

originally written for college debate topics but have now found their way into the hands of high school debaters.

Advocates of critiques will argue that because fiat is only an artificial creation, the outcome of a debate will have no real impact on the world in any case. Critique advocates say that debaters should spend their time in debates worrying only about those things they can directly do something about, namely, their own attitudes toward important subjects such as the evils of capitalism. From this perspective, the political is not as important as the personal. Regardless of the role of fiat, however, debaters should be willing to take some responsibility for their own personal advocacy. Advocates of a savage/victim/savior critique really are saying that it is more important that the United States admit its complicity in colonialization than it is to help the people of sub-Saharan Africa. Opponents of a savage/victim/savior critique really are saying that it is more important to help the people of sub-Saharan Africa than it is to worry about who is to blame for colonialization. Why is it more important to engage in the rhetoric of blaming and guilt assignment than to advocate for helping people who truly are in need?

The intellectual influence of the postmodern critique is on the decline in the academic world at the very time that it seems to be catching on in the debate community. Emily Eakin, writing in the October 17, 2004, issue of *The New York Times*, said the following:

*Mr. Derrida outlived fellow theorists Louis Althusser, Roland Barthes, Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, and Gilles Deleuze, but signs of theory's waning influence had been accumulating around him for years. Since the early 1990s, the grand intellectual paradigms with which these men were prominently associated—Marxism, psychoanalysis, structuralism—had steadily lost adherents and prestige. The world had changed but not necessarily in the ways some of big theory's fervent champions had hoped. Ideas once greeted as potential catalysts for revolution began to seem banal, irrelevant or simply inadequate to the task of achieving social change. (p. IV-12)*

I frequently hear prominent college debate coaches lament what critiques have done to college debate. For high school policy debate, it is not yet too late. Critique debates are still rare events in many parts of the country. Many judges would like an opportunity to vote against critiques, but they have to have substantive answers allowing them to justify their votes. Many users of critiques in high school debates win purely from the shock value of their arguments; they win because the affirmative team is confused and unsure how to answer a critique based in nearly incomprehensible language.