

ELEAZAR, NATIVE DEBATE, AND THE STAKES OF CONCESSION

TAYLOR BROUGH
University of California, San Diego

In this article, I think through the case studies of intercollegiate policy debate and the Harvard Indian College in order to illuminate how the presence of Native thought in academic settings so frequently depends upon a disavowal of genocide, accumulation, and fungibility, even and especially as Native scholars posit sovereignty and vitality as authentic grammars of Native existence. I think with an elegy written in 1678 by a student at the Indian College named Eleazar, as well as the colloquial history of Native debate, in order to parallel how both render unapproachable the ensemble of ethical dilemmas presented by the grammar of genocide that position Native people in proximity to death and those presented by slavery's grammars of accumulation and fungibility. I suggest that in order to theorize Native/Black entanglements, in and outside debate, one must think this concessionary ground through terms authorized by accumulation, fungibility, and genocide in order to, in Frank. B. Wilderson, III's terms, "pose the question" rather than restage the concession to the liberal world of the Settler/Master.

Keywords: policy debate, Native people, anti-Blackness, Harvard Indian College, Louisville Project.

Introduction

To the masters learned in subjects, and to the esteemed ministers
Your virtue was well known, as was your holy faith[...]

Death dies: blessed life returns to life.
 When the last trumpet will give its sound through the thick clouds,
 Returning, you carry iron scepters with the Lord.
 Then you will climb heavenward, where the home of the truly pious is;
 Leading the way to this homeland, Jesus now approaches you.
 There is true rest, there is delight without limit.
 Joys also not to be repeated by human song.
 Dust holds the body, upon earth the name will never perish,
 Famous in our times and those to come;
 And the soul, flying from the limbs, went to high heaven,
 Undying, having been mixed with spirits immortal.

– Eleazar, “On the death of that truly venerable man D. Thomas Thacher, who moved on to the Lord from this life, 18 of August, 1678”

Central to the triangulation of antagonisms is a structural antagonism between the “Savage” and the Settler, as well as structural solidarity, or capacity for articulation (conflictual harmony), between the “Savage” and the Master. This solidarity or antagonism totters on that fulcrum called the Slave.

–Frank B. Wilderson, III

The Harvard Indian College was founded in 1655. It was the first brick building in Harvard Yard and was built using money and materials acquired through the slave trade. The importance of evangelizing Native people was paramount to the founders, who believed Natives could be converted towards civilization through proper education (Wilder, 2013). The Settler/Master class built Harvard College as a fort, protected against siege from the unruly savages exterior to it; in its early years, the college was fortified against its wild outside with the best of colonial weaponry. ¹ Missionizing Native people did not become a primary project of

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¹ I use the terminology Settler/Master to denote the position of not-Black and not-Native. For more on this usage, see Frank B. Wilderson, III’s *Red, White, and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S.*

settlement and genocide until they had effectively been subdued through a combination of the military-style massacres that were common of the English and the distribution of smallpox blankets. After being trained in English schools and colleges, Native youth were to return home to evangelize their people and serve as examples of the benefits of English culture. The learned men of Cambridge groomed Native men and boys, primarily Pequot, Nipmuc, Wampanoag, and Narraganset, for entry into the Indian College. Those who attended upheld strict codes of comportment, following English styles of dress and grooming. They were required to speak first in English, and then, upon educational advancement, only in Latin and Greek, the languages of European diplomacy and aristocracy. The majority of Native students in the Indian College died before graduating (Wilder, 2013).

In stark contrast to the civilizing of Native people from irrational, childlike savagery to rational, Christianized subjects, Harvard's Settler/Master elite repeatedly staged the impossibility of civilizing Black people, as they were understood simultaneously as cargo, property, livestock, and a necessary brute labor force to enable the enlightened epistemological mission of the college. For instance, the Reverend Hugh Jones "saw an intelligence and artistry in Indians that could be cultivated, but there was no similar divine light in [Black] people, whom the minister viewed as 'by Nature cut out for hard Labour and Fatigue.'" (Wilder, 2013, pp. 92-93) Collegiate scholars bought Black people both as personal slaves and to perform campus-wide duties (Coleman 2016). As the Harvard and Slavery Research Seminar explains,

By the mid- seventeenth century slaves were part of the fabric of everyday life in colonial Massachusetts. They lived and labored in the colony. Their owners were often political leaders and heads of prominent families. [S]laves followed the children of that elite onto campus, working in Harvard buildings, passing through Harvard's yard, laboring in the houses of Harvard's alumni[.] Off campus, their toil contributed to many of the fortunes that funded the university. (Beckert, Stevens, and the students of the Harvard and Slavery Research Seminar, 2011, p. 7)

Antagonisms and Tiffany Lethabo King's "In the Clearing: Black Female Bodies and Settler Colonial Landscapes."

Thus, at the same time that Native people and the Settler/Master engaged in civilizing, enlightened thought, Black people were barred from its production and condensed as accumulable, fungible flesh that could be bought and sold at the will of the Master.²

There is, therefore, a distinction in position between the Native men who attended the Indian College at Harvard, who could be civilized through education, and the Black people enslaved at the school, who, according to the Settler/Master, were fit only for chattel. As Wilderson (2010) writes, “Even as Settlers began to wipe Indians out, they were building an interpretive community with ‘Savages’ the likes of which Masters were not building with Slaves” (p. 45). While it is clear that the Native and the Settler/Master are not equivalent positionalities in relation to power or violence, the converse of Wilderson’s statement is also true; for the Native boys and men enrolled at the Indian College in the late 1600s, the decision to sit at the table with the Settler/Master constituted a commitment to a shared interpretive community. The creation of co-constitutive enthymematic tropes, particularly those in the grammars of sovereignty and vitality, became the burden of Native scholarly efforts at the Indian College at the same time that those efforts invested in producing discursive commonality between the Settler/Master and Native.

Situating the Native and the Settler/Master inside common discourses of homeland (as opposed to displacement) and life (as opposed to death) meant that Native scholars had to foreclose both their own critical discussions of the genocide they were undergoing and a critical refusal of slavery as the institution that made Harvard, and the Indian College, possible to begin with. In other words, Native men and boys in the Indian College were rendered unapproachable by the ensemble of ethical dilemmas presented by the grammar of genocide that positioned them in proximity to death and those presented by slavery’s grammars of accumulation and fungibility. How, then, do we think the anatomy of this concession, or its stakes, given the presence of enslaved Black people on Harvard’s campus at the time of the Indian College? How do we

² Understanding slavery merely as forced labor is therefore inaccurate, as the enslaved were part of the fabric of the social in Massachusetts colonial society. As a corrective to this view, Frank B. Wilderson, III offers that the “Slave” is positioned not by labor but by the grammars of accumulation and fungibility, which describe the libidinal, propertied formations that characterize the relegation of Black people to chattel.

critically approach the endurance and durability of these shared enthymematic tropes between the Native and the Settler/Master?

This article proceeds in two sections. First, I investigate a poem written by a student at the Indian College named Eleazar entitled “On the death of that truly venerable man D. Thomas Thacher, who moved on to the Lord from this life, 18 of August, 1678.” Widely recognized as the first poem penned by a Native American, Eleazar’s elegy for Thacher gestures towards enthymemes of sovereignty and vitality that could elaborate the Settler/Master and the Native within discourses of commonality and shared loss.³ I argue that constituting these tropes formed a pact that sealed the dilemmas of genocide, accumulation, and fungibility from weighing in on the historical moment. In other words, Eleazar, Thacher, and the Native and Settler/Master scholars who were their contemporaries could not present genocide or slavery as antagonisms; rather, they could only ontologize the terms of a possible conflict around sovereignty and vitality.

In the second section, I consider the durability of these land- and life-giving tropes in the context of intercollegiate policy debate. Building upon my previous work (see Brough 2017), I argue that Native debate has ascribed to the Settler/Master form of deliberative public dialogue a concession that has historically developed from the enthymematic association of the Native with land, sovereignty, and life. Following Houston A. Baker, Jr.’s (2013) insights on mastery, formalism, and the Harlem Renaissance poets, I argue that while Black debate has engaged in a deformation of mastery, the non-Black Native people and arguments that are popularly understood as Native debate have sought out the mastery of form.⁴ As revealed by the history and ongoing legacy of Black debate, “Black debate” glosses multiple situated and inflected sites of argumentation, performance, and intellectual praxis. In fact, Black debate both exceeds and precedes the capture of even a name, and yet Settler/Master debate, through condensing and

³ The recognition of Eleazar’s elegy as the first poetry authored by a Native person already begins from a genocidal disavowal of oral and kinesthetic rhetorics, as well as a civilizing preference for the written word. For more on these questions, see Kimberly G. Wieser’s *Back to the Blanket: Recovered Rhetorics and Literacies in American Indian Studies*.

⁴ Although I borrow this terminology from Houston A. Baker, Jr.’s *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*, I do not import the optimism that Baker ascribes to “mastery of form.” Rather than tricky signification, I see mastery of form as the concession to the terms of liberal modernity outlined throughout this article.

misrecognizing Black debate, continuously produces that which we name as “Black” debate. Following Fred Moten’s (2008) writing on Blackness, I theorize Black debate as a disruptive, irruptive orientation. In this manner, the Blackness of Black debate is in excess of racial phenotype, though also inseparable from it.

By contrast, Native debate, to the extent that this naming is possible, remains invested in the form of debate’s civilizing mission that antagonizes its Black and Native participants, even as it may pose some conflicts at the level of content. In other words, the (mis)recognition of non-Black Native debaters, coaches, and judges as sovereign has led non-Black Native participants to restage an ongoing concession to their shared interpretive community with Settler/Master debate. This is because, as with Eleazar and the Indian College, the Settler/Master persistently misrecognizes the Native as content from within the civilizing mission, rather than as a refusal of the form of debate itself. The extent to which the Native accepts this concessionary ground—of debating within the content of Settler/Master debate, rather than calling into question its form—is also the extent to which the ethical grammars of accumulation, fungibility, and genocide will, in Wilderson’s terms, “break in on” the terms of the debate (2010, 5). The stakes of this concession reiterate the durable force of the relegation of Black people to accumulation and fungibility and Native people to genocide. Finally, I suggest that theorizing and building upon Native/Black entanglements in and outside debate must include framing this concession in terms authorized by accumulation, fungibility, and genocide, rather than through recourse to sovereignty and vitality.

Reading Eleazar

It is from the dense and violent milieu of Harvard Indian College’s civilizing mission that Eleazar enters the archive as an absent presence. Eleazar was a Wampanoag student at the Indian College from 1675 to 1678. His elegy to D. Thomas Thacher, originally written in Latin, constitutes Eleazar’s only entry into written history (Parker, 2011, p. 47). The elegy praises Thacher, presumably Eleazar’s mentor, for his legacy as a thinker, academic, and Christian, as well as for constructing for Thacher a sovereign rest in heaven and deathless vitality (Peabody Museum, 2019). The rhetorical significance of the form of Eleazar’s writing – the elegy – cannot be overstated. As epideictic speech, elegies are speeches of praise, whose rhetorical function, according to Condit (1985), is to create “opportunities for expressing [...] our shared heritage” (p.

289). As Condit elaborates, in moments of crisis, such as deaths, wars, or farewells, speakers are called upon to perform epideictic rhetoric in order to “help discover what the event means to the community, and what the community will come to be in the face of the new event” (2019, p. 289). In this regard, it is relevant that the only written residue of Eleazar’s life that enters the archive is his speech praising a Settler.

While Eleazar is recorded historically only through his formal grief about a white man, his own death was not recorded. Eleazar died before graduating from the Indian College, likely of smallpox, although he, like the majority of his Native contemporaries, would never be eulogized in writing (Peabody Museum, 2019). In other words, while Eleazar could build an ethical case for Thacher in the giving of the eulogy, his own death from smallpox could not gain stake in that community. This is because the interpretive community that Thacher and Eleazar shared, which constituted the audience for the elegy at the Indian College, could only conceptualize mourning Settlers, but not Eleazar or, for that matter, any of the Native people they attempted to civilize or the Black people they sought to render property. This entry-point for archival memory then, could not occasion a eulogy for the Native death that surrounded Thacher’s own, or for the fact of genocide or slavery that constitute the possibility for the historical moment that occasioned the elegy. In other words, beyond merely a missed opportunity in interracial communication that could be rectified through a more expansive or inclusive interpretive community, Eleazar’s eulogy for Thacher creates and even celebrates a shared, exclusive interpretive community between the Native and the Settler/Master, even as the Settler/Master’s own existence in the “New World” would not be possible without genocide and slavery.

Significantly, Eleazar’s elegy is rife with enthymemes, particularly the enthymemes of sovereignty and vitality, as I will elaborate below. As identified by Aristotle, enthymemes are rhetorical syllogisms wherein the rhetor leaves one “common-sense” premise unstated such that it can be supplied by the audience (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2010). Enthymemes are persuasive because they allow the audience to fill in and thereby participate in the construction of the argument. This, of course, fulfills a particularly important function in epideictic speech, as speeches of praise or blame often demand a call to communal action that enthymemes are uniquely situated to provide because of their affective, persuasive capacity (Miller and Bee, 1972). This quality makes enthymemes a particularly apt vehicle for distributing white supremacist ideologies, as they can mask their investments underneath “common-sense”

assumptions about the nature of race (Jackson, 2006). In this regard, enthymemes frequently traffic in tropes. As Birdsell (1993) describes, “tropes can condense arguments, which are then subject to recall in much the same manner as an enthymeme” (p. 179).

If we think of the enthymeme structurally, against the grain of Aristotle’s insistence that rhetoric is only preoccupied with the contingent yet probable, we can see that rhetorical acts are not merely contingent or contextual but are themselves contextualized structurally by genocide and slavery.⁵ Indeed, in Eleazar’s case, the elegy structurally can only be performed for the death of a Settler/Master, but not his own, not other Native or Black people, and certainly not an elegy of the fact of genocide and slavery.

Throughout the elegy, Eleazar’s enthymematic depictions of idyllic homeland, here epitomized by heaven, frame an enthymematic discussion of sovereignty. As he writes, “Then you will climb heavenward, where the home of the truly pious is; / Leading the way to this homeland, Jesus now approaches you.” (Parker, 2011, p. 50) Marking the return home, Eleazar gestures towards a space of the greatest joy and rest, unmarred by the suffering that characterizes Human (both Native and Settler/Master, in this case) life. The common language of homeland (as heaven) that Eleazar constructs gestures towards the emergent, humanist discourse of sovereignty as a form of mutual belonging or at-homeness that situates Eleazar’s elegy within the civilizing mission that underwrites it. By sharing in the civilizing grammars that authorize the Indian College as well as Thacher and Eleazar’s (parasitic) relationality within it, the elegy constitutes a concession that cedes both the form and content of sovereignty. While sovereignty was not yet wholly conceptually consolidated, the Indian College and Eleazar’s elegy positioned within it constitute an early attempt to build this Settler/Master relational grammar through a disavowal and unthinking of genocide and slavery as its condition of possibility. Seen from the vantage of over 300 years later, it is impossible to extricate this homeland from contemporary politicizations of sovereignty, land, and home in settler colonial theory and Native studies. However, the contemporary moment’s overrepresentation of sovereignty and land in humanist strains of settler colonial theory and Native studies produces a theoretical repertoire that is not analytically attuned

⁵ For more on theorizing rhetoric and contingency structurally, see Amber E. Kelsie’s “Blackened Debate at the End of the World.”

to the task of understanding Eleazar's elegy or the violence that occasions the civilizing mission's pull of the Native toward humanism.⁶

The depiction of Native life as in anticipation of sovereign restoration characterizes Native demands in the register of sovereignty. As Audra Simpson (2007) describes, the representational politics of sovereign demands frequently coalesce around "'tradition,' structuring yet another expectation of a culturally 'pure' indigenous subject" (p. 71). Here, the sovereign demand suggests not an anticipation for a future in the anterior sense, but a "pure" Native past-future wherein decolonization is figured as a rewinding of history back to "traditional" self-determination. Similarly, the Settler/Master, seeking to indigenize themselves to their new settlements, finds home in the "New" World (King, 2013). Imagining this sovereign restoration as "return" situates the Native and the Settler/Master inside the common grammar of nostalgia for an idyllic homeland: for one, a time before genocide and contact; for the other, to the successful resolution of the project of settlement.

Against this fabrication, of course, is the inescapable fact of the magnitude of genocide, as King Phillip's War raged on (eventually culminating in Chief Metacomet's head paraded around Cambridge on a stake), as Native people across the east coast were forced to exchange captive Puritans for food and weapons, as smallpox ravaged Native life (Wilder, 2013). So too, in its magnitude, is the inescapable fact of accumulation and fungibility, as Black people suffered in the bellies of slave ships across the Atlantic, as the port city Barbados gained power and prestige, as colleges like Harvard and William and Mary were built by and for the slave trade, sustained through the buying and selling of Black flesh (Wilder, 2013). A nostalgic return home for who, then?

In this regard, the tropes of sovereignty and vitality perform the "common-sense" of liberal modernity, which allows them to mask their dependence upon slavery and genocide through constituting an enthymematic interpretive community already invested in the genocide of the Native and the accumulation and fungibility of the Black (Wilderson, 2010). Seen in this light, Eleazar's poetry develops the language of common humanity between the Native and the

⁶ For more on the humanism of these projects, see Tiffany Lethabo King's *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies*.

Settler/Master, a humanity entirely dependent upon both disavowal of genocide and juxtaposition against slaveness. In other words, the enthymematic community between the Native and the Settler/Master, built around the tropes of sovereignty and vitality, could not account for genocide or slavery as the enablers of Native socialities with the Settler/Master. In Eleazar's elegy, the trope of sovereignty provides a "common-sense" distraction from genocide and slavery, even as Eleazar's enunciation depends upon both Native death and Black accumulation and fungibility. This interplay of archival presence and absence rests entirely upon the shared elaboration of sovereignty and vitality between the Settler/Master and the Native.

Like the trope of sovereign restoration, Eleazar's gesture towards vitality both starkly contrasts and depends upon slavery and genocide. Of Thacher, he writes, "upon earth the name will never perish" and describes the soul as "undying." He suggests that "blessed life returns to life." (Parker, 2011, p. 50) The need to preserve life against death mimics the constitution of universities as settlements or colonial forts, fortified against the risk of wildness. In Eleazar's repeated attempts to grapple with Thacher's death, he constructs a timeless reiteration of life against death. Reading the archive centuries later, I can only see Eleazar's grief, processed through formal Latin, as constructing a narrative wherein Thacher shouldn't have died, where death is an exception to his life rather than its rule. Eleazar's elegy suggests that life can be fortified against the death that surrounds it, just like the university and its collection of sovereign and life-affirming socialities can be defended against the onslaught of warlike but dying Native people and rebellious but enslaved Black people.

It is no coincidence that Nativeness and Blackness are located outside of the civilizational imperative, epitomized by Eleazar's elegy and the civilizing mission of Harvard's Indian College. As Harney and Moten (2013) theorize, "The fort really was surrounded, is besieged by what still surrounds it, the common beyond and beneath – before and before – enclosure." (p. 17) The surround, as an anti- and ante- civilizational orientation, is simultaneously the Settler/Master's justification for ongoing genocide and slavery in service of their own self-preservation, and the uncivilized's generative refusal of the Settler/Master and their politics. Indeed, as Moten and Harney (2013) write, "[t]he settler, having settled for politics, arms himself in the name of civilisation," (p. 18) and so Eleazar's collaboration with the Settler/Master built the liberal grammars of this same fort.

While I cannot excavate Eleazar's motive or intention in writing the piece, nor return to the time of his writing in order to wholly appreciate his context, the tropes of sovereignty and vitality in his elegy are persistent, as is the durable force of the desire for belonging into the Settler/Master interpretive community. What, then, are the technologies of genocide and slavery perfected in the Indian College's civilizing mission? What do they bring to bear on the present? Eleazar's concession, framed as an investment in the civilizing mission of the university, begs the question of "[w]hat would be outside this act of the conquest circle, what kind of ghostly labored world escapes in the circling act, an act...where what is experienced as knowledge is the absolute horizon of knowledge whose name is banned by the banishment of the absolute." (Harney and Moten, 2013, p. 32) Said another way, Eleazar's assimilation to enlightenment by Western rationality suggests, too, the possibility of the outside of the conquest circle, the risk of another orientation to this fortress.

Native Debate

The political economy of a slave estate looks different from the political economy of debate, but the structural violence and the libidinal economy of the plantation can be apprehended in the political economy of debate, and debate is on the plantation.

-Frank B. Wilderson, III

The flux and instability of the Black and the Native enable the Settler to experience a self-actualizing state of both libratory stability and transcendent autonomy. The ontological positions of the Native (slipping into death) and the Black (sliding into fungibility and accumulation) are positions of fixed-flux.

-Tiffany King

What is the state of Native debate? It is a strange question, to be sure. For some, answering it is as simple as staking the argumentative terrain of intercollegiate policy debate that is most apparently Native, a terrain that is presumed to be phenotypic (who *looks* Native) and/or thematic (who *talks about* Native people or Native issues). This approach may require counting participants to determine who is Native and who is not. Answering this question at all may belie a crude essentialism, an investment in authenticity through demarcating a true Native identity that participants must inhabit in order for their Nativeness to be validated. As I elaborated in my

previous work, “Native debate has become so associated with words like ‘land,’ ‘sovereignty,’ ‘space,’ ‘place,’ ‘treaty rights,’ and others, that it is almost impossible to theorize Native debate absent sovereignty as a grammar that marks our existence.” (Brough, 2017) The widespread assumption in debate that Nativeness constitutes an easily identified and racially knowable category relies upon phenotypical and thematic content in the register of sovereignty and vitality.

Certainly, this approach points towards the difficulty of theorizing about Native debate. As I have described elsewhere, the numeric smallness of Native people in debate, a function of genocide, as well as the (mis)recognition of “the Native” around a set of identifiable enthymemes focused on sovereign restoration, makes any assessment of Native debate fraught, at best (Brough, 2017). Because it is incredibly difficult to pin down either the phenotype or racial authenticity of Native debaters, attempting to describe Native debate through its thematic or phenotypical content proves nearly impossible. Yet somehow, the legacy of Native involvement in debate has persisted as an issue of content rather than an issue of form. In other words, none of these objections to the question suggest the impossibility of theorizing the state, or the stakes, of Native debate; instead, they point to a severe under-theorization of *the Native*.

In my previous work, which circulated widely in and outside of debate, I argued, following Frank B. Wilderson, III’s germinal work, that the Native is positioned through the modalities of sovereignty and genocide. Native speech in the sovereign modality provides the basis for conflictual harmony via a shared interpretive community with the Master, whereas Native speech in the modality of genocide insists on an irreconcilable antagonism between the Settler and Savage that cannot be put right through symbolic redress. Thus far, the non-Black Native people who are overrepresented as “Native debate” have foregone theorizing genocide in favor of theorizing sovereignty. In other words, the nominal presence of “Nativeness” in debate is registered through its distance and divergence from Blackness, and Native thought in debate is historicized via a shared interpretive community with Settlers/Masters that disavows the modalities of genocide and slavery as structuring principles of both Native debate and Native life.

As I describe above, the enthymematic gestures of Eleazar’s writing constitute a shared interpretive community between the Settler and the Savage through advancing discourses of commonality in the tropes of sovereignty and vitality. While these tropes are not rearticulated in exactly the same manner across centuries of accumulated time, their endurance does point to the

significance of the legacies of genocide and slavery in academic contexts. As Audra Simpson (2007) writes, sovereignty is “always a bestowal” (p. 72). In this sense, it is not that the Harvard Indian School and intercollegiate policy debate mirror each other devoid of historical context, but instead that both require a similar set of enthymematic gestures from Native people and Settlers in order to perform their civilizing function. As Shanara Reid-Brinkley (2019) instructively remarks, “The roots of debate training are irrevocably tied to the very foundation of US civil society and as such it too is sutured together by anti-Blackness.” (pp. 229-230) Indeed, while the audiences that provide the context for enthymematic gestures may change, settler colonial theory and humanist strains of Native studies do (still) structurally endeavor to build a shared interpretive community with the Settler/Master (Sexton, 2014, 10).

As I argue elsewhere, many non-Black Native debaters’ arguments rely upon the grammar of sovereign loss because contemporary multiculturalism demands the articulation of trauma in order to authenticate oneself (Brough, 2017). Because this trauma must be authorized by the Settler/Master, such trauma must be recognized by the Settler/Master *as* loss in the first place, which strips away the possibility of articulating the (structural) traumas of genocide or accumulation and fungibility, within the liberal democratic form of debate. Because genocide, accumulation, and fungibility describe structural, irrecuperable loss, the Settler/Master cannot authorize them as enthymemes, which delimits the shared interpretive community via rendering thinkable only the vectors of what Wilderson (2010) terms “intra-Human conflict.”⁷ While arguments in the register of sovereignty and vitality forwarded by non-Black Native debaters are popularly understood as Native debate, this depiction situates a conflict over sovereignty and vitality between the Settler/Master and the Native as the sole gloss for Native participation and argumentation in debate. Through arguments that exclusively focus on land repatriation as decolonization or the rights of Native peoples as guaranteed through treaty or originary claim to land ownership, Native debate’s sovereign register is overrepresented as the only solution to the perils of Native life and, importantly, the sole gloss through which debate’s interpretive community can understand the traumas of (authentic) Native existence.⁸

⁷ I use this term in accordance with Frank B. Wilderson, III’s deployment: to denote conflicts that reflect shared meaning and symbolic integrity amongst communities authorized by vitality and sovereignty.

⁸ It is important to note that, within these representational economies, Nativeness is reduced to trauma and violation. In my previous piece, “Open letter to non-Black Native people in debate,” I discussed

Unlike sovereignty and vitality, genocide, accumulation, and fungibility traffic as antagonisms that disrupt debate's Settler/Master form (Brough, 2017). Speaking in the register of genocide, accumulation, or fungibility requires a disruption of debate as a liberal democratic space of dialogue and deliberation with the capacity to redress harm. Such has been the legacy of Black debate. I believe that Black debate has engaged in what Houston A. Baker, Jr., speaking on the Harlem Renaissance poets, terms a "deformation of mastery." Deforming mastery is "a [guerilla] action in the face of acknowledged adversaries" (Baker, 2013, 50). The deformation of mastery "remain[s] incomprehensible to intruders[,] produc[ing] a notion (in the intruder's mind and vocabulary) of 'deformity'" (Baker, 2013, 51). The legacy of Black debate has been this register of "deformity," the literal de-forming of the contours of liberal democracy that so tightly fortress Settler/Master protocols of debate. The Louisville Project, widely cited as the origin story for Black debate, describes a period at the University of Louisville in the early 2000's in which Black debaters and coaches generatively refused the protocols of Settler/Master debate and posed real alternatives to it through disruptive, irruptive approaches to argumentation, with the goal of increasing meaningful Black participation (Dillard-Knox, 2014, p. 4). As Tiffany Yvonne Dillard-Knox, a scholar of Black debate and current director of the Louisville Malcolm X Debate Program, notes, "the word project implies something that is temporal and/or experimental" and the legacy of this so-called "Project" has proven to be "neither of those things" (2014, p. 37). The enduring legacy of Louisville's (de)formative argumentation and performativity challenges and exceeds temporal fixity; the Louisville Project informs and shapes our contemporary intellectual commitments, argumentation, and language.

From the Louisville Project onward, Black debate has deformed the mastery of the institution of debate, whether through the identification of music samples and poetry, rather than peer-reviewed journals, as a primary locus of knowledge production or through the introduction of Afropessimist thought that erodes the civil barriers of democratic debate.⁹ Unlike critical

this reduction as an intimate and necessary gesture to achieve recognition from the Settler/Master. For more on damage-centered research imperatives, see Eve Tuck's "Suspending damage: A letter to communities."

⁹ See also Shanara R. Reid-Brinkley's "Voice Dipped in Black: The Louisville Project and the Birth of Black Radical Argument in College Policy Debate" and Tiffany Yvonne Dillard-Knox's "Against the grain: the challenges of black discourse within intercollegiate policy debate."

arguments that begin at the register of content, Black debate persistently calls into question the form of argumentation, deliberative democracy, and liberal politics of redress. The practices invited by Black debate continue to trouble and de-form the form of debate through calling into question (by moving immanently to) its persistent modalities of capture.

In turn, Settler/Master debate, taking an approach similar to Harvard College's military-style fortifications designed to defend its monopoly on argument and the proper use of speech, has responded with framework,¹⁰ soft-left plan-based affirmatives,¹¹ an approach to mutually preferred judging that systematically refuses to prefer Black judges,¹² the Harvard point inflation of 2013,¹³ and the formation of the Policy Research League,¹⁴ among other mundane and counter-insurgent behaviors. As measures designed to securitize the Settler/Master form of debate against the impending rebellion of Black debaters, judges, and coaches, these instances speak to a

¹⁰ Framework is an argument that was initially innovated by Settler/Master debate protocols in response to Louisville's creativity; in its early iterations, framework suggested that conversations about race and racism in debate do not belong in the forum, in effect telling Black debaters to get out of debate. Framework still in many ways retains this legacy; although it's updated itself to *look* less deliberately anti-Black than its initial iterations, it still retains the fundamental presupposition that debate should be a space of (racially neutral) dialogue that does not call into question the form of debate itself.

¹¹ These arguments are liberal affirmations of the Settler/Master protocols of debate that are leveraged strategically against Black debate's critical insurgencies. They are widely understood to be more strategic against Black debaters because, unlike their conservative counterparts, they can be more effectively weaponized through the claim that their interventions are "good for Black people."

¹² Mutually preferred judging, or MPJ, refers to a system where debaters have the opportunity to rank judges in order of preference. Perhaps predictably, Settler/Master debate in part secures its monopoly on the proper use of argument by putting all or most Black judges at the bottom of their preference sheets, meaning that they refuse to submit their arguments to evaluation by Black critics.

¹³ At the 2013 Harvard College Tournament, Settler/Master judges colluded to artificially inflate the speaker points of Settler/Master debaters, such that no Black debaters made it to elimination rounds at the tournament.

¹⁴ The Policy Research League, now colloquially known as the PRL, denotes the 2013 attempt by Settler/Master directors and coaches at prominent colleges and universities to segregate Settler/Master debate from Black debate through forming their own research league. While the PRL has been formally disbanded, the structure of desire that motivated it certainly has not.

pervasive (mis)recognition of Black debate and Black debaters—namely, that all Black arguments are reducible to one another and must be militated against.

Native debate has often actively collaborated with these (mis)recognitions of Black debate, in defense of their own shared interpretive community with Settler/Master debate. Whether through scapegoating debaters who read Afropessimism as “just reading cards” and therefore allegedly not departing from the Settler/Master form, associating Afropessimist and Black debaters with dogmatism or simplistic argumentation, or expressing profound anxieties about Black and Native collusion, Native debate has largely decided to sit at the table with the Settler/Master rather than deform their mastery. Some of this, certainly, is due to the (mis)recognition of the Native as wholly imbricated with sovereignty, a (mis)recognition that can be frustrating for Native debaters attempting to think in a register they believe to be outside it. More often than not, however, this dissatisfaction is articulated solely in a register of victimization, rather than through a structural analytic. In other words, non-Black Native people tend to occasionally see our (mis)recognition in the register of sovereignty as an impediment to our argumentative projects, rather than noting the myriad ways that it *also* grants the (non-Black) Native sovereign status within the form of Settler/Master debate.

Importantly, a robust interrogation of the form of debate-as-civilizing-mission has been largely absent from (non-Black) Native argumentation. Again, while Native debate has provided argumentative conflicts from within the Settler/Master form of debate, non-Black Native debaters have been reluctant to pose argumentative antagonisms to the Settler/Master form itself. My previous article (Brough 2017) called for a theorization of genocide, particularly as it pertains to debate, not merely an admission that it exists. While the past several years have seen a number of non-Black Native debaters’ attempts to acknowledge genocide, these arguments more or less amounted to the suggestion that genocide exists and is structural. Rarely, if ever, did these arguments attempt to theorize the vectors of violence through which genocide is exercised, and even more rarely did they identify the form of Settler/Master debate as itself a civilizing mission whose function requires the enactment of genocidal protocols.

Many debaters, coaches, and judges seem to have taken my call to theorize in the register of genocide rather than the register of sovereignty as a referendum on what can and cannot be said in debate. While I have no interest in advocating treaty law in a debate round or nostalgically

describing the need to restore Native relationships to land (not least because “we have yet to tie virtually any debate round to [...] sovereign gains” [Brough, 2017]), I have posed no such referendum. Instead, in my previous work I sought to frame an intervention into an existing conversation that has been detrimental to Native debate’s potential entanglements with Black debate in service of deforming Settler/Master institutions. Indeed, as I have thoughtfully historicized above, theorizations that traffic in sovereignty and vitality are detrimental to Native/Black collaborations because they reaffirm Settler/Master regimes of recognition and require sitting at the table with Settlers/Masters in order to effectuate contingent changes at the level of content, not structural antagonisms at the level of form. Arguments in the sovereign register still demand Settler/Master recognition of trauma, or the building of an enthymematic community based on shared loss. In this regard, I am deeply concerned that the cleared landscape of “settler colonial theory” (an ineffective and reductive gloss for Native thought) in debate will merely circulate through the tropes of sovereignty and vitality, with little meaningful investigation of Native life-in-death or contribution to Native and Black thought. As evidenced by the enthymematic labeling and argumentative trajectory of “set col,”¹⁵ to boil down violence against Native people to a two-syllable abbreviation, Native debate runs the risk of being assimilated into the content of Settler/Master debate and deradicalized just as thoroughly as the “cap K.”¹⁶ In many ways, the land analytic associated with “set col” is simply another version of the “cap K” – just one more focused on primitive accumulation than on the status of the proletariat.

Embedded in the response that regards my previous work as referendum is the assumption that antagonisms to the form of debate are inherently restrictive. This accusation derives from a misreading of Black debate as limitation rather than invitation; in other words, this misreading presumes there is no creativity inside antagonism. One of the fundamental insights of Black debate has been that deforming mastery is a creative project that can only be undertaken from a position that does not take the form of debate as a neutral or inevitable fixture. Against this presupposition, I would ask, has Black debate persisted because of the formalisms of debate,

¹⁵ In debate, “set col” is a very common abbreviation for settler colonial theory, or, worse, Native Studies.

¹⁶ In debate, the “cap K” refers broadly to Marxist and anti-capitalist thought, which has been wholly assimilated to Settler/Master formalisms and generally imposes conservative elements of debate onto Black and Native debaters.

or in spite of them? Indeed, as Harney and Moten (2013) instructively note, “Form is not the eradication of the informal. Form is what emerges from the informal.” (p. 128) In this regard, Black debate is an informal, always-present invitation to more fully theorize one’s position and the raciality of the rhetorical situation, and to begin from one’s position in order to enact and perform an otherwise. As Reid-Brinkley (2019) identifies, “Black radical debate practice has been persistently successful because it forces individual white people and white institutions to react to the immediacy of the competition space.” (p. 231) Black debate has not attempted to draw upon preexisting protocols or build new ones in order to sustain or write its (non)existence into the future. Rather than pose referendums or delimit the boundaries of debatable thought, Black debate envisions the myriad potentialities of exceeding moments of capture through attempting to make every avenue of capture susceptible to question and therefore not inevitable or fixed. Thus the informal deformation of mastery that emerges from the antagonism is the only true creation, as adherence to debate’s formalisms merely writes the existence of deliberative democracy into the future as the only possible forum for argumentation.

Native debate has something to learn from this creativity. Rather than presume a performative distance from genocide as a vector that dictates debate practice and conditions Native participation in debate, debaters, coaches, and judges might consider theorizing the form of debate itself as genocidal. In order to do so, Native debate must begin to more fully critique the rituals of civility, critical distance, and the presumption of neutrality and universality that have secured the solidarity between the Native and the Settler/Master. My work on this issue is thus neither a referendum nor a prescription for a delimited political program.

This troubling dynamic between Black debate and Native debate is also present in the differential imaginaries of Black studies and Native studies about the work each is attempting to do. Noting that Native studies tends to de-escalate the antagonism of genocide to the level of an intra-Human conflict, Jared Sexton (2014) argues that Native studies practitioners frequently presume that “settler colonialism is something already known and understood” and that, therefore, the role of Native studies is both to illuminate this set of facts and to “announce the decolonial intervention” through posing its critical work as itself the alternative to the object of its critique (p. 10). In contrast to this consciousness-raising project, Sexton situates Black studies as “dwell[ing] within an un-inheritable, in-escapable history and mus[ing] upon how that history intervenes upon its own field, providing a sort of untranscendable horizon for its discourse and

imagination” (2014, p. 10) Thus, while Black studies is “as susceptible to a politics of resurgence or recovery as any other mode of historical inquiry,” and while “racial slavery remains the unthought ground of thought within Black studies as well,” the constitutive difference is, again, one of form and not content (Sexton, 2014, p. 10).

The endeavor I suggest Native debate undertake would be fruitless and merely reproduce the shared interpretive community between the Native and the Settler/Master if it did not include a deep and ongoing reckoning with the indebtedness of Native debate to Black debate and Blackness. Dillard-Knox (2014) notes that the alternative debate practices forwarded by Black students and coaches at Louisville and other institutions in the early 2000’s have enabled the recruitment of Native people and others marked by racial domination. Similarly, I argue elsewhere that “it has been the work of Black people in debate that has made Native debate possible at all, as tenuous and numerically small as we are.” (Brough, 2017). Too many non-Black Native people in debate indulge themselves in the illusion that self-determination (as a vestige of sovereignty) means we don’t have to acknowledge our indebtedness to or entanglements with Black debaters, coaches, and judges who have invented and innovated the grounds for our participation in intercollegiate policy debate. Theorizing genocide does not automatically render Native speakers or theorists ethical or “not anti-Black,” as has been assumed in some readings of my previous (2017) piece. Rather, theorizing from and through genocide is an opportunity for refusal of the rules and procedures of the Settler/Master form of debate in a manner that would allow Native debate to take shape as a force as opposed to an identity within a multicultural regime of recognition.¹⁷ If we desire the overhaul and subversion of the centuries-long civilizing missions we are imbricated within, it is imperative that we situate our creative refusals of debate’s particular (but not exceptional) civilizing mission in their entanglements with Black debate.

Posing the Question: An Anti-Civilizational Inheritance

I have gestured above towards the durability of the enthymemes of sovereignty and vitality in their capacity to produce a shared interpretive community between the Settler/Master

¹⁷ For clarification on my use of identity here, see “Open letter to non-Black Native people in debate.”

and the Native. As Stefano Harney and Fred Moten (2017) write, “Maybe the problem is the separability, the self-imposed loneliness-in-sovereignty, of the concept and its representations (as embodiment or individuation or subject or self or nation or state).” Surely Eleazar is lonely in the archive, represented only through sparse words about his grief for a white man. Surely there is another way to be with others. What, then, is made manifest in these refusals to recuperate the form of the Settler/Master? In the informal deformation of mastery I’ve suggested above, what kinds of entanglements become possible?

Citing the two-pronged counter-insurgencies of the militarized U.S. state and the incorporative capabilities of multiculturalism following the Black and Red insurgencies of the 1960’s, Wilderson (2010) writes,

Consequently, the power of Blackness and Redness to pose the question—and the power to pose the question is the greatest power of all—retreated as did White radicals and progressives who “retired” from the struggle. The question lies buried in the graves of young Black Panthers, AIM warriors, and Black Liberation Army soldiers, or in prison cells where so many of them have been rotting (some in solitary confinement) for ten, twenty, or thirty years, and at the gates of the academy where the “crazies” shout at passersby. (p. 4)

In non-Black Native peoples’ fear of the risk posed by revolutionary entanglement with Black people and Blackness, many of us have participated in this abdication. The power to pose the question changes the stakes, and the gravity, of potential Native/Black entanglements and interventions that do not rest on the loneliness of sovereignty. As Dylan Rodríguez (2019) says,

[T]he anti-civilizational is an *honorable* inheritance, because it surges into domesticities that are always again frontiers; the plantation is an idea as much as a place, which is why it never goes away, territory (land) is always invoked, and it all materializes in the endlessly justifiable homicide that defines “freedom’s” limits. Move, then, to the margins of the reputable, just beneath the high ground, flourishing in the tears and sobbing, studying within the mourning and grieving, theorizing the pain, it’s already happening, and it needs no refinement. (p. 129)

To endeavor to pose the question, then, is to accept what countless theorists of the Native and Black entanglements of the surround have been trying to tell us with their lives (and often

deaths): that the end of the world will either be made or foreclosed depending on our commitment to the uncivilized.

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