



## ENGLISH-ONLY LANGUAGE POLICIES IN THE UNITED STATES

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In the United States, immigrant languages are vanishing at an alarming rate [1]. Immigrants replace their native languages with English within two or three generations or faster (Crawford, 1995; Fishman, 1966, 1991; Veltman, 1983, 2000; Wong-Fillmore, 1991). Children grow up fluent in English with little proficiency in the native language. Most do not have a common language with their grandparents and many are unable to speak to their parents in the native language (Beykont, 1997c; Souza, 2000; Wong-Fillmore, 1991). This paper examines one of the contributing factors to the rapid loss of immigrant languages, namely school language policies.

The 18th and 19th century were characterized by the absence of a uniform school language policy in the U.S. Decisions about language(s) of instruction were made locally. No official language was designated and generally, the federal government did not intervene with language choices of individuals because free choice of languages was viewed as an extension of the democratic ideal (Crawford, 1995; Heath, 1976; Keller & Van Hooft, 1982; Padilla, 1982). Immigrant groups, including Germans, French, and Dutch, settled in different parts of the country. In these ethnic enclaves, church services were conducted in the native language of the community and private and church-affiliated schools used children's native languages as a main instructional medium. Some of these schools taught English as a second language; others used English as a second instructional medium. In order to attract minority communities, some public schools also started bilingual programs. The liberal treatment of languages and language minority groups continued until World War I.

In this paper I argue that since World War I public schools have played a critical role in promoting English monolingualism in the U.S. and have contributed to rapid language erosion. I discuss English imposition in public schools by presenting language policy debates and programmatic decisions in the education of language minority students in reference to three historical periods--between World War I and World War II, World War II to 1980, and 1980 until today.

### U.S. School Language Policies between World War I and World War II

In the early 20th century partly due to a nationalistic response to a large wave of immigration the United States adopted an "explicit assimilationist" orientation [2] toward diverse language groups (Anderson, 1990; Gonzalez, 1975; Paulston, 1978; Walsh, 1991). According to this orientation, increasing language diversity constitutes a threat to social unity and must be treated as an urgent social 'problem' to be resolved as quickly as possible (Ruiz, 1984). Many languages are believed to divide a country because immigrant groups' loyalties to native languages and cultures can be a serious obstacle to their linguistic and cultural assimilation into the host country (Beykont, 1994, 1997 a, c; Crawford, 1992, 1995; Gonzalez, 1975).

From a central government's standpoint, a common language forges a similarity of attitude and values which can have important unifying aspects, while different languages tend to divide and make direction



from the center more difficult (Leibowitz, 1971).

Despite the fact that the U.S. was founded and continued to grow as an immigrant country characterized by linguistic and ethnic diversity, English was increasingly imposed as the common language of the country and Anglo Saxon values were espoused as the "mainstream" values (Crawford, 1995; Keller & Van Hooft, 1982). As part of a larger nation-building agenda, "forging a similarity of attitudes and values," meant repressing diversity in languages, values, and beliefs and forcing language minorities to adopt English and assimilate into the mainstream (Leibowitz, 1971).

The assimilationist orientation was institutionalized by cutting public funds for private and church-affiliated schools and abolishing bilingual programs in public schools. Many states passed English-only laws and adopted programs that used English as the exclusive instructional language and set as the primary goal the development of children's literacy and academic skills in English (Beykont, 1994, 1997 b, c; Crawford, 1995; Gonzalez, 1975; Navarro, 1982). Language minority students were not given any special educational provisions and were instructed in mainstream classrooms alongside native speakers of English. Bilingual textbooks were burned and teachers were fired, brought to court, and convicted for explaining concepts in children's native languages (Cortes, 1986; Crawford, 1995). Children were discouraged and even punished for speaking their native languages in classrooms, school corridors, or playgrounds (Cortes, 1986).

The exclusive reliance on English as the instructional medium prevailed throughout the 1940s. The English-only language policies in schools were further reinforced by the Nationality Act, which identified English fluency (1940) and then English literacy skills (1950) as a naturalization requirement. With the exception of elderly immigrants who had lived in the U.S. for over twenty years all applicants had to prove that they were fluent and literate in English in order to become American citizens [3]. Increasingly, English proficiency was equated with political loyalty to the U.S. and minority groups were denied access to their democratic right to vote until they gained English fluency and English literacy (Crawford, 1995; Heath, 1976).

These policies did serve their linguistic assimilationist purpose and many language groups did quickly replace their native languages with English (Fishman, 1966). For many Northern European groups such as Dutch, Germans, and Norwegians, learning English allowed access to the economic and social life of the U.S. Specifically, linguistic assimilation of those who were White and Protestant resulted in cultural assimilation (Crawford, 1995). Other groups, however, due to their differing racial, cultural, and religious backgrounds were often denied equal access to economic and social mobility even after they learned English (Gonzalez, 1975; Ogbu, 1978; Paulston, 1978). Their linguistic assimilation did not result in cultural assimilation: many left their native language and cultural connections behind but the mainstream did not take them in.

In addition to rapidly losing their native languages, language minority students exhibited low achievement in English-only classrooms. When compared with the national norms, they were behind in all subject areas (Beykont, 1994, 1997c; Coleman, 1966; Crawford, 1995; Padilla, 1982; Walsh, 1991; Wong Fillmore & Valadez, 1986). Furthermore, children's difficulties in learning English were confused with cognitive and linguistic delays; many were placed in special education classrooms, tracked out of academic tracks, and permanently relegated to low-ability groups (Cummins, 1981; Oakes, 1985; Stefanakis, 2000; Wheelock, 1990). A disproportionately high percentage of language minority students were retained in grade, and eventually dropped out or were pushed out of school with no diploma (Padilla, 1982; Walsh, 1991).

School failure of language minority students was attributed to children's supposed inadequate intellectual, cognitive, and linguistic abilities (see Gonzalez, 1975; Padilla, 1982; Ogbu, 1978, for reviews). It was widely believed that bilingualism caused mental confusion, inhibited cognitive and academic development, and resulted in low achievement of language minority students (see Hakuta, 1986; Kessler and Quinn, 1982, for reviews). Another commonly held belief was that some ethnic groups were genetically inferior and that their school failure was a result of their lower intelligence (Dunn, 1987). The negative school experiences of language minority students were also attributed to "undeveloped languages" due to continual code-switching behavior, and use of nonstandard varieties of native languages in their communities (see Baratz-Baratz, 1970; Secada, 1990, for reviews). In



essence, language minority students and their communities were blamed for failing in an educational system that was designed for White, middle class, native English-speaking students (Beykont, 1997c, 2002).

Against the prevalent trend of assimilationist policies, a series of U.S. Supreme Court cases found it unconstitutional to impose English in schools through coercive methods. For example, in the case of *Meyer v. Nebraska* (1923), the Supreme Court overturned a lower court ruling that found a teacher guilty of violating the English-only law of Nebraska (1920). Despite the fact that Nebraska's law prohibited use of languages other than English until high school, the teacher had used German to tell a Biblical story to a student. The court found such severe restrictions on the use of non-English languages in schools to be unconstitutional.

The protection of the Constitution extends to all, to those who speak other languages as well as those born with English on the tongue. Perhaps it would be advantageous if all had ready understanding of our ordinary speech, but this cannot be coerced by methods, which conflict with the Constitution (*Meyer v. Nebraska*, 1923).

*Meyer v. Nebraska* established a precedent for later Supreme Court rulings on language rights violations and was an important step in the legal recognition of language-based discrimination in the U.S., but it was not a resounding victory for language minority communities. The Supreme Court found the extreme methods (such as suing teachers) employed to restrict the use of non-English languages to be inconsistent with the ideal of individual liberty. However, it failed to question the prevalent social view of English as the sole language of "ordinary speech" in the U.S. and definition of linguistic diversity as a "problem". The court did not problematize the fact that Nebraska's restrictive English-only law prohibited regular or systematic use of languages other than English in government services including schools, required that all instruction be provided in English, and delayed foreign language education until high school. It was decided, "the obvious purpose [of Nebraska's English-only law] was that the English language should be and become the mother tongue of all children reared in this state. The enactment of such a statute comes reasonably within the police power of the state".

In short, the period between World War I and World War II was characterized by generally negative attitudes toward languages, hostile treatment of language minority groups, lack of interest in foreign language study, and explicit assimilationist school language policies. The summative effect of U.S. school language policies in this period was rapid language erosion. With schools as English-only environments, language minority children grew up feeling ashamed of their native language, quickly replaced it with English, and found themselves unable to speak to their grandparents, relatives, and sometimes even their parents.

#### U.S. School Language Policies from World War II to 1980

After World War II, attitudes toward minorities and non-English languages started to soften and sentiments began to shift away from an exclusive English-only orientation. Many factors contributed to this shift including recognition of the importance of foreign language education for national defense purposes<sup>[4]</sup> (Keller and Van Hooft, 1982). The federal government began to appropriate funds to support foreign language study for native English speakers enrolled in K-12 public schools. Some educational measures were also taken to address the needs of language minority students. For example, in the Little Schools of the 400, Chicano preschoolers were taught common English words to prepare them for placement in elementary classrooms. The Coral Way bilingual program was developed in 1961 and became a model for other bilingual programs. Aiming to foster bilingualism and biliteracy of all students, this program integrated Cuban students and native English speaking students and taught them bilingually through English and Spanish. Sporadic attempts to address the unique needs of language minority students in schools were then strengthened by legislative action when language minority communities joined the civil rights movement and fought to obtain expanded language rights and bilingual services in schools.

Civil rights legislation heightened public attention to many policies and practices that were discriminatory to minorities in the U.S. In 1965, the English literacy requirement for voting was



abolished, thereby recognizing a citizen's right to vote regardless of their level of English proficiency. Exclusionary immigration quotas that limited immigration from certain parts of the world, such as the Mediterranean and African countries, were relaxed (1965). The performance of public schools in ensuring equal access to social and economic life in the U.S. was questioned on the grounds that a disproportionate number of language minority students were failing and/or dropping out of school (Navarro, 1985; Paulston, 1978). Title VI of the Civil Rights Act (1964) declared that "no person in the U.S. shall, on the grounds of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance." A number of common educational practices in schools were questioned, including disproportionate placement of language minority children in special education classes based on their performance in English tests and a tracking system that relegated language minority students to low ability groups early in their academic career (Cummins, 1986; Lyons, 1990).

The Bilingual Education Act of 1968 recognized the increasing number of language minority students in the U.S. public schools and stated a preference for the use of bilingual programs in their education. Bilingual programs in general are based on the pedagogical premise that children's acquisition of basic literacy skills and comprehension of academic content is easier if the instruction is provided in a language that is comprehensible to them, i.e. in their native language, and first language literacy and academic skills are an important support for the development of literacy and academic skills in the second language (Cummins, 1981, 1983, 1986; Krashen, 1982). Children who have to learn literacy skills and academic content in a language they do not speak well are doubly burdened (Cummins, 1981; Wong-Fillmore, 1981). Native language instruction builds upon children's early conceptual and perceptual development, motivates students to come to school and stay in school, and prevents them from falling behind in content matter learning, and thereby helps "to equalize shortcomings of opportunity" for language minority students (Beykont, 1994, 1997 a, b, c; Cummins, 1981; Holm and Holm, 1990; Hornberger, 1987; Krashen, 1982; Medina, Saldate & Mishra, 1985; Navarro, 1985; Paulston, 1978; Skutnabb-Kangas, 1983; Willig, 1985; Wong-Fillmore & Valadez, 1986).

The landmark Supreme Court decision in *Lau v. Nichols* (1974) [5]acknowledged that "there is no equality of treatment merely by providing students with the same facilities, textbooks, teachers, and curriculum; for students who do not understand English are effectively foreclosed from any meaningful education" in mainstream classrooms. The court ruled that public schools must accommodate language minority students' linguistic and academic needs in special programs for at least some period of time. School districts with large numbers of students from non-English speaking homes were mandated to take educational measures to address language minority students' needs, both their need to acquire English as a second language and their need to learn appropriate grade level content. Schools had the option either to develop a program specifically designed for language minority students or supplement the mainstream program with some second language support.

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 (*Lau v Nichols*, 1974).

The Supreme Court did not specify a program model that was optimal for language minority students. In the absence of a prescribed model, many schools continued to instruct language minority students in mainstream classrooms with the addition of some English as a Second Language (ESL) support. ESL services involved pulling out language minority students from mainstream classes and providing special English instruction including drill and practice in grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. A federal study revealed that one decade after the federal bilingual law (1968) was first passed two thirds of language minority students were not receiving any special service, less than a quarter were receiving some ESL support and less than 10% of language minority students were receiving native language instruction (Lyons, 1990).

The ultimate goal of federally supported programs was defined narrowly as teaching language minority students English and preparing them for placement into mainstream classrooms. Though the orientation to language minority education was changing, maintenance and continued development of students' literacy and academic skills in the native language was not considered the school's responsibility. When native languages were used for instructional purposes, their use was generally temporary and



compensatory. Content matter was taught in the native language until language minority students acquired English. Once students were deemed ready to be placed into mainstream classrooms, native language instruction was discontinued.

Throughout the 1970s, the federal government increased funding for bilingual programs from preschool through 12th grade without prescribing the extent and nature of native language use. Funding was also allocated for professional development of teachers, administrators, and school personnel and development of assessment tools. Bilingual programs were perceived as part of a greater "War on Poverty" in which children in poverty were to be prioritized in terms of social services and educational measures (Lyons, 1990). Despite the fact that the low-income requirement was dropped in revisions of Bilingual Education Act, it remained "a popular notion that bilingual education is for the poor and disadvantaged (Ruiz, 1984, p.20)".

Increased federal funds along with legislative and judicial support provided opportunities for bilingual program innovation and experimentation. Schools chose from among several bilingual program models, each different in design. The most commonly used program model in the U.S., transitional bilingual programs, teaches language minority students in their native language for a few years while students are learning English. The program aims to quickly transition language minority students into mainstream classes. A second model, maintenance bilingual programs, is longer in duration. Aiming to develop academic skills in both native language and English, maintenance bilingual programs do not transition language minority students into mainstream classes until after the elementary school years. The third model, two-way bilingual programs, teaches native English-speaking and language minority students bilingually in integrated classes and aim for bilingualism for all students throughout elementary grades. Failure to clearly understand these varied program models and their differing methods of teaching English contributed to confusion among parents, school personnel, and the general public regarding the expected pace of language minority students' English development in bilingual programs.

Many difficulties impeded the successful implementation of bilingual programs. Some bilingual programs were housed in underfunded, overcrowded, segregated innercity public schools where school failure was the norm even for native English speakers [6](National Center for Educational Statistics, 1997). The academic and social integration of students in bilingual programs with the larger school community was a challenge, particularly when the school community viewed bilingual students as deficient and bilingual programs as a remedial service whose goals, philosophy, and implementation were either unclear or objectionable (Berriz, 2000; Lima, 2000; Nieto, 2000). Another problem was a shortage of well-trained bilingual teachers that resulted in placement of native or fluent speakers of a particular language into teaching positions even when they lacked sufficient training or certification (Bartolomé, 2000; Macias, 1998; Maxwell-Jolly & Gándara, 2002; Nieto, 2000). A lack of bilingual curriculum materials and books was yet another challenge, especially for those languages that do not have a longstanding written literacy tradition (Farah, 2000). In some cases, academic content and learning goals in mainstream and bilingual classrooms were different due to estranged relationships between mainstream and bilingual staff within schools and lack of coordination between mainstream administrators and bilingual education departments within school districts (Griego-Jones, 1995; McLeod, 1996). These challenges to the full and successful implementation of bilingual programs, along with the aforementioned confusion about the aims and methods of varied bilingual program models, contributed in time to the anti-bilingual language policies that gained strength in the 1980s.

In summary, in the years following World War II, bilingual education was established as a legally protected right of language minority students in the U.S. Despite some positive changes in public attitudes and the law, legislative and court rulings fell short of defining multilingualism as an enrichment for individual children and an asset for the larger society that should be nurtured in schools. The Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Bilingual Education Act of 1968, and the landmark Supreme Court case of *Lau v. Nichols* in 1974 legally established that educating language minority students through a language that they do not comprehend is a violation of their civil rights. In essence, the federal bilingual law mandated that school districts take some type of affirmative educational measure to ensure equal educational opportunity for language minority students and stated a preference for native language instruction, but it did not define exactly what an optimal program should look like. No emphasis was placed on maintaining and developing students' native language skills throughout the school years. Rather, native language instruction was intended only as a temporary remedy so that children did not fall behind in the



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learning of academic content while acquiring English proficiency. In most cases, the "success" of bilingual programs was defined only by how fast language minority students developed English proficiency and exited special programs. The many enrichment aspects and long-term benefits of bilingual programs, including full proficiency in more than one language, enhanced cognitive development, deeper cross-cultural understanding, expanded economic opportunities, stronger community/school connections, and better preparation for participation in an increasingly interconnected world were ignored (Beykont, 1994; Collier, 1992; Cummins, 1981; Diaz, et. al, 1992; Hakuta, 1986; Holm & Holm, 1990; Moll et al., 1992; Moll & Greenberg, 1990; Willig, 1985; Wong-Fillmore & Valadez, 1985). In school contexts that defined bilingual programs as remedial and bilingualism as problematic and a sign of inferior linguistic, academic, and intellectual abilities, many language minority students continued to quickly replace their native languages with English.

Nevertheless, the period after World War II witnessed rich program innovation and experimentation. Teachers, schools, and communities in isolated pockets developed innovative and successful bilingual programs that supported native languages, English proficiency, and academic success of language minority students from varied backgrounds (see McLeod, 1994, 1996, for reviews). A growing knowledge base was beginning to shed light on the complex pedagogical and political question of language minority education in the U.S. There was hope that the lessons learned from successful program development efforts would lead to further expansion and program improvements in the education of language minority students. Unfortunately, conservative political winds were beginning to blow across the American landscape.

#### U.S. School Language Policies between 1980 and today

Support for bilingual education began to falter in the 1980s. With each succeeding year, the federal vision of bilingual education has become increasingly remedial in focus, shortsighted in goals, and transitional in nature. At the federal level and in much of the state level and public debate, bilingual programs are narrowly defined as a temporary special service for students who have a problem--defined as limited English skills--that needs to be fixed. Policy discussions have focused on whether bilingual programs were fixing the problem efficiently, i.e. quickly enough. Under the Reagan and Bush administrations, federal policy supported a shift of responsibility for determining appropriate programs for language minority students from the federal government to states and local school districts and broadened the definition of permissible services to include English-only programs. Finally, in 2002, the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 was replaced with the English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement Act. Aiming to prepare limited English students for rapid placement into mainstream classrooms, the new law emphasizes flexibility and accountability: States and local school districts will be able to use federal money to implement a program that they believe is effective for teaching English and will be accountable for demonstrating limited English proficient students' yearly progress on standardized tests [7] (Beykont, 2002; Menken & Holmes, 2000; Rice & Walsh, 1996). Changes in the names of government programs also illustrate the exclusive emphasis on English: The Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs (OBEMLA) was renamed as the Office of English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement for Limited English Proficient Students (OELA) and the National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education (NCBE) was renamed as the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs (NCELA).

In concert with the narrow policy focus, in the 1980's and 90's large-scale evaluation studies also judged the effectiveness of bilingual programs by how quickly students developed English skills and were placed into mainstream classrooms (see Beykont, 1994; Cziko, 1992; Meyer & Feinberg, 1992, for reviews). In search for a magic formula--one "best" program model--many evaluation studies asked such shortsighted questions as "What is the most effective program to teach English to language minority students?" or "Are bilingual programs as effective as English-only programs in teaching English to language minority students?" Typically, children's English achievement was assessed once or twice within the first few years of bilingual programs--too early to detect the benefits of bilingual instruction and without sufficient time for children to learn the second language (Cziko, 1992; Kessler and Quinn, 1982). Children's later academic progress and performance throughout the academically and linguistically demanding upper elementary grades and in native language classes were not considered as measures of program effectiveness. Not surprisingly, large-scale evaluation studies were unable to

identify "one best program" that would respond to the needs of widely diverse student groups and were inconclusive regarding "the most effective program" in teaching English because they compared the short-term success of language minority students in programs that have varying goals and different approaches to attaining those goals (Beykont, 1994, 2000).

Another problem with large-scale evaluation studies was that they compared language minority students' school performance across bilingual programs without examining how the programs were implemented (see Beykont, 1994; Ramirez et al., 1991 a, 1991b, for extensive discussion). Consequently they failed to distinguish the academic performance of students in well-implemented programs from the performance of students in poorly implemented programs. Based on these studies it was not clear that bilingual programs were fixing the so-called English problem of language minority students quickly enough. The inconclusive results of large-scale evaluation studies have fueled the policy debate and public concern about the efficacy of bilingual programs.

Lost in the attention given to flawed large-scale studies was the fact that many well-designed bilingual programs have been successful when they are implemented consistently across grade levels by well-trained teachers with the support of school administrators and the larger school community and a focus on providing an academically challenging curriculum (Beykont, 1994; 1997 a, c; Brisk, 2000; McLeod, 1996; Ramirez, et. al, 1991 a, b). In these programs students receive the necessary academic, linguistic, and emotional support, stay in school, develop grade-level academic competencies and English skills, and graduate with a positive sense of themselves, their home culture, and their native language (Berriz, 2000; Beykont, 1994; Brisk, 2000; Farah, 2000; Kwong, 2000). Poorly implemented bilingual programs are bilingual only in name, with little consistency across grade levels, a substandard curriculum, teachers who are not bilingual, and an administration and a school community not supportive of native language instruction (Porter, 1990; Ramirez, 1991 a, b). Language minority students and their teachers are ostracized and segregated from the larger school community and students are rushed into mainstream classrooms before having an opportunity to develop a strong foundation in their native language and in English, and subsequently fall behind academically and fail to achieve the high levels of academic success of which they are capable (Porter, 1990; Ramirez, 1991 a, b). Undoubtedly, the variation in program quality has left bilingual programs open to criticism and contributed to the inconclusive results of evaluation studies.

Operating under a different research paradigm, case studies of successful bilingual programs, longitudinal studies of the first and second language academic and literacy development of language minority students in well-implemented programs, ethnographic studies of instructional practices in exemplary bilingual classrooms, and teacher research in bilingual classrooms have begun to shed light on the complex policy and political question of language minority education in the U.S. (Berriz, 2000; Beykont, 1994, 2000; Beykont & Johnson-Beykont, in print; Brisk, 2000; Diaz, et al., 1992; Farah, 2000; Garcia et al., 1989; Kwong, 2000; Laosa, 2000; Lindholm-Leary, 2001; McLeod, 1996; Moll et al., 1992; Moll & Greenberg, 1990; Walsh, 1991). These studies have recognized that language minority students vary in the type of educational supports that they need depending on background factors (such as age of arrival, English skills, native language skills, academic and immigration history, family education) and have focused on what works with which student population under what conditions. This line of research has brought new insight on the best ways to address strengths and weaknesses of a specific group of students in a specific context. Furthermore, it has offered research-based guidance on what more can be done to improve bilingual education in the U.S. In fact, a great opportunity exists to develop high quality bilingual programs throughout the country by building upon the many insights and useful lessons learned from program experimentation and research conducted in the past few decades.

Unfortunately, public support for bilingual education declined precipitously in the U.S. during the 1980s and 1990s, a period marked by a revival of strong patriotic and nationalistic attitudes, anti-immigrant sentiments, and a coalescing of conservative political forces in the English-only movement [8]. The English-only movement aims to have English adopted as the official language of the U.S. and to curtail the use of other languages in government and public services, including schools (Crawford, 1992 a, b, 1995, 2001b). Emphasizing the politically divisive potential of a growing number of languages in U.S. society, the supposed cost-efficiency and practical advantages of teaching through one language in a multilingual country, and the so-called economic and political benefits of universal proficiency in English,



the leaders of the movement argue that public funds should not be spent on bilingual programs.

English-only policies have gained strength in a time of massive immigration from Asian, Central American, South American, African, and Middle Eastern countries (Crawford, 1992a). Demographic changes are particularly apparent in public schools (Garcia, 1998; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Classrooms are filled with students who represent varied cultural, ethnic, and national origins, speak one of 129 different immigrant languages at home, and have diverse religious, socioeconomic, and educational backgrounds. The United States Census 2000 confirmed the increasing linguistic diversity, particularly among school age populations. Today, about one in every five students throughout the nation comes from a home in which a language other than English is spoken (Crawford, 2001a; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). It is estimated that by 2030, White native English speakers will constitute less than half of the student population (Macias, 2000). Demographic projections that in the near future no ethnic group will constitute a numerical majority have prompted concerns about the status of English as the dominant U.S. language and English monolingualism as the norm.

Some of the support for English-only policies comes from people who are afraid. There is a fear of losing the power and privilege that White, middle class, and speakers of Standard English have enjoyed in the U.S. There is a fear of being outnumbered by immigrants: immigrants of varied colors, with varied languages, religions, and traditions that are strikingly different from those of European Americans (Beykont, 1997, 2000; Crawford, 1992a, 1992b; Macedo, 1994, 2000). There is a fear that the new immigrants may resist assimilating into the American mainstream. Refusing to adopt Anglo Saxon values, increasingly large and politically powerful immigrant communities may require that public schools provide equal recognition and reinforcement of their diverse languages and cultures. Furthermore, there is a fear that immigrants might take jobs away from native English speakers (Crawford, 1992a, 1992b). Leaders of the English-only movement have seized upon all these fears and prompted attacks on immigrant rights, such as bilingual services in schools, health care, and the courts. In short, the support for English-only laws can be understood as a nationalistic response to rapid demographic changes brought about by another wave of immigration--this time largely from non-European countries. Anti-immigrant sentiments have been translated into attacks on bilingual programs and other immigrant services.

Other Americans support English-only policies in schools because they are ignorant about the second language learning challenges faced by language minority students (Beykont, 1994, 1997 a, b, c, 2002; Cummins, 1986, 1989; McLaughlin, 1985; Snow, 1990; Wong-Fillmore, 1981; Wong-Fillmore & Valadez, 1986). Due to geographic isolation from the rest of the world and the status of English as an international language of communication, the U.S. population has remained largely uninterested in learning a second language [9]. Most people either do not have any experience learning a second language or recall frustrating experiences due to the generally poor quality of foreign language education in public schools. In the absence of personal reference, the public readily buys into discredited theories about child bilingualism that grossly underestimate the time it takes to develop the level of English proficiency that language minority students need in order to succeed in mainstream classes with no native language support (McLaughlin, 1985; Snow, 1990).

Viewed more broadly, English-only policies have found strong public support in the generally conservative political context of 1980s and 1990s when many gains of the civil rights movement have been undermined (Macedo, 2000; Orfield, 1999). Attacks on bilingual education are closely linked to broader attacks on the civil rights gains of all people of color in the U.S. (Macedo, 1994, 2000). Indeed many of the same people and organizations that are attacking bilingual programs and language services in courts, healthcare, government and business sectors are also attacking other civil rights gains such as affirmative action on college campuses and in the workplace.

The English-only movement has been particularly successful at the state level. In the past two decades, 23 states have adopted English as the official language and curtailed use of other languages in government and public services, including schools [10]. Most recently, Arizona (Proposition 203) voted in favor of the "English for the Children Initiative" that bans bilingual education and requires that English be used as the only language of instruction in public schools. The new law severely limits school services for non-native English speakers. Language minority students are temporarily placed in a separate English language classroom for a period of time not exceeding one year. All instructional





materials and books are in English. Teachers have a good knowledge of English but knowledge of students' native languages is not required. While mixing students of different ages, language groups, and grade levels for English instruction is allowed, using students' native languages to teach content matter is strictly prohibited. In fact, under this initiative, parents can sue teachers who use any language other than English in the classroom.

The Arizona law does not permit any exceptions. Parents can ask for waivers by submitting a written request for children who already know English, for older children who may need an alternative program, or for children with special physical and psychological needs. An alternative program may be opened if twenty parents make the request, but the school administration can refuse to approve waivers without offering any explanation and will not face any legal ramifications. This restrictive English-only law has set a strong negative precedent for similar initiatives to be introduced in other states and at the federal level. New English-only policy proposals continue to be filed in other states, most recently in Massachusetts and Colorado.

### Concluding Remarks

The United States has come full circle in its treatment of language minority students in schools. The types of extreme educational measures recently adopted in Arizona are reminiscent of the monolingual school language policies that followed World War I. Just like in the early part of the 20th century, the mainstream has started to fear that new immigrants may not adopt English and Anglo Saxon values. Consequently, schools are being used as a vehicle to impose English on children and to strip away native languages and cultural identities. Children then and now attend English-only schools and quickly replace their native language with English. In fact, census data and qualitative studies reveal that language minorities today assimilate linguistically into U.S. society faster than ever before (Fishman, 1991; Veltman, 2000; Wong-Fillmore, 1991). Many questions remain. What will be the costs of rapid language erosion in the U.S.? What are the effects on an individual child who loses ties to his/her family, culture and cultural knowledge? What is lost when a child is cut off from the intellectual resources and emotional support of his/her community? What is the cost to a society that wastes valuable national language resources based on unfounded fears? What will become of increasing numbers of students who do not succeed academically and leave school without even a high school diploma?

Of course, the United States does not stand alone in addressing these questions at the intersection of an individual's right to quality education, a community's cultural and linguistic rights, and a nation's desire for unity. Current U.S. language policies increasingly place the interests of native English speakers and conservative nationalistic political movements above the interests of many other citizens--ethnic, linguistic, and racial minorities in particular. The ethic of equal opportunity through access to educational excellence is sacrificed in the mistaken belief that language minority groups' maintenance of native languages undermines national cohesion and threatens the existing cultural and linguistic hierarchy of the US. The long-term effects of these policies including language loss, the disintegration of cultural identities and communities, and generations of language minority students who fail and dropout from schools will be tallied in the years to come. We may well see that the greatest threat to a nation's social cohesion in the 21st century is a population split between those privileged to receive a quality education and its benefits and those destined to remain on the margins of the society due to failed school language policies.

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## Endnotes

1. This review focuses on immigrant languages only. For an extensive review and discussion about language loss in Native American communities, see Crawford (1995); House (2002); Reyhner, et al. (1999).
2. Language orientation refers to "a complex set of dispositions...toward languages and their role in society...They constitute the framework in which attitudes are formed: they help to delimit the range of acceptable attitudes toward languages and to make certain attitudes legitimate" (Ruiz, 1984, p.16)
3. The English literacy requirement was also utilized, for example, in the systematic exclusion of African Americans from exercising their democratic rights to vote.
4. See, for example, the National Defense Education Act of 1958 that promoted foreign language study from K-12 and in college.
5. The Supreme Court decision in *Lau v. Nichols* was based upon Title VI of the Civil Rights Act.
6. Based on a representative sample of schools throughout the U.S., a nationwide survey conducted in 1993-94 concluded that language minority students were most likely to attend large urban schools with a large percentage of minority students receiving free or reduced lunch (National Center of Educational Statistics, 1997).



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7. Accountability for student progress is reinforced by sanctions and rewards. Students face sanctions in that low test scores result in grade retention and denial of a high school diploma. Schools face monetary sanctions and possible closure if student performance goals are not met and if low-achieving students fail to show measurable progress.
8. For a comprehensive analysis and discussion of the English-only movement, the readers are referred to Crawford (1992a, 1992b).
9. There are some exceptions to this pattern including a small group of elites who are motivated to cultivate their children's bilingualism in private schools so that they can find jobs in international business, diplomacy, and some language minority parents who are motivated to teach their children the native language of their ancestry in community-based language programs.
10. The 23 states that have adopted English-only laws include Alabama (1990), Alaska (1998), Arizona (1988), Arkansas (1987), California (1986), Colorado (1988), Florida (1988), Georgia (1996), Indiana (1984), Iowa (2002), Kentucky (1984), Mississippi (1987), Missouri (1998), Montana (1995), New Hampshire (1995), North Carolina (1987), North Dakota (1987), South Carolina (1987), South Dakota (1995), Tennessee, (1984), Utah, (2000), Virginia (1981), and Wyoming (1996).