populations in the country, Dade County often serves as a barometer for attitudes towards minorities and bilingualism.

Next, an article from the Arizona English Bulletin discusses the issues and political images used in a 1988 Arizona campaign to pass an official language amendment. The amendment was passed, and Karen L. Adatus, a professor at Arizona State University, points out that often the same images, such as an American flag, were used by both proponents and opponents in the debate. Then, Roberto Rodriguez, writing in Hispanic, describes the 1990 district court ruling that struck down the very same amendment on the basis that it violated the right of free speech guaranteed by the First Amendment. The court’s decision, on a case brought by a state employee who claimed she was prohibited from speaking Spanish in the course of her job, nullified what has been described as one of the most restrictive official language laws in the nation.

A more recent court case, decided in late 1993, is the subject of Harriet Chiang’s article from the San Francisco Chronicle. In this decision, the California Supreme Court ruled that over-the-counter drugs do not have to include warning labels in a language other than English. The case was watched closely by Hispanic groups because the drug manufacturer had advertised the product heavily on Spanish-speaking television.

LANGUAGE POLITICS AND AMERICAN IDENTITY

In recent years, America’s ability to reconcile political unity and cultural diversity has been challenged anew. A massive wave of immigration from Latin America and Asia has transformed the character of many local communities and fueled demands for bilingual government services. The specter of linguistic diversity, in turn, has sparked insecurity about national cohesion and fostered a movement to designate English as the official language of the United States.

Underlying the political confrontation between “language

1 Article by Jack Gairn. From The Public Interest Spring 1990. Copyright © 1990 by National Affairs Inc. Reprinted by permission.
by establishing immigration quotas overwhelmingly favorable to applicants from northwestern Europe. Language issues then vanished from the national agenda for almost fifty years.

The interplay of the political and demographic changes that began in the 1960s ushered in a new era of conflict over language. First blacks and then other groups increasingly emphasized the values of ethnic solidarity and distinctiveness. A political climate emerged in which policies came to be judged according to their perceived potential for strengthening or weakening a group's ethnic heritage. In this context, Hispanic activists articulated the concept of language rights as a constitutional entitlement that deserved "equal protection of the laws." Specifically, they called on government to go beyond the mere toleration of minority languages in the private sphere to the active promotion of bilingualism in public institutions.

Official actions designed to support linguistic minorities wishing to maintain their native cultures precipitated the organized drive to endow English with a special legal status. Bilingual-education programs were the main catalyst. The 1968 Bilingual Education Act was the first significant federal step in the promotion of language rights. This measure provided funds to meet "the special educational needs ... of children of limited English-speaking ability," defined as "children who come from environments where the dominant language is other than English." Senator Ralph Yarborough, the sponsor of the bill, declared that his intention was "just to try to make those children fully literate in English," but it is clear that for many Hispanic leaders and activists bilingual education represented a vehicle for resisting cultural assimilation and encouraging the continued use of Spanish.

Implementation of the Bilingual Education Act became a hotly contested issue. Minority activists tended to favor cultural-maintenance programs that teach children most subjects in both their native language and English throughout their educations. This approach contradicts the melting pot in favor of a "multicultural" conception of American identity that celebrates ethnic consciousness. The symbolic importance of this diminished respect for English is the likely reason for the overwhelming public rejection of the bicultural approach, reported in a 1983 national survey conducted by UCLA political scientists David Sears and Leone Huddy. The survey found that the majority "Anglo" group accepts bilingual-education programs that stress the rapid acquisition of English proficiency.

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Despite this popular opinion, court decisions and administrative decrees tended to favor bicultural or lengthy "transitional" programs. In Lau v. Nichols (1974), the Supreme Court decided that Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act required school districts to take steps to ensure that non-English-speaking children can participate meaningfully in the educational system; while the Court did not specify what steps should be taken, the so-called Lau guidelines proposed by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare's Office of Civil Rights were heavily weighted against English-as-a-Second-Language programs.

These regulations were bitterly opposed, particularly by influential teachers' unions, and in 1978 the pendulum at both the federal and state levels began to swing away from official promotion of bilingualism. A four-year evaluation of bilingual-education programs conducted by the American Institutes for Research and released in 1977–1978 played a crucial role. This study found no convincing evidence showing that bilingual-education programs were effective in improving English proficiency or in increasing academic motivation. There was evidence, however, that such programs resulted in the classroom segregation of Hispanic children. In response, Congress became increasingly receptive to efforts to broaden the range of programs funded under the Bilingual Education Act to include structured-immersion programs, which "immerse" students in English-speaking classrooms. With the advent of the Reagan administration, skepticism about native-language instruction dominated official thinking; the advocates of language rights, along with other members of the civil rights coalition, were placated on the defensive.

Together with domestic political trends, changing patterns of immigration prepared the ground for the spread of an "official English" movement. In 1965 immigration legislation abolished the national-origins system and the explicit exclusion of Asians. The new law also raised the ceiling on the number of immigrants and gave priority in the allocation of immigration visas to applicants with family members already in the United States.

The results were a huge increase in the number of legal immigrants and a marked shift in their racial and linguistic backgrounds. Immigration and Naturalization Service figures show that between 1950 and 1960 roughly 2.5 million people legally emigrated to the United States; there were 570,000 legal immi-
grants in 1985 alone. Between 1921 and 1960, 18 percent of America's legal immigrants came from Latin America and only 4 percent came from Asia. Between 1971 and 1980, by contrast, the corresponding figures were 40 percent and 35 percent, while in the next five years 35 percent came from Latin America and 48 percent came from Asia. There also was a large inflow of Spanish-speaking illegal immigrants, principally from Mexico.

Along with the sheer number of immigrants, their geographic concentration—the Hispanics in metropolitan areas in California, the Hispanics in states close to the Mexican border—increased the visibility of foreign customs and values. To some, it also raised the possibility of a territorial basis for linguistic separatism.

The Call For "Official English"

Language rights were demanded by ethnic minorities as a symbolic affirmation of their continuing attachment to their original cultures. In the context of increasing immigration and growing anxiety about America's prestige and power in the international arena, however, the revival of ethnic consciousness aroused concern about national unity. In 1983, warning that the failure to maintain a common language in the United States would produce the unrest and polarization experienced by Canada, Belgium, and other linguistically divided countries, Senator S. I. Hayakawa and a Michigan ophthalmologist named John Tanton founded the organization U.S. English to ensure the preservation of English as America's national language.

One of U.S. English's early goals was a constitutional amendment to declare English the official language. Senator Hayakawa first proposed such a measure in 1981; his English Language Amendment (ELA) also would have given Congress the power to enforce the official status of English with appropriate legislation. Other members of Congress periodically have reintroduced the ELA, but the measure has made no substantial legislative progress.

With the failure of the ELA in Congress, U.S. English has turned its attention to the state and local levels. Due largely to the efforts of U.S. English and its sympathizers, forty-four states and numerous counties and municipalities have considered "official English" laws or initiatives since 1981. Before 1980, only three states—Nebraska, Illinois, and Virginia—had declared English their sole "official" language. Today only three states—Maine, Vermont, and Alaska—have yet to consider "official English" laws. The legislatures of Arkansas, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, North Dakota, South Carolina, and Tennessee adopted such measures, and Virginia amended its earlier declaration to discourage bilingual education. In thirty-four states, however, the legislatures refused to pass "official English" statutes. In four of these states—California, Arizona, Colorado, and Florida—English-language amendments to the state constitutions were subsequently placed on the ballot through the initiative process and adopted by popular vote.

In many states, support for "official English" took the form of a simple declarative resolution. A few states, such as South Carolina and Tennessee, went further and prohibited the use of foreign languages in specified public institutions such as schools and the courts. The implementation of these provisions was left to legislators, administrators, and judges, and it is generally agreed that the impact of state "official English" laws has been almost entirely symbolic. But whatever the local differences in the content of "official English" measures, the deeply emotional debates that they engender have a remarkable consistency.

Proponents of the measures contend that both historical experience and common sense teach that linguistic diversity threatens political cohesion and stability. Previous generations of immigrants understood that learning English was the vehicle of social integration and economic mobility. For English to lose its status as America's common tongue is, therefore, to risk a Tower of Babel and to undermine one of the last things that still binds this pluralistic society together.

Proponents deny that they are hostile to minorities; indeed, many of the movement's leading spokesmen have immigrant origins. Adoption of their proposals, they claim, would not eliminate bilingual programs that genuinely advance the process of acclimation, but only check the development of policies that threaten to erode a common sense of American identity and to prevent immigrants from moving out of economically depressed linguistic enclaves.

Opponents of "official English" measures portray them as instruments of exclusion rather than assimilation. To enshrine the superior status of English in the Constitution, they claim, is to state that linguistic minorities are inferior and unwanted in America. They argue further that the predominance of English usage is not in danger; they cite studies showing that virtually all
immigrants want to learn English and do so, despite the inadequate supply of English instruction for adults. To its critics, then, the campaign for "official English" is at best unnecessary and at worst a thinly veiled form of racism and xenophobia. Whatever the naivete of proponents of English-language amendments to state constitutions, opponents contend that such proposals augur future discrimination against language minorities. In their view, "official English" measures both endanger bilingual services and run counter to America's historical commitment to tolerance and equality.

One might expect proposals for "official English" to be most likely to succeed in states with large concentrations of Hispanics or Asians, because the visible clash of ethnic strains might generate resentment among English-speaking groups. In fact, if one considers only outcomes in state legislatures, the opposite seems true. State "official English" laws are concentrated mainly in southern states with largely Anglo-Saxon populations and tiny proportions of foreign-born, Hispanic, or Asian residents. Under these conditions, language usage is a settled matter, bilingualism a remote issue, and the designation of English as the state's official language an uncontroversial decision. On the other hand, in states with substantial language minorities, the legislatures have defeated or tabled "official English" proposals. In these states, politically active members of ethnic groups have persuaded politicians in both parties to resist attacks on bilingual programs.

The reluctance of elected officials to act, however, does not always seal the fate of "official English." Significantly, the four states in which voters have overridden their legislators to pass English-language amendments to their state constitutions have, as a group, the highest proportions of non-English speakers, immigrants, Hispanics, and Asians.

At the local or regional level, then, English becomes a safetynote, often emotional issue when rapid immigration changes the prevailing pattern of language usage. In this context, leaders of both major political parties have chosen to avoid disturbing the existing language policy. But where supporters of "official English" have been sufficiently well organized to put the issue to a popular vote, they have carried the day by wide margins.

**Voting on "Official English"**

In November 1986, California voters endorsed Proposition 63, an English-language amendment to the state's constitution.

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The stated purpose of this initiative, which was the model for the initiatives passed two years later in Arizona, Colorado, and Florida, was to "preserve, protect and strengthen the English language, the common language of the people of the United States." The initiative also instructed the state's legislature to enforce the status of English as the official language of California and to make no law that "diminishes or ignores" the role of English. Residents and people doing business in California were to have legal standing to sue the state to ensure enforcement of the amendment.

With the single exception of Republican Senator Pete Wilson, all of the state's leading politicians opposed Proposition 63. Governor Deukmejian called it "unnecessary" and warned that it "would cause fear, confusion and resentment among many minority Californians." The state's Roman Catholic bishops also urged the defeat of the "official English" initiative, stating that it would "enshrine prejudice in the law and jeopardize all forms of bilingual assistance." The state attorney general agreed, calling Proposition 63 "an open invitation to hundreds of hurtful and frivolous lawsuits," while the Los Angeles City Council deemed the proposal "contrary to our most basic principles of equality and opportunity" and asserted that it would "result in a sense of inferiority, deasenment and shame in one's own ethnic heritage."

An impressive coalition of interest groups, including the League of Women Voters, the AFL-CIO, the ACLU, and organizations of ethnic minorities, opposed the amendment. The League of Women Voters, for example, accused the amendment of "official English," and the Coalition for Informed Voting in California, which included almost every major civic organization in California, voted against it. The amendment was supported by 58% of the electorate statewide, and a majority in every single county, oped for "official English." An exit poll conducted by the Field Institute indicated widespread support for the amendment in almost every segment of the California electorate. To be sure, Hispanic and Asian voters were less likely to approve the amendment than were black or white voters, but support did not differ significantly between blacks and whites. The young and highly educated were relatively less likely to vote for "official English" than the rest of the public, but even among these groups—including respondents with postgraduate degrees—majorities reported having supported the amendment. Economic concerns did not appear to influence voting; there was no difference in the level of support for Proposition 63 between people who said that they were better off financially than they were a year ago and people who said that their circumstances had worsened.
The cracks in the general consensus about the desirability of "official English" were related to party and ideology. Eighty-four percent of the Republicans surveyed favored the amendment, compared with 56 percent of the Democrats. This divergence in outlook grows even larger when voters are compared according to ideological identification: conservatives were much more likely than liberals to support the proposition. It appears that differences of opinion on language issues result more from differences in attitudes toward social issues than from economic concerns.

The 1988 campaigns for "official English" in Arizona, Colorado, and Florida closely resembled the 1986 campaign in California. Once again, the top elected officials in both political parties, prominent figures in education, religion, and the judicial system, important business and labor organizations, minority group leaders, and the leading newspapers opposed the measures as unnecessary, divisive, racist, and destructive of necessary bilingual services. And once again, the voters opted for the amendment. The Florida amendment received 84 percent of the statewide vote, won in every county, and carried nearly two-thirds of the vote in heavily Hispanic Dade County. Colorado's version of "official English" passed by a three-to-two ratio. In Arizona, however, a more restrictive version of "official English" was adopted as an amendment to the state's constitution by the narrowest of margins, 51 percent to 49 percent. (In February 1990, however, a federal district judge in Phoenix ruled that the amendment was an unconstitutional violation of the federally guaranteed right of free speech. Whether this decision will be appealed and how it ultimately will affect other state and local "official English" laws remain to be seen. In any case, the court's action stands as another example of the gap between public officials and popular sentiment.)

A pre-election poll of Arizona voters conducted by the Arizona Republic indicated that Republicans (67 percent), respondents without any college education (66 percent), and those over fifty-five years old (64 percent) were more likely to support the English-language amendment than Democrats (47 percent), college graduates (44 percent), and people aged eighteen to thirty-four (56 percent). In Florida, however, a survey conducted by Mason-Dixon Opinion Research found no differences in support for "official English" among self-identified Republicans, Democrats, and independents, doubtless a reflection of the greater conservatism of Florida Democrats as compared with those in California or Arizona. As in California, in Florida both whites (70 percent) and blacks (75 percent) strongly supported the amendment, but Hispanics (25 percent) were strongly opposed.

These data, however sparse, make it clear why proposals for "official English" have a good chance of succeeding at the polls. Even large Hispanic or Asian communities often have little electoral power, because these groups tend to include many noncitizens and to have low levels of political participation. The political right is the core of the "official English" movement, but the movement attracts support from all along the ideological spectrum. Despite the condemnation of party leaders, civil rights organizations, and the intelligentsia, a majority of Democratic and black voters, apparently unaware of or unpersuaded by claims that these measures are grounded in prejudice and xenophobia, have approved English-language amendments.

Language and American Identity

Economic competition and cultural resentment are social science's leading explanations for linguistic conflict. These causal theories may differ in their predictions concerning the specific groups that are likely to support "official English" and to oppose bilingualism. But both theories characterize the desire to elevate the status of English as a hostile, defensive reaction to feelings of vulnerability, based variously on ethnic competition for jobs, education, or housing; resentment about the cost of public services that primarily benefit linguistic minorities; unfavorable personal experiences with members of these groups; insecurity about the loss of American power; or sheer prejudice.

No doubt there are voters whose positions on language issues are determined by such motives. The support for "official English" is so pervasive, however, that economic anxiety and prejudice against minorities can hardly be its only or even its primary causes. Indeed, most of the respondents in a 1987 California poll, conducted after the passage of the state's English-language amendment, declared that it was a "good thing" for immigrants to preserve their native languages and customs. A February 1988 California poll found that only 18 percent of the Anglo respondents were "very worried" that the increased number of Hispanics and Asians in the state would make it hard to maintain the "American way of life"; only 3 percent reported that this change had harmed them or their families. In a June 1986 CBS
News/New York Times national survey, 68 percent of the respondents said that they would welcome "today's new immigrants" into their neighborhoods, and only 15 percent were worried that these immigrants would take away their jobs. In sum, most people do not appear very anxious about the personal economic impact of immigration, nor is there pervasive animosity toward linguistic minorities and their cultures.

The polls suggest an alternative explanation for the public's prevailing outlook on language policy: the popular conception of national identity equates being American with speaking English. Thus the February 1988 California poll found that 70 percent of those surveyed, including 65 percent of those with a college degree and more than two-thirds of the Hispanic and Asian respondents, believed that "speaking and writing English" are "very important" in making someone a "true American." Although a conservative political outlook predictably boosted support for this normative conception of American nationality, perhaps the strongest indication of the positive symbolism associated with "official English" is that fully 62 percent of the respondents who identified themselves as strong liberals and 65 percent of those who called themselves strong Democrats also endorsed it.

What is more, although 75 percent of this sample felt that voting in elections was another very important criterion in defining a "true American," 62 percent said that only citizens who can speak and read English should be allowed to vote. In a 1986 Roper national survey, 81 percent of the sample agreed that "anyone who wants to stay in this country should have to learn English." And in a November 1986 CBS News/New York Times national poll found that two-thirds of those surveyed thought that English already was the official language of the United States. In this climate, a vote for "official English" can be taken as an expression—sometimes self-conscious, sometimes reflexive—of one's identification with an important symbol of nationality.

A major reason for the success of "official English" at the polls is that its advocates have succeeded in defining the measure as a show of patriotism rather than intolerance. When asked why they intended to vote for the English-language amendment, 59 percent of the registered California voters polled just before the 1986 election said that they simply believed that "if you live in the United States you should be able to speak English."

Along with Donald Green, Beth Reingold, and Evelyn Walters, I conducted an elaborate statistical analysis of California

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opinion on language issues. We concluded that neither a person's immediate economic circumstances nor the perceived personal impacts of ethnic change were significant indicators of attitudes toward bilingualism. To be sure, there are groups—linguistic minorities themselves, schoolteachers forced to implement bilingual-education programs, residents of communities where the influx of immigrants has unsettled the established fabric of daily life—directly affected by language policy. But for most members of the dominant language group, the short-term personal consequences are quite limited. Under these circumstances, underlying political orientations—such as social conservatism or egalitarianism—are the primary determinants of policy preferences.

The intertwined debates over "official English" and bilingualism reflect a cultural conflict over the meaning of American identity. A large segment of the public believes that becoming an American means speaking English; for these people, learning English figures prominently in the process whereby successive waves of immigrants become full-fledged citizens by their own efforts at assimilation. "Official English," to many, is a code word for a common nationality, hence it wins support all along the political spectrum. By challenging the special status of English, bilingualism becomes a symbol of division and dissent. When patriotic sentiments are aroused, most voters judge specific language policies according to whether they facilitate the diffusion of English-speaking skills. Whereas political elites frequently have responded to the sensitivities of minority groups, sounding the theme of equality and characterizing support for "official English" as prejudiced and unfair, the general public has regarded English as a defining element of a vulnerable civic identity.

From Symbolism to Pragmatism

Regardless of their ethnicity, most Americans take for granted that English is the national language. Any serious challenge to this premise is bound to elicit popular resistance. But while the accusation that "official English" is tantamount to racism angers rather than converts, proclaiming a special status for English antagonizes members of linguistic minorities. In this political atmosphere, it is difficult to design language policies that enjoy widespread legitimacy.

The starting point for policymakers should be the over-
whelming evidence that newcomers to America universally have striven to learn English and that within one generation most have done so. Bilingual programs that expedite this process increase economic opportunities for immigrants and speed their integration into the political community on terms that almost everyone accepts. The goals of language policy should be improving access to English, the nation’s public language, and enacting tolerance for the use of other languages in the private realm. Once bilingualism becomes a practical complement rather than a principled challenge to the dominant image of American identity, the salience of the impulses underlying the “official English” movement will diminish.

The following principles provide the framework for a language policy designed to achieve social comity rather than to win a war of symbols:

1. Efforts to pass “official English” measures should be abandoned. The instrumental consequences of state and local “official English” legislation are virtually nil, and in the absence of a genuine threat to the status of English, the formal subordination of other languages is mainly divisive.

2. Still, the existence of a common language helps strengthen national identity. The purpose of bilingual-education programs in the public schools should be to teach English as rapidly and effectively as possible. Given that the common language of international science and economics is English, improving the linguistic skills of all Americans is a vital national interest. For any particular student, bilingual education should be a transitional stage. The maintenance of one’s ethnic identity, however desirable this might be, is a matter for the home and communal institutions.

3. Current English instruction for adults is inadequate. The expansion of adult-education programs is imperative for the social and economic integration of linguistic minorities into the American mainstream. Only if these programs are effective and readily available is it reasonable to insist on English proficiency as a condition of naturalization.

4. The federal government should help pay for these programs. The influx of linguistic minorities into America is largely the result of federal actions—immigration reform, refugee policy, the inability to seal the border with Mexico, and foreign-policy misadventures. But the impact of immigration falls mainly on local institutions and officials who must cope with the demands for housing, schooling, jobs, and public assistance, and must mediate the tensions generated by the clash of unfamiliar cultural strains. Money is one solvent for these conflicts. Having called the tune, the federal government should recognize its responsibility and pay the piper.

5. The concept of the melting pot should be revitalized. In a society whose population constantly replenishes itself with immigrants from diverse cultures, the inculcation of a unifying civic identity is a permanent problem. The melting pot—the process of cultural assimilation that yields a people to whom America has a common meaning—remains an attractive solution. The ethos of the melting pot is universalistic and inclusive; it produces individuals who are Americans by virtue of their commitment to a democratic national creed.

The resurgence of ethnicity in the late 1960s gave rise to attacks on the melting pot and appeals for a “multicultural” version of American nationality. If multiculturalism means no more than the voluntary maintenance of a proud sense of an ethnic group’s contribution to the nation’s history, it fits easily into the American tradition. But if it means that there should be no single American identity, only several culturally distinct identities whose preservation requires governmental intervention, then multiculturalism implies an alien conception of the nation as a confederation of ethnic communities rather than a community of equal individuals. There will be strong public support for policies that benefit minorities only when these policies are framed in ways that affirm rather than attack the dominant conception of American identity.

If current trends in the ethnic composition of American society continue, language issues will remain on the political agenda. Harmony in diversity requires some consensus on customs and values. The United States cannot be Switzerland, the Austro-Hungarian empire, or even Canada. Our destiny is a revitalized melting pot in which all elements—indigenous and immigrant, majority and minority—intermingle to produce a new identity for all. In this process, something is given up; experience suggests that language is one aspect of the old culture that must be set aside.