Bilingualism Is The Wrong Way To Go

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For the last five years, Political Correctness has forced the academic (and much of the political) world to pay homage to the new sacred cows called multiculturalism and diversity. Those are usually used as code words to challenge the assumption that Western Civilization is the basis of what we call the American system, and to pretend that all cultures are equal and contributed equally to the America we know.

This fad seems to be trying to get us to change our national identity from E pluribus unum (From the many, one) to E uno plures (From the one, many). Indeed, Vice President Al Gore's goof last year indicates that he has already made that transition.

But cultures are not so easily rationalized. Cultures are grounded in deeply held emotions, history and relationships that defy logical analysis. The separatist movement in Quebec and the fighting in Bosnia are two recent evidences of how inherited cultures cause bitter, current problems.

The United States is the world's most stunning example of a nation that has peaceably and successfully assimilated people from many disparate cultures. So why are some people trying to separate us into factions, emphasizing what divides us instead of what unites us?

The $8 billion bureaucratic failure called "bilingual education" keeps more than two million immigrant children in a three-to-five year program where as much as 90 percent of their school day is spent in their native language. Sometimes their teachers speak almost no English.

New York City students are taught in 82 languages, including Kpelle, Nyanja, Twi, Gurma, Ewe, Cham, and others most Americans have never heard of. The bureaucrats try to put all children with Hispanic-sounding names in bilingual education programs even though they may be fully English-speaking and come from English- speaking homes.

The term bilingual education is a complete misnomer because there is no requirement that children in bilingual programs ever become fluent in English. Our tax dollars are used to promote unilingual education in the immigrant's native tongue, and this is nurturing a permanent, non-English-speaking subculture.

Without any proof that bilingual classes promote their announced purpose, and despite the opposition of the majority of those the program is supposed to serve, the bilingual education lobby has shifted its objective. It is now trying to make foreign language and culture an integral component of American society.

Some advocates see bilingual education as the first step in a radical transformation of the United States into a nation without one common language or fixed borders. Josue Gonzales, director of bilingual education during the Carter Administration and now a professor at Columbia University Teachers College, says that Spanish "should no longer be regarded as a foreign language" but should be considered "a second national language."

Some in the bilingual lobby have even more extreme views. At the annual conference of the National Association for Bilingual Education in Phoenix in February 1995, several speakers challenged the very idea of U.S. sovereignty and promoted the notion that the Southwest and northern Mexico are really one cultural region, which they call La Frontera.

Eugene Garcia, head of bilingual education at the U.S. Department of Education in the Clinton Administration, told the conferees that "the border for many is nonexistent. For me, for intellectual reasons, that border shall be nonexistent." His rhetoric was greeted by thunderous applause.

The November 1994 meeting of the Texas Association for Bilingual Education in Austin featured both the Mexican and American flags on the stage. The teachers and school personnel in attendance stood for the singing of the national anthems of both countries. The political battle over California's Proposition 187 in 1994 featured a huge demonstration of people marching with Mexican, not U.S., flags.

The bilingual movement should be stopped before it causes any more damage to our national fabric. At least it should be stopped insofar as this lobby is financed by the taxpayers, and those who work for separatist causes should do so on their own dollar, not ours.

Rep. Toby Roth (R-WI), with 91 co-sponsors, has introduced a bill to make English our official language. It would end the government's multilingual policies, including bilingual education, voting ballots in languages other than English, and foreign language citizenship ceremonies.

You can't be an American if you don't speak English. Our public schools should be mandated to teach all children in English.

President Theodore Roosevelt said it best: "The one absolute certain way of bringing this nation to ruin would be to permit it to become a tangle of squabbling nationalities. We have but one flag. We must also have but one language, and that language is English."