a pretext for advocating a kind of political quietism. Since you don't know what Fascism is, how can you struggle against Fascism? One need not swallow such absurdities as this, but one ought to recognize that the present political chaos is connected with the decay of language, and that one can probably bring about some improvement by starting at the verbal end. If you simplify your English, you are freed from the worst follies of orthodoxy. You cannot speak any of the necessary dialects, and when you make a stupid remark its stupidity will be obvious, even to yourself. Political language—and with variations this is true of all political parties, from Conservatives to Anarchists—is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind. One cannot change this all in a moment, but one can at least change one's own habits, and from time to time one can even, if one tries loudly enough, send some worn-out and useless phrase, some jackboot, Achilles' heel, holier, melting pot, acid test, veritable Inferno or other lump of verbal refuse—into the dustbin where it belongs.

Responding to Reading

1. According to Orwell, what is the relationship between politics and the English language? Do you think he overstates his case?
2. What does Orwell mean in paragraph 14 when he says, “In our time, political speech and writing are largely the defence of the indefensible”? Do you believe his statement applies to current times as well? Look through some newspapers, and find several present-day examples of political language that support your conclusion.
3. Locate some examples of dying metaphors used in the popular press. Do you agree with Orwell that they undermine clear thought and expression? Why or why not?

FOCUS: SHOULD ALL AMERICANS SPEAK ENGLISH?

AGAINST A CONFUSION OF TONGUES

William A. Henry III

William A. Henry III (see also p. 120) wrote frequently on American society and culture, often from a conservative perspective, until his untimely death in 1994. In the following essay, originally published in Time magazine in 1983, Henry argues that bilingual and bicultural education is divisive and disruptive because it poses the threat that large segments of American society will never learn to speak English.

In the store windows of Los Angeles, gathering place of the world's aspiring peoples, the signs today ought to read, "English spoken here." Supermarket price tags are often written in Korean, restaurant menus in Chinese, employment-office signs in Spanish. In the new city of dreams, where gold can be earned if not found on the sidewalk, there are laborers and businessmen who have lived five, ten, twenty years in America without learning to speak English. English is not the common denominator for many of these new Americans. Disturbingly, some of them insist it need not be.

America's image of itself as a melting pot, enriched by every culture yet subsuming all of them, dates back far beyond the huddled yearning masses at the Baja California border and Ellis Island, beyond the passage in steerage of victims of the potato famine and the high-minded Teutonic settlements in the nascent Midwest. Just months after the Revolution was won, in 1782, French-American writer Michel-Guillaume-Jean de Crevecoeur said of his adopted land: "Individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men." Americans embittered by the wars of Europe know that fusing diversity into unity was more than a poetic ideal, it was a practical necessity. In 1820 future Congressman Edward Everett warned, "From the days of the Tower of Babel, confusion of tongues has ever been one of the most active causes of political misunderstanding."

The successive waves of immigrants did not readily embrace the new culture, even when intimidated by the xenophobia of the know-nothing era or two World Wars. Says Historian James Banks: "Each nationality group tried desperately to remake North America in the image of its
may come when there are shrinking economic resources and rising expectations among have-not Hispanics."

Already the separatists who resist accepting English have won laws and court cases mandating provision of social services, some government instructions, even election ballots in Spanish. The legitimizing effect of these decisions can be seen in the proliferation of billboards, roadside signs and other public communications posted in Spanish. Acknowledged Professor Ramón Ruiz of the University of California at San Diego: "The separatism question is with us already." The most potent evidence is in the classrooms. Like its political cousins, equal opportunity and social justice, bilingual education is a catchall term that means what the speaker wishes it to mean.

There are at least four ways for schools to teach students who speak another language at home:

1) **Total immersion in English.** which relies on the proven ability of children to master new languages. Advocates of bilingual education argue that this approach disorients children and sometimes impedes their progress in other subjects, because those who have already mastered several grades' worth of material in their first language may be compelled to take English-language classes with much younger or slower students.

2) **Short-term bilingual education.** which may offer a full curriculum but is directed toward moving students into English-language classes as rapidly as possible. In a report last month by a Twentieth Century Fund task force, members who were disillusioned with the performance of elaborate bilingual programs urged diversion of federal funds to the teaching of English. The panel held: "Schoolchildren will never swim in the American mainstream unless they are fluent in English."

3) **Dual curriculum,** which permits students to spend several years making the transition. This is the method urged by many moderate Hispanic, Chinese and other ethnic minority leaders. Says historian Ruiz: "The direct approach destroys children's feelings of security. Bilingual education eases them from something they know to something they do not."

4) **Language and cultural maintenance,** which seeks to enhance students' mastery of their first language while also teaching them English. In Hispanic communities, the language training is often accompanied by courses in ethnic heritage. Argues Miami Attorney Manuel Diaz, a vice chairman of the Spanish American League Against Discrimination: "Cultural diversity makes this country strong. It is not a disease."
The rhetoric of supporters of bilingualism suggests that theirs may be a political solution to an educational problem. Indeed, some of them acknowledge that they view bilingual programs as a source of jobs for Hispanic administrators, teachers and aides. In cities with large minority enrollments, says a Chicago school principal who requested anonymity, "those of us who consider bilingual education ineffective are afraid that if we say so we will lose our jobs." Lawrence Uzzell, president of Learn Inc., a Washington-based research foundation, contends that Hispanic educational activists are cynically protecting their own careers. Says Uzzell: "The more the Hispanic child grows up isolated, the easier it is for politicians to manipulate him as part of an ethnic voting bloc."

The signal political success for bilingualism has been won at the U.S. Department of Education. After the Supreme Court ruled in 1974 that Chinese-speaking students were entitled to some instruction in a language they could understand, the DOE issued "informal" rules that now bind more than 400 school districts. Immersion in English, even rapid transition to English, does not satisfy the DOE; the rules compel school systems to offer a full curriculum to any group of 20 or more students who share a foreign language. The DOE rules have survived three presidencies, although Jesse Soriano, deputy of the Reagan Administration's $138 million bilingual program, concedes, "This is money that could be spent more effectively."

About half of students from Spanish-speaking homes drop out before the end of high school; of the ones who remain, 30% eventually score two or more years below their age group on standardized tests. But it is hard to demonstrate the value of any bilingual approach in aiding those students. In 1982 Iris Rotberg reported in the Harvard Education Review: "Research findings have shown that bilingual programs are neither better nor worse than other instructional methods." Indeed, the DOE's review found that of all methods for teaching bilingual students English and mathematics, only total immersion in English clearly worked.

One major problem in assessing the worth of bilingual programs is that they often employ teachers who are less than competent in either English or Spanish, or in the specific subjects they teach. In a 1976 test of 136 teachers and aides in bilingual programs in New Mexico, only 13 could read and write Spanish at third-grade level. Says former Boston School Superintendent Robert Wood: "Many bilingual teachers do not have a command of English, and after three years of instruction under them, children also emerge without a command of English." Another complicating factor is the inability of researchers to determine whether the problems of Hispanic students stem more from language difficulty or from their economic class. Many Hispanic children who are unable to speak English have parents with little education who hold unskilled jobs; in school performance, these students are much like poor blacks and whites. Notes Harvard's Nathan Glazer: "If these students do poorly in English, they may be doing poorly in a foreign language."

Even if the educational value of bilingual programs were beyond dispute, there would remain questions about their psychic value to children. Among the sharpest critics of bilingualism is author Richard Rodriguez, who holds a Berkeley Ph.D. in literature and grew up in a Spanish-speaking, working-class household; in his autobiography Hunger of Memory, Rodriguez argues that the separation from his family that a Hispanic child feels or becoming fluent in English is necessary to develop a sense of belonging to American society. Writes Rodriguez: "Bilingualists do not seem to realize that there are two ways a person is individualized. While one suffers a diminished sense of private individuality by becoming assimilated into public society, such assimilation makes possible the achievement of public individuality." By Rodriguez's reasoning, the discomfort of giving up the language of home is far less significant than the isolation of being unable to speak the language of the larger world.

The dubious value of bilingualism to students is only part of America's valid concern about how to absorb the Hispanic minority. The U.S., despite its exceptional diversity, has been spared most of the ethnic tensions that beset even such industrialized nations as Belgium and Spain. The rise of a large group, detached from the main population by language and custom, could affect the social stability of the country. Hispanic leaders, moreover, acknowledge that their constituents have been less inclined to become assimilated than previous foreign-language communities, in part because many of them anticipated that after earning and saving, they would return to Puerto Rico, Mexico, South America or Cuba. Says historian Doyce Nunnis of the University of Southern California: "For the first time in American experience, a large immigrant group may be electing to bypass the processes of acculturation." Miami Mayor Maurice Ferré, a Puerto Rican, claims that in his city a resident can go from birth through school and working life to death without ever having to speak English. But most Hispanic intellectuals claim that their communities, like other immigrant groups before them, cling together only to combat discrimination.

The disruptive potential of bilingualism and bilingualism is still worrisome: millions of voters cut off from the main sources of information, millions of potential draftees inculcated with dual ethnic loyalties, millions of would-be employees ill at ease in the language of their workmates. Former Senator S. I. Hayakawa of California was laughed at for proposing a constitutional amendment to make English the official language of the U.S. It was a gesture of little practical consequence but great symbolic significance: many Americans mistakenly feel there is something racist or oppressive, in expecting newcomers to share the nation's language and folkways.
Beyond practical politics and economics, separation belittles the all-embracing culture that America has embodied for the world. Says Writer Irving Howe, a scholar of literature and the Jewish immigrant experience: "The province, the ethnic nest, remains the point from which everything begins, but it must be transcended." That transcendence does not mean disappearance. It is possible to a eat Mexican meal, dance a Polish polka, sing in a Rumanian choir, preserve one's ethnicity however one wishes, and still share fully in the English-speaking common society.

Just as American language, food and popular culture reflect the past groups who landed in the U.S. so future American culture will reflect the Hispanics, Asians and many other groups who are replanting their roots. As Author Rodriguez observes after his journey into the mainstream, "Culture survives whether you want it to or not."

Responding to Reading

1. In what way does the image of the "melting pot" (2) help Henry to make his point about assimilation? What image could you use to help those who want to preserve their ethnic identities support their position?
2. Henry calls those who favor bilingualism "separatists" and "anti-assimilationists." Is he being fair when he uses these terms? Does he overstate his case in paragraph 5 when he outlines the position of those who favor bilingualism?
3. Both Henry and Jorge Amiselle (p. 253) criticize federal bilingual-education policy. Do both writers make the same points? What kind of information does each writer use to support his position? Which writer do you think makes the more convincing case? Explain.

SHOULD ENGLISH BE THE LAW?

Robert D. King

Robert D. King (1936–) was born in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. He received B.S. and M.S. degrees in mathematics from the Georgia Institute of Technology and later earned an M.A. and a Ph.D. in linguistics from the University of Wisconsin. He is currently a professor of linguistics at the University of Texas at Austin, where he also holds the Andre and Bernard Rapoport chair in Jewish Studies. His scholarly works include Historical Linguistics and Generative Grammar (1969) and Nehru and the Language Politics of India (1997). The following essay for a general audience originally appeared in the Atlantic Monthly in 1997. In it, King surveys the "English Only" movement and uses the examples of Switzerland and India, countries whose linguistic diversity has never threatened national unity, to argue that we Americans should "relax and luxuriate in our linguistic richness and traditional tolerance of language differences."

We have known race riots, draft riots, labor violence, secession, anti-war protests, and a whiskey rebellion, but one kind of trouble we've never had: a language riot. Language riot? It sounds like a joke. The very idea of language as a political force—as something that might threaten to split a country wide apart—is alien to our way of thinking and to our cultural traditions.

This may be changing. On August 1 of last year the U.S. House of Representatives approved a bill that would make English the official language of the United States. The vote was 259 to 169, with 223 Republicans and thirty-six Democrats voting in favor and eight Republicans, 160 Democrats, and one independent voting against. The debate was intense, acrid, and partisan. On March 25 of last year the Supreme Court agreed to review a case involving an Arizona law that would require public employees to conduct government business only in English. Arizona is one of several states that have passed "Official English" or "English Only" laws. The appeal to the Supreme Court followed a 6-to-3 ruling, in October of 1995, by a federal appeals court striking down the Arizona law. These events suggest how divisive a public issue language could become in America—even if it has until now scarcely been taken seriously.

Traditionally, the American way has been to make English the national language—but to do so quietly, locally, without fuss. The Constitution is silent on language: the Founding Fathers had no need to legislate that English be the official language of the country. It has always been taken for granted that English was the national language, and that one must learn English in order to make it in America.

To say that language has never been a major force in American history or politics, however, is not to say that politicians have always resisted linguistic jingoism. In 1753 Benjamin Franklin voiced his concern that German immigrants were not learning English: "Those [Germans] who come hither are generally the most ignorant Stupid Sort of their own Nation... they will soon so outnumber us, that all the advantages we have will not, in My Opinion, be able to preserve our language, and even our government will become precarious." Theodore Roosevelt articulated the unspoken American linguistic-melting-pot theory when he boomed, "We have room for but one language here, and that is the English language, for we intend to see that the crucible turns our people out as Americans, of American nationality, and not as dwellers in a polyglot boarding house." And: "We must have but one flag. We must also have but one language. That must be the