

## Language and Assimilation

*The tie of language is perhaps the strongest and most durable that can unite mankind*  
– Alexis de Tocqueville

America's linguistic unity, which has enabled it to become the most successful multi-ethnic nation in modern history, is under attack as never before. Record numbers of non-English speaking immigrants are overwhelming the assimilation process. And in a stark reversal of the past, our government has embarked on a policy of accommodating the growing number of foreign tongues in the name of "diversity."

The result is "linguistic apartheid" in which an expanding underclass is increasingly isolated in linguistic ghettos, and whose members find it almost impossible to achieve the American Dream. Today more than one in five Americans speaks a language other than English at home.

Alarmed by these trends, 31 states have enacted laws making English their official language, often through citizens initiatives passed by margins as high as nine to one.

Opponents say official English is "anti-immigrant," or that it is merely symbolic and therefore, unnecessary.

These arguments are false. By more than two to one, immigrants themselves say the U.S. should expect newcomers to learn English, and by nine to one Hispanic immigrants agree that learning English is essential to succeed in the United States.

Official English is not "English only." None of the 31 states with official English laws prohibit state agencies from using another language when it serves the public interest to do so, including: protecting health and safety, assuring equality before the law, promoting tourism, teaching foreign languages, and many other legitimate needs. The vast majority of the world's countries have designated at least one official language, including 54 countries located mostly in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean that have made English their official language. Twenty-seven of them have made English their sole official language (see p. 38).

Designating an official language simply means that for the government to act officially, it must do so in that language. And it means that no one has an inherent right to government services in another language.

Making English our official language also sends an important message to new immigrants: that the U.S. intends to protect its linguistic unity as a nation, and that as applicants for admission they have the responsibility to learn English as their first step in pursuing the American Dream, and full participation in American life.

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