

Hello,

We as the USUDC 2021 Organizing Committee, CAP, and Equity team take full responsibility for the anti-Blackness and racism that transpired at the tournament this past weekend. As a team, we want to acknowledge our collective failure to recognize the importance of this equity complaint when it was brought to us and our failure to properly internally communicate about events as they unfolded. As a result we delayed appropriate action and we take full responsibility for the harm caused.

We are attaching the full explanation provided by Morehouse College in regards to what transpired during R5 as we do not believe it is our place as an Organizing Committee to speak for them (attached below). Following the anti-Blackness that transpired in the round, the Equity team at the tournament was contacted by Morehouse College. As part of the resolution process, Equity offered to reach out to the tournament participants involved in the incident and to make an announcement. We would like to acknowledge that Equity did discuss the round and issues at hand with the offending parties.

This Equity announcement was supposed to happen after round 5, but did not due to communication issues on the part of our Organizing Committee. These communication failures are our responsibility and we sincerely apologize. We offer the following explanation not to absolve ourselves of this responsibility, but rather to provide some clarity to tournament participants and the debate community as to why events unfolded the way they did from our perspective. At the time, some members of the Adjudication Core were actively involved in judging rounds and fulfilling our responsibilities as CAs, and those who were sitting out of the round to monitor tournament proceedings were focused on handling a tournament issue flagged in the org-questions channel on Discord regarding the status of trainee judges. This resulted in different members of the team finding out about the Equity complaint at different times through Facebook Messenger and Discord. Due to the communication failures noted on the part of the Organizing Committee above, the majority of our CA team was not aware that an Equity complaint had been raised until the document regarding the incident was posted in the org-questions channel on Discord and a number of institutions expressed their solidarity with Morehouse College following the conclusion of round 6.

We want to emphasize again that our other obligations as a team are not an excuse and do not absolve us of collective responsibility for failing to address the Equity violation brought to our attention by members of the Morehouse team in a prompt manner. It was this lag in communication that inhibited our ability to provide the coordinated response from all members of the Organizing Committee that this merited. This, in combination with members of the Organizing Committee being uncertain about how to proceed without unanimity on a course of action, meant we did not act prior to the round 6 draw being released. We want to emphasize that the reason we opted not to act immediately was because we did not want to delegitimize the incident raised by the Morehouse team by making the announcement to a tournament which was quite distracted by the ongoing dialogue surrounding trainee judges at the competition. In retrospect this was an incredibly poor choice.

Following the publishing of the statement by Morehouse College, a number of institutions also expressed their intent to not participate in any further tournament rounds until concerns about structural racism at the tournament were addressed fully. At this point, following a discussion between Morehouse Director of

Debate Ken Newby and two members of the Adjudication Core, the CA team conferred as to how best to address the ongoing situation. Given the severity of concerns outlined in the document, we considered it imperative to allow an open discussion to take place, as anything else would represent the erasure of Black voices. As such, further rounds were halted and the server's announcement hall was opened to function as a forum to center members of the community who had experienced structural exclusion at USUDC in order to highlight their concerns.

We want to offer clarity for those who were not present at USUDC as to how our decision to cancel the remainder of the tournament transpired. Our immediate response to teams' decisions to leave the tournament as a result of our actions was to halt any further rounds and open the server's Announcement Hall such that members of the community could communicate their experiences and perspectives on anti-Blackness and racism at this tournament and in the debate community writ-large. This forum was a request made by the Morehouse Debate Society to the Adjudication Core, which we did our utmost to facilitate in a prompt manner.

From this forum, which was moderated by Morehouse Director of Debate Ken Newby, many suggestions were offered as to how debate may improve to better ensure equity for Black and other BIPOC debaters, judges, and coaches, and we hope that anyone involved in running or hosting future tournaments reviews the minutes from this discussion in order to implement these necessary reforms. In response to these suggestions and the concern that the competitive integrity of the tournament was thoroughly compromised, the Adjudication Core proposed tournament cancellation as an option near the start of the forum and encouraged speakers to weigh in on this, mindful of the fact that we did not want to impose ourselves on the proceedings of the dialogue. As the conversation progressed, it became clear that given the degree of harm that Black members of the community had faced and the amount of teams that had at that point left the tournament in solidarity, it would be unacceptable to continue the tournament as any further proceedings would have been overshadowed by structural inequity in proceeding rounds.

While we recognize that some teams at the forum expressed their desire for the tournament to continue, we felt that any achievements would have been an inaccurate reflection of what had transpired at the tournament given the number of teams which had dropped, as well as illegitimate in light of the severity of complaints raised by Morehouse College and other tournament participants. Following this decision being conveyed to participants by a member of the Adjudication Core, the conversation was left open such that every person who wished to discuss how they had been harmed, both at this tournament and at any prior debate tournament, could have their perspectives heard.

We realize that some tournament participants have since expressed concern about the way that the forum progressed, as well as difficulties in access due to it being conducted on a private Discord tournament server. Given the urgency of the issue, we felt it best as a team to prioritize the forum happening with all possible haste over the potential for extensive delays in addressing the concerns raised to us. We also did not want to limit participation in the forum. Unfortunately, this meant that individuals were hurt by comments made by speakers in the forum which were perceived as delegitimizing their lived experiences, and we apologize for this.

We also acknowledge that Discord was an inconvenient venue for many participants, especially institutional heads and coaches who joined in the midst of this transpiring, and the text-based discourse lent itself to difficulties in communication and the transcription of minutes, and take responsibility for the flaws in the platform that made the forum inaccessible.

Acknowledging systemic racism and the implications it has on debate, there were steps our team took in advance, and during the tournament to make it as equitable as possible. We realize that these efforts, based on the concerns flagged by not only members of the Morehouse Debate Society but also many other BIPOC participants of the tournament, were insufficient, and we want to detail them to explain to the community where we believe we fell short. Prior to the tournament, the CA team was in charge of selecting the adjudication core and equity team. Public feedback was opened on applicants as a chance for the community to raise issues we would be unaware of in selections. This team was then selected with consideration for diversity (regional, language status, gender), as well as prior experience. Regretfully, there were no Black applicants for the DCA position, and more should have been done on the part of the CA team to encourage Black members of the debate community to apply. For IA applications, we checked for regional and racial diversity and prioritized this in our selection process. During the tournament, we did our best to have diversity amongst chair judges, as well as on panels. We also read all of the judge feedback that came in, and any negative feedback around judges led to them being closely watched and in many cases not slotted to chair rounds.

We want to acknowledge these steps taken were far from perfect. Based on the public forum and our experiences this weekend, we want to flag a number of suggestions that may be helpful for creating a more equitable space at future tournaments. We want to emphasize that these suggestions are not meant to be prescriptive, as it is not our place to impose on the perspectives of tournament participants, and we do not intend to center ourselves in these discussions, though we are happy to contribute in whatever way the community sees fit. We encourage this conversation to continue in other debate spaces to make them more inclusive.

In order to ensure fair treatment of participants by judges, we think it may be useful to include a question to check for racial bias and susceptibility to believe racist argumentation in future judge tests. Similarly, outreach to Black adjudicators should be prioritised more than we did in the run-up to the tournament and allocation of IA funding. Efforts to increase representation should not be limited to judging alone, but also extend to the adjudication core, the equity team, and importantly the speaker pool. To this end, teams would have to facilitate greater outreach to HBCUs to encourage participation overall, as well as individually encouraging potential applicants to put themselves forward.

Looking forward, it is important to understand the events of this tournament and our personal failures, as a lesson for any future debate tournaments, and center the voices of Black and BIPOC debaters in the ongoing discussion. It cannot be the case that these statements and events fade into debate history as so many other similar events have. The first primary suggestion we would like to highlight for future CAPs and organizing committees is that equity announcements and actions related to anti-Blackness and racism should never be delayed due to other events like issues with judge allocations. Further, we encourage the United States University Debating Association to adopt a BIPOC forum or caucus similar to those in other international debating circuits, the role of equity officers to be reformed such that it plays a

proactive rather than a reactive role, organizing committees to prioritize diversity at all levels of tournament organization, and further discussions, involving and moderated by systematically marginalized members of the community, to be taken seriously in order to reform the structural inequalities of this debate format.

Again, we highly suggest that anyone who would like to know more about the events of USUDC 2021 should read through the statement made by Ken Newby (<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1QJfHmCiTZ5UqnDirHFye5v2SIpR3oOCj/view?ths=true>) , as well as the minutes from Sunday night's forum: [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1IIML8gc3\\_xlRqa8MNX5sG1SdVtVFO7th-hoNwuF5Xqwe/edi](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1IIML8gc3_xlRqa8MNX5sG1SdVtVFO7th-hoNwuF5Xqwe/edi))

Sincerely,

The USUDC 2021 CAP, Organizing Committee, and Equity Team

*[Disclaimers: One member of the Equity team, who shall remain anonymous, was not present during Sunday's tournament events and as a result is recused from this statement, given they were not present on the Discord server. Additionally, this statement should not be taken to speak for Tab Team, who were in no way responsible for handling the situation at any point as their role in the tournament was exclusively technical in nature. The CAP, Organizing Committee, and Equity Team are students and recent graduate volunteers who are not officially affiliated with the University of Pennsylvania and this statement should not be taken to reflect the views or any institutional involvement in these events. The tournament organizational staff did not and were not intending to profit personally from the proceedings of the event. This statement should not be taken to reflect the views or institutional involvement of any university, current or former, that any member of the Organizing Team has been or is affiliated with.]*