• Alabama voters, by a margin of 89 percent to 11 percent, adopt English as their official language. Official English measures have now passed in a total of seventeen states.

The Case for Official English

By Senator S. I. Hayakawa

S. I. Hayakawa, a California Republican, served as U.S. senator from 1977 to 1983 following his retirement from the academic world. A semanticist, he is the author of a widely used college text, *Language in Thought and Action*. After sponsoring the original version of the English Language Amendment in 1981, Hayakawa helped to establish a lobby to promote it, U.S. English, and remains the organization's honorary chairman. This article is excerpted from a speech, reprinted as *One Nation . . . Indivisible? The English Language Amendment* (Washington, D.C.: Washington Institute for Values in Public Policy, 1985), pp. 6–18.

What is it that has made a society out of the hodgepodge of nationalities, races, and colors represented in the immigrant hordes that people our nation? It is language, of course, that has made communication among all these elements possible. It is with a common language that we have dissolved distrust and fear. It is with language that we have drawn up the understandings and agreements and social contracts that make a society possible.

But while language is a necessary cause of our oneness as a society, it is not a sufficient cause. A foreigner cannot, by speaking faultless English, become an Englishman. Paul Theroux, a contemporary novelist and travel writer, has commented on this fact: "Foreigners are always aliens in England. No one becomes English. It's a very tribal society. . . . No one becomes Japanese. . . . No one becomes Nigerian. But Nigerians, Japanese, and English become Americans."[2]

One need not speak faultless American English to become an American. Indeed, one may continue to speak English with an appalling foreign accent. This is true of some of my friends, but they are

2. Interviewed by James T. Yenchel, *Washington Times*, Dec. 30, 1984.

seen as fully American because of the warmth and enthusiasm with which they enter into the life of the communities in which they live.

Even as the American nation was coming into being, it had become obvious that the American experience was creating a new kind of human being. Among the first to comment on this fact was Thomas Paine, who wrote:

> If there is a country in the world where concord, according to common calculation, would be least expected, it is America. Made up, as it is, of people from different nations . . . speaking different languages, and more different in their modes of worship, it would appear that the union of such a people was impracticable. But by the simple operation of constructing government on the principles of society and the rights of man, every difficulty retires, and the parts are brought into cordial unison.[3]

Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, in *Letters from an American Farmer*, wrote in 1782:

> What then is the American, this new man? . . . I would point out to you a family whose grandfather was an Englishman, whose wife was Dutch, whose son married a French woman, and whose present four sons have four wives of different nations. *He* is an American who, leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced. . . . The Americans were once scattered all over Europe. Here they are incorporated into one of the finest systems of population which has ever appeared. . . . The American ought therefore to love his country much better than that wherein he or his forebears were born. Here the rewards of his industry follow with equal steps in the progress of his labor.[4]

Herman Melville, in *Redburn*, published in 1849, wrote: "You cannot spill a drop of American blood without spilling the blood of the whole world. . . . We are not a narrow tribe of men. No: our blood is the flood of the Amazon, made up of a thousand noble currents all pouring into one. We are not a nation, so much as a world."[5]

Despite the exclusion of the Chinese after 1882, the idea of immigration as "a thousand noble currents all pouring into one" continued

3. Quoted in J. A. Parker and Allan C. Brownfield, "The Jackson Campaign and the Myth of a Black-Jewish Split," *Lincoln Review* (Summer 1984): 21–22.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.

to haunt the American imagination: Israel Zangwill's play *The Melting Pot* opened in New York in 1908 to enthusiastic popular acclaim, and its title, as Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan remark, "was seized upon as a concise evocation of a profoundly significant American fact." In the play David Quixano, the Russian Jewish immigrant—"a pogrom orphan"—has escaped to New York, and he exclaims:

> Here you stand, good folk, think I, when I see them at Ellis Island . . . in your fifty groups with your fifty languages and histories, and your fifty blood hatreds and rivalries, but you won't be long like that, brothers, for these are the fires of God you've come to. . . . A fig for your feuds and vendettas! German and Frenchman, Irishman and Englishman, Jews and Russians—into the Crucible with you all! God is making the American.[6]

In the past several years, strong resistance to the "melting pot" idea has arisen, especially for those who claim to speak for the Hispanic peoples. Instead of a melting pot, they say, the national ideal should be a "salad bowl," in which different elements are thrown together but not "melted," so that the original ingredients retain their distinctive character. In addition to the increasing size of the Spanish-speaking population in our nation, two legislative actions have released this outburst of effort on behalf of the Spanish language and Hispanic culture.

First, there was the so-called "bilingual ballot" mandated in 1975 in an amendment to the Voting Rights Act, which required foreign language ballots when voters of selected language groups reached 5 percent or more in any voting district. The groups chosen to be so favored were Asian-Americans (Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean), American Indians, Alaskan Natives, and "peoples of Spanish heritage," that is, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and Mexican Americans.

Sensitive as Americans have been to racism, especially since the days of the civil rights movement, no one seems to have noticed the profound racism expressed in the amendment that created the bilingual ballot. Brown people, like Mexicans and Puerto Ricans, red people, like American Indians, and yellow people, like the Japanese and Chinese, are assumed not to be smart enough to learn English. No provision is made, however, for non-English-speaking French-Canadians in Maine or Vermont, or for the Hebrew-speaking Hasidic Jews in Brooklyn, who are white and are presumed to be able to learn English without difficulty. Voters in San Francisco encountered ballots

6. Quoted in Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1963), p. 289.

in Spanish and Chinese for the first time in the elections of 1980, much to their surprise, since authorizing legislation had been passed by Congress with almost no debate, no roll-call vote, and no public discussion. Naturalized Americans, who had taken the trouble to learn English to become citizens, were especially angry and remain so.

Furthermore, there was the *Lau* decision of the U.S. Supreme Court *(see pp. 251–55)*, in response to a suit brought by a Chinese of San Francisco who complained that his children were not being taught English adequately in the public schools they were attending. Justice William O. Douglas, delivering the opinion of the court, wrote: "No specific remedy is urged upon us. Teaching English to the students of Chinese ancestry who do not speak the language is one choice. Giving instructions to this group in Chinese is another. There may be others. Petitioner asks only that the Board of Education be directed to apply its expertise to the problem and rectify the situation." Justice Douglas's decision, concurred in by the entire court, granted the *Lau* petition. Because the *Lau* decision did not specify the method by which English was to be taught, it turned out to be a go-ahead for amazing educational developments, not so much for the Chinese as for Hispanics, who appropriated the decision and took it to apply especially to themselves.

The new U.S. Department of Education, established during the Carter administration, was eager to make its presence known by expanding its bureaucracy and its influence. The department quickly announced a vast program with federal funding for bilingual education, which led to the hiring of Spanish-speaking teachers by the thousands. The department furthermore issued what were known as the Lau Regulations, which required under the threat of withdrawal of federal funds that (1) non-English-speaking pupils be taught English, and that (2) academic subjects be taught in the pupils' own language. The contradiction between these two regulations seems not to have occurred to the educational theorists in the Department of Education. Nor does it seem to trouble, to this day, the huge membership of the National Association for Bilingual Education.[7]

Bilingual education rapidly became a growth industry, requiring more and more teachers. Complaints began to arise from citizens that "bilingual education" was not bilingual at all, since many Spanish-speaking teachers hired for the program were found not to be able to speak English. Despite the ministrations of the Department of Edu-

7. Editor's note: At the time Hayakawa spoke, this professional organization had fewer than 2,000 members and an annual budget of less than $250,000, according to its executive director, James J. Lyons.

cation, or perhaps because of them, Hispanic students to a shocking degree drop out of school, educated neither in Hispanic nor in American language and culture. "Hispanics are the least educated minority in America, according to a report by the American Council on Education," writes Earl Byrd. "The report says 50 percent of all Hispanic youths in America drop out of high school, and only 7 percent finish college. Twelve percent of black youths and 23 percent of whites finish college. Eighteen percent of all Hispanics in America who are 25 or older are classified as functional illiterates, compared to 10 percent for blacks and 3 percent for whites."[8]

I welcome the Hispanic—and as a Californian, I welcome especially the Mexican—influence on our culture. My wife was wise enough to insist that both our son and daughter learn Spanish as children and to keep reading Spanish as they were growing up. Consequently, my son, a newspaperman, was able to work for six months as an exchange writer for a newspaper in Costa Rica, while a Costa Rican reporter took my son's place in Oregon. My daughter, a graduate of the University of California at Santa Cruz, speaks Spanish, French, and after a year in Monterey Language School, Japanese.

The ethnic chauvinism of the present Hispanic leadership is an unhealthy trend in present-day America. It threatens a division perhaps more ominous in the long run than the division between blacks and whites. Blacks and whites have problems enough with each other, to be sure, but they quarrel with each other in one language. Even Malcolm X, in his fiery denunciations of the racial situation in America, wrote excellent and eloquent English. But the present politically ambitious "Hispanic Caucus" looks forward to a destiny for Spanish-speaking Americans separate from that of Anglo-, Italian-, Polish-, Greek-, Lebanese-, Chinese-, and Afro-Americans, and all the rest of us who rejoice in our ethnic diversity, which gives us our richness as a culture, and the English language, which keeps us in communication with each other to create a unique and vibrant culture.

The advocates of Spanish language and Hispanic culture are not at all unhappy about the fact that "bilingual education," originally instituted as the best way to teach English, often results in no English being taught at all. Nor does Hispanic leadership seem to be alarmed that large populations of Mexican Americans, Cubans, and Puerto Ricans do not speak English and have no intention of learning. Hispanic spokesmen rejoice when still another concession is made to the Spanish-speaking public, such as the Spanish-language Yellow Pages telephone directory now available in Los Angeles.

8. *Washington Times*, July 3, 1984.

"Let's face it. We're not going to be a totally English-speaking country any more," says Aurora Helton of the governor of Oklahoma's Hispanic Advisory Committee. "Spanish should be included in commercials shown throughout America. Every American child ought to be taught both English and Spanish," says Mario Obledo, president of the League of United Latin American Citizens, which was founded more than a half-century ago to help Hispanics learn English and enter the American mainstream. "Citizenship is what makes us all American. Nowhere does the Constitution say that English is our language," says Maurice Ferré, mayor of Miami, Florida.

"Nowhere does the Constitution say that English is our language." It was to correct this omission that I introduced in April 1981 a constitutional amendment which read as follows: "The English language shall be the official language of the United States" *(see p. 112)*. Although there were ten cosponsors to this resolution, and some speeches were given on the Senate floor, it died without being acted upon in the 97th Congress.

But the movement to make English the official language of the nation is clearly gaining momentum. It is likely to suffer an occasional setback in state legislatures because of the doctrinaire liberals' assumption that every demand made by an ethnic minority must be yielded to. But whenever the question of English as the official language has been submitted to a popular referendum or ballot initiative, it has won by a majority of 70 percent or better.

It is not without significance that pressure against English language legislation does not come from any immigrant group other than the Hispanic: not from the Chinese or Koreans or Filipinos or Vietnamese; nor from immigrant Iranians, Turks, Greeks, East Indians, Ghanaians, Ethiopians, Italians, or Swedes. The only people who have any quarrel with the English language are the Hispanics—at least the Hispanic politicians and "bilingual" teachers and lobbying organizations. One wonders about the Hispanic rank and file. Are they all in agreement with their leadership? And what does it profit the Hispanic leadership if it gains power and fame, while 50 percent of the boys and girls of their communities, speaking little or no English, cannot make it through high school?

For the first time in our history, our nation is faced with the possibility of the kind of linguistic division that has torn apart Canada in recent years; that has been a major feature of the unhappy history of Belgium, split into speakers of French and Flemish; that is at this very moment a bloody division between the Sinhalese and Tamil populations of Sri Lanka. None of these divisions is simply a quarrel about

language. But in each case political differences become hardened and made immeasurably more difficult to resolve when they are accompanied by differences of language—and therefore conflicts of ethnic pride.

The aggressive movement on the part of Hispanics to reject assimilation and to seek to maintain—and give official status to—a foreign language within our borders is an unhealthy development. This foreign language and culture are to be maintained not through private endeavors such as those of the *Alliance française*, which tries to preserve French language and culture, but by federal and state legislation and funding. The energetic lobbying of the National Association for Bilingual Education and the Congressional Hispanic Caucus has led to sizable allocations for bilingual education in the Department of Education: $142 million in fiscal 1985, of which the lion's share goes to Hispanic programs. The purpose of this allocation at the federal level is to prepare administrators and teachers for bilingual education at the state level—which means additional large sums of money allocated for this purpose by state governments. In brief, the basic directive of the *Lau* decision has been, for all intents and purposes, diverted from its original purpose of teaching English.

One official language and one only, so that we can unite as a nation. This is what President Theodore Roosevelt also perceived when he said: "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." Let me quote in conclusion a remark from the distinguished American novelist, Saul Bellow, when he agreed to serve on the advisory board of our national organization, U.S. English: "Melting pot, yes. Tower of Babel, no!"[9]

9. Editor's note: Through his literary agent, Saul Bellow has denied any involvement with U.S. English. But the organization, claiming to "have a letter on file" from the author, has continued to use his name in its fundraising; William Trombley, "Norman Cousins Drops His Support of Prop. 63," *Los Angeles Times*, Oct. 16, 1986, Pt. 1, p. 3.

Official English: Another Americanization Campaign?

By Joseph Leibowicz

Joseph Leibowicz is a lawyer in New Haven, Connecticut. This article is excerpted from "The Proposed English Language Amendment: Sword or Shield?" *Yale Law and Policy Review* 3, no. 2 (Spring 1985): 519–50.

Supporters of the English Language Amendment (E.L.A.) and other measures to protect the English language in the United States base their proposals on a venerable idea, one reaching back at least to biblical times: A common language is a strong bond of nationhood. The Select Committee on Immigration and Refugee Policy based its recommendations for continuing the language requirement for naturalization on this idea, simply quoting Noah Webster's famous dictum that "a *national language* is a band of *national union*."[10] In justifying the additional burden of a requirement that illegal aliens seeking amnesty study English, Representative Jim Wright admitted that this demand was inconsistent with the policy of other federal programs, but stated that such a requirement was necessary to reverse a national trend toward "balkanization" because "language is the thread, the common thread, that ties us all together."[11] In supporting inclusion in the Immigration Reform and Control Act of a nonbinding declaration that English is the official language of the United States, the Senate Judiciary Committee warned: "If language and cultural separatism rise above a certain level, the unity and political stability of the nation will—in time—be seriously diminished."[12] During hearings on the E.L.A., Gerda Bikales, the executive director of U.S. English, an organization formed to combat the displacement of the English language from official life, described how general cultural and political fragmentation has created a situation in which "English is no longer *a* bond, but *the* bond between all of us."[13]

10. Select Commission on Immigrant and Refugee Policy, *U.S. Immigration Policy and the National Interest*, Final Report, March 1, 1981, p. 289.

11. *Congressional Record*, 98th Cong., 2d sess., 1984, p. H6066.

12. Senate Rep. no. 62, 98th Cong., 1st sess., 1983, p. 7.

13. U.S. Senate, Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on the Constitution, *The English Language Amendment: Hearing on S.J. Res. 167*, 98th Cong., 2d sess., June 12, 1984, p. 6.