballot "doesn't undo antiblackness, and thinking that it does is asinine." I think that 1) this argument needs more development and implication—I need to know why this is true, and why it is actively counterproductive to view the ballot in this way. The argument is made defensively and briefly, when it needs to be offensive and form a core component of the AFF's approach against a strategy like this one. 2) As phrased, this solvency takeout doesn't respond to the thesis of Wake's argument, which as I understand it is not that voting NEG reverses particular instances of antiblackness, but rather that doing so endorses/embraces Black debate in a way that facilitates its continued existence.

The second impact argument that Michigan makes in favor of their framework argument is a defense of Fiat for the skills inculcated by the practice of imagining policy outcomes in the context of nuclear AI. I don't think this impact is compared to the NEG's (while again, I think the NEG is saying that their impacts turn the AFF's). I also think the 2NR has an argument about why the AFF's model of debate doesn't get exported, while the NEG's does, because of the performative nature of the NEG's argument. Finally, I

think the AFF's access to the "fiat good" offense is tenuous, because the NEG's model—while it certainly does not care about Fiat in this debate—does not necessarily exclude the discussions that the AFF wants to have. I understand that we are evaluating competing models, but I don't see anywhere that the NEG says that debating about plans has no possible place in their vision of debate—rather that the AFF model won't actually be realized beyond this particular debate, while the NEG vision can be actualized by honoring the legacy of Black debate. The negative impacts to the NEG's choice not to rejoin the 1AC in this debate are not articulated.

I don't think the AFF gets a permutation. The NEG wins that the performativity of the 1NC/negative position cannot be captured by the affirmative. Dallas summarized this problem along the lines of "The AFF doesn't perform," which is true, though it's unclear what "performance" would have satisfied the conditions to produce a legitimate permutation. I think the AFF needs to tie in their "burden of rejoinder good" arguments here, and again, make them offensive. The AFF tells me not to accept a forced choice between the 1AC and the 1NC, but doesn't explicate the negative implications of positing the decision as a forced choice. Again, the argument is phrased defensively rather than offensively. Relatedly, there is no net benefit articulated to voting for the permutation. It is just phrased as "you can do both/no mutual exclusivity," but the NEG convinces me that I cannot simply "do both" in light of the performativity of the position.

I think the AFF needs to go for offense about the troubling implications of endorsing the NEG's vision for what it means to vote in a particular way in this debate. There are a couple of moments in the debate where Michigan gestures at the notion that raising or "inflating" the stakes of the ballot beyond a win and a loss is troubling, but those arguments never get beyond a sentence. What are the types of debates that are incentivized by the model that views the ballot in this way, and why are they problematic? Rather than the 2AR's litany of examples about how Wake also cares about competition/fairness, we should hear about why those inherent competitive incentives distort the possibility of inclusivity that Wake seems to be trying to achieve. I also think there is an argument to be made about the homogenization of Black debate in the NEG's characterization of it. Michigan seems to accept the premise that the "Black chorus" speaks for all of Black debate, and I think that idea is highly contestable.

I also think that in this debate, Michigan could have been better served by a more narrowly tailored framework argument that recognizes the way in which many critical arguments ARE examples of important rejoinder. This could be coupled with a push on the idea that arguments focusing on individuals as community members, or treating individual debaters as stand-ins for a larger collective, ought not form the basis for deciding a particular debate, even (or especially!) one with as much symbolic significance as the NDT finals.

Please feel free to follow up with any questions.

Perkins*

People refer to debates such as this as a clash of civilizations. I suppose there is some truth in that characterization, but I found this debate more of a clash of styles, with powerful rhetoric matched against superior line-by-line debating.

I think the affirmative wins for two reasons. First, is the negative argument competitive? Does it meet the basic negative burden of rejoinder? The affirmative advances its theory of competition in the 2AC: the negative must present a forced choice, not simply another different advocacy. I don't really understand what competing theory the negative offers. Yes, it's a debate about debate, but that does not absolve the negative of the burden of rejoinder, the burden of advancing an argument which forces us to choose.

There is no forced choice here. No reason is advanced as to why one can't love the poem, worship the idea of a safe space for Black Debate, but still advocate that we not let a bunch of computers kill us all. What reason could there be?

I agree that it is troubling that the affirmative team never manages to full-throatedly endorse The Chorus, or to match the eloquence of the negative team's appeal. But the bottom line is that a failure to perform the negative advocacy doesn't make the latter competitive.

The negative suggests the affirmative is not genuine in its casual endorsement of The Chorus and Black Debate generally. The 1AR suggests the negative might not be so genuine either; I have that totally dropped in the 2NR. I get that the negative debaters seem very genuine, but who can really know what a debater really believes? In fact, why should it matter? Is the role of the judge to evaluate the character of the advocates, or merely the quality of their arguments?

The second reason the affirmative wins is the question of fiat and the role of the ballot. The negative makes the standard offensive argument that the affirmative plan isn't going to happen, while the impacts the negative discusses are real, ongoing problems in our community which must be addressed. The 1AR is quite careful here, advancing a number of arguments defending fiat as thought experiments, etc., but also makes the argument very clearly that the negative advocacy isn't going to fix anything either. The 2NR reiterates no fiat, but abjectly fails to explain any hint of solvency for the negative advocacy. Not a shred of red ink here at all! And how could this case be made? Will social relations in the community be improved by, "Fuck you, you can't ask me shit?" Will this debate on UTube persuade some administrators to restore Emporia's debate budget? Forgive my skepticism, but this doesn't seem credible.

It therefore seems that neither side is really going to fix anything or save the world here. So, who wins? It seems to me that the team that does a better job of defending the utility of their scholarship has a huge advantage. The affirmative read and extended evidence saying that everybody, but especially young scholars, should pay close attention to the risks of accidental war, and learn about the mechanics of how to avoid it. Was there some evidence read by the negative that extolled the virtues of their scholarship? What scholarship was that, precisely? Only one team did any new research for this debate, only one team tried to learn anything new. If the ballot can't fix anything, it can at least reward the best scholarship producing the best arguments. Losing the "no fiat" debate is far more damaging to the negative.

Dallas Perkins

Stannard

Congratulations to Kelly Phil and Rafael Pierry of the University of Michigan, and to Iyana Trotman and Tajai Robinson of Wake Forest University, for advancing to the final round of the 2023 National Debate Tournament, and for some of the greatest regular season records I have ever seen. It was a real honor to judge this debate

I voted negative for Wake Forest. I think the negative controls the foundational framework argument (that this is a debate about the debate community), the uniqueness on that question (the ongoing and worsening --or at least not improving-- situation of Black students in the debate community), the impacts to that question (Black debaters risking their lives, experiencing alienation, being excluded or subject to unfair burdens), and the distinction between the negative's advocacy and the permutation and benefits of the former. The negative's compromise, "Affirmative's framework works in every other debate except this one" is not adequately answered by the affirmative, and because of the negative's work on uniqueness, is a valid distinction as I see it.

I don't think voting affirmative is necessary to accrue the benefits of discussing AI or nuclear policy. And, I think that the 1NC was not just a call to weigh the plan versus the alternative, but a performative call for the debate community (and in this instance the affirmative) to dwell in the performative and ethical space of the "chorus," the self-identified dissidents of the community, and thus there was an unrefuted burden on the affirmative to iterate their arguments in a way that demonstrated the desirability, and even the possibility, of the permutation--the most obvious way to do this would have been some kind of self-consciously and affect-centered performativity.

There is a line in the negative's poem: "If you don't understand us and what we've been through, then you probably wouldn't understand what this moment is about." The negative is way ahead on the uniqueness of "this moment."

The affirmative could have been more explicit and clear about a few things--the offense for their framework (possibly which could also address the uniqueness question), the possibility that both chorus-affirmation and plan-affirmation could be achieved and meet the respective impacts of both frameworks. Importantly, I think the affirmative needed to provide a model of how the permutation works. I see the 1NC as a call to engagement. A permutation of that engagement would have been to dwell at least for a time in the world of the 1NC, talking about the debate community in a concrete and specific way rather than just as a conduit for portable skills in policy analysis.

The affirmative needed to situate its various analogical models into the debate space. The 2AC did not argue that ballot was key to actualize affirmative advocacy--this is a predictable inquiry, debates right now are full of such questions--like, what does the judge have to do to build a conduit between the speech act of the 1AC and the external world? Even (expository extension of and not just mentioning) cards about policy deliberation would have helped. And in fact there was evidence the affirmative could have really spent a lot of time extending, the Offerd card on nuclear policy and empathy, the Nash evidence (could possibly have won the debate, it's a long and detailed card engaging directly with the Black critique of legal imaginaries), or the James evidence, which is offense against the negative

framework, possibly a "construction of resistance as artistic expression [that will] problematize political agency."

The Malik "things are getting better" evidence doesn't apply to debate and isn't transposed by the affirmative into the debate space. I don't think the negative ever says the ballot is a "referendum on whether Black people belong in debate" in the way the affirmative characterizes it. The negative's advocacy revolves around a recognition that, having been "let in" only hesitatingly and on white colonialist terms, they are still subject to violence and exclusion.

The affirmative's portable skills and portable empathy arguments feel vague (there was a lot of room to make them more concrete or even personal, which would have been engagement with negative affect), which gives some credence to the arguments in the negative block about how we don't need to vote affirmative (at least in the final round of the NDT) to see those skills developed. Moreover, discussions about nuclear policy may generate empathy and care, but how does this affirmative generate empathy and care in this debate space?

Let me end with two observations. First is that the debate community has become less "performative" than it was 10-15 years ago, and this may have limited the affirmative's own perception of their available options for engagement with the alternative. When performative debate played a stronger role in critical arguments, policy-oriented teams would sometimes offer permutations that were to some degree performative. In this instance, the negative also specifically invited the affirmative to participate in the alternative, which means I would have wanted to both reward the affirmative for such engagement and protect the affirmative from a negative team that might move the goalposts in the negative block or later.

Second, I was politically and emotionally affected by this debate in a way that favored the negative, although not in an exclusive way. In making this decision, I was comfortable deferring to what I thought were unanswered or under-covered arguments in the debate, focusing on places where the negative invested a lot of time and argumentation, but I don't think it would be intellectually honest of me to say that this was the full extent of how I processed my decision. There was also affect and aesthetic -- a call to action in a particular form and voice -- that elevated the negative's arguments, and a deeply personal lamentation that made the negative's strategic narrative knock more sharply on my mind. These considerations are inseparable from any evaluation of the content and relative weight of each side's arguments. Still, I think if one team would have had "affect only" and the other team were technically ahead on arguments, I'd have gone with the arguments. As it was, the negative seemed ahead on important arguments, and also the affect and aesthetic of the debate.

Thank you again to both teams and best of luck in both debate and non-debate lives to all of you.

Stidham

Recognition

Congratulations to the University of Michigan and Wake Forest University on reaching finals of the 2023 National Debate Tournament.

It was truly an honor to judge this debate between two powerhouse teams, from powerhouse programs like Wake and Michigan. While I'm sure some of my facial expressions were consistent with the round's late hour, I was genuinely thrilled to have the privilege of judging both teams.

To Wake Debate – congratulations on such an incredible season. Two teams in the top five, an NDT championship, and a heck of a lot more hardware along the way. Wake achieved all of this on top of hosting the NDT – a huge undertaking and accomplishment.

To Michigan Debate – congratulations on such a dominant season. The back-to-back Copeland is amazing but not at all surprising given the strength of the Michigan program. I don't think anyone expected anything less than finals from the team who is basically incapable of losing a prelim.

To Rafael – even as a labbie back in 2017 you were way ahead of your time. Many people in the debate community have correctly described you as the GOAT and I can't imagine anyone disputing that status. It wasn't surprising at all when you won the TOC, and it isn't shocking that your reign continued in college debate. When I was looking back at old emails from 2017 camp, I saw one of our research group threads where I wrote: "Great job on the Natives Education Aff. You'll see the majority of the evidence in the 1AC comes from you. Keep up the good work!" Congratulations on one hell of a career, Rafael.

To Kelly – you have always been fierce, period. When I first saw the PP partnership for this year, I remember thinking "oh no..." because it was clear you were going to be everyone's (competitive) problem. I haven't judged you much in college, but have nevertheless enjoyed watching your meteoric rise ever since summer 2019 in lab. I found a bunch of old notes from your practice debates and redos, all of which usually involved me saying something about your speed and ethos. When I was looking through old lab leader gchats from that summer, your name was almost always associated with some kind of TKO:

- "Kristen and Kelly are yeeting rishi and joseph so hard right now"
- "wew Kelly is efficient"
- "yeah I judged them yesterday for the first time and Kelly just tore it up"
- "Kelly is really impressive"

Congratulations on a phenomenal season, Kelly.

To Taj – from value criterions to finals of the NDT, the Tajai Robinson story. While you may not be the first former LDer to do it, you are still one of the very few who have and you won't be the last. And that's because your success will undoubtedly inspire more high school LD debaters to pursue college policy debate. You went from competing in only three tournaments last year to reaching late elimination rounds at every tournament this year. That's crazy. If this really was your last season, you've done the community a collective (competitive) favor because whew, you are a force to be reckoned with. Congratulations on making history, Taj.

To Iyana – it is still hard to fathom that this was your first and last NDT. I'm not sure how many people can say they won the NDT as a junior and first-time qualifier – on top of being ranked #3 in the Copeland race. I did not judge you much throughout college, but I remember you explaining your future plans to become a teacher when I judged you at the Rutgers RR. Even without knowing you very well, I feel confident saying you're going to be an incredible teacher for the students who are lucky enough to sit in your classroom. You are one the best speakers I have ever witnessed. Congratulations on making history, Iyana.

RFD

It should go without saying that this was an extremely close debate.

I voted negative for Wake Forest to “affirm a duty this activity has to the Black Chorus”, per the 1NC's counter-advocacy.

Top level

The negative has won the following arguments that shaped my decision:

- a) Uniqueness + impact framing
- b) This is a debate about debate
- c) Embodiment and performance are key
- d) The role/impact of the ballot
- e) We have a duty to the Black Chorus

Beyond the arguments mentioned above, Wake was able to effectively neutralize most of Michigan's offense by making several smart, defensive arguments:

- a) Fairness? Impossible in this debate
- b) Other debates solve most of the aff's framework offense
- c) The ballot matters for us, but not to them or their advocacy
- d) Performance frames the permutation

First, I'll outline broad themes + core issues before discussing the more granular arguments mentioned above.

A large, structural issue for the affirmative in this debate is that we were too defensive from start to finish. This was present in speeches and CX and gave Wake a perceptual advantage. A secondary issue is that we missed important opportunities in the 2AC to generate offense and preempt the direction of the block. I understand this was a new strategy from Wake, which makes the 2AC's job tough no matter what. Many of the 2AC cards and arguments didn't end up having a meaningful strategic value for the rest of the debate, which put the aff in a difficult position for the 1AR and 2AR.

For example, the 1NC explicitly says "this is a debate about debate" which clearly sets up the block. And while the 2AC attempts to answer this in different places, it's only in passing. There is never a moment where the 2AC directly, and substantively answers Wake's large push for "this is a debate about debate." When it is referenced, it is still primarily defensive.

When I was comparing arguments and outlining possible routes to an aff ballot, it was difficult to find clear offense with an impact I'd be able to hang my hat on. The aff made a few smart and persuasive defensive arguments to Wake's strategy, but there was so little offense present in the 2AR that I was left thinking, "What impact does the aff want me to vote on? What are the possible ways I could justify voting affirmative? Where is the impact comparison?" I had a really tough time answering those questions.

The aff speeches spent more time explaining what they *don't defend*, rather than what they *do defend*. I was surprised the aff didn't talk more about the aff, especially in later speeches. Most of the offense that was extended seemed disconnected from the 1AC; we heard references to nuclear war and AI, but not nearly enough. When the 1AR and 2AR would extend something from the 1AC, it felt like I was rewriting tags. There was not as much **argument development** when it came to 1AC specifics; it didn't feel like I learned anything new about the aff's evidence or advantage throughout the debate. This immensely benefited the negative as they were able to make us forget about the 1AC, essentially.

Most of what is written above about offense relates to the 1AC. Another important aspect of offense/defense in this debate pertains to the 1NC, and opportunities to generate offense against it. While Michigan did extend and introduce *some* offense in the 2AC, there were a few crucial places where it was missing.

For example, Michigan never challenges or indicts Wake's notion of "Black Debate" or the "Black Chorus" in debate. Michigan asked questions about what the Black Chorus is and who gets to decide if the call was answered in CX of the 1NC, but this did not result in creating offense. Another example relates to Wake's arguments about Emporia, the uniting of the crowns, and the legacy of those victories. Michigan does not say much about this; there is a smart 2AR argument about the power of the ballot, but there's never a moment in an earlier speech where the affirmative directly challenges these core premises in Wake's strategy.

Specifics

Uniqueness + Impact Framing

The negative wins a central uniqueness argument about anti-blackness in debate, the lack of Black women debaters and coaches, the Black Chorus / Black debate community, and NDT finals. Wake consistently extends this argument and more importantly, they clearly explain the **implication** of winning this argument.

This uniqueness argument is part of their impact, and impact framing explanation. Wake does a good job framing the magnitude of this impact, even if they don't use the language of "magnitude" when describing it. They outlined numerous examples of the impact of Black Debate, policing and discrimination, and programs going extinct. The impact felt pretty huge by the end of the debate.

While I have some personal hesitation about the ballot's ability to resolve these examples, the affirmative does not invest much time here. The 2AC's primary response is:

- a) We are not personally responsible for or guilty of the specific examples of policing in the 1NC, e.g., we did not make those awful racist comments, and those should not be leveraged against us.
- b) Voting neg is a forced choice to resolve these examples (I'll discuss this more in the perm section)

These are fine arguments to make, but they do not sufficiently address the negative's explanation of solvency or spillover. Wake wins that a negative ballot in NDT finals does something **material and meaningful** for Black Debate, or the Black Chorus. This is also where they connect these arguments to the counter-advocacy and the legacy of Emporia uniting the crowns. The neg does this judge instruction in multiple places, but the affirmative does not match it in the 1AR. The 2AR gets closest when Michigan says Wake has inflated the power of our ballots, voting neg does not keep Emporia's program alive, etc. This was absolutely the right argument for Michigan to make and it certainly resonated with me. But this did not ultimately tip the scale because:

- a) it was so late-breaking, which meant there was such little argument development to compare to Wake's depth of explanation. I would be doing a lot of work for the affirmative to determine otherwise, even though I found a lot "truth" in this argument.
- c) there was no offense attached to this aff argument, but Wake was already ahead on winning a **huge risk** of their impacts. In a very simple offense/defense comparison, it is hard to ignore.
- d) I do not think Wake is arguing that voting for them will magically resolve all instances of policing or anti-blackness in debate. The 2NC, 1NR, and 2NR frame the ballot almost like a value statement on what the community thinks about Black argumentation, Black debaters, and coaches. They explain that Black debate *is* what makes teams like Michigan better – it forces them to innovate, read critical literature, and seriously engage with Black people in the community. This was a core premise in Wake's strategy that I do not think the affirmative grappled with.

Framework

The 2AR starts by telling me to vote aff to affirm the value of fiat. As I understand it, there are two components to Michigan's framework strategy:

- a) Fairness – the affirmative argues that fair debate is the only way to have deep engagement, mooting the 1AC is unfair, competitive incentives matter for both teams, debate is a game, etc.
- b) Skills -- this is where Michigan explains why it's important to debate about nuclear risks so students can be informed and fight back, nuclear war affects everyone, etc.

At the top of my ballot, I mentioned that Wake made a few smart, defensive arguments when answering Michigan's framework push.

First, the negative says that fairness is already an impossible standard for them in this debate. They call out the panel, and essentially say they do not trust the judges to evaluate the debate fairly because they believe the panel ideologically favors Michigan's approach. These arguments are introduced and warranted in the 2NC and 1NR and extended in the 2NR.

Wake disagrees with Michigan's argument about competitive incentives always overdetermining the arguments we read and decisions we make. The 2NC, in a kind of humorous way, explains how their choice to read this 1NC in front of this panel demonstrates the opposite. Not only does the negative team critique the affirmative's universal assumption about competitive incentives, but also just flat out say they don't have any hope that the judges will vote for their arguments anyways.

From my perspective as a judge, it almost seemed like Michigan was surprised or confused by this approach. This is certainly understandable as I think most teams would be caught off guard. But the affirmative never really adapted to Wake's fairness angle, despite Wake spending so much time developing these responses. Michigan extended their fairness arguments in the 1AR and 2AR without ever directly answering these 2NC/1NR/2NR arguments. The aff says (paraphrasing), "the neg still expects you to evaluate their arguments fairly, they would be upset if you arbitrarily decided the debate" but the negative's whole point is **they already expect** the judges to decide unfairly, and they do not believe they will win anyways. The aff does not have a reraise here.

Additionally, Wake uses their argument about Black Debate and innovation to turn the affirmative's skills offense. The negative's whole argument is that Black Debate is the precondition for critical innovation and better clash, which is why we are all indebted to the Chorus. This is where they mention Emporia vs. Northwestern and how so many teams have studied that round over the past decade. Wake says (paraphrasing), "Black Debate IS what makes them better" and this is also where they extend the 1NC's argument about the "whispers in your blocks."

Wake also introduces an argument about other rounds solving a large portion of the aff's framework offense. While this almost seems a little silly since it is the final round of the tournament and there are no more 'other rounds', the negative's point is that:

- a) The aff could have garnered their fiat-based topic education in every other round, there's no reason why reading or winning on this 1AC is **necessary** for them.
- b) Because there are no stakes for voting affirmative, we should have a debate about debate in finals of the NDT.

The 1AR/2AR extension of framework was not reactionary or specific enough to the negative block. The aff pushes back a little when the 2AR says we should think about the negative's interpretation holistically as a model of debate, but there is not much warranting here. When the 2AR extends the skills offense about discussing nuclear risks, it was still very light and not impacted out.

By the end of the debate, the affirmative does not have a compelling argument for why this should **not be** a debate about debate.

Permutation

The permutation portion of the debate felt easy to resolve in Wake's favor due technical concessions made by the affirmative. This is primarily because the negative block spent so much time covering the permutation all over the flow; the 2NC devoted a significant amount of time to the perm and referenced it throughout the speech, and the 1NR also buried the permutation with additional arguments. This ended up being a strategic decision on Wake's part because it made it so difficult for the 1AR and 2AR to adequately cover everything.

The negative wins that a permutation is unworkable in this debate because performance shapes it, and they have compelling reasons why the affirmative's performance is bad. Even if I had gripes with evaluating competition this way, the problem for the aff is two-fold:

- a) The aff does not provide the judges with a different way to evaluate competition, so we are left with Wake's judge instruction.
- b) The aff does not have a concrete reason why it is **bad** to evaluate permutations through the lens of performance.

The affirmative invests a lot of time in this forced choice argument. They describe their framework as additive, not exclusive. There are moments throughout the 1AR and 2AR where Michigan explains the permutation as voting aff to affirm the value of fiat and debates about nuclear risks, while also acknowledging the voices and demands of the Black Chorus. But I do not know how this answers Wake's arguments about performance, and they have functionally won an opportunity cost to voting aff. Michigan says (paraphrasing), "We are defending our performance of fiat, we are embodied because we are all impacted by nuclear AI" but this is not quite responsive. The negative has unique offense tied to them winning finals of the NDT. It seems like their whole point is that we must vote neg to affirm the duty this activity has to the Black Chorus because we are all indebted to the legacy of Black Debate. I do not know how voting affirmative for the permutation accomplishes this task. This is the implication of, "We don't owe y'all shit. You owe us everything."