

THE BIG PICTURE

by Renard C. Francois

After reflecting on the generalities in approximately 175 L/D debate rounds I judged last year, I have come to some conclusions about the style of Lincoln Douglas debating that is seemingly pervasive in not just national circuit debate but also in the local tournaments. I shall touch on a number of subjects and issues in the following article. The veracity of these comments should be determined by the individual coaches and the debaters according to their interpretations of L/D debate, and if, in fact, you conclude that I am wrong then at least the article has caused you to think about the manner in which this relatively young event ought to be debated *vis-a-vis* the present manner of debating.

Considerably, the most striking aspect that I notice in today's debate rounds is the lack of examination of the issues in the refutation or, even, the rebuilding of an issue. All too often I am subjected to extrapolating information from one line sentences that are not applied to why the resolution is true or false. Too many times in rounds I hear that "because of the protection of rights we must affirm the resolution". This may, indeed, be a fine and winning argument, but I have no way of knowing the analytical acuity of the argument. The real question is *why* is this happening and I think I have a few sources for the problem.

Nearly all of the debates, that I have judged or heard, suffer from "issue interference". "Issue interference" identifies debaters who, with a great deal of cocksure ostentation, make several arguments on an opponent's point, many of which are asserted sentences; and, whatever the opponent fails to address becomes unfortunately and predictably the main vot-

ing issue of the round. The opponent and the judge feel obligated that *all* of the points must be given significant weight and attention. The ensuing breathless one-line responses are the product of this perfunctory strategy. It amazes me when debaters drop good analysis in their case for the sake arguing about baseless and superficial argumentation. This method of debate which some debaters, in Gump-like bliss, call strategy, only serves to make the clash that is necessary for meaningful debate effete.

However, this run-and-shoot style of debate allows many debaters to lose focus on another important part of debate--the art of elocution. The fundamental part of Lincoln Douglas debate is to persuade people to believe that your interpretation of a value conflict is correct. Often, the rhetorical skill is considered a waste of time and not what the big boys on the national circuit do. To describe this skill as no more than a woeful attempt at pity would be a gross oversimplification and lose sight of one of the most important tie-breakers in close rounds. Elocution is being able to use few words to express

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points, knowing how to allocate time, listening to the *opponent's* analysis and refuting it, and showing that there is a great deal of

thought involved. In short, the skill involves debating with a sense of purpose and effervescence that is genuine while at the same time subtle. The great debaters speak with an elegance that is impressive, and at times, when done well, awe inspiring. However, I find that chimeras have little to contribute in the way of grace, elegance or beauty in the activity. Debaters must realize that in an activity where there is no correct or incorrect answer the only way for a judge to be persuaded is if you convey a sense of believability.

Of course, I do think there are times when speed is necessary; it should be done only by those who are persuasive, articulate and lucid in quick thought and discussion. The 1AR is the only justifiable situation for a debater to proceed rapidly. By the 1AR, the dissemination of the major issues is beginning, but, by no means concluded, and the four minutes is prohibitively short for a debater to present the ideas in a manner befitting a fireside chat. Because of a lack of confidence in the ability to extend ideas or in the truth of the ideas presented, many students draw comfort from having more arguments on the flow, which often are the same ideas continually reworded. There is still ample time for the debater to rebuild and to refute, but strategy and preparation are essential elements in making the 1AR efficacious.

Just to say the phrase "in L/D we are to debate values" is far too simplistic to encourage people to change. I shall refer to this old wives tale--the purpose of each idea is to prove the resolution true or false, on face value. Take the time when refuting the argument to prove why the opponents idea is false or how it would harm society or

show how your idea would accrue better results. If your opponent does not bother to apply an idea to the truth or falsity of the resolution, be not afraid to tell the judge(s) why the point is irrelevant and what needs to be done to make it relevant. I would rather hear an opponent debate the major issues than to hear them try to keep up with the unanalyzed and inapplicable sentences that are slung back and forth.

For your own arguments take the time to extend the main arguments, which are the ideas that *de facto* prove the resolution true or false. I think that it is fine to make the opponent debate the issues and not let him/her run away from an issues oriented debate by spewing throughout their speech. If the opponent fails to grasp the point of your idea, then take the time to explain how the issue wins the resolution; do not waste time on the arguments which are applied to a misanalyzed issue. However, this does not mean that you are expected to say, "my opponent (