



Racial and Ethnic Identity Performance in Speech and Debate in an Era of Division

Preparing for Controversy –
Hoping for Insight



Grounding Premises

- Speech activities foreground the values of self expression, freedom of speech, and civil dialog.
- Educators have a responsibility to weigh considerations of student safety in their pedagogical decision making.



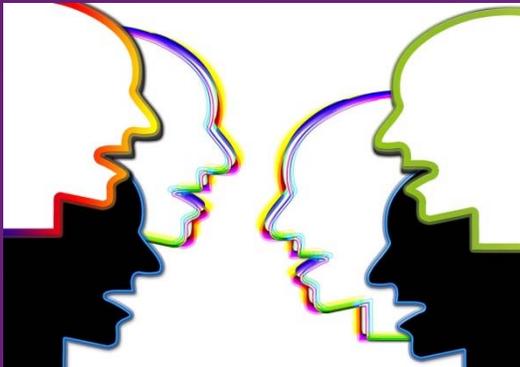
Phrased as a Debate Resolution

“When in conflict, freedom of
expression is more important
than public safety.”



Environmental Context

- Educational institutions are taking the pro-active stance of banning controversial speakers from campus in the interest of public safety.
- A resurgent extreme right is increasingly comfortable expressing messages of hate in public venues.
- Students are increasingly aware of movements such as “Black Lives Matter” and “Antifa” factions, and are inspired by their messages and tactics.
- Likewise, the “Alt-Right” has highly visible young membership. We would do well to assume that sympathetic students are in our classrooms and tournaments, too.
- Educational institutions are increasingly seen by the extreme right as perpetuating harmful values or pressing a left-leaning agenda. Parents and community members can be as disruptive, or more.



Competitive Context

- Identity politics in debate.
- Identity expression in oral interpretation.
- Civil rights/liberties advocacy in oratory and other platform events.
- Analysis of current affairs in Extemp.



Scenario Two

- Situation: Debaters are debating on the national topic – China – and the affirmative elects to ignore the resolution and present a rap performance that expresses the history of oppression of African Americans. Both of the affirmative debaters are African American. They argue that the ballot should be awarded to them as an act of reparation for past injustices. The judge agrees with the argument and votes for the affirmative.
- Complaint: The coach of the negative team complains that the decision discriminates against white competitors who are given a loss because of their skin color.



Scenario Three

- Situation: A Dramatic Interpretation competitor, who is African American, performs literature with significant use of historically derisive words, including: Nigger, Bitch, Ho, Darky, etc. Her intention is to convey the severity of this historical mistreatment.
- Complaint: Another competitor in the round, who is also African American, takes offense to the use of the words, arguing that they violate the state association's decency policies.



Scenario Four

- Situation: A debater uses a narrative in his speech to describe how he discovered his homosexuality. While not using graphic language, the speech references masturbation and sexual experimentation with other boys.
- Complaint: A debater from the opposing team lodges a complaint using the association's sexual harassment policy and argues that the discourse has created a hostile learning environment which has deprived him of a fully realized competitive and learning experience.



Scenario Five

- Situation: The state championship is at a University where a confederate statue stands. Student activists have organized to perform a “sit-in” on the awards stage prior to the closing ceremony. They want to demonstrate against the failure of the association to make a public statement of condemnation against the University’s continued display of the statue. They are supported by an activist coach.
- Challenge: How do you address the student demands and conclude your closing ceremony?



Scenario Six

- Situation: A controversial, but regularly successful student performer is competing with a highly charged piece about the Black Lives Matter movement. The student's success has achieved statewide publicity because of a local newspaper piece about the student.
- Challenge: A group of white supremacists organize a demonstration outside of the school where you plan to host the State Tournament.



Preparatory Insights

- How will you interpret your “decency” rules in situations where race, gender, and sexual orientation are concerned?
- What is the role/authority of the judge with respect to the finality of a decision in competition? Are there circumstances where a decision might be reversed? Do you have criteria to help make that decision?
- What is the organization’s position with respect to peaceful protest or demonstration by students? By outsiders? ... at the tournament site.
- Are there circumstances in which you would prohibit the performance of a speech for its topic or message as opposed to the chosen word? Do your rules equip you with the power to make such a decision?
- Does your organization have a published non-discrimination policy? If so, what do you know about its implications for protection of students from messages that might be perceived as injurious to their educational access?



What is Your Imperative?

