

# ONE

## Improving Education and Healing America through Debate-Centered Education

### *An Introduction*

I think debating in high school and college is most valuable training whether for politics, the law, business or for service on community committees such as the PTA and the League of Women Voters . . . I wish we had a good deal more debating in our educational institutions than we do now.

*President John F. Kennedy, August 1960<sup>1</sup>*

America is as divided politically and economically as it has been at any point in my lifetime, nearly seven decades long, a period that spans the divisive and tumultuous years of the Vietnam War and, later, Watergate. People are sorting themselves, in their work and at home, into “blue” and “red” bubbles to an unprecedented degree, and increasingly are living in very different worlds, choosing their news sources and friends and splitting their families along political lines.<sup>2</sup> Widening income inequality (especially manifest in the wide disparities of who has suffered the most during the economic contraction triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020), the economic division between rapidly growing blue regions of the country and less rapidly growing areas, or even shrinking red regions,<sup>3</sup> coupled with the receding American Dream for too many, all surely have made matters worse.

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We are now more than just polarized and are growing more so at a faster rate than other industrialized countries.<sup>4</sup> We are becoming tribal, where whatever you may say or write is viewed by others entirely according to which side of the political divide you fall. Former Secretary of Defense and highly decorated Marine general James Mattis put it well when he wrote these words in August 2019: “We are dividing into hostile tribes cheering against each other, fueled by emotion and a mutual disdain that jeopardizes our future, instead of rediscovering our common ground and finding solutions.”<sup>5</sup>

At no time in recent history has this tribal conflict been more on display, and the political rancor more in evidence, than during the impeachment of President Donald Trump. As this book went to market, the country headed into uncharted territory with an impeached but not convicted president campaigning for reelection only several months into the nation’s experience of its second-greatest pandemic and one of its worst recessions in history. It remains to be seen whether the only silver linings in this horrible episode—the extraordinary coming together of people online and the support for medical professionals and millions of lower-paid “essential workers” who fought the pandemic on its front lines and kept the economy from totally collapsing—will begin to heal the country’s deep political divisions, or whether those divisions will grow deeper.

Political leaders, academic and think tank scholars, journalists, and pundits across the political spectrum have suggested several ways to do what General Mattis urged before the pandemic crisis to bridge the differences between us. Some options have to do with changing the institutions of government to encourage more political moderation and compromise: finding ways to reverse and prevent gerrymandering (such as using independent commissions to draw district lines); changing the mechanics of voting (such as a nonpartisan primary system that picks the top two candidates for each elected office, regardless of party, to run in the general election, or choosing the winner based on voters’ rank order preferences); or eliminating the electoral college, if not by constitutional amendment then by enough states passing legislation

declaring the presidential victor in each state as the one receiving a majority of the national vote, which would accomplish the same objective.

Another very different idea for helping bridge our political divisions is to require young people, after high school or college, to devote at least a year to national service, either military or civilian.<sup>6</sup> In addition to fixing some of America's problems, national service would mix Americans of all backgrounds at a highly impressionable age, reducing stereotyping, building empathy, and restoring some sense of national cohesion and purpose.

This book advances a very different, perhaps counterintuitive, prescription: incorporate debate or evidence-based argumentation in school as early as the late elementary grades, clearly in high school, and even in college. Debate-centered education, as I call it (it has other names, as you will learn) would excite students about learning, thereby enhancing their engagement and performance. In addition, there are good reasons for believing it also would enhance their earnings prospects throughout their working lives while helping to heal our political and economic rifts.

Debating has deep historical roots. Its use in education, resolving legal disputes, and by deliberative bodies of all sorts hearkens back to ancient Greece and Rome, and to famous philosophers such as Aristotle and Socrates. Civil discourse through debate among candidates for political office, and among citizens, also has long been a characteristic of effective democracy.

Why not, then, greatly expand debate participation beyond the world of "competitive debating," which for decades has been limited to a small fraction of the U.S. high school student population? It seems like an easy question to answer in the affirmative. But the fact is that debate as an instructional device is rarely used in school classrooms. I have written this book to persuade school leaders, policymakers, and the wider public why this should change.

I know I can't wave a magic wand and make the changes I recommend happen all at once. At best, debate-centered instruction (DCI) will take decades to fully penetrate the education system, while moving

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it into the entire electorate will take even longer. Skeptics who are persuaded by the case I am about to make will correctly point out that we do not have the luxury of time. We need to heal our nation much sooner, for all kinds of reasons. I agree with that; if you do, too, then I hope you can be in the vanguard that brings about the reform outlined here much more quickly. However rapidly change comes, we must start somewhere and some time. Why not now?

### **The Virtues of Debate: A Preview**

My case begins by recognizing and then building on the virtues of competitive debating, whose major features are outlined in the next chapter. Until you get there, all you need to know is that competitive debating, even with some of the changes over the years that I criticize in later portions of the book and which a few critics claim would harm our national political discourse if widely adopted, is very much the antithesis of the partisan and uncivil shouting matches we see daily on cable TV or in congressional floor speeches. Debating in school develops a much different and much more important set of skills: research; thinking logically and critically and doing it on your feet; listening carefully to others; backing up arguments with evidence (not fake news!); working collaboratively with partners; speaking persuasively in a civil fashion; and perhaps most important, being able to argue both (in some cases more) sides of nearly any issue or subject. Understanding how to identify and articulate the merits and drawbacks of multiple sides of almost any subject or issue is important in all phases of life and is key to a healthy democracy.

Although it has had problems counting votes in elections, one county in Florida, Broward, is a national leader in recognizing the educational power of having its students participate in some form of debating activity, and proudly touts the improvements in educational performance that have resulted.<sup>7</sup> Since 2013, all high schools, middle schools, and even elementary schools beginning with 4th grade in the

county have been required to offer speech and debate classes. After getting off to a slow start, this “Broward Initiative” is now thriving, with over 12,000 students currently participating. It is not surprising, therefore, that two of the leaders of the national movement for gun control who emerged after the mass shooting at Marjorie Stoneman High School in Parkland, Florida, centered in Broward County, in February 2018, David Hogg and Jacklyn Corin, debated competitively.<sup>8</sup> Several other students from the school had been preparing for debates over gun control before the tragic shooting took place.

Hundreds of thousands of former competitive debaters know the value of debate from their own experiences. Many successful politicians, actors, and business leaders were once debaters. Look through the sample list provided at the end of this chapter. Some of the names there may surprise you.

Over two decades ago, a cadre of educators believed that competitive debating—through its training in research, thinking, and speaking—would be especially valuable for minority students, who often come from low income families and attend school in urban school districts. In the late 1990s, these educators put this idea into practice by forming city-wide “urban debate leagues,” initially in Atlanta, and shortly thereafter in Baltimore, Chicago, and New York. With early major financial support from the Open Society Institute (OSI), the National Association for Urban Debate Leagues (NAUDL) was formed in 2000 as a national organization to help these city-specific debate leagues in the United States. The idea borrowed from similar efforts by OSI to spur competitive debate programs in high schools and colleges in Asia and Eastern Europe as a way of inculcating free speech and democratic values in those parts of the world. The NAUDL, and its over twenty debate leagues around the country, is still going strong, even without OSI’s support, roughly twenty years later. Similar efforts aimed at enhancing the education of minority students on a state-wide basis can be found in some states, such as the Speak First program in Alabama.<sup>9</sup>

But the adult success of former debaters does not necessarily prove that their participation in competitive debate was primarily or even

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partially responsible for that success. Former debaters may have become accomplished as they aged because they have the traits that would have made them successful anyhow and only incidentally participated in debate in their formative years because they were and still are naturally good speakers and students. Chapter 2 reviews some studies that take account of this possible “self-selection” bias and shows through one rigorous statistical method that, in fact, competitive debate has made a positive difference among minority debaters, especially girls.

That the limited evidence of the value of competitive debate is positive should not be surprising. Even the most naturally gifted people can and do benefit from formal instruction in any activity, especially when combined with practice and hard work. Just ask Michael Jordan, LeBron James, or Patrick Mahomes, or any other highly successful athlete, entertainer, or teacher. Indeed, what is true for successful adults is also true for students, as the pioneering research of psychologist Angela Duckworth shows. “Grit,” as she calls it, is as or potentially more important for success in school and later in life as innate talent. Using the principles of debate more broadly in all classroom settings can be a powerful way of engaging students in the fun of learning, thereby encouraging them to stick with education—precisely the trait of grit that Duckworth has documented to be so important in education and in life.

In any event, in my own case, selection bias clearly wasn’t an issue. Until the age of fifteen, I had a severe stutter, and my mother, on the suggestion of a friend, had to more than twist my arm to persuade me to enroll in a speech and debate class in my sophomore year in high school. Thank goodness she did, because competitive debate cured the speech impediment that, up to that point, had made me reluctant to speak up in class and which years of formal speech therapy was unable to fix. It also taught me the research and thinking habits that gave me the confidence to succeed in school and have a successful professional career thereafter. In interviews conducted for this book, I have listened to similar and even more compelling stories of how debate transformed the lives of people starting out in life with much greater disadvantages than me.

One such example is Eric Tucker, who grew up in Iowa in a low-income household with multiple learning issues and self-admitted behavioral issues. He says he was enticed into competitive debate in middle and high school by the prospect of traveling and hanging out with cool kids. Debate gave Eric a purpose in life, helping overcome his learning difficulties (which clearly were greater than my own) to gain an Ivy League education and then a Ph.D. in social science at Oxford, after which he joined, to help run, the National Association of Urban Debate Leagues. Afterward, Tucker and his wife Erin Mote founded the Brooklyn Labs charter school, which, at this writing, has over 800 students, almost all minorities, many with learning disabilities (like those Tucker overcame), and currently teaches students from the 6th through the 10th grade.<sup>10</sup>

That so many educators and students have participated in various forms of competitive debate over multiple decades suggests that, at the very least, there must be some value added to the activity beyond self-selection—though I admit more rigorous evaluations of the kinds I will soon describe are necessary. But why should the skills that competitive debate teaches to participants be limited to just them? Why shouldn't all students, not just the less than 1 percent who debate competitively, have an opportunity to acquire such skills?

### **Debate-Centered Instruction in Action**

In fact, as you will learn in chapter 3, several educators have been hard at work on a little-noticed effort to incorporate debate- or argument-centered instructional techniques into other parts of the high school (and lower school) curriculum and classes. A pioneer of this kind of learning, Les Lynn, the founding executive director of the NAUDL, calls this “debatifying” the curriculum. Lynn has developed a set of materials, featured on his website, to enable teachers to do precisely this across a wide range of subjects, including science, where one wouldn't think debate instructional techniques would be useful or appropriate.<sup>11</sup>

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Similarly, the Boston Debate League (BDL) has been assisting over a dozen Boston-area schools in a similar way since 2013. Lynn's and the BDL's activities implement, in multiple innovative ways, "debate across the curriculum," a pedagogical approach that has been advocated in a theoretical way over several decades by multiple researchers from different academic backgrounds,<sup>12</sup> which Lynn, the BDL, and the teachers they mentor have put into practice.

Well before any of these academic articles were written or Lynn and the BDL's current leader Mike Wasserman became active, one middle school teacher—in Dodge City, Kansas, in the 1980s—experimented with the notion that debate techniques could be useful in nonspeech classroom settings. Former debater and current trial lawyer Brian Hufford recounted to me that his teacher in a "citizenship class" in 9th grade had the students argue both sides of different propositions, such as what policy stance the United States should take vis-à-vis the Soviet Union.<sup>13</sup> He told me that this exercise taught him to look at issues from both perspectives—one of the most important lessons rules-based debating imparts to all students. Hufford's experience also enticed him to become a competitive debater in high school, which, in turn, led to a full scholarship to debate in college and put him on his way toward his outstanding legal career.

As multiple researchers have written, and as Lynn, Wasserman, and the teachers they have coached have told me—and common sense is likely to tell you—students are much more likely to remember what they research and debate than when some or even much of the material is delivered to them by "the sage on the stage" in lecture format that they then regurgitate on an exam. It is often said that the best way to learn something is to teach. Debate-centered education takes this adage up a notch, requiring students not only to teach but also to anticipate and counter questions and opposing arguments, activities that teacher-delivered lectures do not promote.

British educator Lucy Crehan, whose *Cleverlands* provides a comprehensive survey of why school systems in other countries are outperforming those in the United States, observes that the "motivation of



students plays a huge part in whether they succeed . . .”<sup>14</sup> Having to prepare for and participate in a debate in class, perhaps first in small groups and later before the entire class, should be an ideal way to motivate students of all ages, but especially those in middle and high school, when students hit the first stage in life where they want to express themselves as individuals separate from their parents. Structured debate formats make that possible, making learning enjoyable and worth pursuing.

I am not claiming that DCI is the only way to do this. As Ted Dintersmith makes clear in his compelling and pathbreaking book *What Schools Could Be*, multiple educational innovation efforts are underway across the country, primarily in conventional public schools, to engage students in the joy of learning, organized around solving society’s problems. Many of these efforts are described under the umbrella of project-based learning (PBL).<sup>15</sup> Tom Vander Ark, former director of education grantmaking at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and deputy secretary of the U.S. Department of Education, has compiled an even broader list of innovative instructional techniques being used by both conventional and charter public high schools throughout the country.<sup>16</sup>

Dintersmith also makes a compelling case in his book not only for PBL but against the use of standardized test scores to measure student and teacher performance. Whether or not you are convinced of his arguments, the education establishment is not likely to abandon test scores any time soon as a measurement tool, and so I make the case that DCI can improve *both* test scores and interest in learning (which otherwise is deterred by a single focus on test score improvement) as well as workplace skills and civic life. One can be an advocate for PBL *and* DCI, viewing DCI as a type of ongoing project. The closing chapter of the book suggests that a linkage of DCI and PBL as part of a broader “education innovation” campaign could be the best way to expand the implementation of both ideas.

I cannot overemphasize the importance of making debate a central part of learning during the school day and not just expanding students’ participation either in competitive debate or some variation of it as an extracurricular activity. Education researchers and practitioners Jal

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Mehta and Sarah Fine have reported the huge problem of boredom in high schools all across America—only 32 percent of students reported being “engaged” in school, according to a Gallup poll taken in 2015—and have suggested that competitive debate, along with theater and sports, *after school* can help address the problem by giving students “much more agency, responsibility and choice.”<sup>17</sup> DCI would do the same thing for all students, *in all their classrooms, potentially throughout every school day.*

One of the school leaders Mehta and Fine interviewed highlights another problem endemic to all K–12 education, but especially at the high school level: “Most schools and classrooms are set up in ways that trigger adolescents to resist. What we need to do is to trigger their instinct to *contribute*”<sup>18</sup> (emphasis added). By directly involving students in their own learning and in teaching others, and by enabling them to express themselves in a civil and constructive way in front of their peers, DCI directly answers this challenge.

DCI also should be attractive to teachers, many of whom may be initially skeptical of the idea. It reduces the number of lectures teachers must give and turns them more into mentors. I suspect many teachers would enjoy this mentorship function as much as, if not more than, delivering lectures, especially if they get better educational results. Moreover, DCI does not require all teachers to be superstars. The techniques of teaching through debate are replicable, scalable, and capable of being implemented well, even mastered, by all teachers who believe in it and want to make it work.

### **There Is Enough Evidence to Warrant Further Experimentation with DCI**

DCI does not require all students take an introductory course in forensics and debate to prepare themselves for debates in the classroom. With a limited amount of upfront training, and some coaching or mentoring throughout the school year, any teacher instructing any subject

can transform her classes, using the same curriculum she is already teaching, into debate-enhanced centers of excellence. The modest cost for doing all this can and should come out of existing professional development budgets that are now used to fund a variety of professional development programs for teachers. Although there may be some resistance to reallocating a limited portion of such existing budgets to DCI, as more teachers learn of the advantages to students and to them of DCI, such resistance should wane.

Ideally, the education philanthropic community, which historically has shown great interest and financial support for education reform, will turn its attention to this agenda: supporting more research into, development of, and experimentation with ways to introduce debate-centered instructional techniques into elementary, middle, and high school classes; in developing curricula or materials that can be easily adapted by teachers so that each doesn't have to reinvent the wheel; launching state-based summer institutes for training public school teachers (with scholarships) in debate-centered techniques; and funding rigorous evaluations not only to test the validity of the concept but to provide teachers with scientifically grounded feedback about how to improve such instruction.

Perhaps philanthropists, working with school districts, and researchers will be motivated by this book to launch one or more randomized control trials (RCTs)—long the standard in testing the efficacy and safety of new pharmaceuticals and more recently used for assessing various educational reform ideas—of DCI, with performance measures not limited to educational performance and teacher satisfaction during a few years but broadened and extended for a sufficient length of time to measure the longer-term workforce and civic benefits of this instructional technique. However, even in the best of circumstances, developing, funding, and assessing those studies and their results may be a decade away or more. Can we afford to wait?

I believe not, and I will show in the course of this book that a strong presumptive case already exists for all these benefits, enough so that much experimentation and refinement of DCI is warranted *now*.

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Indeed, my intention is to convince you through a combination of logic and evidence that when those definitive studies are finally completed, they will confirm the propositions advanced here, or at the very least point the way to how DCI can be refined to achieve the multiple benefits I assert for it throughout this book.

More specifically, there is presumptive evidence that much more widespread adoption of DCI would equip many more workers than otherwise would be the case to have the communications, critical thinking, and research skills that employers say they want. It would make workers and our entire economy more productive, which would translate to higher and potentially more evenly distributed and higher wages. Furthermore, if all Americans had the skills that debate imparts, many more of us would be more open-minded and, thus, the voting public eventually would be less—I believe much less—politically divided.

In this age of information silos on the internet and on television, the last claim may strike some readers as hopelessly idealistic. But bear with me; in chapter 5, I support this claim in more detail.

For now, it should be sufficient to note that our Founding Fathers recognized that reasoned, fact-based debate is essential for any democracy to function. It directly follows, therefore, that a citizenry equipped with the skills debaters must master should improve political discourse, the understanding of essential government activities, and thus the functioning of government itself.

To be sure, there is plenty of evidence from past U.S. presidential elections backing historian Yuval Harari's claim that many, perhaps even most, voters act on their feelings or emotions toward candidates or parties rather than using rational thought.<sup>19</sup> *Wall Street Journal* columnist Peggy Noonan has called this the "magic pony" syndrome, describing a series of recent presidents as magic ponies who lacked substantial executive experience but, nonetheless, were elected, in large part, as she sees it, because enough voters were sufficiently dissatisfied with the status quo to believe that only a new magic pony would solve their problems.<sup>20</sup> While Harari and perhaps many others would question whether voters will heed Noonan's plea to give greater weight

to candidates' past relevant experience and deep knowledge—in other words, more weight to reason—the merits of her plea are hard to dispute. Even Harari himself demonstrates that the many challenges facing future leaders in this country and in others are extraordinarily complex and demand reasoned-based leadership. But for voters to realize and act on this insight, they must themselves be better trained in exercising reason above emotion.

Debate training can help do this, by ensuring that the next and future generations of young people have experience and training in arguing *both or multiple sides* of issues so that, by the time they reach adulthood, they will vote for and demand leaders who have these same qualities. DCI teaches through active student participation in learning that many, if not most, problems in life do not have simplistic solutions. Knowing this in high school makes it more likely that, as voting adults, students will be skeptical of those who promise them. Debate training also teaches that compromise is not a dirty word but something that is necessary for deliberative democratic government to work.

Properly run debates also have the virtue of separating ideas from the identities of those who offer them, while teaching participants to avoid putting labels—conservative or liberal, democratic or republican—on ideas, which should be considered on their merits rather than as markers of identity. This runs counter to the prevailing tribal tendencies in the voting public, as well as among elected officials or those running for office who seek to reinforce partisan divisions. But if Americans are ever to have a chance at tackling the many stiff challenges our society now faces—doing a better job of assuring that all benefit from economic growth, addressing climate change, reducing the large and growing structural federal budget deficit, and establishing a broadly acceptable compromise on immigration policy, among many other issues—governments must be led by those dedicated to solving problems rather than posturing politically for the next election.

Of course, substantive policy changes that address people's real fears that economic changes could leave them out in the cold would also clearly help. I and others have written essays or books offering sen-

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sible ways to help Americans adjust better to continued changes and to broaden the benefits of future growth. Some of those ideas are summarized later in this book, especially in chapter 5. But sensible ideas will be implemented only if voters rationally weigh them and then vote for representatives who support them. DCI can help bring this about.

If I am right about the educational and civic virtues of a debate-centered education, why shouldn't all voters, who are already adults, be trained in these techniques? In an ideal world, they would be. In the real world, however, it is unrealistic to expect an already highly polarized electorate to embrace such a broad educational reform for themselves, although one organization, Better Angels, discussed at the end of chapter 4, is trying to do something close to that. But it is not too early for a new generation to be exposed to and trained in debate-based thinking and learning. As they are, by osmosis, the benefits of such training should seep into the minds of some of their parents, in off-hand conversations or at the dinner table when topics like "What did you do or learn at school today?" are routinely discussed.

Some might say that the demise of civility in our political discourse, and even in many of our personal relationships, is irreversible. Or that too many parents will oppose education that purposefully teaches students to be open-minded, forgetting that this is precisely what education is supposed to foster. I do not believe that will happen, though. Most parents who see their children excelling and being excited about learning, especially if they see improvements in educational outcomes (grades and test scores today, hopefully better measures of educational attainment in the future) that I believe debate-centered education can and will deliver, will be pleased with these outcomes and will not resist them. Indeed, beyond the specific skills that DCI imparts, including the ability and willingness to see both (or multiple) sides of most issues, DCI makes learning exciting and fun. How many parents will be opposed to that?

I do not urge that DCI be adopted in a one-size-fits-all fashion imposed by the federal government, which is politically impossible in any event and inconsistent with local control of education in America,

which has deep historical roots, but rather on a voluntary basis from the local level up. That may make the technique slower to penetrate the educational system—even assuming the formal evaluations prove to be positive, as I fully expect—but it also fits with the need for experimenting with and refining the idea, which may have to be tailored to benefit different student populations in different ways.

One major advantage of concentrating on improving instructional techniques is that they can improve all public schools without pitting advocates and opponents of public charter schools against each other. Shortly after the mid-term elections in 2018, *Wall Street Journal* columnist Jason Riley posted an op-ed declaring that the “blue wave may wash education reform away,” referring to the growing opposition within the Democratic party to school choice, principally charter schools.<sup>21</sup> Whether or not this assessment proves true or lasting, it is a mistake in my view to equate education reform solely with parental or student choice, even for successful public charter schools. Pedagogical reform infused by debate or argument-centered education could be even more important than what kind of schools students attend, if the goal is, as it should be, to improve educational outcomes for *all students* in all types of public schools—conventional and charter—and especially for students from disadvantaged backgrounds who face steeper challenges than peers from higher income families and neighborhoods.

### **Getting from Here to There**

Notwithstanding the clear educational, workplace, and civic benefits of DCI, persuading local school boards, principals, and even many teachers to embrace it will not be easy. Most school systems around the country face stiff fiscal challenges, and although the cost of the proposed reforms recommended here would be a wash if funded by reallocating existing teacher professional development monies, doing that may also be politically problematic, at least for a while. In addition, school boards, principals, and teachers are constantly being pitched all

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kinds of pedagogical reforms, and as a result there is understandable reform fatigue that works against widespread adoption of DCI techniques. That is why there is a need for the studies called for here. If they demonstrate the educational benefits of DCI, this would provide an important impetus for wider adoption.

I am also fully aware of how difficult change can be to accomplish, especially when good ideas are introduced from outside the “club” of existing practitioners. It took well over a hundred years for doctors and hospitals to give priority to hand washing as a way of preventing the spread of infections, a simple idea whose power was discovered in the nineteenth century by Joseph Lister. Or, in a completely different arena, it took a while—but at least a shorter period than hand washing in the medical context—for sports executives, managers, and coaches to embrace the power of statistics or “analytics” pioneered by Bill James in baseball and popularized by Michael Lewis in his best-selling book *Moneyball*. The baseball establishment is embracing the more recent efforts by innovators on the fringes of professional baseball to combine insights from physics and statistics to improve player performance with even greater speed.<sup>22</sup> I am hopeful, as an outsider to the educational establishment, that the faster dissemination of good ideas witnessed in sports will be replicated in education with the rapid and widespread adoption of DCI.

In the meantime, the fact that there are well over a million adults who have benefited from competitive debate in school should provide a natural constituency for change and activism to support a much larger role for debate in education. Former debaters know its pedagogical value and are ideal ambassadors to the education community to urge much wider use of debate techniques in all classrooms. Indeed, many elected officials at all levels of government—though, admittedly, not necessarily at the school board level—were former competitive debaters in high school, and perhaps in college, and for them urging DCI should be like pushing on an open door.

To be clear, I do not claim that requiring debate and introducing debate-centered education in nondebate courses will completely solve



both the political and economic problems of the country, or even most of the challenges confronting K–12 education. Former Education Secretary Arne Duncan makes a powerful case in his book *How Schools Work* that major increases in teacher pay, coupled with true accountability, and multiple measures for reducing gun violence in schools (not just reasonable gun control measures), stand at the top of any “to do” list to improve American education, especially in its inner-city schools.<sup>23</sup> The argument here, rather, is more modest: that much wider participation in debate and the introduction of DCI techniques clearly belong on education reform, workforce improvement, and civic health agendas, ideally at or near the top of the list.

The logic supporting the expansion of DCI is compelling. I am confident that rigorous evaluation will confirm the logic or, at the very least, shape the ways in which American students are taught to search out and understand multiple sides of the issues they confront in their personal and political lives. The future health of our society and our economy may depend on it.

## APPENDIX 1-A

### *Sample List of Former Debaters*

Samuel Alito	Supreme Court Justice
Steve Bannon	Political strategist
James Belushi	Actor
John Belushi	Actor
Stephen Breyer	Supreme Court Justice
Bill Clinton	President
Hillary Clinton	Senator, secretary of state, presidential candidate
Calvin Coolidge	President
William G. Crow	Former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; U.S. military

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Ted Cruz	Senator
Bo Cutter	White House official during Clinton years; private sector financier
James Fallows	Journalist and television personality
Dan Glickman	Congressmen, agriculture secretary; former head of the Motion Picture Association of America
Austan Goolsbee	Former chair, Council of Economic Advisers
Kamala Harris	Senator
Glenn Hubbard	Former chair, Council of Economic Advisers; dean, Columbia Business School
Lee Iacocca	Legendary corporate CEO
Richard Nixon	President
Frank Partnoy	Popular nonfiction author; law professor
Jane Pauley	Television journalist
Norman Pearlstine	Journalism executive
Jonathan Rauch	Journalist; prolific author
Franklin Roosevelt	President
Karl Rove	Political strategist
Robert Rubin	Financier; treasury secretary
Carl Schramm	Foundation president; entrepreneur
Heidi Schreck	Broadway star; playwright
John Sexton	College president
Lawrence Summers	Treasury secretary; president of Harvard
Margaret Thatcher	Former prime minister, United Kingdom
Lawrence Tribe	Constitutional lawyer
Malcom X	African American leader; activist
Elizabeth Warren	Senator and presidential candidate

*Source:* National Speech and Debate Association website: [www.speechanddebate.org/alumni/?utm\\_source=newsletter&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_content=Alumni%2520page&utm\\_campaign=Family%2520Newsletter%252020181220](http://www.speechanddebate.org/alumni/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_content=Alumni%2520page&utm_campaign=Family%2520Newsletter%252020181220) and the author's own research.