Fight On Your Ground
Strategy Overview by Mark Csoros



 In *The Art of War,* probably the best-known book of military wisdom in human history, Sun Tzu wrote that *“Victorious warriors win first and then go to war, while defeated warriors go to war first and then seek to win.”* To me, that quote means two things. First, your level of preparation will determine your win rate. Second, winners win because they put themselves in winning situations. This article is intended to help you prepare strategies that let you frame the debate on favorable ground. The following pages are mostly filled with resolutional analysis concepts that build from the definitions in the Resolutional Overview. If you haven’t read the Overview, I highly recommend you do that first and then come back to this article. I will wait patiently for you.

Structurally, I’ve split this piece into two parts, which answer the following two vaguely grammatical questions: Who is doing the valuing? When can they do the valuing? Part I deals with the resolution’s actor, and Part II covers the conflict in the resolution. I’ve included, in both parts, some assorted tips, tricks, and tactics that I hope you can apply throughout your years of debate. Tally ho.

# Part I: The Actor

The actor in Lincoln-Douglas doesn’t actually do anything, so the term is a bit of a misnomer. But we don’t have anything better, so “actor” refers to the entity in the resolution that values things. In this case, the resolution is crystal clear that culture is the entity doing the valuing, so you would be forgiven if you thought that this section was a waste of time. However, for the first time I can remember, there’s potential for the actor clash to be the most exciting part of this season’s metagame.

## Actor View 1: Dominant Culture

 This view is probably the one that’s at the forefront of your mind. When people hear “Resolved: Culture ought to value assimilation over multiculturalism”, they generally think that you’ll debate whether Western powers (say, France) should seek to assimilate immigrants into French culture (perhaps by banning burqas[[1]](#footnote-1)) or should allow immigrant communities to maintain their native culture (some suburbs of Paris operate under Sharia law[[2]](#footnote-2)). Under this view, the dominant culture - which the minority culture is a relatively new addition to – is the actor, and will decide to value assimilation or multiculturalism. Let’s start with the advantages of basing your case on this view, before we delve into how to defend and support this paradigm of the actor. For brevity’s sake, I’ll abbreviate dominant culture as DC (yes, like the comics) and minority culture as MC (yes, like my initials) for the rest of the article.

 There are a few advantages to adopting the DC view of the actor. You enter the round with a leg up, because the judge probably already plans on judging a round where the DC decides what to value and how to treat the MC. Nearly all of the research and philosophizing about assimilation and multiculturalism is written from the DC paradigm. Finally, your experience, and your judges’ experience, will mostly consist of living in a DC. It’s a lot easier to debate about what a culture should value when you’ve lived your whole life in that culture, instead of trying to debate from the perspective of someone in whose shoes you’ve never walked.

To defend this view of the actor, you can interpret some of the key definitions to support the DC’s sole right and ability to value both sides of the resolution. Merriam-Webster defines multiculturalism as:

*“cultural pluralism or diversity (as within a society, an organization, or an educational institution)*

***:*** *a*[*multicultural*](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/multicultural)*social state or a doctrine or policy that promotes or advocates such a state.”[[3]](#footnote-3)*

“Cultural pluralism or diversity *as within a society…*”. The DC is the society that the MC is within, so the DC has the right to choose what to value. With regards to the second part of the definition, the DC is the “social state” that has the political ability to set doctrine and policy. Further, the Encyclopedia Britannica’s definition of multiculturalism*[[4]](#footnote-4)*, which you can find in full in the Overview, mentions withholding the demand for assimilation, granting special acknowledgments, and compensating groups for past exclusion as parts of multiculturalism. Only the DC is equipped to do those things, so the MC cannot truly value multiculturalism, so the DC must be the actor in the resolution.

The second argument for the DC view connects with the concept of framer’s intent, a well-established way to defend resolutional interpretations. Framers’ intent is the idea that the resolution writers framed the resolution in a specific way, to maximize fairness and educational value, and so we ought to debate the resolution the way the framers intended us to debate it. Arguing that your opponent is violating the framers’ intent is a gently worded way of saying that he’s debating like a no-account cheatin’ hound dog sneakin’ around tryin’ to find an easy way to win. The problem with arguing framers’ intent is that it sounds a lot like whining, even when your opponent is truly trying to tamper with the fair bounds of the resolution. So, use this tactic wisely, and only when you have convincing proof that your opponent’s paradigm is unreasonable and unfair. In this case, after you explain framers’ intent and its importance to the judge, you might prove how your opponent’s non-DC view violates framers’ intent using the following logic:

* When you Google the resolution, every resulting article for at least the first ten pages assumes that the DC is the actor.
* The framers definitely researched before they wrote the resolution, and they definitely want us to research before we debate.
* The framers clearly intended the DC to be the actor, because the overwhelming majority of research materials support this view.
* My opponent’s view of the resolution violates the framers’ intent.
* Impact 1: My opponent’s flawed interpretation is clearly unfair.
* Impact 2: My opponent’s flawed interpretation harms the educational value of the round.
* Impact 3: My opponent’s case is built on a flawed foundation, and therefore falls.

## Actor View II: Minority Culture

 This is where we buck the trend a bit. This perspective sets the resolution’s actor as the MC, so that now we would debate whether, for example, immigrants in France should value assimilation and blend into French culture, or value multiculturalism and strive to retain their inherited culture.

The benefit of placing the MC as the actor, especially when your opponent’s actor is the DC, is that you disrupt the planned flow of the round. You’re debating on a totally different paradigm, which your opponent has to wrap his head around and respond to before he can return to his own paradigm and present the arguments he planned on. You may have an uphill battle convincing the judge to accept your interpretation of the resolution, but you may also have a judge who likes being surprised by creative debating (every debate alumnus in existence loves when this happens). Finally, running a case based on an MC actor might be tricky at first, because you probably don’t have first-hand experience living in a minority culture. But I bet your opponent doesn’t have that experience either, and I bet that you’ll know more about your case than he will. Fight on your ground, and you’ll be at an advantage.

Fighting uphill to overthrow the DC actor paradigm will require some tactical finesse and reasonable-sounding rhetoric. Fortunately, that’s the sum total of this response section. Here are some ways to push back against the DC view.

1. Neither the definitions nor the resolution explicitly state that the DC or MC is the actor, leaving it up to interpretation. But, all three definitions of assimilation in the Overview include language that requires action by the MC. Acquiring habits, taking on traits, and shedding old customs all require action, and action requires a motive. If the MC doesn’t value assimilation enough to act, the process of assimilation won’t occur, suggesting that the definitions support the MC view.
2. The ability of the DC to make policy doesn’t prevent the MC from making value judgements. Perhaps only the DC can grant special acknowledgments, but MCs can certainly value the ability to practice their native culture.
3. Ability simply doesn’t matter. This is LD value debate, not LD policy debate. An MC can still value assimilation or multiculturalism without the ability to turn those values into actionable policy.
4. If your opponent insists on making the actor clash about ability, there are responses available. In most cases, the DC can’t pressure an unwilling MC to assimilate without running the risk of human rights violations. And, if the MC wants to assimilate, there’s no realistic way for the DC to force the MC to retain its old customs. So, the MC has just as much, if not more, ability than the DC.

 Finally, there are a few responses to framers’ intent. Google results mean nothing if the resolution doesn’t specify an actor. If the framers were dead set on a certain interpretation, they could have easily eliminated alternate interpretations just by naming an actor. Second, differing views of the resolution enhance educational value, by increasing the depth of the debate and incentivizing new and better arguments. Third, every debater has the same amount of time to prepare. A novel interpretation of the resolution isn’t an unfair tactic, and debaters bear the burden to either prepare thoroughly or adjust to new tactics on the spot. To cap off a response of this nature, I like to turn my opponent’s accusations of skullduggery back on him. “Judge, while my opponent tries to psychoanalyze the framers of the resolution, my interpretation relies on the black and white words of the resolution the framers put at the top of your ballot. This claim that I’m violating framers’ intent is meant to camouflage my opponent’s faulty analysis. In fact, if anyone is this room is trying to unfairly tamper with the terms of the resolution, it’s my opponent, who’s hoping that the authors of this resolution will storm in and patch up the logical cracks in his flawed analysis.” Don’t be discourteous, but it’s okay to fight fire with fire.

## Actor View III: Anything Goes

 Well, not literally. This interpretation of the actor simply subsumes the two views above, meaning that the debate is about whether culture – DC and MC - should value assimilation or multiculturalism. The beauty of this paradigm is that you get to shake things up, without having to turn a blind eye to nearly all the scholarship on this topic, all while being the debater encouraging openness and free debate. It’s human nature to get suspicious when someone discards an argument on a technicality (whether real or contrived) instead of refuting the argument head-on. In my experience, the debater with the broader paradigm seems more credible, open, honest, and prepared, while narrower paradigms can make debaters look shifty, lawyerly (in a bad way), and more focused on peccadilloes than on powerful properly prepared proof.

The strongest argument in support of this view is that the definitions leave room for DC and MC actors. If your opponent challenges your all-inclusive view by arguing that the resolution requires a DC-only actor, use appropriate refutation from the MC view. Appropriate responses, here, are those that attack the DC-only view, not ones that support the MC-only view. It would be counterproductive to defend your all-inclusive paradigm against a more exclusive view by running MC-exclusive arguments. If your opponent attacks you from the MC side, I’d recommend falling back on the ten pages of Google search results and the common-man view that the judge probably brought into the round. “Judge, I agree with my opponent that MC actors ought to be included in this debate. However, the vast majority of the scholarship on this topic is from the DC perspective, and our common sense understanding of the resolution says that DCs are the entities determining cultural values. The balanced and reasonable view of the resolution counts both types of cultures as actors, in accordance with the intentionally broad language of the resolution, so that we can debate assimilation and multiculturalism as comprehensively as possible.”

# Part II: The Conflict

## Mental Images

So far, the best way I’ve found to describe the conflict in the resolution is by describing the difference between a milkshake and an ice cream sundae. A culture that values assimilation is blending away at this milkshake, working to incorporate diverse ingredients – I mean cultures - into a unified, homogenous whole. A society that values multiculturalism has the dominant culture, the ice cream, taking up most of the space in the bowl. The toppings (the minority cultures) make up part of the sundae, but they’re separate entities even while they’re part of the whole. Some toppings, like sprinkles, are widespread, but less noticeable because they’re spread evenly throughout the sundae, the same way that Mexican culture is spread throughout Texas. Other toppings are like the whipped cream, very clearly a separate entity that might be independently edible, the way that Scotland is squirted from an aerosolized can…sorry, I got too deep into that metaphor. I meant to say the way that Scotland might be separable from the UK.

 If we take that example, combine it with our knowledge of the resolution’s terms, and apply it to the world, we get a good picture of the resolution’s defining clash. Are cultures better off seeking cultural unity, or are they stronger when they contain, or are, robust and separate sub-cultures?

It’s possible that that question may not have or even need an answer. The first thought that ran through my head when I read this resolution for the first time was something like this: “American culture values multiculturalism, at least to the extent that we value freedom. If that’s true, then assimilation into American culture means adopting a mindset that values multiculturalism. If that’s true, then assimilation and multiculturalism, at least in America, mean the exact same thing, and there is no conflict in the resolution with regards to America.” That logic springs from a soft definition of multiculturalism, one that’s less focused on special acknowledgments to minority cultures and more focused on a commitment to liberty. But, let’s take this a step further with a little thought experiment.

## I Can Only Imagine

Picture a culture, totally committed to valuing multiculturalism. Let’s call this culture Culture A, because creativity. Definitionally, we could say that Culture A is a social group with only one customary belief. That belief is that [cultures](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/cultures), races, and [ethnicities](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ethnicities) deserve special acknowledgement of their differences, and that the views and contributions of diverse members of societies should be included, while maintaining respect for their differences and withholding the demand for their assimilation into Culture A. In other words, Culture A is the perfect multicultural culture, a shining example of flawless valuation of multiculturalism.

We know that assimilation is a process whereby minority cultures take on traits of a dominant culture, and that total assimilation occurs at the end of the process, when members of the minority culture are socially identical to members of the dominant culture. In Culture A, assimilation is a very quick process. There is only one trait to adopt, and that trait is multiculturalism. One nanosecond before I adopt the trait of multiculturalism, I am not a part of Culture A, but one nanosecond after I adopt the trait of multiculturalism, I am a fully assimilated member of Culture A. Even if I really want to assimilate into Culture A, the only way I can do so is by ceasing to value assimilation and adopting the trait of valuing multiculturalism, at which point I am fully granted the assimilation that I no longer value.

1. <https://www.nationalreview.com/2010/07/should-france-ban-burqa-nro-symposium/> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/10404/france-no-go-zones> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/multiculturalism> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/multiculturalism> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)