

## DISPUTATION CLXV

May 4, 2017

Dear Peucinians,

Two weeks ago, we thought about whether the “Work Hard, Play Hard” lifestyle was the way for us. We opted for moderation by a narrow margin. This week we sadly—but with no less fire—take on our final disputation of the academic year. This topic may be more difficult and personal for some of us around the table, but I know that our high standards for respect and intellectual honesty will ensure our discussion is thoughtful and fruitful.

### **RESOLVED: NATIONS SHOULD EXPECT ASSIMILATION FROM THEIR IMMIGRANTS**

**Affirmative: Simone Weil ‘20**

**Negative: Monique Wittig ‘18**

In the Peucinian mission statement, we encourage the exploration of “Goals that unify Culture.” Yet rarely do we ask if culture should be unified.

Do immigrants have any obligations to their new communities? What can and should nations reasonably expect from their new neighbors? What does citizenship mean, and who deserves it? What is (and should be) the relationship between immigrants and culture? How do your answers to these questions bear on civil liberties and rights, national security, and building community?

One view is that immigrants, as strangers in a new land, must adapt to the host nation’s culture. Governments should help ease this transition—assimilation, that is—by offering programs to teach the national language, history, and civic system. Likewise, immigrants must try to take advantage of these programs. Communities will welcome their new neighbors with open arms, and immigrants will throw themselves into their new, happy lives. No hyphens; everyone is either a citizen or not. By assimilating in this way, the nation can maintain unity and cooperation while avoiding any animosity that might result from a perceived or real threat to culture. National cultures ought be preserved and protected—and unassimilated immigrants might undermine that mission.

But what about individual freedom? By demanding assimilation, nations suppress the availability of choice for immigrants, ultimately overwhelming any culture the immigrants originally belonged to. Can we call this a dignified approach? Will it even make people happy? The goal of unifying a nation’s culture is self-defeating—it winds up dividing society and perpetuating damaging hierarchies of cultural superiority and inferiority. Instead, nations should embrace the new cultures brought by immigrants, celebrate diversity, and do what they can do preserve and protect as many cultures as possible—not just the national one, if “national culture” even exists. Identity is complex, and nations should not demand subservience from their new inhabitants.

What will it be: melting pot or salad bowl? As always, I’m looking forward to seeing you all, and more importantly, hearing your thoughts.

**Thursday, May 4, 8:30 p.m. (Note the later-than-usual start time)**

**Third Floor of Massachusetts Hall**

**Semi-formal attire**

Sincerely,  
Jean-Jacques Rousseau

*Pinos loquentes semper habemus.*