

## How Debate Got Them Where They Are

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The English philosopher, Herbert Spencer wrote, "The great aim of education is not knowledge but action." The education I have gained from forensics has lead me to take political action where the opportunity arises. But I am not unique, many great minds have learned from their experiences in speech and debate, which led them to actions that brought them to the limelight, where they are today. From presidents of the United States to Brad Pitt, forensics has helped many people accomplish great things in life. This is how some of the more prominent of those people used forensics as a tool for greatness.

Arguably the most famous debaters of all time (at least within the American forensics community) are Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas. Though they themselves were not National Forensic League members in high school, they used public discourse and analysis of current issues to help bring the fine tradition of debate to the public of the United States. Lincoln Douglas debate is named after the debates that these two presidential candidates used to try and rally support for their policy stances and themselves as candidates. Currently still the only debate within the NFL in which two opponents, as opposed to two teams, vie for the ballot. Lincoln and Douglas, used debate to enhance and further their political careers, but they were not the only ones to do so.

Other presidents and world leaders, including Bill Clinton, Richard Nixon, Lyndon Johnson, Woodrow Wilson, and Nelson Mandela all participated in debate events. (3) Johnson and Wilson were actually both debate coaches. (4) It is easy to understand why, when we look to what French essayist Joseph Joubert wrote in 1782, "It is better to debate a question without settling it than to settle a question without debating it." When looking to all the questions politicians are faced with, along with the opposing view points that accompany them, politicians have no choice but to debate the issue, while trying to make their personal stance on it seem the best possible answer. Thus it is foolish for anyone hoping to pursue a career in politics to not participate in competitive debate beforehand.

Even entertainers have cross-applied the skills they gained from competitive public speaking to aid them with their careers in the public light. Oprah Winfrey, John Wayne, Brad Pitt, and Kelsey Grammer are all former speech and debaters. (4) Former debater, R.E.M. lead singer Michael Stripe, sings about famous Policy disadvantages. In his famous song "The End Of The World As We Know It" Stripe alludes to nuclear war, an impact that seems somewhat inevitable in any CX debate.

Those only in the public eye by default including JFK's speech-writer Ted Sorenson and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Maxwell Taylor, also attribute their success in politics to having debated in school. (2) One of O. J. Simpson's lawyers, Robert Shapiro also debated, and like so many debate-lovers before him, ended-up in the courtroom. (2) Strange that that seems to be the route most debaters take... I guess it makes sense in that one should do what one does well. However, it is not surprising the number of success stories that come out of debate experience. According to Linda Collier of the University of Missouri in Kansas City, in a study she orchestrated in 2004, high school students who participated in debate performed 25 percent higher on reading tests than those who did not debate. (1)

Yet still, the most famous debate within the current forensic community, perhaps third to Lincoln and Douglas, is Ted Turner. A former debater himself, Mr. Turner has used his speaking experience to make a voice for himself in today's media as well as bringing publicity and funding to NFL. (4) A judge in the most recent nationals in his own event— Ted Turner debate/ Public Forum debate— Mr. Turner was cross-examined by both finalist teams. As a note of interest for those who saw the round, Mr. Turner voted for the virtually undefeated CDE team of Jennifer Goldstein and David Nadle from Florida, who ended-up taking second place.

If it is not clear from these numerous success stories, speech and debate teaches skills and develops logical thinking that aid people in nearly every activity they do after. Any basic writing instructions include all elements of a good extemp speech, all educational discussion includes the tactics one learns in competitive debate. Phillip Reece of the School of Management at Murdoch University points to many studies as he notes the number one fear people have, ahead of dying, is public speaking. (5) Once you've learned to conquer this fear you are unstoppable, because what you have to say you can now make people stop and listen to. So no matter what career is in your future, the aspects of and strategies taught in competitive speaking will help you get there.

## Bibliography

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