

2018 Final Round Ballots

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June 18, 2018

Congratulations to both teams for an exceptional season and NDT. The season Kansas had is unlikely to be replicated any time soon, and I greatly enjoyed every debate I judged them in. Congrats to Georgetown as well; Natalie is a once in a generation debater, and David has to be one of the few first year college students to make it to the finals of the NDT. I'm thankful for the chance to have judged this debate, and sincerely apologize about procrastinating typing up my ballot; thanks to those who continually reminded me about the privilege of judging the finals and the tradition behind the ballot. Below are the notes that I wrote immediately after the debate.

March 26, 2018

Thank you for the privilege of judging this debate. I'm happy for Quaram, Will, and all of my friends at Kansas; you had an absolutely amazing season. That said, I am of the opinion that Georgetown won the final round of the 2017-2018 season. While the affirmative might not have had the most accurate language for describing the problems of health inequality, it does have the tools required for materially improve the lives of millions of people with healthcare and reduce rates of imprisonment. This is complemented by the fact that I didn't think the negative was winning much of an alternative framework (more on that later), which means the negative needs to win a massive link argument capable of outweighing the gains of the aff. I thought that the 2NR went for too many link arguments and didn't sufficiently win any of them; but in many instances the aff had offense against those links.

1) Abolition -> policing. The 2NR needed to be more descriptive of how and why this policing would occur; all I have is "abolition is bad ->white vigilantism." Instead of impact turning abolition, I think Kansas would have been better off calling into question how the aff leads to abolition, because impact turning it grants the aff access to abolition. After the debate I read through all of the negative evidence to find warrants about why abolition is worse than the status quo and came up empty.

2) UCC. This link was a non-starter for me because even if the aff lead to UCC (which I don't believe is the case) there is no reason why UCC is worse than a diluted Obamacare.

3) Alt right/Matthews. While I often find cede the political arguments to be less than persuasive, this ended up being a big reason why I voted aff in the debate. Given that the neg introduced the argument, I thought it was brilliant to both link turn it with the aff but also prove that the alternative links. First the link turn – the plan might provide white supremacists with job security but the aff also brings an end to the GOP by "breaking the Republican party in half." The negative needs to respond to this analysis with more than "it will get the base excited." While I believe that Trump's base is Teflon, I don't think single payer and prison abolition is something that they would rally behind. I also think that the aff argument of "we shouldn't hold the healthcare of millions hostage because the alt right would get healthcare" is persuasive. Now on the flip side, I thought the alternative would likely lead to more takeover by the alt right. The alt right has figured out how to use the tools of the state and have been effective in dismantling most progressive measures implemented since the New Deal, should the left just abandon that system? I thought the aff was persuasive on the need to take advantage of situations that can

confront the alt right – and the aff is one of those examples. But there is some risk that moralizing instead of taking action could result in worse situations than we are already in.

Given that I thought the aff was ahead on the link questions, the negative would have to win an overwhelming amount of the alternative and framework debate. I do not think that occurred. I'm not really sure what constitutes a turn to the "black matrix" or how the "black matrix" is capable of resolving either the issues of the status quo or the impacts outlined by the negative. In reading through the evidence after the debate I was unable to resolve these issues. This is also the portion of the debate where the "racial rape" arguments were made; at no point during the debate did I understand how the aff makes the conditions worse; this might be due to my lack of familiarity with the literature, but again was something that I could not piece together by reading evidence afterwards.

The ontology debate was something that also gave me pause, but I thought this debate was proof that things can always get worse and possibly can get better. Mostly this debate was too theoretical by both sides; particularly in regards to how to read particular authors of other authors. I tried reading the whole context of every card on this issue, but ultimately decided it was too interventionist of me to figure out what was going on with the Aranke evidence. In short, I thought the aff was in a decent spot explaining how historical circumstances can help determine blackness/anti-blackness and healthcare can be huge in changing those circumstances.

Brian Klarman

Abstract – Congratulations on an amazing season everyone! I voted affirmative. I thought the affirmative was preferable to the status quo and did not understand how the alternative could resolve (and perhaps made worse) anti-Blackness or racial rape (which currently exist).

I. Prelude

Congratulations to everyone for making it to finals of the National Debate Tournament. It was pretty cool to judge the last round of the season and it feels pretty special that a few of you wanted me to judge your last debate (or, at least, were not so put off by the idea that you took me off the panel). In other words, thank you all for this opportunity to judge, because I really love this activity (even if I am not great at showing it all the time and I am sure I looked extremely unhappy prior to finishing my coffee).

Before I get to my decision, I would like to make one note about this ballot. I am realizing that everything written after my decision actually happened is written with a bit more intervention than I would ever want. I apologize for that. The further away I get from the debate, the more my memory for the debate is reworked and harder it is for me to decipher my hand writing. It is possible that some things I mention and some examples I give were from cross-examination or earlier speeches and they are just the clearest things to me about the debate now, as I look back. That is all to say, please forgive me if I am misquoting a few lines of the debate. Without further ado, my decision:

II. Decision

A – Framework for Analysis

Before I did anything else in this decision, I tried to determine what the framework for the debate was. I fairly quickly came to the determination that this debate is a question of competing praxis¹. I have the 2nr making this argument after a brief explanation of the alternative in what I understand to be an extension of the framework arguments² made in the 2nc. I do not have a 2ar response to this argument, so I started from the following question: what analytic would be best to approach the world? That

¹I understand praxis (at least in this debate) to mean research methods and strategies that we have to interact with the world. This working definition seems to best match the framework arguments earlier made by both teams. That being said, it is possible that the negative meant this phrase to mean something different. One thing that is extremely difficult about this debate (and many other debates with extremely technical and/or philosophical language) is that small phrases that are used and extremely important, yet rarely explained (and when they are explained, the explanation is often difficult to flow).

²One thing that becomes slightly frustrating about most of the rebuttals in this debate is that order is quickly lost. This results in me having to piece things together in ways that I understand the best. It also makes it very difficult to tell if a set of 2nr and 2ar explanations and arguments are new. If it feels like some explanation of an argument being “dropped” or “applied” is intervention, keep in mind that such a thing is an inevitable result of the line-by-line order collapsing.

means I voted based on if I determined that the affirmative's research strategy and ideas of change are better than the negative's alternative vision of "unflinching paradigmatic analysis." That meant in order for me to decide the debate, I had to resolve three seemingly simple (yet preposterously complex) debates: (1) what is the affirmative's paradigm and how does it situate us, (2) what is the negative's paradigm and how does it situate us, and (3) which paradigm is better.

One thing to note about this: since I quickly determined that I was looking at paradigm and praxis (instead of plans) I looked at this debate a lot more along the lines of orientations toward the world than along the lines of "would it be good to implement single payer." In other words, it is possible (and, I take from the 2 sentence oral decisions given, extremely likely) that I cared significantly less about if single payer was desirable or not (and hence the alt right turn) than others on the panel. That being said, I started deciding on the case because it is where both the 2nr and the 2ar started the debate. Starting anywhere else just felt too different than what happened in the round.

B – The Case

There were three arguments on the case that seemed relevant for this debate.

1 – Abolitionism. This is, in my opinion, the central question of the debate (and heavily tied in with the critique) and yet got relatively little air time. If the affirmative wins that abolition can be useful, it is likely that they will win the world is not immutable, allowing them to win that the affirmative's methodology is positive. Alternatively, if the negative wins that abolitionist praxis is violent, they are likely to win that the affirmative's methodology is useless and net worse than the alternative and/or the status quo.

I say that this got little air time because my flow of the 2nr is literally (and I actually mean to say that this is all I have written down), "abolition bad -> white vigilance" (I think I meant to vigilantism, which I will use to reference this argument for the rest of the ballot). That is somewhat frustrating because there is not an impact calculus argument about white vigilantism in comparison to prisons. To clarify, if I were to determine that the affirmative's praxis ends prisons, I would have to determine what degree of white vigilantism is created by ending prisons and if that is worse than the plan. I have no such comparison made. In the debate I understand white vigilantism to be a negative, but not how harmful it is in comparison to prisons (which seem to be very dangerous).

That being said, I actually read the evidence in the document on critiques of abolition because this seemed so important for the decision. That being said, I read the evidence to see if the negative evidence was so overwhelmingly persuasive that the light explanation was acceptable. I did not think that it was. As I read the 1nc evidence, it says that abolition fails to solve because anti-Blackness exists. This seems to be some combination of case defense and an alternative cause. Just to paste what I see as the best portion of the Wilderson evidence, it says:

Any serious musing on the question of antagonistic identity formation — a formation, the mass mobilization of which can precipitate a crisis in the institutions and assumptive logic that undergird the United State of America — must come to grips with the contradictions between the political demands of radical social movements, such as the large prison abolition movement, which seeks to abolish the prison-industrial complex, and the ideological structure that underwrites its political desire. |

contend that **the positionality of Black subjectivity is at the heart of those contradictions and that this unspoken desire is bound up with the political limitations of** several naturalized and uncritically accepted categories that have their genesis mainly in the works of Antonio Gramsci, namely, work or labor, the wage, exploitation, hegemony, and **civil society**

I do not read this portion as saying a shift takes place in anti-Blackness that is net worse, just to say that the affirmative's methodology cannot solve because it is not a significant departure from the status quo. That is also how I read the other portion of the card that calls the plan a **"reproduction of an anti-Black politics that nonetheless represents itself as being in the service of the emancipation of the Black prison slave."**

I am also somewhat unsure what about this argument means that abolition leads to worse violence or where "white vigilantism" is coming from. The 1nr card (which is the evidence that seems to be extended here) is marked before making an offensive argument and just says: **"Blackness is a positionality of "absolute dereliction" (Fanon), abandonment, in the face of civil society, and therefore cannot establish itself, or be established, through hegemonic interventions."** The marking and cutting of this evidence is strange to me because it does not say anything about deputizing white people as police through abolition (although this article³ as well as other pessimists do questionably make that argument). The other thing that seems to be missing from the way this evidence is read is some impact to why the notion of abolition that is worse than the status quo, not just why it fails. For example, you could make an argument about the violence it does to revolutionaries (there is some stuff in this evidence as highlighted about Assata Shakur and the effect of anticipating violence, but not much and it never gets explained) or the way it prevents alternative solvency. I think there is an interesting quote in this evidence that is neither underlined nor highlighted that says:

I wish to theorize the symptoms of rage and resignation I hear in the words of George Jackson, when he boils reform down to a single word, "fascism⁴," or in Assata's brief declaration, "i hated it"

³Just to quote this article, but not in the card read: "white people are, ipso facto, deputized in the face of black people, whether they know it (consciously) or not. Whiteness, then-and, by extension, civil society cannot be solely "represented" as some monumentalized coherence of phallic signifiers but must first be understood as a social formation of contemporaries who do not magnetize bullets. This is the essence of their construction through an asignifying absence; their signifying presence is manifested by the fact that they are, if only by default, deputized against those who do magnetize bullets. In short, white people are not simply "protected" by the police. They are in their very corporeality-the police"

⁴Another interesting passage worth exploring on this might be from the interview "We're trying to destroy the world:"

FW: Many years ago, right before George Jackson was murdered, Angela Davis was being interviewed by a journalist, who asked her: 'George Jackson has said that America is a fascist state. Do you agree with that?' And what's important here is the next thing that she said, because this is the moment where we see how the Black psyche is coerced by the hydraulics of terror. She said that, 'if I were to say as Jackson did that America is a fascist State, the only way I can say that is if there were some outside force that was ready to come in and deal with it', and she referenced the Americans and the allies going into Nazi Germany, bombing the hell out of it, and turning it into something other than a fascist state. So what I'm trying to say here, and this is something that happens to all Black people including myself, is that you're faced with this person who wants something coherent from you, so her mind moves from the question,

Anyhow, apart from a large side note of evidence quality and what else Wilderson has to say about prison abolition, as this debate plays out, I do not really understand why abolition is or could be any worse than the status quo and the explanation given did not make all of the evidence that I quoted above completely relevant.

From the affirmative, I do have a constant articulation of the suffering caused by prisons that they may be able to decrease and ways that they can create some individual freedom from ending prisons. I did not really go through the affirmative evidence on the harm of prisons because there was zero contestation of it. It is possible that the affirmative's evidence could have gotten me to say that prison abolition pedagogy is really necessary and solves, but I found that the explanation by the 2ac, 1ar, and 2ar were sufficient to beat the negative's explanation⁵. As such, I end up thinking that there is a chance that the affirmative's praxis of prison abolition is beneficial. At the minimum, I think the affirmatives demand that people who are in prison or former prisoners have healthcare would reduce suffering without producing anything worse than the status quo. In other words, I concluded that (at best for the negative) abolition is not perfect, and it probably does not make the world much better. It is, however, better than nothing.

Before moving on, I will note that I think the negative should have some better internal link press between praxis of abolition and abolition itself. I realize that Kansas has an arguments about hegemonic movements failing and Gramscianism being unable to articulate Black suffering, but I understand those (see footnote 1) to say that ending prison abolition cannot end all Black suffering or even end Black suffering on its own terms, not as saying that being part of the movement would be net worse for Black people (again, why I really like that part about Assata Shakur). A rearticulation of the critique of Gramsci could go very far for me.

2 – Normal Means. To be perfectly honest, I am not sure how this could end up mattering in a debate where both teams agree we are debating praxis. I could be convinced that something about one paradigm would lead to policies that were always more restricted, but as read that is not what is happening. I am also not really sure why UCC does or does not solve part or all of the affirmative.

That all being said, I thought the affirmative was fine on the arguments that they can specify and that the lack of cross examination about this or theoretical push on why they have to specify in the plan made this unimportant. I am more than happy to vote on a fleshed out theoretical specification argument. It just needs to be debated on a theory level about negative strategy.

3 – Alt Right Turn. As with the normal means argument, I am not positive that this disadvantage to the plan is actually a disadvantage to an abolitionist praxis. I could see it as being framed as a disadvantage

which is a question of pure analysis, 'is this fascism?', and shifts over to the register of Lenin's question, 'what is to be done?'

⁵Once I determined that abolition was better than not, I found it unnecessary to read affirmative evidence. Had something else in the debate lead me back to a position where it would be important to resolve a scope of how good prison abolition was, I would have happily gone back to that portion of the debate. However, I never found it necessary to do. As such, the provisional claim that abolition is not great but is better than the status quo was sufficient for them to win.

to a universal or humanist praxis, but I did not have a connection there. As such, I am not really sure how this argument is supposed to relate to my decision.

However, I do not actually think the negative is winning this argument. The link explanation about job security is alright, but I do not know what the answer is to the argument that the plan basically ends the GOP forever, hence largely diminishing the violence that can be carried out by the right. The introduction of this link by the negative in the 1nr makes it hard to say that the two things are unrelated later on. The affirmative evidence has some rhetorically strong quotes that are not answered, for example, the plan “**would risk breaking the Republican Party in half**” or “**The mover on health care loses**” [...] “**Republicans could be at the same risk**”. Without more of a response to these turns, I think that the affirmative is likely to reduce the power of the (alt) right. This is especially true when Mathews is framed throughout the debate as something that would hurt Trump’s credibility. These are largely questions of evidence interpretation (or spin) that Georgetown just seems far ahead on. I did not read the Mathews evidence because I found Georgetown’s interpretation clear. However, even had I determine that the affirmative increased alt right violence but collapsed the GOP and Trump’s credibility, I am not sure how I would have decided. There is just no impact calculus done here. As such, it is extremely difficult for me to give the negative much offense on this portion of the case.

However, the affirmative made an alternative links to the turn argument on this portion of the debate that I thought was extremely persuasive and conceded. I had flowed that the alternative cedes the political arguments here and that was never answered by the negative. I believe the affirmative even read 2ac evidence on ignoring politics because of Trump. The affirmative successfully characterized the alternative not only as withdrawing from fighting Trump in the name of moralism but also as allowing all protections against violence to be eroded, meaning that the alternative seemed to enable some of the violence by the alt right that they were attempting to solve. I think this is indicative of where many of the negative’s problems become really clear for me in this debate and I liked the affirmative strategy of framing everything through the alternative. The affirmative seemingly made clear here that all of the turns on case (and offense on the case) linked as much (if not more) to the alternative praxis. This, I will note, is somewhat strange because it means I concluded the alt right turn had interactions with the plan where I think Georgetown was somewhat ahead (but I could see how one might think Kansas is had), but has no link to the affirmative’s praxis (which we could either call abolitionism or “non-reformist reforms”) and had links a lot to the negative’s praxis. As such, I think this argument actually hurts the negative in a way that surprised me.

C – Critique

1 – Permutation and Links. On the critique, I started with the links, as they appear to be the negative’s biggest offense, but to be perfectly honest it was hard to look at this page without thinking of the alternative fails arguments on the case in the 2ar. This also fit with the 2ar’s overall description of the alternative as the status quo, leading me to view many of the links and ask: “in comparison to what.” The issue with almost all of the links, then, was that they were all different versions of “the affirmative fails” or “you do not theorize anti-Blackness” arguments without an explanation of what another world would look like. While I think the affirmative is unlikely to resolve the issues of anti-Blackness because of its politics of compromise, the flaws of citizenship, the issues of phobia, etc. I just don’t understand what the other choice I am left with in the debate is (which I think was a very intelligent way for the

affirmative to frame parts of this debate, including the permutation which I did not vote on, but had this argument on next to the links). In other words, I viewed the links largely as claiming that the alternative was mutually exclusive with the affirmative, but without an argument that the affirmative was uniquely violent, leading me naturally to the alternative.

2 – Alternative. I have written down: “the alternative is a turn to the black matrix, this is a question of praxis, failure to do the alternative means racial rape is ignored and captivity continues,” and then an argument that abolition fails alone. I do not understand how a turn to the black matrix is a praxis that solves anti-Blackness or how it is better than the case. This is the only alternative line I found in the James evidence (Politicized black mothers, although pre- maturely silenced or disappeared through grief or death,²⁰ transform tragedies into a breach in democracy's concertina wire.) and I do not have any explanation. It is unclear to me what we would strive to do or how we would strive to do it with this praxis. I went back to the 1nc alternative evidence, but It is equally under-highlighted and lacks explanation. The entirety of the evidence is as follows:

During this period, I began to see how essential an unflinching paradigmatic analysis is to a movement dedicated to the complete overthrow of an existing order. The neoliberal compromises that the radical elements of the Chartist movement made with the moderate elements were due, in large part, to our inability or unwillingness to hold the moderates' feet to the fire of a political agenda predicated on an unflinching paradigmatic analysis. Instead, we allowed our energies and points of attention to be displaced onto pragmatic considerations.

This evidence, as I read it, says movements failed for not holding “moderates’ feet to the fire.” It does not say that if we started from the black matrix (or an unflinching analysis) Trump and the alt right would disappear or that anti-Blackness and racial rape would be resolved. There needs to be some explanation of this evidence because it does not speak for itself. The place where I could see the negative getting traction is the end of the abolition evidence that says:

The value of reintroducing the unthought category of the slave, by way of noting the absence of the Black subject, lies in the Black subject's potential for extending the demand placed on state/capital formations because its reintroduction into the discourse expands the intensity of the antagonism. In other words, the positionality of the slave makes a demand that is in excess of the demand made by the positionality of the worker.

However, the negative never explains the alternative as a demand upon the state/capital formation that is larger in scope or how a demand on the state/capital formation would solve. There needs to be some explanation of theory to praxis and the 2ar is excellent on this push.

I think that having little to no ability to solve any of the issues pointed out with the case in the 2nr leaves the vast majority of links fairly non-unique because the status quo is anti-Black and constituted by racial rape. Furthermore, the alternative’s distancing from demands and moralizing might make these things worse. Until I understand how the alternative does anything about this, it is very difficult for me to vote negative (at least without an impact about why the inevitability of this structure means trying is useless).

3 – Ontology. Coming to this after the alternative makes me feel extremely skeptical of what the negative would have to win in order to win this debate. I would have to say that the structure of anti-Blackness is one in which Black suffering is irrelevant. However, if the negative definitively wins the debate about ontology, there could be a negative ballot on presumption. Unfortunately, I think that the affirmative and negative explanations of ontology are difficult to resolve decisively for the negative because the negative keeps saying that the affirmative has dropped these questions and the affirmative extended this Gordon evidence as proof that politics isn't predetermined and is a question of commitment (rather than forecasting, which is to say rather than optimism and pessimism). As such, I do not think the warrant in this evidence was ever answered and I believe that change is still possible.

I know I got on Kansas' case a bit earlier about the cutting, highlighting, and marking of the Wilderson evidence from "The prison slave as hegemony's (silent) scandal" (mostly because that is, perhaps, my article written by Wilderson) so now it is time to give Georgetown a hard time about this Gordon card. The best part of this evidence:

Because human beings can only build the future instead of it determining us, the task at hand, as phenomenology-oriented existentialists from Beauvoir and Sartre to Fanon, William R. Jones, and this author have argued, depends on commitment. His concern also pertains to the initial concerns about authenticity discourses with which I began. **One could only be pessimistic about an outcome, an activity. It is an act of forecasting what could only be meaningful once actually performed. Similarly, one could only be optimistic about the same. What, however, if there were no way to know either?** Here we come to the foi element in mauvaise foi. Some actions are deontological, and if not that, they are at least reflections of our commitments, our projects. Thus, **the point of some actions is not about their success or failure but whether we deem them worth doing.**

That is alright. It makes the argument that you need to win that pessimism is not 100% true because things can always change, and we should focus on commitment. I get it. The argument is very intelligent. But that is not the card to read. That card is just okay and has little in the way of examples. What about reading the other Gordon 17 article ("Critical Exchange Afro pessimism") where he indicts how Afropessimism reads failures? There are a lot of arguments made in that article (and it should be well highlighted), but the best one in this context is that failure does not mean an act achieved nothing, as it sets up conditions for new success. As such, challenges like the affirmative's praxis can be useful to change our grammars⁶ away from anti-Black grammar.

On one other side note, I wish there had been some explanation of this Aranke evidence because it wasn't evident to me what this card was doing, but it seemed like everyone really wanted it to matter.

⁶This is found most clearly in the paragraph's surrounding Gordon explaining Afropessimism's "failure to understand failure" which concludes in a slew of historical examples that could actually be used. Just a brief quote (because I can't help myself):

Although no exemplar of radicalism, Obama's "success" emerged from Chisholm and Jackson's (and many others') so-called "failure." Beyond presidential electoral politics, there are numerous examples of how prior, radical so-called "failures" transformed relationships that facilitated other kinds of outcome. The trail goes back to the Haitian Revolution and back to every act of resistance from Nat Turner's Rebellion in the USA, Sharpe's in Jamaica, or Tula's in Curacao and so many other efforts for social transformation to come.

To be honest, I did not understand what I was supposed to be drawing from this card during the debate so the chances that I was going to vote on it unless it said something unbelievable for Kansas were pretty low. When I finally read the card, all I got from Kansas' highlighting was a summary of Wilderson's argument. It was not clear if this article was in agreement or disagreement with that. I also have no idea what this card was supposed to do for Georgetown. I felt similarly about Berlant. It might just be that it was late, but I did not understand what this evidence was supposed to be doing.

Anyways, I concluded the ontology portion of this debate with Blackness and anti-Blackness are not fixed but extremely likely in our historical circumstance. As such, I did not vote negative on presumption.

III. Conclusion

I determined that the affirmative praxis of abolition and non-reformist reforms was better than a negative praxis that I did not fully understand. It is unclear to me what the alternative does besides leave Black people to suffer and die. In order for the negative to win this debate, I would have needed one of the following three arguments: (1) an impact to participating in politics that outweighs the small amount of solvency that the affirmative has and is a reason that the alternative is preferable, (2) an alternative that is able to somehow challenge anti-Blackness, or (3) some alternative framework argument that makes the purpose of the debate pure description (for example, Wilderson ends one book with this comment that could be worth contemplating: "a concluding consideration of the question, What is to be done? would ring hollow") rather than praxis. Without any of those arguments, the risk of affirmative solvency is likely to outweigh the negative's critique.

On one other aside that runs through this decision, I would highly prefer fewer cards that are better highlighted, cut, and explained.

Good debate and if any of you have any questions about this debate or anything I have mentioned, feel free to contact me.

Best to all and thank you again,

Brian Klarman