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INTRODUCTION

The recent debate surrounding Proposition 187 in California has launched many offsprings that parallel the same sentiments in other states, such as Illinois. Consequently, the anti-immigration backlash has been identified, in the eyes of most progressives, with Proposition 187. However, the reaction against poor, third world immigrants has not stopped with the intent of making the stay of illegal immigrants more difficult in the United States. Despite the motivations and hopes of legal immigrants that voted in favor of Proposition 187 in California, thinking perhaps that their legal status would make them invulnerable to further attacks, now a second ghost is re-appearing to haunt them: it is the second coming of the English Only Movement, which was not surprisingly supported by Bob Dole, the Republican nominee for the Presidential candidacy.

English Only, or as their supporters now want it to be known, U.S. English, had appeared already during the 1980s with the agenda of "helping" the immigrants from non-English speaking countries to accelerate their English language proficiency. English Only fans argue that such a goal would be obtained if immigrants are forced to become immersed in English without the hazard of getting involved in Bilingual Education programs, ballots in foreign languages, or any other public service that would use any other language simultaneously with English. Conveniently, taxpayers would save a lot of money by not implementing any public service that would not be conducted in English. Although favored by the electorate throughout several states of the Union, after English Only won in Arizona by a close margin, it was declared anti-constitutional and stopped from becoming state law anywhere in the Nation. Now that U.S. English is making a resurgence, it is necessary to review the findings of researchers who are critical of the funding, goals, and ideas of English Only.

WHO IS BEHIND ENGLISH ONLY?

According to USA Today (April 6, 1995, p.12A), the English Only movement is based on

...a disgraceful tradition:

New York once barred one million Yiddish speaking citizens from voting. California disfranchised Chinese. Nebraska, in an anti-

Kaiser frenzy, expelled German and any other foreign language from its elementary schools.

And it's unnecessary. The vast majority of immigrants are assimilating quite nicely.

More than 95% of first-generation Mexican-Americans are proficient in English; by the second generation, most have totally lost their parents' native tongue. Tens of thousands of immigrants are on waiting lists for over enrolled adult English classes. The urge to succeed drives most immigrants to learn English quickly. Laws that make the language "official" only deny our history and surrender to our fears.

In addition, James Crawford (1992; pp. 171-177) shows that the funding of U.S. English comes from groups that have vested interests in anti-Latin American, anti-African,
anti-Asian, and anti-Catholic immigration into the U.S. The white supremacist nature of U.S. English supporters caused a split in its steering committee—Linda Chávez resigned in the midst of a media scandal—as well as the loss of celebrity sponsors such as Arnold Schwarzenegger and Walter Cronkite. Furthermore, Crawford (1992; pp. 176-177) points that:

One thing is clear. Rather than promote English proficiency, 99 percent of the organization's efforts go toward restricting the use of other languages. Certainly, there is nothing in Official English legislation to help anyone learn English. On the other hand, there is much to penalize those who have yet to do so.

The potential for mischief is wide-ranging. Would states be allowed to provide drivers' exams, assist voters, publish tourist information, or enforce contracts in languages other than English? Could courts supply translators in eviction, bankruptcy, divorce, or adoption proceedings? Would schools be permitted to use bilingual education to foster fluency in foreign languages? Could Indian or Hispanic legislators communicate with constituents in their native tongues? Probably not, under the more draconian Official English measures. Arizona's Proposition 106, for example, would largely forbid public employees to use other languages on the job. In any case, such questions would be litigated for years to come...

If U.S. English sincerely wanted to foster ethnic harmony, it would stop chastising immigrants, open its multi-million-dollar campaign chest, and join with advocates for Asians and Hispanics to remedy the scarcity of seats in adult English classes. Instead, it exploits strong feelings about languages to build a new nativist movement.

Minorities supporting Proposition 187 or U.S. English may see their actions come to haunt them. As Howard Jordan (1995; pp. 35-38) argues, public policy targeted at illegal immigrants also often ends up harming Puerto Ricans and African Americans. For example, "...between 1980 and 1988, 53% of immigrants to the United States were of African descent. Thus, the shortsightedness of some African American leaders has resulted in their attacking people who form part of their natural political constituency" (Jordan, 1995; p. 36). Furthermore, "...the growing anti-immigration hysteria promotes a climate of discrimination which directly affects Puerto Ricans, who are viewed by many as "foreigners" (Jordan, 1995; p. 38). Finally, as Rick López (1995; pp. 11-12) makes clear:

English-Only makes little economic sense, promoting monolingualism when multilingualism is becoming an economic imperative...

NAFTA and GATT largely reflect the fact that world economies, the U.S. included, are increasingly export-driven. In the U.S., exports create more jobs, and higher-paying jobs, than any other sector of the economy. It is no accident that the fastest growing economies over the past few decades—for example, Japan, Germany, and Taiwan—have had their economic growth fueled by rapidly growing exports.

The former review shows the true nature of the leadership of the English Only or U.S. English movement. Their agenda is one of elitism, racism, and anti-colored immigration. Nevertheless, it is still necessary to give an explanation of why such a movement has a constituency in the U.S. Proposition 187 in California passed with 59 percent of the vote, including the support of 40 to 50 percent of black and Asian voters and 20 to 25 percent of Latino voters (Schuyler, 1996; p. 27). Exit polls conducted in Texas and California in 1988, based on voter interviews in favor or against English Only propositions, showed that supporters of such measures belonged to every educational or income group (Schmid, 1992; pp. 203-209). However, voters clearly differed in one dimension: ethnicity. Latinos were much less likely (around 24 percent) to vote in favor of English Only propositions than non-Latinos (around 64 percent) in Texas and California (Schmid, 1992; pp. 203-209). Although "racism" might be...
used to explain the resulting positive voting behavior of a large segment of the voters across several states, the task remains to explain what motivates such behavior, since a significant portion of the support of English Only propositions comes from African Americans, Latinos, Asians, and Asian-Americans, precisely the constituency most affected by racist attitudes and laws. In the next section, several theories are reviewed to explain what motivates the social base that supports English Only and other anti-immigration laws.

**THE SOCIAL CONSTITUENCY OF ANTI-IMMIGRATION MOVEMENTS: THEORETICAL APPROACHES**

**Social Status & Conservative Movements Theories**

Alternative interpretations of support for English Only—that could be extended to support Proposition 187—have been based on the role that status and politics play in conservative social movements. Schmid (1992; p. 203) summarizes the theories of Lipset and Raab (1978), Bell (1964), and Gusfield (1963), respectively:

> According to the notion of status preservation, declining groups seek to maintain their eroding position by identifying with extremist causes. A second approach also emphasizes status politics, arguing that supporters of Senator Joseph McCarthy, for example, were either falling in status (“Americanism”). A final theory postulates that status symbolism, rather than an angry response to changes in status, is of primary importance in swelling the ranks of conservative movements. According to this view, the American temperance movement reflected identification with a threatened lifestyle, a symbolic clash between two cultures—dry, Protestant middle classes versus wet, immigrant, primarily Catholic workers.

In her analysis of voters in favor or against English Only measures in Texas and California in 1988, Schmid (1992) observes that status loss-gain or status symbolism theories fail in the case of the English Only movement. The reason—she argues—is the absence of a clearly defined group that is losing status or that needs status symbolism. Exit polls conducted in Texas and California show that white non-Latinos (“Anglos” in Schmid’s analysis) tend to vote in favor of English Only across income or age groups. The only significant group differences are: (1) Latinos (“Hispanics” in her analysis) vote significantly less than white non-Latinos; and (2) women tend to vote less for English Only compared to men, although the differences are not as large as in the Latino versus white non-Latino case. I will discuss these observations after presenting the following perspective.

**A Split Labor Market Theory**

Global economic competition has increased sharply during the last thirty years. In 1962, American Fortune 500 corporations doubled those of Europe and outnumbered five times those of Asia. By 1992, the number of Fortune 500 corporations of the Americas (mostly U.S. corporations), Europe, and Asia had become very close, approximately 150 from each sub-continent (Bradhaw and Wallace, 1996; p. 181). Vernon (1990; p. 19) summarizes the decline of the American competitive advantage:

> Although the United States continued to hold a dominant place in world trade and investment, its relative position was substantially reduced. U.S. output had accounted for about 38 percent of world output in 1950, but it was down to about 27 percent in 1990. U.S. merchandise exports, which had amounted to about 20 percent of world exports in the early 1950s, had slipped to about 10 percent by 1990. In 1950 the foreign direct investments of U.S.-based firms were greater than the foreign direct investments of firms based in all other countries combined; by 1990, however, firms based in Europe and Japan had built up their overseas investments to totals that nearly tripled the U.S. totals.

Such a level of economic competition has propelled the formation of trade agreements among countries around the world: the National Free-Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between the U.S.A., Mexico, and Canada; the Maastricht Treaty that created the European Union (EU); and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC).

Although the primary motivations for U.S. interests in the NAFTA pact are the competition from Europe and Asia, access to cheap labor in Mexico, and an emerging middle-class consumer market in Mexico, the calculated immediate effect has been the loss of approximately 100,000 American jobs (Myerson, . . . public policy targeted at illegal immigrants also often ends up harming Puerto Ricans and African Americans. — Jordan
As commented above, an important reason for American corporations to relocate manufacturing plants in other countries is the availability of a cheaper labor force. Similarly, if immigrant workers are perceived by Americans to be able to accept lower wages for the same jobs the latter would perform, then the threat of a lower standard of living is now at home. Given that in the present circumstances American workers can do very little to stop Multinational Corporations from flying to other countries, their efforts will tend to concentrate in impeding the foreign threat to come into their country. Thus, the real or imaginary threat of a split labor market across foreign and national lines, combined with a split across ethnic lines in the case of Latin American, Asian, or African immigrants is likely to produce ethnic and anti-immigrant conflict among segments of the American population.

Immigrants from areas with a lower standard of living vis a vis the US are specially threatening for American workers, since their willingness to accept lower wages than American workers to perform a certain job, constitutes, in the eyes of Americans, an unfair threat. Therefore, although in principle all immigrant competitors are threatening, those coming from more underdeveloped areas of the world are perceived as a more serious threat against the American way of life. Consequently, given that the underdeveloped areas of the world are more likely to contain non-white, or non-pure-European origin populations, the reaction of American workers against such immigrants or potential immigrants is going to be tarnished by racism. As explained by Bonacich’s (1972) split labor market theory of ethnic antagonism, those workers with a higher standard of living are also more resourceful. They have well organized unions, access to political parties and media influence. Their optimal solution would be to expel all foreign workers that represent a potential threat to their well-being, as in the case of Australia under the “all white Australia immigration policy” of 1896-1923, a policy oriented to prevent capitalists from importing cheaper labor from India, China, Japan and the Pacific Islands, that resulted in a policy of exclusion of Asian and Polynesian immigrants (Bonacich, 1972).

If the exclusion of cheaper labor from the market is not possible, then higher paid labor will try a caste arrangement. That is, cheaper labor will be excluded from certain types of work. The good jobs, with good wages and work conditions will belong to the more resourceful group, while the cheaper group of workers will be restricted to lower status jobs with lower wages and inferior working conditions. Bonacich (1972; p. 482) illustrates this case with South Africa’s Apartheid:

Unlike exclusion movements, caste systems retain the underlying reality of a price differential, for if a member of the subordinate group were to occupy the same position as a member of the stronger labor group he would be paid less. Hence, caste systems tend to become rigid and vigilant, developing an elaborate battery of laws, customs and beliefs aimed to prevent undercutting. The victory has three facets. First, the higher paid group tries to ensure its power in relation to business by monopolizing the acquisition of certain essential skills, thereby ensuring the effectiveness of strike action, or by controlling such important resources as purchasing power. Second, it tries to prevent the immediate use of cheaper labor as undercutters and strikebreakers by denying them access to general education thereby making their training as quick replacements more difficult, or by ensuring through such devices as “influx control” that the cheaper group will retain a base in...
their traditional economies. The latter move ensures a backward-sloping labor supply function (cf. Berg, 1966) undesirable to business. Third, it tries to weaken the cheaper group politically, to prevent their pushing for those resources that would make them useful as undercutters. In other words, the solution to the devastating potential of weak, cheap labor is, paradoxically, to weaken them further, until it is no longer in business' immediate interest to use them as replacements.

In this view, the ultimate goal of U.S. English or English Only laws as well as Proposition 187 and its similars, would be the reduction of third world immigrants to the situation of an inferior caste. The attacks against bilingual education are nothing less than obstacles to immigrant access to education. The real intention of such antibilingualist proposals is to monopolize native worker's access to essential skills, such as education and on-the-job training, as well as political resources, e.g. political voting and influence on legislation. Without comparable quality education the immigrant worker, lacking access to political organization, and without the protection of the health care system, is to dissuaded from willing to compete at all. That is, supporters of anti-immigration hope that such an "elaborate battery of laws, customs and beliefs" will stop immigrants from coming, especially those with a lower standard of living. If their expectations are as bad as what they can have in their countries, why come at all? Why risk such high psychological and economic investments, if economically there will not be any progress and psychologically—even physically—they would have to confront racism?

Nevertheless, if those immigrants come after all, the law will make sure they will be kept in their proper place: as an inferior caste. In order to make sure these immigrants will be a future inferior caste, it will become necessary to exclude the next generations from escaping their caste-like future. Thus, the constitutional right of children of illegal immigrants to be American citizens must be eliminated. As Bonacich points above, the inferior caste has to be weakened until it is no longer useful for employers. That is, which employers are going to employ such an unskilled, uneducated, unhealthy, and undisciplined labor force? Certainly, the superior caste will look at the inferior one and ask employers: C'mon, would you employ such an inferior race? They are good for nothing! ...Sure, that was precisely the idea of English Only and Proposition 187 laws.

Thus, an interpretation of the English Only and Proposition 187 movements through the split labor market theory provides some interesting considerations regarding Status Theories. Firstly, the hypothetical defense of "status" or the use of "status symbolism" among American workers has an economic base. Most Americans are clearly threatened by international economic competition from Europe and Asia. American corporations are not as almighty powerful as they used to be. Hence, the hegemonical status of Americans vis a vis other countries of the world has decreased. Secondly, capital flight and the threat of plant closings have diminished the strength of unions to negotiate across the U.S. making job security more rare to find. Consequently, the high status of unionized jobs has suffered. Similarly, other professional and white collar workers are also threatened to follow suit if such jobs can be provided by cheaper professionals in the third world. Finally, native workers try to protect their economic status by electing laws restricting the flow of immigrants—legal or illegal. Both types of immigrants are threatening, but the latter type is the most dangerous. Illegal immigrants are more likely to accept lower salaries and displace native workers. Therefore, by using political means, native workers will try a policy of territorial exclusion, combined with the creation of a caste-like system, where illegal immigrants are to be placed in the inferior caste.

The former considerations might explain why white non-Latino workers would support English Only and Proposition 187 laws. They also suggest an explanation of why some segments of minority groups—including Latinos, Asians, and African Americans—would support such reforms. These minority groups are the most threatened by immigrant job competition, given that they are disproportionally represented in low-skill occupations, the most sought after jobs by illegal immigrants. However, minority support for anti-immigration laws cannot include the majority of the minority groups. The difficulty to identify legal and illegal immigrants, plus the general threat that all immigrants offer to native white non-Latino workers make ethnic conflict go beyond illegal immigrants versus native workers. The use of "cheap" screening devices—skin color, features, height, foreign language use, etc.—to identify illegal immigrants, make minority groups the victims of ethnic conflict, since those groups share the same ethnic characteristics of targeted illegal immigrants. Thus, the ambivalent position of minority groups as victims and persecutors may divide them more radically in terms of their support of anti-immigration legislation.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Minority voters in favor of Proposition 187 were surprised by yet another proposition in California: the rejection of Affirmative Action. Such a sequence of outcomes seems to advance more evidence to the hypothesis that American workers might feel threatened by skin-colored
third world immigrants among the reasons for supporting Proposition 187 and English Only laws. It also shows that minority voters, skeptical about supporting an anti-immigration backlash that would come to haunt them, have been right. Analogously, one might hypothesize that, if a caste solution were to be implemented in the United States, restricting the mobility opportunities of illegal immigrants, that such a movement would eventually extend to the next phase: the inclusion of minority groups into such an inferior caste. That is, back to the pre-Civil Rights Movement years.

Similarly, the progress achieved by the militarization of the border with Mexico, as a solution to the problem of illegal immigration on one hand, and on the other, the police oriented solution to the problem of crime in the impoverished neighborhoods—extensively populated by minorities—shows how connected the problems of illegal immigrants and minorities are in the United States. It also shows that minority organizations and voters should consider their common interests with third world immigrants. A political alliance between minorities and immigrants would certainly increase the political pressure to avoid assaults against services for illegal immigrants, such as education and health, and prevent the beginning of a second wave of attacks against the provision of services for impoverished minorities.

Among the services to be eliminated by English Only supporters, bilingual education could easily prove to be a general benefit for the whole population. In a world of increased international trade and communications, American workers will need to increase their human capital. The teaching of a second language in bilingual education programs will benefit everyone at an earlier age. Bilingual education is not a policy that exclusively benefits a minority group. Therefore, its elimination goes against the interest of the majority of American workers. It only favors the interest of an elite that can acquire language skills through alternative ways—at a much higher cost which they can certainly afford without a problem.

Although destined to the garbage can of History, US English can still do much damage. Its supporters have focused their current efforts on eliminating Bilingual Education. Because of this, it is imperative to inform and be informed first about the real reasons behind US English: racism, anti-immigration, and elitism. And secondly, that programs like Bilingual Education are the lifeline for many immigrants to succeed and become empowered. Bilingual Education must not become a casualty in the path of the elites to gain and maintain power.

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