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Reflections on Voice: The Long-Term Benefits of Forensics

Educational outcomes beyond the collegiate experience are inferred in many research offerings within forensic journals, but not nearly enough work has been conducted in the area of forensic education to determine outcomes beyond undergraduate participation.

- Andrew C. Billings (2011, p. 111)

Copeland et al., (2015) write that there are various academic articles that discuss the educational benefits of forensics (see Allen, Berkowitz, Hunt, & Loudon, 1999; Billings, 2011), however, the majority of work, “focuses mostly on the facets of competition and trophies.” Academic discussions on the benefits of forensics are not something new; however, academic journals rarely discuss the long-term skills provided by the activity. The goal of this special issue is to provide further justification for forensics programs at the individual, cultural, and institutional level by analyzing individual experiences in the activity over a decade later. The following essays valorize, critique, and provide insight into the structure of the forensics model while providing various examples of the long-term benefits of engaging in forensics. My hope is that both coaches and competitors at both the collegiate and high-school levels find value, accessibility, and insight into how the forensics model produces epistemic structures that benefit competitors long after their final round.

In the first essay, Bryan J. McCann articulates how the manifestation of significant social and political events can force epistemic ruptures that alter the purpose and construction of public address. McCann notes how these alterations, in thought and analyses, are useful long after the completion of the individual event. Javon Johnson articulates the value of friendship, community, and the fostering of “black homespace” in the face of the ideological structure produced by forensic competition. The network provided by the creation of “black homespace” provides an ongoing and lasting dialogue among members and speaks back to the institutional concerns, at both internal and external level, of the forensics paradigm. Bonny McDonald

discusses her transformative experience performing about race and racial segregation in the south, particularly the challenges of ethically performing race and representation in the move toward dialogic engagement. Jake Simmons discusses his experience at a religious university and how literature and forensics provided an epistemic break that allowed him to seek new pathways and mentors who altered the course of his academic future. Finally, Alison Fisher Bodkin and Ben Gaddis provide tools for negotiating the competitive forensics terrain, while at the same time, offering insight into the long-term lessons provided by the rules and regulations found in forensics minutia.

My hope is that the essays in this special issue serve as instructive models for how to approach forensics competition, while at the same time, offering arguments about the long-term benefits of engaging in the act. It is a common saying for those who competed or coached that “forensics changed my life,” and I believe the following essays point to how those changes manifest and continue to inform each scholar long after the competition has ended.

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 Texas Speech Communication Journal

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Speaking in Times of Terror: Discovering Radical Context and Difficult Questions in Forensics Competition

Bryan J. McCann

I begin, embarrassingly, with a cliché: EVERYTHING CHANGED AFTER 9-11! This is, of course, an eye roll-inducing phrase, for it was and remains ubiquitous following the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon. Nine-eleven represented “the end of irony” (Hirschorn, 2011), the production of the “melancholic citizen-subject” (Biesecker, 2007), and, of course, the beginning of the so-called War on Terror. For this brief essay, I refer to the changes that occurred in my own sense of politics and vocation as a 21-year-old living in central Illinois. The fall of 2001 marked the beginning of my senior year at Illinois State University and, therefore, my final year on its speech team. I entered my final year of competition with a sense that I was experiencing the dreaded “senior slump.” I was not sure what I had left to say in the context of the activity and was ambivalent about shouldering the burdens of leadership typical of successful team members during their senior year. However, the events of 9-11 prompted a reappraisal of my relationship to forensics and helped lay a foundation for my current roles as a communication scholar, educator, and community activist. Drawing on my experiences as a speech competitor at the dawn of the War on Terror, I argue in this essay that forensics, at its best, provides an outlet for the production and dissemination of radically contextual knowledge and, at least in my case, the rhetorical and intellectual enactment of radical politics. One week before the towers collapsed, I completed what I believed to be the final draft of my Communication Analysis (CA). The American Forensics Association describes CA as “An original speech ... designed to offer

an explanation and/or evaluation of a communication event” (“Event Descriptions,” n.d.). The standard CA applies a “model,” typically drawn from a single article in a communication journal, to an “artifact,” or the “communication event” under consideration. It is, in short, a ten-minute rhetorical criticism. While the competitive CA does not possess anywhere near the rigor of a scholarly article or monograph, I remain indebted to the event for, more than any other, providing me with an early sense of how one can apply theory to concrete communicative phenomena (i.e. what I now do for a living). For my senior year CA, I chose to analyze an article published by the iconoclast author Gore Vidal in the September 2001 issue of *Vanity Fair*. The piece, entitled “The Meaning of Timothy McVeigh,” made several, to put it mildly, provocative claims about the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building. The Oklahoma City Bombing was, up to that point, the most notorious terrorist attack on U.S. soil. Vidal’s (2001) article suggested that there was a federal conspiracy behind the bombing intended to erode civil liberties. Furthermore, based largely on his mail correspondence with the condemned bomber, he characterized McVeigh as an individual whose actions, no matter how forcefully we may condemn them, were grounded in legitimate grievances about the excesses of state control.

Vidal was clearly playing with fire, and I was intrigued. Six years after the bombing and several months after McVeigh’s execution, the events in Oklahoma City remained emotionally charged for U.S. citizens. Here was one of our nation’s most controversial men of letters rewriting the sacred narrative of a right-wing sociopath who savagely murdered innocent men, women, and children. Such a provocation struck me as interesting and, maybe more importantly at the time, competitively promising. With some guidance, I discovered an article by Phaedra Pezzullo (2001) describing “critical interruptions” performed by environmental justice activists that provided me with a model for systematically analyzing Vidal’s own interruption of this

traumatic public memory of terrorist violence. After several drafts, I concluded the speech was ready for the season's first tournament.

I intended to sleep in on September 11, 2001, but my roommate woke me with news of the apocalypse unfolding in New York and Washington. We sat and watched the television stunned by a scene that resembled so many high-budget action movies (see Baudrillard, 2003). As bodies fell from windows, towers collapsed, and the suspicion that Al-Qaeda orchestrated the attacks became more certain, I was struck by the concretization of so much of my armchair activism over the previous years. In addition to focusing my competitive energies on events, like CA, which required familiarity with theory and current events, I had a longstanding fascination with radical politics. I spent much of high school listening to punk bands and devouring work by the likes of Noam Chomsky and other leftists. I had even given some competitive extemporaneous speeches arguing that the likelihood of a terrorist attack on U.S. soil was directly correlated to our nation's violent imperial legacies in the Middle East and other parts of the world (see Johnson, 2000). As my thoughts gathered and coalesced with the guttural horror I was feeling, I realized that such analysis was manifesting before my eyes. Yes, what was unfolding in Manhattan and Washington at that very moment was horrific and unforgivable, but I quickly concluded that these attacks occurred largely in response to my own nation's many sins.

I eventually found my way to the speech team room on campus, convinced it was the only space where I could engage in a rational discussion about events that I, and everybody else, already knew would fundamentally change the trajectory of U.S. politics and culture. Subsequent experiences in classrooms, at work, and consuming national media confirmed my strong suspicion at the time that a leftist analysis of this tragedy was not welcome in polite discussion. These were, after all, times that prompted one journalist to call for "a unified, unifying, Pearl

Harbor sort of purple American fury” (Morrow, 2001). People did not want to hear about empire, blowback, or any other commentary that might be, incorrectly, interpreted as claiming we deserved this.

The team room, on balance, provided the enclave I sought. I joined several likeminded teammates in a conversation that oscillated between grief, rage, and analysis. Indeed, all three merged in our discussions, for none of us doubted that what occurred was tragic, but we directed much of our anger toward decades of U.S. foreign policy for providing men like Osama bin Laden with the evidence they required to mobilize so much anger in our direction. An hour or so passed before one of my coaches, with whom I worked most closely on my CA, entered the room in a daze. He promptly looked at me and said, “You’re going to have to rewrite your CA.” He then left to go home and watch the news. Admittedly, next week’s tournament was not foremost on my mind at that moment, but I immediately knew that he was right. My speech had suddenly become a living, contextualized thing that, if I wanted my last year in this activity to mean something, needed to speak to this difficult moment. I was, after all, at that moment, thinking through precisely the challenges Vidal’s incendiary essay reified. How does one say the unsayable in these charged times? How does one critically interrupt the emerging prevailing narrative around 9-11?

I promptly revised my speech and, in the process, my relationship to forensics. I spent the year using my CA to call for rhetorical strategies that created space for the kinds of analysis I thought we needed after 9-11, but, because of the tendency of a national tragedy to foreclose critical discussion, was often elusive. I also reexamined my relationship to my other competitive events and began selecting topics that reflected my emerging belief that reading Chomsky was not enough; I wanted and needed to say things, even if others did not want to hear them. I say

this not to indulge in any heroic pretensions, but to illustrate the ways forensics became a new kind of gift in my life. The activity initially provided voice and friendship for an awkward, queer kid from the Chicago suburbs. Now it offered what Rosa Eberly (2000) described as a proto-public sphere, or a space where I could engage in the kinds of deliberation and rhetorical invention that were unavailable elsewhere. While I do not want to overstate the activist character of forensics, for such work must also occur outside the speech tournament, this final year of competition became a training ground for the kind of work I continually seek to do today.¹

It was at this time that I also made the decision to apply to graduate programs and continue exploring the fundamental question of how and why difficult, often violent, topics resisted radical intervention. I was not through thinking about these issues, and graduate school struck me as an intuitive space for doing so. After discovering the work of my future dissertation advisor regarding therapeutic rhetoric, or the use of emotional discourses to privatize social issues, I drafted a master's thesis attending to the ways victim rights rhetoric emphasized the suffering of victims' families at the expense of deliberation regarding the myriad inequities of capital punishment (Cloud, 1998; Cloud, 2003; McCann, 2007). Upon completing my master's degree at Illinois State University, I entered the Ph.D. program at the University of Texas, where I continued exploring the rhetorical character of crime in public culture and helped coach the speech team. I also spent my four years in Austin organizing with the local death penalty abolitionist community. Working with other activists, as well as the families of condemned individuals, concretized my sensitivity to the challenges of making complex arguments about

¹ To be clear, while I do not believe a persuasive speech about a particular form of injustice occurring in the U.S. or elsewhere is an adequate substitute for community engagement confronting such issues, I wholeheartedly believe participants in forensics, particularly those from historically marginalized communities, can and do play activist roles in efforts to make the activity itself more just (e.g. Gamboa, 2014).

social inequality amid prevailing discourses that privileged the visceral, and quite real, pain and anger of murder victims' families and their communities.

Today I continue to work in the academy and, to the extent that I am able, engage in activist work. I continue to be interested in the ways discourses of crime and violence circulate in public culture, particularly in their racialized and gendered iterations. While I am no longer affiliated with a forensics program, I continue to believe it is an activity with immense value. For me, the rewards of forensics did not begin or end with my engagements of the work of a legendary provocateur amid the beginnings of a seemingly endless war whose legacies are mass casualties, torture, rampant Islamophobia, and the horrifying excesses of state secrecy and surveillance. However, the road that led to my current juncture, in many respects, began that surreal Tuesday afternoon in the speech team room. It inspired at least two insights that continue to inform my work on the page, in the classroom, and in various communities.

First, the best work, or at least the work worth doing, is radically contextual. Nothing occurs in a vacuum, and one must allow history's various conjunctures to guide, no matter how unpredictably, the processes of inquiry and invention. To wax theoretical about the musings of Gore Vidal regarding terrorism in 2001 without accounting for an abruptly changing world would have been an ethical, intellectual, and, in all likelihood, competitive failure. Similarly, writing and teaching about crime and public culture without constantly responding to the rapidly changing national conversation on such matters would yield utterly useless work. In the best traditions of cultural studies, and before I knew what cultural studies was, forensics encouraged me never to assume I knew in advance where a project would take me (e.g. Grossberg, 2010).

Second, the most meaningful and valuable work can, or at least should, scare the hell out of you. The months following 9-11 were often lonely outside the context of forensics. Central

Illinois was and remains a culturally and politically conservative region, and the national mood following the attacks was similarly so. I even recall moments early in the speech season when a knot formed in my stomach before delivering my CA out of fear of retaliation. Nonetheless, the memories of this year in my forensics career remain among the most vivid. The activity, largely due to my mentors, teammates, and peers at other colleges and universities, provided a venue for saying what I feared was unsayable and going down roads that, it seemed, would have been closed to me in any other context. In my current position as a rhetorical scholar and educator, the character of a difficult question or conversation has changed, but, in my best moments, remains a central component of what I do. As someone who identifies strongly with critical and cultural studies, I am fundamentally interested in questions of power and agency. Texts and Discourses that illuminate the nature of domination and resistance in public life are the ones that attract me. However, I must often remind myself to take detours that lead in uncertain directions. The impulse to dismantle potentially harmful discourses was not the real payoff of engaging Vidal's provocations through the contextual lens of 9-11. Rather, it was appreciating the necessity of asking uncomfortable questions. For example, it is deceptively easy to identify a flagrantly racist, sexist, homophobic, or otherwise noxious text and draw on a few theories to validate my first impressions. Similarly, there is little intellectual risk involved in using the critical essay to celebrate the brave efforts of one's favored activist organizations. I do not mean to suggest that members of the academy should not be in the business of identifying oppression when it presents itself in public discourse or illuminating previously neglected voices, but one can and should do so in ways that invite ambivalence rather than certainty. It is, after all, worth asking what made the words of one of history's great villains so enticing (Burke, 1957) or asking readers to consider how seemingly progressive discourses can be complicit in the marginalization of the

very communities they presume to defend (Chávez, 2013). These are not always comfortable lines of inquiry but, I am increasingly convinced, have the most to teach us. Thus, it was the space forensics provided me to head down uncertain paths that prepared me for what I do today.

Lest I wax too nostalgic about the opportunities forensics provided concerning the risks and rewards of radical inquiry and practice, I should make clear what may not be obvious to the reader: I am a white cisgender man. During four years of competition, no one accused me of exploiting my race or sexuality in the name of competitive success (e.g. Billings, 2000).² In my current capacity as a faculty member at a research university and member of several disciplinary organizations, I have been able to make a career out of writing about and commenting on matters of controversy, particularly the racialized politics of crime, without being dismissed or targeted because of my race (e.g. Locher & Ropers-Huilman, 2015). While forensics competition and academic inquiry have typically allowed me to engage in provocative and radical work, others experience these worlds in very different ways. Thus, in addition to adopting a radically contextual orientation toward forensics and scholarship, those of us who occupy either or both of these worlds should do so with an investment in making our most idealized visions of what we do available to and subject to critical intervention from, all who seek to call these places home.

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² I am bisexual, but never chose LGBTQ-related speech topics or performed queer literature.

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The Politics of Grace: On Blackness, Friendship, and Forensics, Or BFF

Javon Johnson

For Anyah and Cobe. May you find grace, homespace, black homespace, and the kinds of friendship grounded in a transformative politics of love.

I met my dear friend Rachel Nicole Hastings in November of 2001, when we were both undergraduates competing in intercollegiate forensics. She, California State University, Chico, and I California State University, Los Angeles, we had both made names for ourselves regionally and nationally and were set to compete head to head for the first time. Truth be told, she and I did not immediately get along. I was an arrogant competitor who offended her by yawning during her performances. Rachel was fierce, one of the few forensics people who challenged me, and intimidating me in a way that led me to cheap tricks in an attempt to gain an edge. We grew closer once Rachel moved to Southern California to begin her M.A. program at California State University, Long Beach. I followed suit and began my M.A. program a year later at my Alma Matter, CSULA. We were young, black, and critically un/learning the world together, and it was during these graduate years, as well those spent in our doctoral programs, when Rachel, this bad sistah, became my sister.

Rachel, “standing in solidarity with Black revolutionary womanists,” often showed me love and support by challenging my race politics with sharp and necessary gender critiques that recognizes how “forms of...love, as well as those of abuse and domination, have and continue to occur in Black communal spaces.” She taught me the critical importance of intersectionality and how it is a key part in dismantling systemic oppression. Whether it was bell hooks, Kimberlé

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Crenshaw, Patricia Hill Collins, Audre Lorde, Omi Osun, or any number of other people, Rachel and I talked whatever new theories we were reading as if they were the latest hip-hop albums. To be clear, we also spoke about hip-hop, which “functions as a therapeutic vehicle and a political engine” to continue with the car metaphor, “and debated passionately about its liberatory possibilities.”³ Rachel is one of my closest friends, perhaps my BFF even. No doubt derived from texting and Twitter culture, the term BFF is an acronym that stands for “best friends forever.” While I love this notion of lasting friendship, I want to riff on it to think about how Rachel and I were Black Friends in Forensics - another kind of BFF - who eventually became best friends forever.

Citing only Rachel Hastings’s work, this short essay pays homage to her brilliance and our friendship. Moreover, it is a critical reflection on how we constructed what Hastings might call a “homespace.”⁴ Thinking of forensics as site “where intellectual development occurs”⁵ the following piece briefly questions that very development, while considering the ways in which Rachel and I chose a performance of black grace to create a space where we could function in forensics and gain control over our own development.

Rachel purchased a brand new 2002 Mitsubishi Eclipse when she moved to Long Beach. She named her Grace, and like us, it was all black: black interior and exterior. In many ways, Grace was a performance of social mobility, of (an almost) arrival. It was everything us poor black kids could dream. We took road trips in Grace, drove to various tournaments, poetry venues, and so much more. Indeed, Grace was a black vehicle to get around, but black grace,

³ Hastings, R. (2009). *Black, blue and loved all over: Revolutionary love, ‘Seven’ and the ritual of spoken solidarity. Women & Language. 32.3 p. 17*

⁴ Hastings, R. (2009). “Sole/Daughter:” *Race, intellect and the process of creating black subjectivity. Liminalities. 5.5 p. 3*

⁵ *Ibid*

what Hastings might describe as a “racialized performative condition,” was the vehicle we used to navigate this anti-black world.⁶ And, like Grace, a relatively small black vehicle, black grace was both liberating and constricting in that it is “conditioned by a system of power” of and expectations placed on black bodies.⁷

Black grace is often a necessary performance of politics that allowed Rachel and me to strategically maneuver the forensics terrain. We understood too well that forensics was not always a welcoming space for black folks. While well intentioned, the compulsory desires to teach *proper* speaking is not only off-putting to many young and poor black folks, but also grounded in troubling race, gender, and class politics. The fashionable use of critical race theory and the hoards of white students who speak it like it tastes good can be maddening for people of color. When ethnics study ethnic studies it is not simply a lesson in card cutting; it is a lesson in survival.

Black grace, a strategic performance of respectability, a tactical choosing of exactly when and how to speak up against racialized injustice, often got us through forensics. When every coach introduced me to their newest black competitor, it was black grace that helped me to focus more on the new black kid on the block and not weird and messy racial issues at play. When Long Beach questioned why Rachel, their few black competitors, and myself all spent so much time together (after introducing us all of course) it was black grace that prevented us from blowing up on them. When ballots questioned why so many of our pieces focused on race, black grace was the vehicle we used to create a piece that questioned their problematic question. To be clear, I learned a lot of positive things in forensics, but above all it taught me the importance of

⁶ Hastings, R. (2009). *Performative decolonization: Critical performance ethnography, Rize, and the battle to articulate race*. *Radical Philosophy Review*. 12.1 p. 46

⁷ Hastings, R. (2009). *Performative decolonization: Critical performance ethnography, Rize, and the battle to articulate race*. *Radical Philosophy Review*. 12.1 p. 47

creating black spaces even in, and sometimes especially in, well meaning, progressive white spaces who far too often feel as though they are above critique on the grounds they are “one of the good ones.”

Building on our experiences in forensics, Rachel and I continued to construct black homespaces for the survival of our friendship and sanities. Since competing against each other for the first time 15 years ago we have been on a number of panels together, performed for one another’s institutions, edited each other’s work, leaned our shoulders when the academy was unbearable and have always supported one another. I am her first child’s godfather, a position neither of us takes lightly. These days we do not always talk as much as we would both like, life has a way of doing that to friends, but whenever we do it feels as though we have never taken a break.

Rachel is my dear friend, my sister, and, in some ways, one of my teachers. Here is to my BFF, to blackness, friendship, and forensics, to Rachel for allowing me to share in her good black graces. It has all been so life affirming and life saving.

Unperforming Racism: Performing Lynda Barry's *The Good Times are Killing Me*

Bonny McDonald

I am about to perform in the final round of Prose at McNeese State University in Lake Charles, Louisiana in 1999. I survey the audience: the classroom is brimming with people—Black¹ people. The situation is the first time in my life I am the racial minority. I am eighteen. I don't have the wherewithal at this moment to wonder how it is my life has always been so...white, but I find myself I feeling exposed, strange, awkward in my own skin. I am performing a first-person prose in which the "white trash" seventh-grade narrator tells the story of an interracial friendship. It is Lynda Barry's true story, and it echoes my own story of tense race relations in public schools in southern Louisiana, though I haven't given that history much thought...yet. I have never performed it for a group of Black audience members, and I find myself deeply self-conscious, aware of the careful eye contact I make with the twenty or so people in the audience before I begin as if to say, "Hi, there! I'm totally not racist!" At the time, that's how I think of myself—"totally not racist"—and yet I have a semi-subconscious sense that I don't know how to work this audience like I do a "typical"—that is, for me—a white audience.

I had the joy of performing a ten-minute cutting of comic artist Lynda Barry's *The Good Times Are Killing Me* all over the country as a first-year student competing for the University of Texas at Austin's forensics team in 1999. Barry tells the semi-autobiographical story of Edna Arkins, a young white girl who tentatively befriends the first young Black girl to move into her neighborhood. The two become friends amidst a tense racial setting, presumably in the early 1960s, sneaking their time together outside of the suspicious eyes of Edna's poor white family, until social pressure to fraternize in same-race groups at school tears them apart. As Edna explains, "I already know [Bonna] won't be caught dead talking to no little honky girl this year, and the same goes for her from me only backwards using the word I won't say" (Barry, 1988, p. 44). The performance of this piece marked a significant turning point in my life, initiating my awareness of race politics, my conception of white privilege, and my ongoing process of

¹ See Toure's (2011), argument for capitalizing "Black" and not "white" on the grounds that Black folks in the U.S. often cannot point to precise ethnic lineages due to the familial disruptions of slavery (p. ix).

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unlearning racism. The book moved me when I read it, but the lifelong impact the text had on me unfolded in repeated live performances before the sort of small, intimate audiences we encounter at forensics tournaments.

I want to document my experience as part of a broader interest in how the performance of literature may operate as a transformative social force. I argue that it does so largely due to its invitation of a hyper-self-conscious investigation of the performer's relationship with the audience by way of a text, a sort of whole-body *attunement* to the audience during a literary performance. In making micro-adjustments to accommodate an audience, the performer becomes aware of—and thereby may begin to adjust—her affective relationship with a given audience in a way that spills over into her everyday life. I focus here on a particularly profound moment in which I performed for an audience comprised mainly of Black persons—this was not the only moment I experienced epiphanies about race and racism during the run of this prose, but it is emblematic of many.

“My name is Edna Arkins” (Barry, 1988, p. 1), I begin. I have practiced the process of connecting with an audience: breathe, center yourself, make extended eye contact, react to the audience’s reactions. The eyes do not pry or push; instead, they must empty. Like a hand that grips a stone must let it go to grasp another, the body must drain its expectations to meet a stranger, a listener, an Other. A woman in the front row smiles invitingly at me; I start my story off for her, looking only at her, not at the crowd my eyes consolidate by their color. Her smile bounces off my face; my frown reflects in hers. I reach out to someone else, moving slowly from face to face, looking for openings, seeking connection, finding places where we seem to know each other and where we don’t. I allow space for folks to react, and I reflect the quality of their reactions as I proceed through my narration. Edna explains right off the bat that “In the beginning of this street it was mainly a white street...the houses went White, White, White, White, Japanese, White, White” (Barry, 1988, p. 2). I notice quickly that despite my apprehension, this narrative finds a particular traction with this audience. They are interested. Folks nod knowingly, smirk, humph, lean in.

I grew up in the Deep South in an educational environment infused with racial ignorance and white supremacist structures. As part of Louisiana’s latest half-hearted stab at desegregating the public school system, I was bussed for a special program nearly an hour from my home into

what I understood to be “The Hood.” There, my overwhelmingly white middle school cohorts and I received special treatment (highly qualified teachers, expensive resources, nice facilities) in an otherwise failing school with an otherwise 99% African-American student population. The situation was a recipe for racial tension, the reasons for which I was wholly ignorant at the time, not understanding why students whose school I just invaded might be angry about it. In the narrator’s unselfconscious blabbering style, Barry foregrounds a kind of white ignorance of Black culture and the complicated history of race relations akin to my own, at least as a youth. Edna describes one of her first meetings with Bonna in her signature innocently ignorant tone:

Bonna’s records had a screaming sound that I had never heard before...

There would be a man screaming; and I really mean screaming, and then

all of these people would scream back. She said the man’s name was

James Brown and told me that the song he was singing was called ‘Say it

Loud, I’m Black and I’m Proud.’ I had never heard of being proud of

being a Negro so I wondered was this a joke song or what? (Barry, 1988, p. 48-9)

The audiences I encountered at speech tournaments, including this one, operated under the assumption that I was performing this script in good faith—that I was, in fact, commenting on the main character’s ignorance as if I didn’t share it. Actually, I did share it, and this performance gave me the opportunity to act—and therefore find—that out.

I am worried how the James Brown bit is going to go over, but the audience laughs uproariously. I am relieved, but then immediately, doubly worried about the next line: the use of the term “Negro,” wondering if being proud of being Black is a joke. How can I say this in front of these people? I muster the affect of complete ignorance I have practiced for the character, but I find myself—the body of the actor beneath the character—blushing deeply, a blush incongruous with Edna’s genuinely perplexed tone. A great sense of shame rushes over me, one I must tamp down to get through the piece, but that haunts me later. I realize I am afraid of speaking about matters of race to people who are Black, that in my everyday life, I never have—not once.

The discomfort I felt in this round was a great teacher for me: I had some self-interrogation to do. Why was I afraid of telling this story to this audience? I became conscious that I had to manipulate my affect so as to communicate a sense of comfort with Black audience members—a labor I did not find myself mustering when speaking to white audience members. In effect, I became conscious of my own racism.

In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sarah Ahmed (2004) examines the emotion of fear as a key force in the formation of racial difference and of governance. Building off of Fanon's "Black Skin, White Masks," she argues that fear "re-establishes distance between bodies whose difference is read off the surface, as a reading which produces the surface (shivering, recolouring)" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 63). She locates fear in a moment of "passing by" or turning away from the feared other or object and toward the familiar, the "home or enclosure." She suggests that vulnerability—the openness of the body toward the feared object—feels dangerous since it is a space where the body and the world might meet (Ahmed, 2004, p.68-9). In the repeated close-contact style of performance demanded in the forensics setting, the sort of "passing by" Ahmed discusses may be impossible. To win over the audience and judges in this round, I instead had to *turn toward* them.

Throughout the year, the performance of the prose moved me into settings and situations that demanded my looking at people of color in new and less fearful ways and ushered me into many pivotal conversations about racism and whiteness with people of color. In one case, I had the opportunity to perform the piece for a public high school auditorium in my hometown where Lynda Barry herself was a keynote speaker and where students expressed having had similar experiences. I began to see that fear cultivated the distance I kept from Black folks and that the

adults, the institutions, and the configurations of public spaces in my life had nurtured this fear in the more and less overt ways Ahmed theorizes.

Every performance of this prose was an opportunity for me to practice talking about whiteness, race, and racism; and many were a chance for me to practice talking about these topics to nonwhite persons for the first time in my life. The prose created a space for me to practice seeing *other people* rather than *the other*; the reconfiguring of fear into trust necessary for connecting with audiences of color spilled over into my ability to “turn toward” people of color in everyday life. The performance of literature formed a bridge between me and folks with whom I habitually did not engage inside and outside of competitive rounds—a bridge I slowly began to cross.

The part where I perform Bonna Willis is coming up. She teaches Edna a few dance moves in their secret basement “night club.” Suddenly, I understand that I have no business attempting the “Black” affect I have practiced for this character. Though I have performed the piece several times before, in front of this audience, I am suddenly too embarrassed to try it. I make the call in the moment to use my own voice rather than the voice I rehearsed. When I perform Bonna, I focus my attention on conveying the playful, teasing quality in the line rather than the posture and movement I had imagined as “Black.”

I learned from my forensics coaches to split my focus between (a) conveying the content of my piece and (b) developing the relationship with the particular audience to whom I was speaking. In this case, I had built some trust with the audience by right of my careful attention to each individual, and I felt I could not risk breaking that trust by performing my concept of Bonna Willis’s “Blackness.” In the moment, I sensed on the corporeal level that a cross-racial performance would be inappropriate; I later understood that the performance choice I eschewed was rooted in a wholly unexamined stereotype of Blackness.

The choice to instead focus on the intention of the line is a step toward avoiding what Daniel Banks (2006) identifies as performances of Blackness in the tradition of blackface

minstrelsy (p.186). In his essay “Unperforming Race,” from whence I borrow the title of this article, he advocates instead a practice of *unperforming*: “stag[ing] contradictions in the discursive system of ‘race’ and raciology, revealing complexity, limitations of language, omission of history, un(der)represented populations, and contradictory subject locations” (Banks, 2006, p.192). Citing Plato and Heidegger, he characterizes such performances as *poesis*, “‘bringing forth’...a new understanding, a new reality, an alternative epistemology” (Banks, 2006, p.192). For me, performing Barry’s text brought forth a new awareness of my own whiteness, how that whiteness shaped my conception of Blackness, and ultimately, how my personal experience fit into the broader workings of white supremacy. My sense of unperforming racism, then, speaks to the transformations of stereotyping made possible by a process of reflexively inviting, adjusting, and complicating one’s conscious and unconscious practices of engaging others in the moment of live performance.

When I performed the piece in the final round at AFA, I could barely see the audience from the proscenium stage. But by that point, I had internalized the lessons I’d learned from a year’s worth of more intimate performances. The piece has had a lasting impact on my relationships, my involvement in race politics, and my scholarly interest in critical pedagogy. When I reflect on my time in forensics as a competitor, I am often troubled by its institutionalized elitism, sexism, racism, and other isms, but this experience reminds me that the activity has many potentially transformative spaces worth cultivating.

The story doesn’t end well. Edna and Bonna are wedged apart by their friend groups and even by teachers’ expectations. I find the scene of the first day of school incredibly difficult to perform this round. In it, Bonna hits Edna. She has to: all her friends are watching, but this is not where everyone thought the story was going: bodies in the audience stiffen, faces harden. I have to work hard to show in the last moments that I understand Bonna’s action as something larger than herself, a forced hand. Edna is the victim of the punch, but she is also the perpetrator of social violence. I want to show that I know that she is responsible for what she did not do, for what she did not say, and even for what she did not understand.

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Toward a Liberal Arts Consciousness: The Study of Communication as Ideological Intervention

Jake Simmons

“Wonder. Go on and Wonder.”

Faulkner. *The Sound and The Fury*

I was a first-generation college student, and my Mom had it in her head that I should probably be a truck driver. With little knowledge of university culture, Mom thought driving a truck was a perfect career path for me. I always had “impatient feet,” as mom told me, and driving a truck was a logical choice for someone who was adept at and excited about traveling cheap and often, especially in the late 90’s when a gallon of gas was roughly \$1.19. I could see the world that way. The idea, I admit, was briefly inviting.

As my high school career came to a close, I began to realize that I wanted something else. I

wanted to travel and see the cultural landscapes of the United States, but I wanted to do it in something besides a semi-truck. I did not want to work in the same way my parents had in order to make ends meet. My Stepfather’s hands always reminded me of why my desire to work differently was important. They were rough, cracked, and scarred from pulling wire through attics in negative temperatures or 100-degree weather. I learned quickly that there had to be a better way. He was always the first to remind me of that. “Work with your head,” he said. So, I considered my options, which, at the time, felt scarce.

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Liberty

“I seemed to be lying neither asleep nor awake looking down a long corridor of gray half light where all stable things had become shadowy paradoxical all I had done shadows all I had felt suffered taking visible form antic and perverse mocking without relevance inherent themselves with the denial of the significance they should have affirmed thinking I was I was not who was not was not who.” (Faulkner. *The Sound and the Fury*)

My cousin was attending Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia at the time, and the opportunity to travel across the country with family close was appealing to me. As he put it, “Anyone can get in. You just have to write a personal statement about your dedication to Christ and, of course, get a loan.” So, upon graduation, I worked as part of a cleanup crew on a construction site for an elementary school for a few months in the summer to save some money (which mainly consisted of me practicing my nonexistent karate skills on old sheetrock), sold my 1977 Chevy truck for two thousand dollars, and left Texas to start my collegiate journey in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia.

It was much harder than I had expected. In retrospect, my first generation college student identity started to become debilitating. Lowery-Hart and Pacheco Jr. remind me that “if FGS [First Generation College Students] want to academically succeed, they must stop focusing on their cultural identity as first generation” (p. 65). This was, of course, much easier said than done. I felt as if others had a recipe for success to which I did not have access. I lived on the fifty dollars a month that Mom could muster. I didn’t travel home for holidays. My cousin, who encouraged me to travel across the country, with whom I shared a bunk bed in a small dormitory, left college clinically depressed a few months into the first semester. After a long and lonely Thanksgiving break in my dorm room, I knew I had to regroup. I spent most of my time after his

departure in the library trying to find books to read. Books from the library, it turns out, are free. I settled on Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, a book that I heard mentioned by a person who I considered to be smart, so I checked it out. I needed a savior.

I found myself lost three pages into the text. I could not seem to comprehend the narrative style. I was in no way adept in reading books written in non-traditional literary modes and stream of consciousness was a whole new animal. I had probably heard of the purveyors of the style, like James Joyce and Virginia Wolff, but that did not do much for the first encounter. So, reading Benjy's nonlinear narrative, where quotation marks readily appeared for no reason I could then comprehend (which I later found to represent shifts in literary style) confounded me. I took the next logical step and found Noel Polk's edited volume, *New Essays on The Sound and the Fury* in the hope that he understood what I could not. I finished the criticism, dictionary close by. To no fault of Polk, I was still ill-equipped to take on the "quintessential American high modernist text" that was *The Sound and The Fury* (p. 1).

However, my experience reading the book was probably much like Faulkner's when he articulated, "I wrote this book and learned to read" (*Introduction*, p. 705). I read that book and learned to read. Burke describes this phenomenon as "equipment for living" wherein I maneuver to "direct the larger movements and operations in [my] campaign of living" (p. 257). Even though I was encountering disaster with Liberty, reading Faulkner helped me to make capital out of it (Burke, p. 257). My encounter with *The Sound and the Fury* allowed me to develop strategies for selecting enemies and allies (p. 262). My enemy became the fundamentalist Christian right who ordered me to avoid worldliness, an order that would eventually lead to incidents like Jerry Falwell Jr's recent call for Christians to conceal and carry weapons to eliminate Muslims. I knew I could not live within such a framework of hate. My allies quickly

became the more liberally minded sect of culturally conscious academics, a population that encouraged intercultural exploration and competency.

This enemy/ally dialectic was reinforced by my professors at Liberty. Growing up, I attended a Southern Baptist church with my father every other weekend. As a result, I was privy to the intricacies of Christian religious fundamentalism. But still, I was not prepared for the level of fundamentalism at Jerry Falwell's prized university in the late 90's. During my first convocation, I was surprised to hear Dr. Falwell speak about the ills of compulsive masturbation, secular music, and premarital sex. The terms were, of course, rhetorically grouped. I began to ask myself if I was at church camp or if was I a student of knowledge in the academy. The lines blurred often. In my freshman English class, I was tasked to identify secular bias in literary texts. My psychology professor, the area of study in which I had declared as an early major, railed about "homosexuality" and other forms of "mental illness" as simply "demon possession" that could only be cured through diligent prayer and a good relationship with God. Was my depressed cousin really demon possessed? Is that why he left? I sat through a semester of young earth creationist apologetics, a course in which the professor "proved" a seven-day creation period and a six-thousand-year-old earth. Carbon dating was "flawed" and dinosaurs were considered "off topic." In my "philosophy" class, my professor took a day to talk about the problems with nihilism through a gross mischaracterization of The Smashing Pumpkins shirt he had seen around Lynchburg that simply said, "zero." I had one of those unChristian shirts in my dorm room. I loved that shirt.

Needless to say, the rhetoric felt increasingly thin. I contemplated for a long time whether or not I was giving this entourage of fundamentalists a fair shake. In this contemplation, I started to skip class and listen to secular music in my dorm room while reading the classics. My resident

advisor put a stop to the secular music, through, by issuing me a demerit. My love for Paula Cole cost me \$40. I learned quickly that “[a]rt is no part of southern life,” as Faulkner said (*Introduction*, p. 410). I lived on \$10 that month.

As time passed, I came to realize I was not the ideal Liberty student. I wanted knowledge about art, music, and literature, a true liberal arts education, an avenue to being a better, worldlier person. After perpetual droning lectures about the sins of “worldliness,” I sought admission to West Texas A&M University. To my surprise, I was accepted. I left Liberty for good in December of that year.

Change

“When I was little there was a picture in one of our books, a dark place into which a single weak ray of light came slanting upon two faces lifted out of the shadow.” (Faulkner. *The Sound and The Fury*)

The first day of classes at West Texas A&M felt good. Few would describe WT as a particularly liberal academic institution, but when compared to Liberty, it felt like U.C. Berkeley in the 1960s. My biology professor talked about evolution and mutation. My English professor, who was the first woman I had seen teach in a university classroom, talked Faulkner. We read *Barn Burning*, and I saw reflections of my experiences with social class in the South reflected in the text. I was elated to be learning about the complexities of culture. For my term papers, I wrote about Plath, Woolf, Hemingway, and suicide. I was not asked once to consider the biblical morality regarding these prominent figures taking their own lives. I was not required to mention their demon possession. I wanted more, and just as hometowns can be black holes for old habits, I needed something else to keep me going.

I had done a bit of forensics in high school and I decided to ask around about a forensics team on campus. After finding out the location of the university forensics team, I walked the halls of the communication department (a department I did not know to exist) to see if there was an opportunity to audition. I met a dynamic and convivial man named Guy Yates who welcomed me with open arms. Years before, Guy had taught at Caprock high school, the school from which I had graduated. Before I left his office that day, he set me up with a scholarship and a few performance texts.

I quickly learned that the college forensics circuit was nothing like the high school forensics circuit. Everyone was stellar. Each competitor had put in months of hard work into the study and performance of literature to achieve something memorable and beautiful. I did not have much competitive success that first year, but I found a home in Communication Studies that would keep me motivated to work hard in my classes and to continue to study literature.

Guy retired at the end of that semester after a long and successful career in forensics. A new coach, Dr. Russell Lowery-Hart, took over the reigns. His style was different than other coaches I'd had. He was hyper-relational, and he encouraged me to select literature that spoke to me, and to my own struggles with identity. Russell introduced me to a whole new body of contemporary literature, a library of social and cultural voices that would transform my identity through performance. Russell asked me questions about my relationship to texts that I was forced to contemplate over several years. I still contemplate some of these questions today. I was suddenly thinking about sociocultural issues in ways that I had not previously considered. My interest was peaked, and I found a niche for a poor kid from the panhandle of Texas to develop that liberal arts consciousness that I was so desperately seeking.

My most meaningful performances were not always my most successful, and Russell reminded me that this was natural. I was to respect the artistic growth involved in the process and the performance and let the ranks fall as they may. Being quite competitive, I found my groove. The successes over the first year under Russell's leadership kept me engaged in the activity. One performance that sticks with me is my work with Tony Carbone's non-linear surrealist text, *The End of the Beltline*. Carbone's piece of short fiction was my first encounter with *contemporary* postmodern literature. This time, I had a community of people around me who were interested in literary criticism and performance. So, I studied that text until I knew it inside and out. Through the performance of Carbone's text, I found relationships, connections, and meanings within surrealism. I had new equipment for living. I learned to appreciate alternative literary modes and found performance to be an apt tool for analysis, criticism, and alternative sense-making strategies. Amidst the radical ideological shifts that I was experiencing in my academic and personal life, my world desperately needed some sense making.

Perhaps the most influential performance I had the pleasure to be involved with, one that had a long-lasting impact, emerged out of a bit of a gray area. The team was competing at a tournament in Austin, Texas. Russell approached my duo partner, Brandon, and I, and said, "We need to see a movie. Like, now." The theatre was just a block away, so we found time between rounds to find out what Russell had deemed so urgent.

The film was called *Twin Falls, Idaho*. It was about the relationship between conjoined twins named Blake and Francis Falls. From the write up we read in a local Austin publication on the way to the theatre, we assumed it had all of the elements of a good duo performance. The drama seemed fairly high, and there appeared to be humor, tension, and maybe even a tragic death. In the theatre, Russell, Brandon, and I watched intently. With the fear of the Federal

Bureau of Investigation imprisoning us for life, we transcribed the film, for educational purposes, of course. We divided up responsibility for each character's lines, and through our carefully planned strategy, we managed to walk out with the script. The year was 1999, a time before scripts and screenplays were available online. What's more, we knew we had one shot because independent films did not find their way to the panhandle of Texas.

As we soon found out, there were significant limitations to the script. It was episodic, the dialogue was sparse, and the performance of this film would be extremely difficult to pull off without a world-class costumer and makeup artist. There was a third character who played a fairly significant role in the script. How do you play conjoined twins on a duo interpretation stage? The unwritten rules said that we weren't even allowed to touch.

We compared and combined transcription notes on the way home, an exercise in patience to be sure. Finally, we compiled an intelligible script. Brandon and I cut the script, memorized it in a week, and showed it to Russell. He said he loved it. But, he felt something still wasn't right. "How can we embody the metaphor?" Russell asked. He followed with, "Let's just use one book." I said, "Um . . . I don't think that will fly." Brandon argued that it would disqualify us. Neither of us was having this one book nonsense.

That is when the brilliance of interpretation, and the limitations of the black book, began to challenge us. During that coaching session, I remembered something Jerry Falwell said during my time at Liberty. He said, the definition of Liberty is "freedom within limits." I considered how the metaphor was apt if applied to the constraints of ideology. The limitations of the event, the rules (both written and unwritten), allowed us to brainstorm ways of devising creative freedom in our performances in forensics rounds, as well as in our lives.

There was a thoroughly abused binder sitting on the shelf. It probably belonged to a competitor of years past. The metal rings were falling out. Russell grabbed it off the shelf and pulled the rings the rest of the way off. He said, “Here’s your other book. Are you happy now?” We stared at him, confused, and thought, “How are we going to put a script in that book without the rings?” He explained to us that the ring-less book would fit perfectly behind the other, an embodied metaphor for Blake and Francis being fused together at the torso, having to share everything.

So, we stood close together, our bodies touching, and each held the book(s) with our outside hand. In the climax of the performance, where the conjoined twins separate through surgery, the binders came apart, each of us holding our own, an illusion, an embodied metaphor for meaningful interpersonal relationships and connections. Francis dies, and Blake declares, “The story of me is over.” Francis assures the audience, “The sad ending is only because the author stops telling the story. But it still goes on. It’s just untold.” The rest, all the way to an AFA national championship, is history. Together, the three of us learned to push boundaries, take chances, and trust each other.

Epilogue

“Some days in late August at home are like this, the air thin and eager like this, with something in it sad and nostalgic and familiar...” (Faulkner. *The Sound and The Fury*)

Following graduation, each of us went our separate ways. A few of us remain close, and each of us remains in the stories we share. Motivated by this notion of storying life with others, I went on to earn a Ph.D. in the study of literature, communication, and performance at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. I am now an assistant professor in the Department of

Communication at Missouri State University, a university that's communication department is rooted in the teachings of Virginia Craig and Irene Leslie Coger, two foundational scholars in the study of literature and performance. I still try to push boundaries through research and other critical approaches to scholarship to make the world a more habitable place for students who are lost in understanding their identity in college and university contexts. I offer students connections to literature and theory as equipment for living.

I heard that a competitor from Liberty won an AFA national championship in POI last year. Rumor is, he coached himself and funded his own travel. I wonder if he ever spent time in the library with Faulkner, or any other authors to make it through, to expand his liberal arts consciousness. I like to think so. I like to think literature changed his life.

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Productive Insights: Long-Term Benefits of Forensics

Alison Fisher Bodkin and Ben Gaddis

Those of us who were a part of a speech team, or *seriously* competed in individual events in high school or college (or in our respective cases, both) easily log 10,000 hours of participation. Malcolm Gladwell (2011) says that mastery of a skill takes 10,000 hours of practicing (i.e., a student who agrees to be in a suit by 7:00 AM on Saturdays). Participation in forensics provides opportunities for students of all creeds not only to explore their identities but also to decide what matters to them. This activity provides numerous benefits down the road. Between the individual practicing of events, coaching sessions, and researching, that goes into public address. Or reading potential literature, cutting, splicing, rearranging so that the tightly packed ten-minute seeds have some coherence by way of a dramatic arc, or trajectory.

Forensics programs across the country have lost funding or are cut entirely. Many of these programs have a difficult time justifying the high expenses that come with competition. It can be difficult because the short-term benefits are hard to justify to administrations. A particular team has to negotiate a series of budget items, such as travel, hotel rooms, visual aids, meals, and support staff or part-time coach compensation. These aspects can appear to be a high immediate cost to many administration officials. We believe that by emphasizing long-term benefits of speech education, this paper could help those programs. Speech is an investment, and in the case of the larger, older programs, one that is beginning to pay dividends in the form of scholarships, donations, and even endowed chairs. As former competitors and one current coach, we will discuss via bullet points the long-term benefits of forensics competition, specifically, how forensics operates as a site of long-term personal and professional growth.

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What Forensics Teaches

How to research is something any “speechie” who’s logged 10,000 hours knows. Also, recent research matters. Because it exists, and if it didn’t then, do you have an irrelevant topic? It’s your job to be a boss about your topic via Google Alerts, or any other online media aggregator. This teaches you important life skills that could help in a variety of fields with skills such as:

- How to research like a scientist,
- How to write the prose of a TV lawyer,
- Understanding a topic from multiple angles,
- How to line-edit, or the art of word economy,
- The real world skill of “bring me research on this” that is a part of any career,
- How to synthesize research quickly; and how to provide comments on an issue, with limited time.

Aside from how to work, forensics teaches you how to take constructive criticism. Taking feedback from judges easily translates to real-world adulthood. Your employer is upset, or wants something different, incorporate that feedback into future “performance.” Like the judges who write them, ballots are a real crapshoot. So is academic publishing. Sometimes you feel confident that you won the round (or at least advanced with a “revise and resubmit”) and when you get your ballots, you see a reality is different than your perceived prophecy. Taking this a lesson for improvement and validating all opinions helps build successful habits for taking feedback from all sources and incorporating it.

We learn how to make do with what we have. Forgot visual aids? Having hair issues? Forensics teaches you to work with what you have, the approach of fix-it-and-forget-it; and if

you can't fix it, *feature* it. (e.g., pencil eraser is an earring-back, hairspray for a pantyhose-run, safety pins for buttons, electric tape on interp book spines, Velcro on visual aids, Band-Aids on blistered heels).

Forensics also teaches us more than making do with what we have. It teaches us a lifelong love for the spoken and written word. This includes:

- Storytelling is an art form and goes into so many non-performance areas. How do I sell you on my product or service? Probably with a story.
- How to notice the little things: such as an awkward stance with a foot askew, or how harsh a lipstick color is under fluorescent lights. You just know when something is off, or not right.
- How to be a critical listener and recognize logical fallacies. The ability to locate where the problem with a message is; is it an analogy that's needed, a more updated source, a tie-in to the point before?
- How to be about something. For me, it was Margaret Atwood. Either through literature or researching a specific topic, forensics teaches us that there are different ways to live a life by considering questions such as: where do I stand on an issue? From where did this belief or position emerge? How do I trace my comfort with something? What is important to my worldview? What do I count as good or bad?

Former competitors also maintain a lifelong respect for forensics. Days start early and last late. And usually, such days mean navigating a campus terrain in uncomfortable shoes, stiff clothing, and literal baggage. The days are long regardless of if you win or lose. We learn how to work with others in a productive collaborative environment; we hug teammates at postings,

regardless of breaking into final rounds. Also, “van talk” is real. It’s the only truly self-selected safe zone to vent. And gossip. Aside from days of competition, an ethic of pride gets cultivated to represent your school, and your school’s traditions.

We have learned to have empathy for difference. One person’s opportunity is another person’s privilege. Anyone who has logged over 10,000 hours has experienced emotional investment in oral interpretation or public address. Speech teaches us empathy for fellow humans of the world: fathers of dead children, alcoholic mothers, teenagers on the brink of coming out, and so on.

How to be hospitable. Forensics taught me that when a job candidate or any campus visitor first arrives on campus, they want to locate a restroom, information about parking, and understanding the general whereabouts of the place. Bonus hospitality points earned by providing possible lodging options (with various price points and amenities) and places for food and gas.

How to be unique. When forensics is at its best, people’s individuality shines in brilliantly nerdtastic and quirky ways. After 10,000 hours one knows that style matters. Style includes: how you hold yourself, what you wear, and especially the words you choose to say or write. You learn to have a presence, or how to properly walk into a room and “read the room” simultaneously.

In conclusion, forensics has many long term benefits that lead to job productivity and quality of life. In this essay, we have provided what we hope to be productive insights into the long-term implications of forensics competition, both personally and professionally.