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**ROLE CONFUSION:  
THE CASE AGAINST POLICY DEBATE AS A ROLE-PLAYING EXERCISE**

BY JACOB WILLIAM JUSTICE\*

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*Introduction*

Despite the ideological divisions in the policy debate community, advocates of both traditional and alternative debate styles have found a strange area of agreement. Debaters and coaches from across the argumentative spectrum have frequently characterized policy debate as being a “role-playing” exercise. In debates where the negative team argues that affirmative teams should be required to discuss a topical action, the negative team often outlines the pedagogical benefits of “role-playing” as members of the United States government. By contrast, even when the negative team does not explicitly advance arguments about role-playing, affirmative teams often refute topicality and framework arguments by claiming that their social location prevents them from being able to role-play as members of the government. This argument usually contains the premise that because the United States government is irredeemably exclusionary, violent, or otherwise antagonistic towards a particular identity group, asking certain debaters to imagine themselves as the government is unethical and forcing them adopt the perspective of their oppressor.

This debate-about-debate recently reached its zenith in the final round of the 2013 National Debate Tournament between Emporia State University and Northwestern University, which contained a discussion on the merits of role-playing.<sup>1</sup> Although debate arguments are constantly evolving, this understanding of debate as a role-playing exercise has remained mainstream. This claim can be supported by anecdotal evidence (I have participated in and judged several rounds where debaters have advanced these arguments) and by hard evidence such as a cursory scan of both the high school policy debate caselist,<sup>2</sup> college policy debate

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<sup>1</sup> See *Finals - National Debate Tournament 2013 - Emporia SW vs. Northwestern LV*, Youtube, (posted by Ricardo Saenz on Apr. 2, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RZrWfDIediU>).

<sup>2</sup> *National Debate Coaches Association High School Policy Wiki*, National Debate Coaches Association, <http://hspolicy.debatecoaches.org> (last accessed: Nov. 11, 2014).

caselist<sup>3</sup> and the National Debate Coaches Association's 2014-2015 open evidence project.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, many prominent high school summer debate camps hosted by institutions such as the University of Michigan, Michigan State University, Georgetown University, and the University of North Texas, continue to release evidence meant to be deployed for the purpose of characterizing debate as a role-playing exercise. These camps are responsible for educating hundreds of high school debaters each summer and are highly influential on the development of student attitudes towards arguments, which means that the circulation of these arguments by summer camps all but ensures these positions will continue to be advanced in the near future.

Given how widespread this argument is, it is long past time to correct the misconception that policy debate is a role-playing exercise. In this paper I will build on prior criticisms of role-playing, including Scott Harris's criticism in his 2013 NDT final round ballot, to argue that elements of both sides of debate's ideological divide have reached the wrong conclusion regarding debate's format and purpose.<sup>5</sup> Although nothing prevents policy debate from being used as a role-playing exercise, it is a gross mischaracterization to describe policy debate as practiced by most teams as such.

### *Distinguishing Policy Debate from Role-Playing*

Much of this problem stems from confusion over the definition of role-playing itself. In many debates, concepts like role-playing, simulation, policy-making, scenario-planning and institutionally-focused politics are often conflated and used interchangeably. Both the debaters themselves and the evidence cited by debaters are guilty of this conflation. Much of the evidence debaters use to defend role-playing is not in the context of policy debate, but rather speaks to educational simulations broadly.<sup>6</sup> However, a useful distinction exists:

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<sup>3</sup> *OpenCaselist 2014-2015*, Paperless Debate, <http://opencaselist.paperlessdebate.com> (last accessed: Nov. 12, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> *Open Evidence Project*, National Debate Coaches Association, <http://www.debatecoaches.org/resources/open-evidence-project> (last accessed: Nov. 12, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> Scott Harris, *Scott Harris NDT Final Round Ballot*, CEDA DEBATE FORUMS, Apr. 5, 2013 <http://www.cedadebate.org/forum/index.php?topic=4762.0>.

<sup>6</sup> Thorkild Hanghøj, "*Playful Knowledge: An Explorative Study of Educational Gaming*," (PhD Dissertation, Institute of Literature, Media and Cultural Studies, University of Southern Denmark. 2008), [http://static.sdu.dk/mediafiles/Files/Information\\_til/Studerende\\_ved\\_SDU/Din\\_uddannelse/phd\\_hum/afhandling/2009/ThorkilHanghoej.pdf](http://static.sdu.dk/mediafiles/Files/Information_til/Studerende_ved_SDU/Din_uddannelse/phd_hum/afhandling/2009/ThorkilHanghoej.pdf).

Some scholars believe that the difference between *role play* and *simulation* is in the authenticity of the roles taken by students. *Simulation* is a situation in which the students play a natural role, i.e. a role that they sometimes have in real life (e.g., buying groceries or booking a hotel). In a *role play*, the students play a part they do not play in real life (e.g., Prime Minister, Managing Director of a Multinational Company or a famous singer).<sup>7</sup>

As it is commonly practiced, policy debate bears little resemblance to role-playing. Debaters do not pretend to be politicians, Senators, or any other part of the government. Policy debate has no assigned roles other than the sides (affirmative or negative) and speaker positions. Debaters are free to test arguments from a variety of perspectives and often adopt multiple viewpoints within a single round.

This distinction becomes obvious when policy debate is contrasted with activities that are clearly role-playing exercises. In Model United Nations, students pretend to be delegates of U.N. member nations and debate international issues from the perspective of an assigned country, while in parliamentary debate students utilize strict parliamentary procedures using a “Speaker of the House” and other predetermined roles. Compared to actual role-playing activities, policy debate’s rules and roles are much more flexible. Policy debaters do not address each-other as senators or representatives, in the same manner that Model U.N. participants might refer to each-others as delegates. They do not have to motion to obtain the floor if they wish to speak, as is the case with other debate formats. They cannot raise a “point of order” if they believe their opponents have broken the rules, as is common practice in parliamentary debate formats which imitate real-world legislative forums.<sup>8</sup> Policy debaters have no illusions that they are anything other than high school or college students attempting to persuade a judge about the benefits or disadvantages of a certain action or strategy. Although nothing in theory prevents debaters from pretending they are members of Congress, this is not a mainstream debate practice by any measure.

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<sup>7</sup> Maria A Kodotchigova, *Role Play in Teaching Culture: Six Quick Steps for Classroom Implementation*, 8:7 INTERNET TESL J. (2002), <http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Kodotchigova-RolePlay.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Branham and John Meany, *Parliamentary Debate*, DEBATE CENTRAL, Jan. 1 1998 <http://debate.uvm.edu/meanyparli.html>.

*Policy Debate Beyond Role-Playing*

Proponents of the role-playing model might ask what exactly debate is, if not a role-playing exercise. Recent innovations in argumentative strategies and the evolution of performance debate have made it more difficult than ever to create a universal definition of what policy debate is without being reductionist. However, it can reasonably be said that policy debate is an activity where students debate the desirability of various political actions or strategies, using a variety of perspectives and forms of evidence. This merely requires that the debaters form an opinion about any given proposal, but does not mandate role-playing. Scott Harris, director of debate at the University of Kansas, articulates this distinction persuasively in his ballot for the final round of the 2013 NDT:

I have no idea at all why it would be oppressive for someone to form an opinion about whether or not they think the government should or should not do something. I do not role play being the owner of the Chiefs when I argue with my friends about who they should take with the first pick in this year's NFL draft. I do not role play coaching the basketball team or being a player if I argue with friends about coaching decisions or player decisions made during the NCAA tournament.<sup>9</sup>

The key source of misunderstanding would thus appear to be a conflation of mere discussion about the desirability of government policies with role-playing and embracing the government. Although the arguments presented herein might seem contrary to conventional wisdom about policy debate, the activity need not sacrifice any of its educational potential by admitting it is not a role-playing exercise. Most of the benefits attributed to role-playing such as increased civic knowledge, self-reflexivity, identity exploration, and the ability to inhabit multiple perspectives do not stem from role-playing, but are rather a product of the format of switch-side debate and discussions of government policy-making generally. Proponents of critical debate or other non-traditional debate styles can also criticize topicality and framework arguments without mischaracterizing the activity as role-playing; it would simply require a rephrasing of the argument to emphasize why discussions of United States government policy are objectionable as opposed to calling debate an unethical form of role-playing.

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<sup>9</sup> Harris, *supra* note 5.

In summary, it is time to discard the old notion of debate as a role-playing game. The continued propagation of this concept contributes to needless confusion regarding policy debate's format and purpose. Although there appears to be some momentum towards re-conceptualizing debate as such, the argument is still commonly advanced and continues to be in evidence files produced by summer debate institutes. Until coaches and camp instructors cease the propagation of this misconception, it is likely inertia will reign and debate's role confusion problem will exist.

**DEBATER-CORPORATIONS AND THE CAPITALISM OF  
COMPETITIVE INTERSCHOLASTIC DEBATE:  
A SWIFT PROPOSAL**

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*Introduction*

Competitive interscholastic debate in the United States exists within a capitalist-leaning<sup>10</sup> economy. It is therefore unsurprising that when closely examined, competitive interscholastic debate is or very much resembles a capitalist microcosm. The competition among players in the competitive interscholastic debate industry results in the exploitation of resources, exacerbates resource inequalities, and furthers the gap between the winners and losers. The organizations that sponsor competitive interscholastic debate, while providing very specific rules regarding tournament structure and advancement in the name of “fair competition,” generally take a laissez-faire approach to regulating the conduct of competitors. And even for the organizations that take a stricter approach to regulating competitors’ conduct, debaters frequently attempt to evade imposition of the rules by appealing to decision-makers’ sensibilities and pointing out the lack of clarity in the guiding rules, just like the lawyers of large corporations help corporate clients evade laws.

In the capitalist microcosm of competitive interscholastic debate, debaters or debate teams are like the businesses and corporations who voluntarily engage in direct competition with others. They are “debater-corporations.” Almost all debater-corporations have a parent company, the debater’s school, that controls at least one and usually many subsidiaries (debaters or debate teams) that all aim to make the owners of the parent company profit. High schools and colleges permit and fund competitive interscholastic debate programs primarily for the profits of

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<sup>10</sup> Economists would generally agree that the United States and all other countries have a mixed economy with varying degrees of capitalist, socialist, economic fascist elements. This article assumes the competitive interscholastic debate community is generally correct in that the U.S. economy is at least capitalist-leaning. See Richard J. Colling, *Critiquing Chimera: Part I*, 3:2 NAT’L J. SPEECH & DEBATE 22, 27-28 (2015).

institutional prestige and, as such, competitive interscholastic debate comprises merely one of many markets in which the schools seek to profit, both in the indirect sense of promoting a school's reputation but also indirectly to acquire monetary profit.

The economic factors that tend to influence a large corporation's economic successes influence successes in the competitive interscholastic debate community. Public and private high schools and colleges are, literally speaking, legal entities and market participants who compete in the education industry for students, teachers, and other resources, including tuition dollars and public funding. Competitive interscholastic debate plays a role in advancing schools' goals in sustaining market activities in two undeniable ways, one direct and one indirect. The first, direct way is that a school's competitive interscholastic debate program's successes can reflect positively upon a school. The second, indirect way is that competitive interscholastic debate programs are sometimes justified to improve students' job-related skills that enable them to be competitive applicants in the job market, and alumni's competitive advantages indirectly advance a school's reputation by placing capable bodies in stable jobs (which expands the school's alumni network to reinforce the school's primacy in the market). The competitive interscholastic debate community not only exists within an overarching capitalist market, it also is a capitalist market in both literal and figurative senses.

### ***Competitive Interscholastic Debate as Part of the Capitalist-Leaning Economy***

Competitive interscholastic debate is part of the overall capitalist-leaning economies of the United States and even the world. Many students remain blissfully ignorant of the private market transactions that are necessary to ensure the existence of competitive interscholastic debate programs and the tournaments at which students compete. Individuals, private business organizations, and governmental bodies in the competitive interscholastic debate market voluntarily enter into contractual relationships when becoming a member of a debate organization; registering to compete at a tournament; hiring a judge to fulfill judging obligations; and perhaps buying evidence files from a third party such as The Forensics Files.

Outside of competitive interscholastic debate tournaments, there are various forms of economic competition among schools. Schools compete for students (and their tuition dollars or how they might help the school acquire additional public funds). This is clear in the post-secondary context, but it is not rare for a student to transfer to another high school with a superior program. In this larger market of

economy competition among academic institutions, competitive interscholastic debate programs seek money by offering services (i.e. hosting a tournament), which can result in direct competition when schools host tournaments on the same weekend. Schools also compete for coaches and assistants. A school that has a more resource-rich program, and thus can provide students and coaches with more resources and opportunities, is more likely to attract talented students, college or graduate assistants, and coaches. Thus, schools with competitive interscholastic debate programs exist and participate in part the larger capitalist-leaning economy.

Because the competitive interscholastic debate community is part of the capitalist-leaning whole, the common criticisms of capitalism are applicable in the competitive interscholastic debate community. One of the primary, common criticisms of capitalism is that it results in the concentration of resources in the hands of a wealthy few.<sup>11</sup> This criticism suggests that capitalism results in unfair circumstances that reward the resource-rich and disadvantage the resource-poor, sometimes meaning the resource poor cannot survive. Additional criticisms suggest that the capitalist system reinforces structures that exacerbate unequal resource distribution, and thus ensure the wealthy stay wealthy and the poor stay poor, and expand the gap between the resource-wealthy and the resource-poor.<sup>12</sup>

These criticisms can be applied to most if not all interscholastic competitions, including debate. There are definitely resource inequalities. Many colleges and universities have large endowments; others do not. Property-tax based funding of high school districts and the concentration of the wealthy in segregated geographical areas mean that some public schools can afford to fund their programs more than other public schools. Private schools have an even greater advantage by the direct contribution of tuition money and fewer government regulations to raise money for students programs. The additional resources of wealthy schools enable them to better compete in the competitive interscholastic debate market by attracting more students, hosting tournaments with more amenities and qualified judging, hiring more successful assistants, and retaining more experienced coaches. While abundant resources are not strictly necessary in every context for a program's success, the possession of a greater amount of resources at a school's disposal undeniably promotes the success of the school's programs.

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<sup>11</sup> See *Capitalism & Its Critics: A Modern Marx*, THE ECONOMIST, May 3, 2014, <http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21601512-thomas-piketys-blockbuster-book-great-piece-scholarship-poor-guide-policy>

<sup>12</sup> *Id.*

These resource inequalities frequently affect outcomes of interscholastic competitions. In competitive interscholastic debate, schools with larger budgets can afford to travel more teams and more frequently. They also tend to more easily afford assistants, and have a higher assistant-to-student ratio. More teams, more assistants, and a higher frequency of competition necessarily mean more information about the positions, strategies, strengths, and weaknesses of other competitors. Larger teams with larger budgets and assistants are able to more effectively collect information about other schools' teams and divide the preparative work up into manageable parts among the members of the larger team. This frequently makes the difference when smaller schools with smaller budgets and fewer people are unable to handle the relatively less amount of information they *are* able to obtain. The smaller schools with fewer resources and students place a higher burden on students, like the criticism of capitalism as burdening the working class, to be productive to be able to compete with the larger, resource-wealthy schools. Moreover, smaller schools sometimes lack administrative support and must take on not only preparing for debates, but also the administrative tasks of handling the paperwork for registering for tournaments, scheduling travel, submitting paperwork for reimbursement (assuming they are not paying out of pocket) and, one cannot forget, attend school and pass classes.

The successes of the more resource-rich schools translate into continued or increased support and funding for the successful schools' competitive interscholastic debate programs. One example of the reinforcing effect of resource inequality in the competitive interscholastic debate community is the correlation between the national successes of a school and the prestige of that school's tournament. On the college level, the most successful teams host some of the largest, most prestigious tournaments. On the high school level, one needs to look no further than the list of Tournament of Champions qualifying tournaments to see that the largest national tournaments correspond with resource-rich schools, mainly colleges and private schools that have very large debate teams, one or more research assistants, and numerous TOC qualifying debaters in the past and present.

### *The Debater-Corporations & the Influences of Capitalism*

Not only do competitive interscholastic programs exist within a larger capitalist-leaning economy, they are direct analogs to a capitalist-leaning economy. In the analogy in debate, debaters/debate teams are the corporations, or the "debater-corporations," and they are the subsidiary companies of larger parent companies, which are the debaters' respective schools, which are the ultimate profiteers from

the successes of the debater-corporations. The accumulation of ballots is a form of accumulating money in debaters' corporate bank accounts; the ballot is the profit, the motive for which largely shapes debaters' conduct both in and out of rounds. The "profit-motive" in competitive interscholastic debate is the "ballot-motive." Ballots translate into wins and success; wins and successes translate into trophies; successes and trophies translate into reputation; and a reputation for success not only increases the chances of winning close rounds, but also translates into additional or maintained support and resources/funding from the school (the parent company). Ballots are what debater-corporations relentlessly compete with each other for. Judges are consumers who are presented with the choice of buying from one debater-corporation or a direct competitor. A judge-consumer makes a purchase by voting for one team or the other and, in return, receives literal monetary compensation from the tournament or from the judge's affiliate school, or from the mere feeling that they voted for the "right" debaters. Competitive interscholastic debate organizations that provide rules for competition are the governing bodies that regulate—or, perhaps more accurately, decline to regulate—interactions between debater-corporations and judge-consumers.

But more expressly stated, the primary characteristics of a capitalist economy—competition, the profit-motive, minimal regulations, and adaptation<sup>13</sup>—are apparent in competitive interscholastic debate. Competition among private corporations is viewed as a key component of capitalism, just like competition among debaters is a key component of competitive interscholastic debate. Large corporations exist to pursue resources and profit, just like competitive interscholastic debaters compete to pursue ballots and wins. These wins add value to the debaters and their respective schools similar to how a successful venture increases the value of a publically traded company's stock. Moreover, when it comes to the specific interactions between debaters and judges with regard to "making the sale" / "winning the ballot," the governing bodies, like governments in capitalist economies, take a laissez-faire, hands-off approach.<sup>14</sup> Although the tournaments are very well structured with rules governing tournament advancement, just as there are rules governing the structure of government and corporations in a capitalist society, there are actually very few rules governing the application of resources (evidence, coaching, tournament travel, etc.) in competition among debaters. Like the laws in capitalist society, the rules in debate

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<sup>13</sup> Kristina Zucchi, Certified Financial Analyst, *Main Characteristics of Capitalist Economies*, INVESTOPEDIA, Oct. 29, 2014, <http://www.investopedia.com/articles/investing/102914/main-characteristics-capitalist-economies.asp>.

<sup>14</sup> See Jacob William Justice, *Role Confusion: The Case Against Policy Debate as a Role-Playing Exercise*, 3:2 NAT'L J. OF SPEECH & DEBATE 1, 5 (2015) ("Compared to actual role-playing activities, policy debate's rules and roles are much more flexible.")

(such as having an equal amount of prep and speech time) are justified to promote “fair competition.”

Capitalism is also associated with permitting corporations’ strategies to adapt to all sorts of market changes. The incorporation of technology in both society and debate is not the only parallel. It is a common corporate strategy to sell products and services in the market by commoditizing progressive values such as environmentalism, social justice, and diversity. Corporations incorporate these values into advertising and marketing strategies to convince consumers they are not just buying the corporation’s products or services; they are buying a clean environment; they are buying social justice; they are buying equality or diversity. But this bears little relationship to what the consumer is actually getting in return for paying money to the corporation. Corporations continue to pollute the environment, disregard social justice issues, and coopt the diversity of their employees only to the extent it maximizes profit for the owners. These same adaptive strategies are employed in modern competitive interscholastic debate. Debaters are not selling anything different than they were decades ago. They are still selling arguments, and to an increasing extent themselves, to get ballots; they are just changing the sales pitch. Like corporations utilizing progressive values of environmentalism, social justice, and diversity to sell products, debaters similarly commoditize progressive values in calling for the ballot while selling their identities, the diversity of their experiences, or a promise of social justice. Necessarily influenced by the ballot-motive, these adaptive strategies merely place an old product in a new package to compete and acquire ballots. And like corporations’ modern commercials to sell products and services use catchy tunes and emotional visuals, competitive interscholastic debaters have adapted by incorporating music, compelling visuals, and emotional appeals to help sell voting affirmative or negative. In doing so, the debater-corporations embody the adaptive and competitive essence of capitalism that is commonly criticized.

This is not to say the commoditization of social justice, identities, or diversity is consciously disingenuous. And many might honestly deny intending such commoditization. But that cannot render one’s conduct an illusion. Many debaters are convinced by their coaches (corporate agents of the parent company who stand to profit from the success) to become true believers of a system that ultimately profits from off the commoditization of their identities, diversity of experiences, and other discursive representations. The competitive interscholastic debate market is structured to facilitate an unquestionable illusion of sincerity. Many debaters are numbed by the capitalist competition and ballot-motive and adopt the approaches of other teams while being unaware that this is the force of capitalism. But even when debaters invest their commitment to social justice or

their identities or diversity of experiences to reap a return in the form of ballots with genuinely good intentions, they nevertheless fall prey to the capitalist forces that trickle down from the greater economy and infect competitive interscholastic debate. The competition frequently blinds debaters to capitalism's grip over them and to how others are capitalizing on their commitments to social justice, expressions of identity and diversity, or other discursive representations in debate rounds. The competitive and adaptive components of capitalism encourages the elite schools to coopt these strategies to the extent the strategies are successful and, because the elite have more resources to train debaters and send them to camp, implement those strategies more effectively to solidify their dominance and widen the gap between the winners and losers in the competitive interscholastic debate marketplace.

An even less desirable situation is when the audience is also blinded by the competition to not see that the competitive strategies of commoditizing one's commitment to social justice, identity, diversity, or other discursive representations reinforce capitalism. Handing the commoditizing team the ballot confirms the inevitability and necessity of capitalism in debate despite the content of debaters' performances. An effective capitalist marketing strategy of businesses and corporations is to try to get consumers to jump on a bandwagon and buy trendy products; this effectuates a "buyer's confirmation" that a consumer made a "good purchase" because others are purchasing the same good or service, too. Competitive interscholastic debaters frequently attempt (yet in reality fail) to rhetorically distance themselves from the capitalist market by using a similar marketing strategy when cashing in on their identity and diversity by persuading many judges that their ballots are going to have a cumulative effect and be part of a movement or revolution.<sup>15</sup>

The capitalist elements reproduced in competitive interscholastic debate—competition, the profit/ballot-motive, minimal regulations, and adaptation—contribute to the problems associated with capitalism, primarily the creation of winners and losers in a two-class system and expand the gap between the resource-rich and the resource-poor. Competitive interscholastic debate programs that are successful receive more support and funding from their schools; in turn, the programs grow in resources and in strength just like a large corporation that receives additional investment. Conversely, the less successful programs must justify their school's expenditure of resources on a program that does not

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<sup>15</sup> Companies have used the same social movement rhetoric to sell products. *See, e.g.*, BOSQUE BREWING COMPANY, COMMERCIAL 3, JOIN THE REVOLUTION, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xo75ssp6Yr0> (last accessed: July 21, 2015).

effectively serve the school's purposes in advancing prestige. Their funds are frequently cut and institutional support decreases. This makes the losers in the system even less able to compete as they are left with little to no administrative help or even a person who can coach them. Some schools have completely defunded their competitive interscholastic debate programs despite students who, despite the lack of success, still want to participate. The criticisms suggesting that capitalism results in unfair circumstances that reward the resource-rich and disadvantage the resource-poor, sometimes meaning the resource poor cannot survive, are thus applicable to the competitive interscholastic debate community.

The capitalist forces at play in the competitive interscholastic debate community produce an upper echelon of schools that are frequently successful on both local and national levels. They have the resources to prepare rigorously for most competitors. Their success, like a large corporation that has a wildly successful product, compounds on itself by word of mouth. More successful schools develop a reputation for being successful; and such a reputation frequently intimidates students of other schools. It also causes judges to feel (sometimes consciously and sometimes unconsciously) the pressures of having to over-justify voting for a lesser-known school over a school that has a national reputation for being historically and presently successful. Thus, even when a less successful school comes close to prevailing against a larger, more successful school, the close calls go to the past winners. This keeps the upper echelon on top and pushes the less fortunate closer and closer to the bottom where they are less able to compete and survive.

### *Cooption of Community Efforts at Reform*

The capitalist elements in competitive interscholastic debate coopt efforts to address the negative influences of capitalism in debate. Efforts at change have been woefully inadequate, empirically unsuccessful, and to top it all off, have been re-appropriated by the upper echelon of schools to cement their superiority in markets of interscholastic competition. Asking for others' support, such as calling for judges' ballots, has proven ineffective. The preceding analysis explains why; calls for support based on one's commitment to social justice or expression of identity or diversity is simply a capitalist sales-technique to repackage voting affirmative or negative in a more persuasive way that coopts modern progressive values. As a result, calling for the ballot, and the award thereof, in support of one's identity politics or commitment to social justice has accomplished no more than advancing the capitalist elements of competitive interscholastic debate. There

have been no concrete, significant gains for the community by one team winning over another; it is just business as usual.<sup>16</sup>

Even the imposition of formal organizational or tournament rules has also been ineffective. Like the working class in a capitalist economy is economically excluded from successfully participating in policy making, schools with fewer resources are unable to participate as effectively as larger schools in the rulemaking process. Larger schools with more resources have a greater impact on the direction, shaping, and wording of organizational rules. It is unsurprising that the vast majority of the very few rules that do govern debaters' in-round conduct suffer from insurmountable vagueness or ambiguity. And even for the rules that are crystal clear, the remedy is nearly always left to judges' discretion. The previous discussion demonstrates that resource-rich schools whose camp-trained debaters are much better positioned to influence a judge's exercise of discretion or refusal to exercise discretion to the elite's benefit. The elite schools are better able to adapt their sales pitches to include reasons judges should not exercise their discretion to "pull the trigger" and enforce the rule against the elite. As one administrator of a TOC qualifying tournament aptly stated when refusing to enforce the tournament's strictly-worded disclosure rule against a debater from another highly competitive school on the TOC circuit, "Nobody wants to be that guy." And like large corporations that employ highly paid, highly qualified attorneys, students participating in elite programs are better trained to emphasize rules' vagueness, ambiguities, or lack of a clear remedy. Proponents of organizational rules also attempt to justify new rules in terms of fairness, and frequently allude to the disparity of resources between "big schools" and "small schools." The "fairness" justification is problematic because "fairness" tends to be defined by the dominant narratives of resource-rich schools. It also paternalistically co-opts the plight of resource-poor schools to advance the interest of the resource-rich in the adoption of favorable rules that further tip the scales in the favor of the winners in the marketplace.

Another failed attempt to ensure "fair" and "educational" debate has been a resort to theory. Theory presents a punitive, ex post facto alternative to formal organizational rules. Proponents of theory in debate have argued that it "equalizes the competitive playing field" by allowing students to craft their own, non-evidence-based arguments. This approach suffers from the same problems as formal organizational rules. Even assuming theory did provide schools with fewer resources with additional arguments, they provide the same ground to the

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<sup>16</sup> Michael J. Ritter, *Overcoming the Fiction of "Social Change Through Debate": What's to Learn from 2PAC's Changes*, 2:1 NAT'L J. SPEECH & DEBATE (2013).

resource-rich schools. To the extent theory might assist smaller schools, theory is frequently not persuasive because theory interpretations created by students without the help or guidance of an experienced coach or research assistant generally lack necessary or sufficient clarity and justifications that the elite students are, because of their greater resources, better trained to argue. Because theory is not necessarily rooted in literature, it vastly increases the strategic capacities of resource-rich schools. It also creates an additional layer of unpredictability for resources-poor schools, which are structurally rendered less able to prepare for both sides of any and all issues the mind can think of.

One of the most obvious ways the elite have profited off progressive values in the community is by claiming to attack the effects of unequal resource distribution in debate by providing public information domains, particularly online case-lists and the Open Evidence Project. Public information domains have further burdened smaller schools with the one-two punch of socially compelling disclosure and then providing an excessive amount of case and position information to research. The resource-rich schools with numerous coaches, assistants, and research staff, are much better positioned to effectively research and prepare for the entirety of case-lists. But the very existence of case-lists pressures small schools to give up one of their sole competitive strengths, which is the element of (at least some) surprise. Furthermore, resource-rich schools that voluntarily place information into publically available caselists frequently provide inaccurate, incomplete, and misleading information that only diverts the limited resources of smaller schools into time wasted developing inapplicable arguments.

The Open Evidence Project, created by the National Debate Coaches Association, which is now selling membership benefits for money,<sup>17</sup> has had similar effects. The Open Evidence Project's burden on schools is so great that it has, consistent with the expected capitalist effects on the competitive interscholastic debate, increased the market demand for more research assistants to sift through all of the evidence for the useable information. And that task is difficult, as the quality of evidence (frequently cut by high schoolers learning how to cut evidence) is relatively poor and less applicable when compared to evidence cut and prepared by research assistants and coaching staff. As a result, schools whose limited resources force them to rely on the camp files from the Open Evidence Project are even further disadvantaged. Evidence from one camp's files is frequently copy-pasted wholesale into another camp's file, which proliferates the amount of duplicative information and adds to the burden on small schools to find out what

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<sup>17</sup> National Debate Coaches Association, "Membership," <http://www.debatecoaches.org/membership> (last accessed: January 21, 2015).

might be unique about each particular file. Thus, while purporting to create a more socially equitable community and address resource disparities, the public information domains have only exacerbated and re-solidified the problems associated with capitalism in the competitive interscholastic debate community.

### *A Swift Proposal*

There appears to be only one, clear way to effectively find our way out this predicament. I have been assured by my readings of academics (who, admittedly, are employed by private schools to advance the prestige of their respective educational institutions within the education industry), many of whom make some of the most valuable contributions to society in the form of postmodern thought, one method of solving these problems is crystal clear: Eat it. The only way for us to break the chains of capitalism in debate is for judges to eat their ballots. By eating the ballot, the judge cannot sign it; no one can make the judge sign the ballot once it is in the digestive system. By eating the ballot, the judge is not forced by the competition to contribute to the inequalities in debate.

For tournaments that use paper ballots, the procedure is simple. The first step is, obviously, to tear the ballot up into small, digestible, bite-size pieces. Tearing a standard 8.5" x 11" piece of paper in half about five times can accomplish this. The more dramatic the tearing, the more effective the act of defiance will be, as the act of ripping up an important document immediately catches the attention of all around. With the audience captive and watching the judge's every move, the judge's message will be obvious. If judges refuse to endorse the capitalism of competitive interscholastic debate by eating their ballots and not voting, they will hold the system hostage and ultimately cause it to come to a grinding halt. Because I am neither a nutritionist nor degreed in biology, I cannot attest to the health consequences or benefits of eating a ballot. But if judges ate their ballots in acts of defiance, there would likely be the additional benefits of having tournaments print ballots on paper made from trees that were not treated with pesticides. Thus, not only would eating the ballot obliterate capitalism from debate, it would also save the environment in its totality. Admittedly, paperless tournaments present a challenge to eating the ballot. But at those tournaments, which are usually hosted on college campuses, printers are not difficult to find. By going and finding a printer and printing out a ballot on paper, a judge could further defy the capitalist system by transforming the entire tournament into a non-paperless tournament. This is the only clear way out of capitalism in debate.

*Epilogue*

The risk of frivolous litigation resulting from a misreading of the prior section convinced me to produce an addendum to this article explicating my intent. “Swift” in the title of the previous section is a reference to Jonathan Swift, and proposal is a specific reference to “A Modest Proposal.”<sup>18</sup> Swift supported his “modest” proposal of eating the problem in a way that satirically shed light on the contradictions and absurdities of persuasive strategies of his contemporaries in tackling significant social issues. The section entitled “A Swift Proposal” proposes a similarly absurd proposal that mimics some of the proposals (and conduct) of competitive interscholastic debaters and their judges in or immediately following a debate round. But the sections preceding the section entitled “A Swift Proposal” are satirical only in method. The points made in those sections, like Swift’s concern with poverty, are not satirical; they satirically re-deploy the logic and absurd and obfuscating rhetoric of common criticisms of capitalism.

Everything can be accurately called “capitalist” or identified as “reinforcing,” “propping up,” “reifying,” “endorsing,” or some other variation thereof, when “capitalism” is ill-defined or simply undefined. The critics, their audience, and their opponents are overly willing to indulge the willful failures to define and even intentional misrepresentations of “capitalism.” “Capitalism” is frequently a floating concept that is loosely based on a competitive free market economic system. But even using a relatively narrow definition of capitalism that somewhat comports with economists’ understanding of capitalism, nearly all aspects of competitive interscholastic debate could be described as capitalist—competition, the “ballot”-motive, a laissez-faire regulatory approach, and adaptation.

Ironically, critics’ of capitalism unrelenting attempts to label anything and everything an opponent does as capitalist resembles McCarthyist strategies to disempower political enemies by purporting to “root out” communism in the 1950s. Like the McCarthyists before them, critics of capitalism are blindly obsessed with identifying others’ conduct as capitalist or (the analog to being a “communist sympathizer) “propping up,” “reinforcing,” or “reifying,” etc., capitalism. (This occurs in academia because of the “Publish or Die” principle that requires academics to contribute something seemingly novel to their area of expertise. If the academic does not publish enough, then they risk losing their job.) Critics of capitalism are frequently guilty of parroting portions of academic texts and lumping together varying conceptualizations of social and economic

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<sup>18</sup> JONATHAN SWIFT, A MODEST PROPOSAL (1729).

problems and just calling it “capitalism.” The critics’ opponents thereby become subject to accusations and victimized by desperate, unrelenting attempts to locate capitalism somewhere in their speech or conduct. The result is the chilling of speech and valid ideas. Audiences’ ideologies, which are frequently aligned much more with other economic systems, can frequently interfere with the fair evaluation of the critics’ arguments. As such, accusations of capitalism and “capitalist sympathizing” are given credence despite sufficient evidence or analysis. The amorphism of “capitalism” and the McCarthyism-like attempts to eschew it damage the educational purposes of interscholastic competitions because students and their audiences become misinformed about basic economics, a rudimentary understanding of which is essential to survival into the world students inevitably must enter. The misinformation also renders audiences less capable of effectively participating in social discourses both inside and outside of their respective communities. A further, internally inconsistent malady contained within modern and postmodern criticisms of capitalism in academia is that they actively preclude discussions about how to make the world a better place in a way the usually less-educated, working class understands.

The critics’ of capitalism proposals to reject capitalism or to reject “working within the system” inherently fail to account for interscholastic competition necessarily takes place “within the system.” Interscholastic competitions are capitalist microcosms; they’re used by schools to increase the schools’ competitive positions and prestige in the education industry; and exist within the larger capitalist-leaning economy of the United States. Ignoring the reality of interscholastic competition is situated in the larger, capitalist-leaning market and national economy serve to destroy the “advocacy training” purpose of such competitions. The attempts to change debate or society through an hyperbolic treatment of the ballot comes at a zero sum expense of the lost opportunity to learn how to defend proposals that would appeal to an audience outside of the competitive interscholastic debate community.

Finally, any claim interscholastic competition is outside of “the system” is akin to a corporation’s false and misleading advertisement. Audiences who fail to hold the message and argument to higher standards are not only acting within the system, they are also acting to maintain the system and encourage dishonest and unethical communication. By participating in interscholastic competitions, all participants have consented to the system. Any request for the ballot implicitly and inherently acknowledges this. The only real way out is to not compete, to withdraw from the tournament, to concede the round, or for the judge not to vote. But the “desired” effect of such conduct would not be desirable for anyone involved in the capitalist microcosm known as debate; it directly contradicts the

ballot-motive. The participants have paid money into the system by entering the interscholastic competition, and the judge is being paid to ensure the competition continues. “The system” always wins in competitive interscholastic debate, and it does so because everyone has consented to such and intends to profit in their own way from it.

Rejecting capitalism is necessarily rejecting competitive interscholastic debate. Really, no ballot needs to be eaten any more than a particular debater needs to be rejected or voted for to address actual problems in the competitive interscholastic debate community. Rather, judges and debaters merely need to start holding each other to higher standards of competitive, academic, and intellectual integrity when it comes to discussions of capitalism in competitive interscholastic debate. A fruitful first step would be to jettison the anti-“capitalism” McCarthyism that accuses individuals and their conduct as sympathizing with, endorsing, or promoting, etc., an undefined, decontextualized notion of “capitalism.” These relentless, desperate accusations are overly focused on (mis)categorizing everything as “capitalism” and tend to crowd out rational reflection and discussion on the problems in the community. The next step would be to educate oneself on basic economics.

## CRITIQUING CHIMERA: PART I

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### *Ghostbusting the Chimera*

“Sorry, Venkman, I’m terrified beyond the capacity for rational thought.”<sup>19</sup>

In modern competitive interscholastic debate, “capitalism” is a chimera. A chimera is “an imaginary monster made up of grotesquely disparate parts.”<sup>20</sup> The logical fallacy metaphor of a straw man is too feeble to aptly describe the Cthulhu-like creature “capitalism” has become in debate rounds. While it is likely fun to play Ghostbusters at tournaments, pretending to fight a ghost that debaters and modern academics identify as “capitalism,” it undermines education in at least three ways. First, it misinforms students about how to properly identify a concept for criticism and to distinguish the criticized concept from its alternatives. Second, the constant sliming of capitalism prevents true understanding of economics and practical solutions to problems in the real world beyond the debate round. And third, debaters are learning a caricature of history when learning and re-communicating to others that money, jobs, wages, corporations, and production, etc., are unique to capitalism or that regard for “the other” is the exclusive provenance of alternatives to capitalism. Understanding capitalism and its alternatives is the first step in addressing the deleterious effects of ghostbusting this so-called “capitalist” chimera. In this article, I offer a primer on basic economics in hopes that debaters and their judges engage in more honest and informed discussions about what capitalism actually is.

Identifying an economic system simply requires identifying what is fundamental to each major theory in terms of property ownership, the control over the means of production, and the distribution of produced goods. The means of production are important because, regardless of the system created by any typically proposed alternative (the rejection of capitalism, the rejection of a debater, or whatever), if humanity will be able to live in a new world of a proposed alternative, production—like breathing—will be essential to survival. People will need food,

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<sup>19</sup> GHOSTBUSTERS (1984).

<sup>20</sup> The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, “chimera,” 2015, <https://www.ahdictionary.com/word/search.html?q=chimera>.

water, medicine, transportation, shelter, and more; production and distribution of these goods are necessary to human survival regardless of the economic system in which the production occurs. Unless one expects an individual to produce everything he or she needs to sustain his or her life (an expectation that would defy how humans and almost every other species has survived and evolved), a market for trade must also exist. Thus, production, distribution, and markets for trade are fundamental to every economic system. Opposing production, distribution, or the market then is not opposing capitalism, it is opposing human existence, and the mere suggestion of opposing human existence should be resisted by any rational human.

This article focuses on the three economic systems of communism, fascism, and capitalism for a few reasons. First, these are the major economic systems attempted globally in the past century. More importantly, these systems conceptually capture what would be essential to any actual economic alternative to capitalism. Economic systems—regardless of how they are constructed in any alternative, deconstructed, and reconstructed world—would still resemble one of these systems. This is because economies are generally either “command” (meaning controlled mostly or totally by the government), “market” (meaning controlled heavily or totally by individual citizens), or “mixed” (meaning a mixture of command and market).<sup>21</sup> This conceptualization is descriptive of only the structure of various economic systems and not of the various values allegedly imbued in or purported by each system.

Communism is an economic system in which the means of production are owned and controlled publicly or by the state. In theory, this is to happen after a violent overthrow of the capitalists or the “bourgeoisie” by the working class or “proletariat.” Resources are to be produced from each according to their ability and distributed to each according to need. Communism is a system most closely identified with Karl Marx, but he like all theorists was certainly influenced by other philosophers.<sup>22</sup> Clearly, communism is a version of command economy. Socialism is a command economy and a variant of communism advocated by Marx and Vladimir Lenin.<sup>23</sup> There may still be some private enterprise under

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<sup>21</sup> I hope my anarchist friends will forgive me, but I do not view anarchy as a viable or sustainable economic alternative.

<sup>22</sup> Dr. Paul M. Johnson, *A Glossary of Political Terms*, Auburn University (2005), <http://www.auburn.edu/~johnspm/gloss/communism>.

<sup>23</sup> *Id.*

socialism or communism but this is heavily regulated by the government rather than subject to market forces.<sup>24</sup>

Fascism is a bundle of ideologies like nationalism and adulation of a single leader such as Adolf Hitler (Germany, 1930s to 1940s) or Benito Mussolini (Italy, 1920s to 1940s).<sup>25</sup> This is not to imply that communism does not also contain its own ideologies, but communism is more readily recognized as an economic system. Fascism on the other hand does seem more readily associated with some of its ideological baggage than with its economic theories.<sup>26</sup> Regardless, fascism (or economic fascism), like communism, is a form of a command economy but under fascism, property is not nationalized. Property is still considered to be owned privately, but the use (including what is produced and how it is distributed) is heavily regulated and planned by government agencies. There are wage and price controls and many of the more important markets are allowed to operate without competition.<sup>27</sup>

Capitalism differs greatly from socialism and communism in that capitalism is not a command economy. Under capitalism, the means of production are privately owned, there is minimal interference from the state or other third parties, and goods and services are sold or traded in a free market. A free market is one where prices, distribution of goods, and labor policies, etc., are established without interference from the government.<sup>28</sup> The government would exist solely to punish those who commit violence and resolve conflicts between citizens by acting as an objective third party. Contrary to what many (including debaters) believe, there is little more to capitalism than this. However, supporters of capitalism will justify capitalism on different grounds such as it is more beneficial to the poor, to the environment, to the collective good, to the individual.

Thus, when “capitalism” is divorced from privately-owned production and statist control over the market and then criticized, the criticism’s subject is not capitalism; it is a chimera erroneously called “capitalism.” Typical competitive

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<sup>24</sup> *Id.* at <http://www.auburn.edu/~johnspm/gloss/socialism>.

<sup>25</sup> *Id.* at <http://www.auburn.edu/~johnspm/gloss/fascism>.

<sup>26</sup> For whatever reason, fascist governments—which have killed over 28 million people—tend to be associated more with genocide and mass death than communist governments—which killed 94 million people but seem more associated with economics than genocide. John J. Walters, “Communism Killed 94M in 20th Century, Feels Need to Kill Again,” *Reason*, March 13, 2013

<sup>27</sup> Johnson, *supra* note 22, at <http://www.auburn.edu/~johnspm/gloss/fascism>.

<sup>28</sup> *Id.* at <http://www.auburn.edu/~johnspm/gloss/capitalism>.

criticisms of capitalism decontextualize academic discussions to criticize a chimera, a ghost, a legend, a legend many with anti-capitalistic ideologies merely want to believe capitalism is. And it is easy to slime the fanciful chimera when all participants uncritically believe, and want to believe, the chimera exists and it can be slimed away by mere imagination. But this exercise in futility is not simply uneducational, it is antieducational. It teaches to rage not against the machine but against the necessary conditions for human thriving in a society that produces and provides a market for trade. Those who rage against these requirements will never be happy, or even satisfied, with whatever system might replace capitalism. Whatever the alternative is, if people are to live in that alternative system, there must be and will be a market and trade. And whatever the alternative is, it will appear to the unfortunate who have been miseducated that the capitalism chimera grew a new head. This is a recipe for personal and political nihilism, which are strong contributing factors to complacency and complicity with the murder of millions of people at the hands of the state.

***Real Ghostbusting***

“We’ll cross the streams!”<sup>29</sup>

The United States is by no means a capitalist economy; city, county, state, and federal governments in the United States constantly control in the market. For example, the federal government is heavily involved in regulating the markets for healthcare and education, setting wage rates, and more. The federal government publishes 2,500 to 4,500 new regulations on the market annually.<sup>30</sup> Plainly, the US is not a capitalist system because the very existence of coerced taxation means property rights are not fully respected in the United States and the market for goods and services is not fully free. A comprehensive study of global economic freedom describes the United States as the 12th freest country in the world,<sup>31</sup> suggesting the majority of the world is even further away from capitalism than the United States. Even the freest country in the world according to this index, Hong Kong, only protects property rights at a measured index of 89.6%<sup>32</sup> meaning even the freest country is not really, by definition, purely capitalist. Therefore, identifying the status quo as capitalism tells a ghost story.

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<sup>29</sup> GHOSTBUSTERS (1984).

<sup>30</sup> Maeve P. Carey, *Counting Regulations: An Overview of Rulemaking, Types of Federal Regulations, and Pages in the Federal Register*, CONGRESSIONAL RESEARCH SERVICE, Nov. 26, 2014, <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R43056.pdf>.

<sup>31</sup> Terry Miller & Anthony B. Kim, *2015 Index of Economic Freedom Promoting Economic Opportunity and Prosperity*, THE HERITAGE FOUNDATION, 2015, <http://www.heritage.org/index>.

<sup>32</sup> *Id.*

Most accurately, the United States is a mixed economy meaning it is a mixture of communism, fascism, and capitalism. It may astound the reader to think there are elements of communism or fascism in the land of the free and the home of the brave. But this characterization is empirically supported. The United States has a history of nationalizing certain industries for a duration, and then allowing that industry to privatize again. Recent US history provides numerous examples. The US government effectively nationalized the General Motors Corporation during the financial crisis of 2008.<sup>33</sup> That same year the US government nationalized the mortgage giants Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, and forced a major restructuring of American International Group.<sup>34</sup> In 2001, the US government nationalized the Transportation Security Administration.<sup>35</sup> Prior to 2001, the US government nationalized the railroads, telegraph industry, Smith & Wesson, and has tried to nationalize more.<sup>36</sup> Despite the United States' numerous nationalizations of private markets and business organizations, it would be unfair and inaccurate to describe the US economy as communist because it does not meet the definition of communism. There is simply too much industry that is not nationalized or under private control. But by definition, the US also is not capitalist.

There are elements of fascism in the US economy as well, and likely more elements of fascism than communism. Fascism retains a façade of private property but regulates and plans the private market through regulation. It could be argued that given the pervasive regulation by governments in the United States, the United States maintains a mere façade of private property rights. The Supreme Court decision of *Kelo v City of New London* gave communities the power to use eminent domain to seize properties to stimulate and plan their local economy.<sup>37</sup> Many states subsequently passed laws to curb this practice, but these laws vary in strength with most state laws doing little in actuality to curb this use of eminent domain.<sup>38</sup> In other words, property is privately owned and controlled in the United

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<sup>33</sup> CBS News/AP, *A History of Corporate Nationalization*, CBS NEWS/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, June 2, 2009, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/a-history-of-corporate-nationalization>.

<sup>34</sup> *Id.*

<sup>35</sup> *Id.*

<sup>36</sup> *Id.*

<sup>37</sup> Charlotte Allen, *Kelo Revisited: Properties were seized and a neighborhood razed in the name of 'economic development' that never came*, WEEKLY STANDARD, Feb. 10, 2014, [http://www.weeklystandard.com/articles/kelo-revisited\\_776021.html](http://www.weeklystandard.com/articles/kelo-revisited_776021.html).

<sup>38</sup> Castle Coalition, *50 State Report Card: Tracking Eminent Domain Reform since Kelo*, [http://castlecoalition.org/pdf/publications/report\\_card/50\\_State\\_Report.pdf](http://castlecoalition.org/pdf/publications/report_card/50_State_Report.pdf) (last accessed: Jan. 31, 2015).

States—unless it isn't. The localities wielding the power of eminent domain also have the power under the National Preservation Act of 1966 to declare different properties landmarks for the purpose of historical preservation; here, again, property rights are not protected. The Endangered Species Act regulates what people can do with their property if an endangered species is found on the property. Cities can regulate how high store signs can be, whether people can smoke on your property, how many people you can have in your building, whether you can gamble on your property, in some cases how much money a property owner can charge in rent, how waste must be disposed, whether you can build a house, whether you can catch rain that falls on your property, etc. Because the list is far too long to list them all in a single article, I must refer the reader to the "U.S. Code," "Code of Federal Regulations," "U.S. Register," and the voluminous state and local analogs for further study.

The US economy also has fascist elements with wage and price controls such as the minimum wage (which is really a price control) and setting prices especially in the healthcare industry. The US also has multiple agencies and czars in place to heavily regulate and control various industries such as the EPA, ATF, Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Education, Energy, and more. As discomfoting as it might be to realize, an analysis of the characteristics of different economic systems shows the United States is closer to economic fascism than to communism. It would still be premature to label the US economy as fascist because it does not fully meet the definition. Most prices are not controlled. Most wages are not controlled. Most people do not live in historical locations or have endangered species on their property. There is still very little regulation of the Internet and technology sectors of the economy.<sup>39</sup> There are very few regulations on the clothing, printing, textile, laundry, publishing, and other industries.<sup>40</sup> Thus, the US economy is not totally fascist or communist, but by any intellectually honest measure, it is not capitalist either. Other influences certainly affect the market, such as Keynesian stimulation policies, but many such influences are simply statist (and thus anti-capitalist) interventions in the private market.

There are elements of capitalism left alive in the US economy. The existence of "due process" hoops governments must jump through to justify seizing or

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<sup>39</sup> Thomas J. Donohue, *Regulation: Do the feds control too much or too little?*, FREDERICKSBURG, Dec. 28, 2014, [http://www.fredericksburg.com/opinion/columns/regulation-do-the-feds-control-too-much-or-too-little/article\\_ae179592-0155-500d-a6c6-194c7a3e5e39.html](http://www.fredericksburg.com/opinion/columns/regulation-do-the-feds-control-too-much-or-too-little/article_ae179592-0155-500d-a6c6-194c7a3e5e39.html).

<sup>40</sup> Antony Davies, *Regulation and Productivity*, MERCATUS RESEARCH, 2014, <http://mercatus.org/publication/regulation-and-productivity>.

controlling private property demonstrates a measure of respect for private property that it is not purely facile. The United States tends to value free trade with other nations. Businesses are still mostly free to set prices, wages, etc. Different states regulate to vastly different degrees. Regulations come and go meaning an industry might be heavily regulated for a few years and then new politicians might deregulate that industry making the market for that industry freer, at least for a while.

In conclusion, the United States is a mixed economy. Decontextualizing academic texts, or drawing upon mischaracterizations of economic systems by unqualified individuals, then, is the first place that seemingly-all criticisms of capitalism mis-educate students. The common criticism inaccurately identifies the United States as part of the “capitalist” chimera, the values of the US as capitalist, the actions of the US as capitalist, both the US’s economic successes and its failings as capitalist, and more. Clearly, the United States cannot solely value allegedly capitalist ideals if it regularly embraces policies and ideas from non-capitalist economic systems. Nor can all its actions or policies be motivated by or described as capitalism; such allegations initiate the process of conjuring the chimera. Because there are some elements of capitalism still alive in the United States, critical analyses of capitalism in the United States are possible upon a thorough and thoughtful analysis about the criticized market, or the policy that is being criticized, etc. It is very possible that—considering how mixed the economy is—the criticized or analyzed policy or institution is either not capitalist at all or overwhelmingly influenced by fascist or communist elements that are both the cause of an identified problem *and* the proposed solution to that problem. Suggesting an alternative to a problem that is, because of a misunderstanding of basic economics, the same thing as the cause of the problem mis-educates students and audiences. Such a thorough analysis ordinarily takes an entire academic publication, not decontextualized snippets of several such publications. Any criticism that generalizes the US economy as “capitalist” ought to be dismissed out of hand as ridiculously inaccurate or dishonest propaganda.

Progress in the struggle to ensure human flourishing requires honest people and fair analysis of the competing economic systems at play in the US economy so that destructive policies will be avoided in favor of productive ones. This can be achieved only through real ghost-busting, not criticizing a chimera.