



# **Official English/English Only**

## **Using Language as a Wedge**

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# English Only Movement

## Backlash against 'Bilingualism'

- ❑ Late 1970s: Controversies over bilingual education, bilingual voting rights
  - ❑ 1979: Rebirth of immigration-restriction movement (FAIR)
  - ❑ 1983: Founding of U.S. English
  - ❑ 1996: House passes 'English Language Empowerment Act'
  - ❑ 2006: Senate passes 'National Language' amendment to immigration bill
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# Official English

## Virginia Statute (1981)

### **Section 22.1-212.1 – English as Official Language**

English shall be designated as the Official Language of the Commonwealth of Virginia.

School boards shall have no obligation to teach the standard curriculum, except courses in foreign languages, in a language other than English. School boards shall endeavor to provide instruction in the English language which shall be designed to promote the education of students for whom English is a second language.

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# Official English

## Arguments For

- ❑ English has played a major unifying role for Americans
  - ❑ Increasing diversity threatens the status of English as our common language
  - ❑ Bilingual societies = divided societies
  - ❑ Accommodations for limited-English speakers
    - burden taxpayers
    - discourage immigrants from assimilating
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# Official English

## Arguments Against

- ❑ Divisive
    - ❑ A thinly veiled attack on Latinos & Asians
  - ❑ Unnecessary
    - ❑ English is in no way threatened in USA
  - ❑ Pointless
    - ❑ Offers no practical help in learning English
  - ❑ Punitive
    - ❑ Endangers civil rights and free speech
  - ❑ Self-Defeating
    - ❑ Bilingual services promote assimilation
    - ❑ America needs multilingual proficiencies
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# What's Behind English Only?

## Questions Worth Considering

- ❑ Why does bilingualism generate such emotional debate today?
  - ❑ What attitudes about language are shaping this controversy?
  - ❑ How have Americans dealt with language questions historically?
  - ❑ What would be a constructive, equitable, humane language policy?
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# Views of Bilingualism (I)

*'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.'*

– Theodore Roosevelt (1919)

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## Views of Bilingualism (II)

*'The protection of the Constitution extends to all, to those who speak other languages as well as to those born with English on the tongue.'*

– U.S. Supreme Court  
*Meyer v. Nebraska (1923)*

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## Views of Bilingualism (III)

*'I agree that immigrants should learn English. But instead of worrying about whether immigrants can learn English — they will learn English — you need to make sure your child can speak Spanish ... We should have every child speaking more than one language.'*

– Barack Obama (2008)

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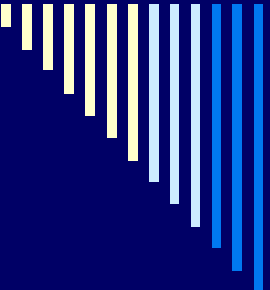


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# Language Policy

## Options in Responding to Diversity

- ❑ Treat bilingualism as a problem or threat
  - ❑ Recognize language choice as a right
  - ❑ Conserve and develop languages as a resource
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# Why This Debate, Why Now?

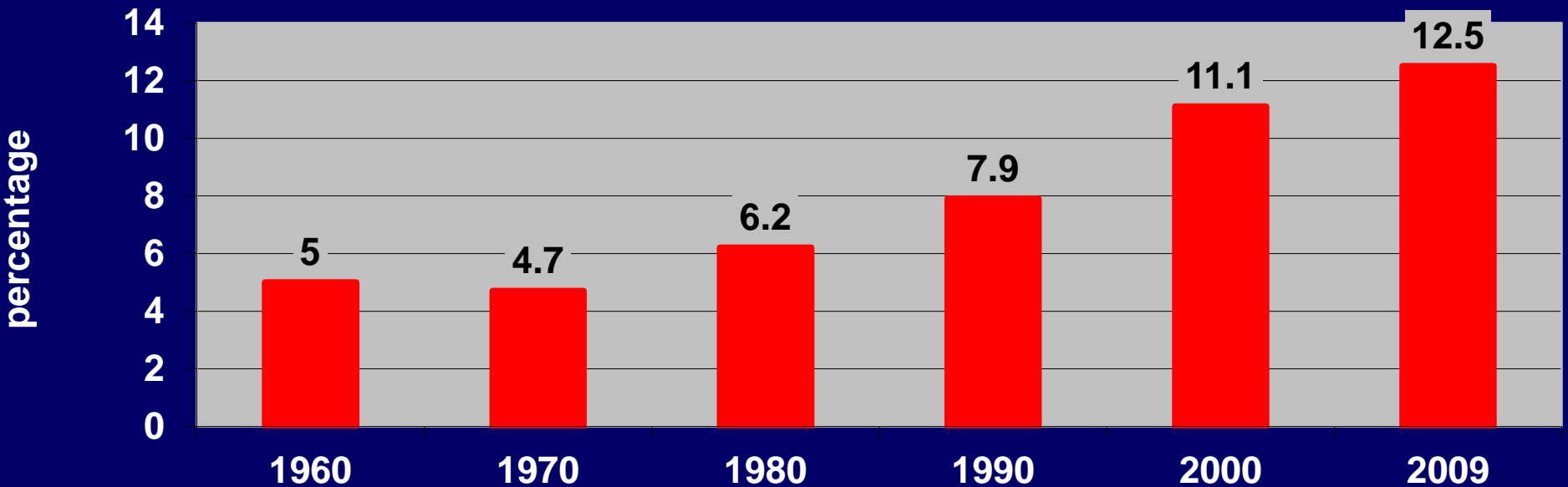
## Language Conflicts = Symbolic Politics

- Reactions to demographic change
    - anxieties about inclusion, exclusion, assimilation, pluralism, separatism, disunity
  - Identity politics
    - competition for power, jobs, resources, representation, social status
  - Prejudice and discrimination
    - language as a tool for repressing & controlling unpopular minorities
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# Demographic Diversity

## Recent Trend

### U.S. Foreign-Born Population, 1960 – 2009

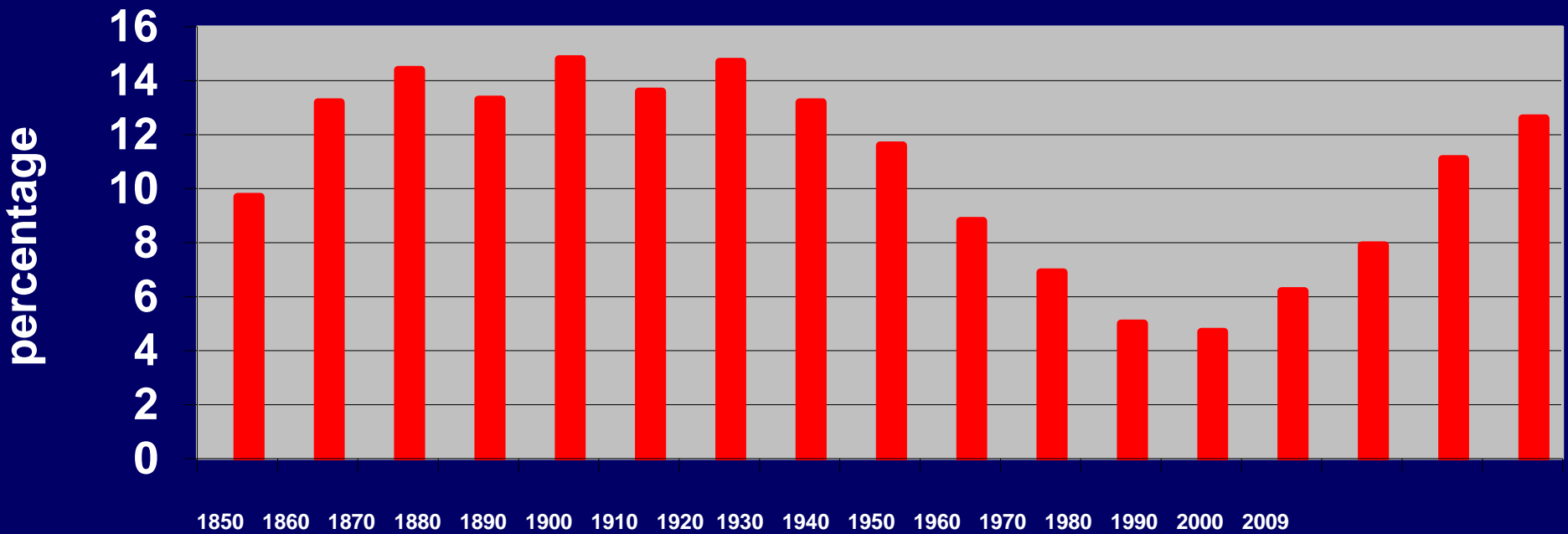




# Demographic Diversity

## Historic Pattern

### U.S. Foreign-Born Population, 1850 – 2009



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# Debating Bilingualism

## Role of Myths and Misconceptions

- Demographic
  - Historical
  - Educational
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# Language Attitudes

## Demographic Myths

- ❑ Our 'common language' is threatened by the spread of non-English languages, especially Spanish
  - ❑ Today's immigrants are slower to learn English than those of earlier generations
  - ❑ Bilingual programs, services, and rights discourage English acquisition
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# Language Diversity

## No 'Threat' to English in USA

### Language Spoken at Home & English-Speaking Ability, 2009

All speakers, age 5+	285,797,349	100.0%
English only	228,699,523	80.0%
Other language	57,097,826	20.0%
Speaks English 'very well'	32,516,042	11.4%
... less than 'very well'	24,581,784	8.6%
Speaks Spanish	35,468,501	12.4%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau





# Countertrends

## Growing Diversity + English Proficiency

**Percentage of Home Language Speakers Other Than English  
and English-Speaking Ability, 1980-2009**

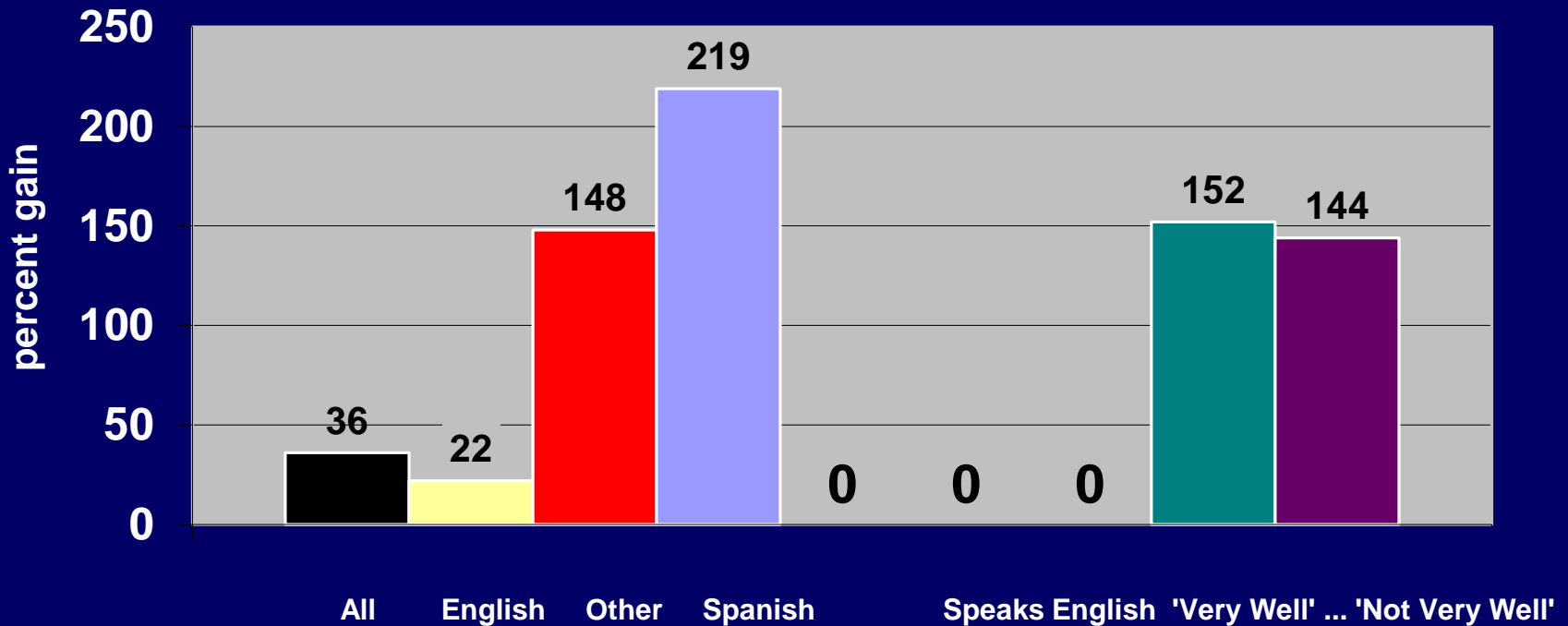
	1980	1990	2000	2009
English only	89.0	86.2	82.1	80.0
Other language	11.0	13.8	17.9	20.0
Speaks English 'very well'	6.1	7.8	9.8	11.4
... less than 'very well'	4.8	6.1	8.1	8.6
Speaks Spanish	5.3	7.5	10.7	12.4

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

# Language Speakers

## Growth Rates, 1980 – 2009

Language Spoken at Home and English Ability, Age 5+





# Youth Trends

## English Gains + Language Loss

English & Heritage-Language Proficiency of  
2nd Generation Immigrant Youth (%)

	Knows English		Knows HL		Prefers English
	Well	V. Well	Well	V. Well	
Latin American	94.7	65.1	60.6	21.4	71.0
Asian, Pac Is	90.3	57.9	20.1	8.8	73.6
Haitian	95.4	71.4	15.2	2.0	85.6
Other	99.0	84.2	33.7	7.8	83.5
Total	93.6	64.1	44.3	16.1	72.3

Source: Portes & Hao (2002)



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# Language Shift

## Rapid Erosion of Minority Tongues

- ‘Anglicization’ of immigrants
    - from 3-generation to 2-generation model
    - without immigration to replenish them, minority languages would die out
  - Threat of extinction for Native American languages
    - about 175 survive, but only 20 still spoken by Indian youth
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# Language Accommodations

## Limited Rights, Services

- ❑ Bilingual voting in some jurisdictions
  - ❑ Federal Court Interpreters Act of 1978
  - ❑ Ad hoc policies by federal, state agencies
    - ❑ Drivers' tests, IRS forms, tourist brochures
  - ❑ Native American Languages Act
  - ❑ Executive Order 13166
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# Language Attitudes

## Historical Myths

- ❑ Until recently, the USA was a monolingual, English-speaking country
  - ❑ A 'common language' has been a major factor in American identity
  - ❑ In the past, immigrants were quick and eager to enter the 'melting pot'
  - ❑ Schools and government never operated in other languages before the 1960s
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# Language Diversity

## Constant in U.S. History

- ❑ 1664: 18 languages spoken in Manhattan
  - ❑ 1790: Germans = 8.6% of population
  - ❑ 1803: Louisiana Purchase
  - ❑ 1848: Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo
  - ❑ 1830-1900: 5 million Germans immigrated
  - ❑ 1910: 14.7% foreign-born
  - ❑ 1924: Restrictive immigration quotas
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# Language Diversity

## Non-English Speakers, 1890 vs. 2000

	1890	2000
<b>USA</b>	<b>3.6</b>	<b>1.3</b>
New Mexico	65.1	1.6
Arizona	28.2	2.3
N. Dakota	11.8	0.05
Wisconsin	11.4	0.3
Minnesota	10.3	0.4
S. Dakota	8.8	0.03
Louisiana	8.4	0.1

	1890	2000
California	8.3	3.6
Nevada	8.0	1.7
Texas	5.9	2.7
N. Hampshire	5.7	0.1
Colorado	5.4	1.3
Michigan	5.2	0.3
Nebraska	4.9	0.6
New York	4.6	1.8

Source: U.S. Census Bureau





# Language Diversity

## Government Accommodations

- ❑ Continental Congress
    - documents in German, French
  - ❑ 1812: Louisiana
  - ❑ 19th century: States publish laws etc. in
    - German, French, Spanish, Norwegian, Swedish, Danish, Dutch, Czech, Welsh
  - ❑ Bilingual education laws in a dozen states
  - ❑ 1900: German-English schooling
    - 600k – 1m elementary students – 4-7% of U.S.
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# Linguistic Nationalism?

## Minor Theme in U.S. History

- ❑ Linguistic libertarianism
    - no 'American Language Academy'
    - no federal language laws until 1906
  - ❑ Pan-ethnic concept of Americanism
    - a nation that immigrants could join
    - exception: Chinese Exclusion Act
  - ❑ No official language
    - 1923: 'American' proposed in Congress
    - 1981: first Official English proposal
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# Assimilation or Pluralism?

## English and the 'Melting Pot'

- ❑ German Americans
    - *Sprachinseln, Deutschtum*
  - ❑ Coercive assimilation for the conquered
    - Indian boarding schools
    - English Only in Puerto Rico
  - ❑ 'Americanization' campaign
    - 'New' and 'old' immigrants: Italians, Jews, Slavs, Greeks vs. Germans, Irish, Scandinavians
  - ❑ Repression of German in World War I
  - ❑ English Only instruction laws
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# Language Attitudes

## Educational Myths

- ❑ Bilingualism tends to confuse the mind and retard intellectual growth
  - ❑ 'Total immersion' is the best way to learn a language, the younger the better
  - ❑ Children should be taught English as early as possible
  - ❑ Bilingual education delays English acquisition and holds students back
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# Language Education

## What the Research Shows

- Building on native language
    - transfer of knowledge & skills
    - no 'critical period' for 2nd language
  - Research shows bilingual models are superior in promoting
    - English acquisition
    - Academic achievement in English
  - Failure of 'structured English immersion'
    - no shortcut to academic language
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# Youth Trends

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# Bilingualism

## Benefits to Individuals

- ❑ Social adjustment
    - identity construction, educational aspirations
  - ❑ Family relationships
    - minimizing conflicts
  - ❑ Cognitive advantages
    - executive control, working memory
    - limiting effects of aging
  - ❑ Career opportunities
    - growing need for bilingual skills
    - higher incomes?
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# Bilingualism

## Benefits to Society

- ❑ Economic edge
    - trade, development assistance
  - ❑ Cultural vitality
    - enhancing arts, learning, expression
  - ❑ Ethnic harmony
    - protecting rights, limiting conflicts
  - ❑ National security
    - dealing with a dangerous world, diplomacy
    - climate change, public health, education
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# English Plus

## Language-as-Resource Policy

- ❑ Excellent English skills are essential in the USA – but not sufficient
  - ❑ In today's world, Americans need English *plus* other languages
  - ❑ Language policy should:
    - foster second language programs for all
    - encourage language preservation and revitalization
    - protect rights of minority language speakers
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# Official English/English Only

## Questions for Debate

- ❑ Does Official English = English Only?
  - ❑ Other countries have official languages. Why not U.S.?
  - ❑ Isn't bilingualism inherently divisive?
  - ❑ What would be the legal impact of Official English legislation?
  - ❑ How about the social/political impact?
  - ❑ Is Official English constitutional?
  - ❑ Is the English Only movement racist?
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