

MOLLY MIRHASHEM

## WHO'S RIGHT? The great Heritage-versus-Cato intern debate of 2015

**I**F YOU'VE EVER HAD WHISKEYS in my kitchen, you may recognize some of these points," Christopher Bedford, a senior editor at *The Daily Caller*, told a capacity crowd of about 200 at the Cato Institute's Hayek Auditorium last Thursday evening. Bedford, in his role as moderator, was introducing the fifth-annual debate between interns from the conservative Heritage Foundation and the libertarian Cato Institute. Two interns from each side—who had spent weeks preparing for this moment—flanked him on the stage. The Cato interns sat on the right and wore flashy bow ties; the Heritage interns sat on the left wearing conventional ties.

Prior to the start of the debate, a man seated in front of me had turned to the woman beside him and remarked, "The Heritage interns kind of underwhelmed last year." Two young men searched for seats in the rapidly filling room and asked a man near the aisle: "Which side is

this—the good side or the bad side?" (Plenty of people didn't get in: 175 watched from Cato's overflow space.)

The conservative team—the audience was reminded repeatedly that the interns did not represent the views of their respective think tanks, but rather their philosophy more generally—won the coin toss and began with an opening statement from Tony Bergida, a rising junior (as well as student senator and football quarterback) at Benedictine College. "When we say conservatism, we are not talking about neoconservatism, compassionate conservatism, or any other hybrid," he told the audience. "We are not here to defend any one politician. We are here to advocate for a philosophy that follows in the tradition of the Founding Fathers."

Will Duffield, a recent Sarah Lawrence graduate representing libertarianism, warned the audience in a measured voice fit for radio: "In this debate, you may hear libertarian views derided as fanciful, radical,

or unrealistic. Do not be deceived by the words of our opponents: True radicalism is the belief that the state can and should control what we put into our bodies."

After a brief rebuttal from Bergida, Duffield's teammate Charles Lehman—a Yale senior—chimed in to say pointedly: "I'm a little worried that my opponents think they're debating against Ayn Rand and Murray Rothbard, when neither myself nor Will are objectivists or anarchists. What we are, are principled libertarians."

Over the course of nearly two hours, Bedford presented the interns with prompts related to immigration, military dominance, the role of religion in society, Edward Snowden, and

the general superiority of their respective ideologies. The audience was enthusiastic and engaged—both in the room and online. At one point during the event, Jim Harper, a senior fellow at Cato, tweeted: "Auditorium is full. Conservatives, please move to the overflow room, or the street. Or the 18th Century. #LvCdebate." (Nearly 400 people tuned into the event's livestream.)

Both teams grew progressively snarkier as the evening wore on, and with every jab or passive-aggressive gibe, the audience erupted into laughter and cheers. While tackling immigration policy, Bergida presented a dramatic story of a woman recently murdered by an immigrant with an extensive criminal record. This was met with rousing applause from the crowd. But without missing a beat, Duffield chirped back: "To our conservative friends: Data is not the plural of anecdote"—and the audience burst into laughter.

After an initial half hour of silence, Bergida's conservative teammate, Cameron Swathwood, finally spoke up—on the topic of Edward Snowden's "unjustified actions"—and came across like a natural debater. His period of muteness had sparked some Twitter discussion about whether "red-tie conservative," as he'd been dubbed by some of the onlookers, would ever join the conversation. ("My parents forced me into high school

speech and debate,” he told me later, “very much against my will.” He eventually grew to love it, but by the time he headed to Liberty University for college, he quit debate. “It was more of a lifestyle than I could commit to,” he recalled. When this opportunity came up to jump back into the debate game for a short stint, “I just went for it,” he said.)

Swathwood delivered the closing remarks for the conservatives, cautioning that “libertarianism leads to barbarism.” In a theatrical speech, he went on to ask: “Will we burn away the fabric of our society in a haze of cannabis smoke, boasting of our supposed freedom as our civilization crumbles beneath us, crushing those who would follow in our footsteps?”

For the libertarian closing, Lehman began: “More often than not, conservatives and libertarians are allies.” But he added, “Conservatism needs desperately the prudence that only libertarianism can counsel.”

At the end of the formal debate, Bedford fielded questions from the audience—and playfully encouraged “mean questions.” A House intern took Bedford up on his request, turning to Duffield and Lehman to ask bluntly: “Why don’t libertarians win elections?” A woman from the O’Neil Center for Global Markets and Freedom at Southern Methodist University asked the four debaters about their philosophical influences, and Lehman made his case for “a libertarian reading of Russell Kirk.” A few moments later, a Heritage intern stood up to ask more about Lehman’s libertarian interpretation, before she added with a laugh: “And Russell Kirk is actually my grandfather.”

The Q&A session eventually shifted to tie selection. Duffield’s bow tie was decorated with the yellow rattlesnake of the don’t-tread-on-me flag—which, he later told me, he did not purchase specifically for the event. “But it’s probably my favorite bow tie,” he added. (He has about 30.)

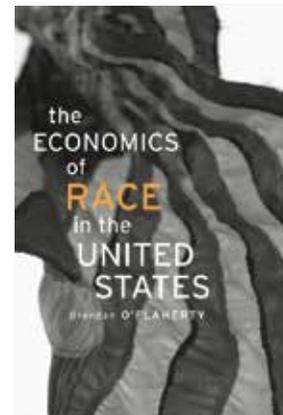
After the debate, Swathwood told me, he and a group of fellow Heritage interns had a “Twitter reading party,” checking the debate hashtag to catch up on the online conversation he’d missed during the action. All four debaters told me they were impressed with the audience size and engagement, but Bergida added: “It was definitely a Cato home crowd—I think I’ll leave it at that.”

## How it Pays to be White

### The Economics of Race in the United States

by Brendan O’Flaherty

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**WHAT IT’S ABOUT** There are observable racial disparities in economic life; are they the results of a racist past or of current discrimination? That’s the question O’Flaherty, a Columbia professor, sets out to answer in his thoroughly researched look at the numerous factors that contribute to the economic gap between whites and nonwhites in the United States. O’Flaherty turns a broad review of academic literature—from disciplines including economics, sociology, and public policy—into a compelling narrative on the intersection of race and economic achievement, and in doing so he finds a pattern: Race continues to be a barrier to economic advancement today, influencing outcomes in diverse realms, including education, employment, health care, and the real-estate market.

At one point, O’Flaherty tries to diagram all the factors that affect economic achievement among racial minorities in the United States. The result looks something like a spider web, with a range of public and private institutions in tension with one another. “Causation is mutual, not unidirectional,” O’Flaherty writes. In other words: Mitigating the effects of racial discrimination through policy is a very complex task. Ultimately, changing the economics of race will depend heavily on two factors, O’Flaherty argues: building trust on both sides and providing market incentives for fairer outcomes.

**TARGET D.C. AUDIENCE** Economists; health-policy wonks; the White House Council of Economic Advisers; immigration and civil rights activists; fans of John Maynard Keynes and Frederick Douglass.

**BEST LINE** “Appearances can be deceiving: some racial disparities have no racial content, and some apparently race-neutral policies have a lot.”

**TO BE SURE** Many of the policies that O’Flaherty proposes would require greater public spending. He argues that the investment would be worthwhile and might even net gains for the economy in the long term; fiscal hawks and libertarian-minded economists would likely disagree.

**ONE LEVEL DEEPER** Those looking to defend affirmative action as a way to help minority students gain ground—and those who oppose it because they believe it unfairly penalizes white and Asian-American students—may want to flip through Chapter 7, in which O’Flaherty makes a case for the policy under certain circumstances. He cites three studies—one from 1995, one from 2002, and one from 2011—which suggest that affirmative action boosts black students’ lifetime earnings but does not have a commensurately harmful effect on the earnings of white students. “Their implicit answer is that the direct effects of affirmative action are positive on the net, since the black student moving up [to a more elite college] gains more than the white student moving down loses,” O’Flaherty writes.

**THE BIG TAKEAWAY** Race influences outcomes in most every realm linked to economic success but not necessarily in the ways conventional wisdom dictates.

—Emma Roller