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"It's precisely because of the large numbers of Hispanics who have come here, that we ought to remind them, and better still educate them to the fact that the United States is not a mongrel nation. We have a common language, it's English and we're damn proud of it."

—Terry Robbins, former head of U.S. English operations in Florida

Official English

BY THE YEAR 2000, the number of non-English-speaking residents in the United States is expected to reach 40 million. Many find this alarming, worrying that we will become a fractured society, unable to understand one another, transact business, or perpetuate our common culture. Public interest groups such as U.S. English and lobbying groups such as English First have capitalized on these fears, organizing and agitating on behalf of an English-only agenda. A proposal in 1982 by the late Senator S. I. Hayakawa (R-Calif.) to make English the official language of the United States fired the opening salvo.¹ Hayakawa, a semanticist whose Japanese immigrant family had settled in bilingual Canada, co-founded an organization called U.S. English. Although subcommittees of the Senate and House Judiciary Committees held hearings on his proposed official-English constitutional amendment, the measure did not pass.

Undeterred, the movement shifted its focus to the state level, where it achieved rapid success. In the November 1986 election, California passed Proposition 63 by a 3-1 margin, making English its official language. Over \$1 million was spent in support of the measure,² including \$500,000 from Hayakawa's U.S. English,³ by then the nation's largest and most powerful

English-only activist group. With half of its membership residing in California, the organization was well situated to make the state its trial run. The initiative was critical to the movement as well because of its far-reaching wording; of the six states that had passed official-English legislation, California's was the first to require the legislature to undertake *affirmative measures* to "preserve and enhance the use of English." Passage of the initiative also indicated a change in public sentiment since previously California had enacted broad legislation protecting nonspeakers of English.⁴

Building on the momentum of the California campaign, supporters of English-only returned to the federal level, lobbying and petitioning conservative Republicans Senator Steven Symms of Idaho and Representative Norm Shumway of California to sponsor several of the six bills introduced into the U.S. Senate and House in 1987 to amend the Constitution and make English the official language. Shumway, who later became chairman of U.S. English, believes that bilingualism is a threat to national unity and could lead to social unrest. Other supporters argue that the bills will help minorities assimilate and advance more quickly in American society.⁵ None of the early bills passed; but at the time of writing, a new generation of bills was on the floor of the 104th Congress. One, jointly proposed by Representative Bill Emerson (R-Mo.) and Senator Richard Shelby (R-Ala.), is the most popular, with 160 Republican co-sponsors. It would make English the official language, with an exception for emergency services. Another bill requires citizenship ceremonies to be performed in English. A third calls for printing ballots in English only, while a fourth does away with bilingual education.

Not Going Quietly into the Night: The Groups and Their Connections

A main player in the English-only movement, U.S. English is a national non-profit organization founded in 1983 by Hayakawa and John Tanton, a retired Michigan ophthalmologist. Tanton, formerly a liberal conservationist, in his previous guise belonged to a web of groups with overlapping interests and agendas, including population control and immigration reform. After holding various offices in the Sierra Club and Planned Parenthood, he went on to become president of Zero Population Growth. When his position that immigration was the main cause of overpopulation became unacceptable to

that group, he founded the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR). Tanton founded U.S. English when FAIR refused to embrace the English-only movement, although staff members still move between the two groups, which share the same office space, direct-mail consultant, general counsel, and funding benefactor.⁶ Boasting over 620,000⁷ members nationwide, the group's ultimate goal is to make English the official language of the U.S. government through a constitutional amendment. Other goals include: "action to end policies which require government agencies to conduct their official business in multiple languages; enforcement of English language and civics requirements for naturalization; English proficiency as a national priority; expanded opportunities to learn English quickly in our schools and in the workplace."⁸ Unlike other groups, however, the organization does not support English-only workplaces.⁹ Foreign-speakers may still, for example, discuss their homeland during breaks, or ask each other how to use safety equipment or find the bathroom in their native language.

In 1986 Tanton wrote a controversial paper for a private study group known as WITAN, a word derived from the Old English *witenagemot*, meaning wise men who advise the king—a kind of prototypical Anglo-Saxon think tank.¹⁰ In the paper Tanton asks a series of questions on a variety of topics dealing with the consequences of immigration in California, some of which are:

"To govern is to populate." Will the present majority peaceably hand over its political power to a group that is simply more fertile?

As Whites see their power and control over their lives declining, will they simply go quietly into the night? Or will there be an explosion?

Can *homo contraceptivus* compete with *homo progenitiva* if borders aren't controlled? Or is advice to limit one's family simply advice to move over and let someone else with greater reproductive powers occupy the space?

Perhaps this is the first instance in which those with their pants up are going to get caught by those with their pants down?

Since the majority of the retirees will be Non-Hispanic Whites, but the workers will be minorities, will the latter be willing to pay for the care of the former? They will also have to provide the direct care: How will they get along, especially through a language barrier?!

The document was never intended to become public, but in 1988 it was discovered and disclosed by the *Arizona Republic* during the state's official-

English initiative campaign. It created a sensation. Arthur J. Kropp, president of People for the American Way, called for the immediate resignation of U.S. English board members, declaring, "The scandal has laid bare the ugly core of the English-only movement. The real motivation for too many of the movement's leaders is racism, plain and simple. The leaders of U.S. English have grossly misrepresented their real purpose."¹² Amid the controversy Tanton resigned as chairman, as did advisory board members Linda Chavez, former executive director of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, and Walter Cronkite.¹³ One who did not resign was Alistair Cooke, award-winning television host for PBS's *Masterpiece Theatre*. Cooke, an immigrant from England in 1941, holds that a common language is necessary to maintain national unity and dismisses charges of racism toward the movement as simply "inevitable."¹⁴

To temper the charges against it, U.S. English points out that a majority of its leaders, as well as a large number of its members, are minority immigrants.¹⁵ The organization also paints itself as the real champion of ethnic and linguistic nondiscrimination. Because over 150 languages are spoken in the United States, the impracticability of printing government and official documents in all of them would entail discriminating against groups who do not speak Spanish or another major world language.¹⁶ Leaders also point to the current troubles in Yugoslavia, arguing that without a common language the United States is headed in the same direction.¹⁷ Many of these justifications and comparisons, of course, are the same ones the public heard in connection with proposed legislation at the national level—not surprising since they were made by many of the same people.

Beset by power struggles within and criticized nationwide in the press, U.S. English spent two years recovering from the disclosure of John Tanton's WITAN memo. Fiscal problems in 1990 led to an Internal Revenue Service examination. In spite of it all, U.S. English regrouped and retained the loyalty of most of its members, who continued to contribute a major portion of its budget through direct-mail solicitations.¹⁸ In January 1991, the organization commissioned a Gallup Poll, which purportedly showed 78 percent of registered voters favoring making English the official language of the United States and requiring that all government forms, proceedings of the legislature, and other business take place in English.¹⁹ Soon afterward, the organization launched a national "Campaign for Our Common

Language," kicked off by a rally in Washington, D.C., in September 1991 that attracted hundreds of supporters from more than a dozen states.²⁰

Funding for the English-only movement comes from a miscellany of sources. In 1993, U.S. English reported total contributions in excess of \$6 million.²¹ Apart from member dues (approximately \$20 a year), funding for the organization comes from the Laurel Foundation²² and reportedly also from the Pioneer Fund²³—two groups that have backed a number of dubious ventures and that appear several times later in this book. The Laurel Foundation, established by Cordelia Scaife May, a Mellon family heiress with a keen interest in Third World birthrates and population control, has supported the Tanton network for many years. According to an examination of IRS records by investigative reporter James Crawford, between 1983 and 1989 May donated at least \$5.8 million to the U.S. English Foundation (formerly U.S. English), FAIR, Population-Environment Balance (formerly Environmental Fund), and U.S. Inc. (Tanton's umbrella corporation).²⁴

Laurel also gave \$5,000 toward the distribution of the first United States translation of Jean Raspail's 1973 novel *The Camp of the Saints*, which describes the overrunning of Europe and the United States by "swarthy hordes" from the Third World. Although former U.S. English board member Linda Chavez calls it "the most vehemently racist book I have ever read,"²⁵ it is said to have been a big hit with staff members at the organization. Laurel also helped fund Garrett Hardin's 1993 book, *Living Within Limits: Ecology, Economics, and Population Taboos*.²⁶ Hardin, professor emeritus at the University of California at Santa Barbara, is a co-founder of Zero Population Growth, a WITAN participant, and a member of FAIR. He supports incentives for sterilization and argues that multiculturalism leads to chaos and loss of freedom. Like U.S. English, he points to the former Yugoslavia as a prime example of cultural disintegration. An equal opportunity alarmist, Hardin also warns that the United States is turning into the France Raspail depicts in his novel.²⁷ The Pioneer Fund also supported Hardin's book²⁸ as well as controversial research by J. Philippe Rushton, Richard Lynn, Arthur Jensen, and Michael Levin, figures that also appear later in this book.²⁹

U.S. English directs and funds a strange assortment of groups working for its cause, including Mothers of Multicultural English (MOME), Learning English Advocates Drive (LEAD), and the Institute for Research in English Acquisition and Development (READ). MOME, a New York City group composed of immigrant mothers who want their children to be taught in

English only is directed by Anita Cloutier De la Garza. Not herself Hispanic but married to a Mexican American surgeon, De la Garza argues that to survive in today's United States and get a decent job, immigrant children must have a thorough command of English—something she believes bilingual education impairs. Although MOME is under the direction of U.S. English, the group denies that it is anti-immigrant or anti-Hispanic.³⁰

LEAD, founded in 1987 by Sally Peterson, a Los Angeles Unified School District elementary school teacher, receives financial support from U.S. English and English First as well as from ten-dollar membership dues. Like De la Garza, Peterson believes that bilingual education is ineffective and that immigrant children should be taught subjects such as math and history only in English. In 1989, LEAD opposed a proposal that would have awarded certified bilingual teachers in Los Angeles special stipends for their language abilities.³¹ In 1993, LEAD appeared at hearings for the reauthorization of the federal Bilingual Education Act, which allows students whose native language is not English to be taught in that language, arguing on the side of flexibility—school districts should be able to do whatever they think works. By 1993 the group boasted about twenty thousand members nationwide, many in Dade County, Florida, San Francisco, and New York City, where the Hispanic immigrant population is large.³²

A sister organization, the READ Institute, was founded in 1989 to carry out research into the failings of bilingual education. READ received a start-up grant of \$62,000 from U.S. English. In addition, it receives support from the Laurel Foundation and English Language Advocates, another Tanton organization. Rosalie Porter, author of *Forked Tongue: The Politics of Bilingual Education* and advocate of English-only instruction, took over as director in 1991. Board and advisory panel members have included Abigail Thernstrom, senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute; Christine Rossell, professor of political science at Boston University; and Richard Estrada, former research director of FAIR.³³ READ studies profess to show that native-language teaching harms the foreign-born by delaying their acquisition of English with little compensating gain. They insist that English as a Second Language (ESL) classes are more effective and less costly in the long run. Ignoring evidence by such organizations as the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund that total immersion programs will cause the dropout rate for Hispanic students to rise precipitously,³⁴ READ urges that federal and state governments cease requiring bilingual or native-language instruction entirely.

U.S. English bills itself as a national public interest group, thereby making it eligible for 501(c)(3) status as a tax-exempt charitable organization under Internal Revenue Service regulations. Taking advantage of this status, in some years it has used up to the maximum amount allowed (20 percent of its annual budget) for lobbying expenditures. It does this, James Crawford points out, by transferring part of its tax-exempt revenue (up to 20 percent) to the U.S. English Legislative Task Force, which in turn passes it on to state lobbying groups. Thus, taxpayers, regardless of their views, are subsidizing part of the cost of U.S. English campaigns.³⁵

A spin-off of U.S. English, English First is a Springfield, Virginia-based lobbying organization founded by Lawrence Pratt in 1986. Claiming approximately 250,000 members, by 1991 it had raised \$7.1 million, according to official reports filed with the U.S. Senate.³⁶ It has three basic goals: "make English America's official language; give every child the chance to learn English; eliminate costly and ineffective multilingual programs." The organization, whose logo is the Statue of Liberty (donated by France!), attempts to achieve those goals through grassroots movements across the country. English First adopts a harsher tone than its parent organization, although its basic belief—that English unites the country—is the same. English First sponsors two associated groups to help its cause: the English First Foundation, which distributes pro-English books to school libraries, educates the public on English-only, and writes briefs on research dealing with official English and the English First Political Victory Fund, a fundraising arm that supports English-only candidates.³⁷

Members of English First are convinced that the downfall of the English language in America started in the 1960s when the federal government for the first time mandated multilingual teaching.³⁸ A 1987 English First fund-raising letter describes non-English-speaking groups as "remain[ing] stuck in a linguistic and economic ghetto, many living off welfare and costing working Americans millions of dollars every year."³⁹ The organization quotes immigrants who support its cause, including Josephine Wang, a former member of the National Advisory and Coordinating Council on Bilingual Education, and Sandor Balogh, executive secretary of the National Federation of Hungarian Americans and head of University Professors for Academic Order. English First funds itself, in part, through annual membership dues of approximately twenty-eight dollars per year.⁴⁰

English First supported the 1987 congressional movement for official

English and presented Senator Symms with over two hundred thousand signatures on petitions supporting a constitutional amendment. It also advocates English-only workplaces, arguing that if an employee is allowed to use her native language, she could secretly conspire against co-workers or supervisors. Furthermore, a Spanish-speaking worker could be harassing another Spanish speaker in that language, with impunity, if the supervisor speaks only English. English speakers would, thus, be subject to penalties for harassment that Spanish speakers would not—a situation that Jim Boulet, legislative director of English First, insists is radically unfair.⁴¹

English First is also active at the state level. In April 1995, Boulet wrote a letter to the editor of the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* decrying Georgia's English-only bill because it authorized the printing of official documents in other languages and allowed the right to speak a language other than English in court.⁴² The bill ultimately passed, only to be vetoed by the governor.⁴³ In Allentown, Pennsylvania, English First sent four thousand letters to voters asking them to support city council candidates who had sponsored the city's new English-only law. English First jumped into this seemingly innocuous election because the Department of Housing and Urban Development was making an inquiry into the new law.⁴⁴

A third group that has recently entered the fray is English Language Advocates (ELA). Still standing by his WITAN memo, John Tanton founded this new organization as an even more hard-line version of U.S. English.⁴⁵ ELA's chairman is Bob Park, who is also the chairman of Arizonans for Official English. ELA unsuccessfully appealed, on behalf of Arizonans for Official English, a 1994 ruling from the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit striking down Arizona's official English initiative as unconstitutional. Like all the other organizations mentioned so far, ELA argues that the official English initiative preserves a sense of community and that without it the government would become a Tower of Babel.⁴⁶

An Intricate Web

Although English-only groups are sometimes in competition with one another, they are closely connected in terms of personnel, rhetoric, and method of operation. The key players, also ever-present in right-wing circles, crop up throughout this book. Consider, for example, the career of

Lawrence (Larry) Pratt. English First president, Pratt is also secretary of the Council for Inter-American Security (CIAS), which sees increasing Hispanic immigration as a threat to the United States. The council issued a document in 1986 declaring, "Hispanics in America today represent a very dangerous, subversive force that is bent on taking over our nation's political institutions for the purpose of imposing Spanish as the official language of the United States."⁴⁷ Earlier it published *On Creating a Hispanic America: A Nation Within a Nation*, which warned that bilingual education "could feed and guide terrorism in the United States."⁴⁸ During the 1980s CIAS also championed Lt. Col. Oliver North, former National Security Council member under Reagan, in his covert attempts to fund and supply the contras in Nicaragua with guns.⁴⁹

Pratt established English First in 1986 as a subsidiary of his Family Foundation, a nonprofit organization he had founded in 1980. Among other initiatives the foundation has called for a quarantine for those with AIDS; in 1990 it raised almost \$150,000 to pay expenses and fines incurred by Randall Terry's Operation Rescue, a radical antiabortion group.⁵⁰

In 1992, Pratt, in yet another guise—executive director of Gun Owners of America (which lobbies for private ownership of machine guns)—participated in a three-day strategy session in Estes Park, Colorado, where he addressed a gathering of members of Pete Peters' Christian Identity, an organization that has ties to Aryan supremacist groups, the militia movement, and survivalists. Exhorting the crowd, he advocated the right for citizens to own the military assault weapon of their choice and to belong to people's militias, which in his 1990 book *Armed People Victorious* he declared should replace professional law enforcement.⁵¹

The indefatigable Pratt is also a member of the Coors-funded Council for National Policy (CNP), which writer Russ Bellant has called "a secretive group of the foremost right-wing activists and funders in the United States." Founded in 1981 by Nelson Bunker Hunt, a Texas billionaire and John Birch Society council member, T. Cullen Davis, another wealthy Texan, and Tim LeHaye of Moral Majority as the right's answer to the mainline New York-based Council on Foreign Relations, CNP focuses on setting national policy for the conservative movement. Its first executive director, Woody Jenkins, told members, "I predict that one day before the end of this century, the Council will be so influential that no President, regardless of party or philosophy, will be able to ignore us or our concerns or

shut us out of the highest levels of government.” Members of the council have included Paul M. Weyrich, architect of conservative causes for the past two decades; direct-mail king Richard Viguerie; Heritage Foundation president Edwin Feulner; Tom Ellis, one-time director of the Pioneer Fund; Senator Jesse Helms (R-N.C.); Morton Blackwell of the Leadership Institute; J. A. Parker of the Lincoln Institute; one-time presidential candidate Pat Robertson; television evangelist Jerry Falwell; singer Pat Boone; Richard DeVos of the Amway Corporation; Joseph and Holly Coors; Edwin Meese III; Arnaud de Borchgrave; Henry Salvatori; Phyllis Schlafly; as well as military figures Lt. Col. Oliver North and retired generals John Singlaub and Gordon Sumner.⁵² (Many of these people, too, reappear throughout this book.) Most recently Pratt agreed to step down as Patrick Buchanan’s campaign co-chairman when his connection to para-military groups came to light during the 1996 presidential primaries.⁵³

Conservative causes are generally funded in one of two ways: by business-oriented foundations, or by grassroots contributions from middle- and working-class people. Rarely is there much crossover. The foundations support curricular reform, such as teaching economics in junior high schools and educating judges and law students in law and economics approaches to deregulation. By contrast, movements promoting immigration reform, school prayer, family values, and English-only target worried lower- and middle-class people and garner support from a large number of contributors of modest means.

Official English is a nearly pristine case of the latter type of financing. Although the movement receives occasional support from conservative foundations and think tanks, this support tends to take the form of encouragement and research, not dollars. Most of the money appears to come from membership dues and direct mail campaigns emphasizing such themes as the need to preserve a common culture and for immigrants to assimilate into it as soon as possible—even in the face of social science evidence showing that most immigrants want to learn English quickly and that linguistic diversity has never in this country’s history been associated with social unrest. Fundraising material capitalizes on workers’ fears of multilingual confusion, linguistic ghettos, and the draining of resources from Social Security and other programs that aid the elderly and poor who are already citizens. As such, it is a true *nativist* movement—it exploits the

country’s fear of social upheaval and limited resources and argues for a return to core values and practices in order to cope with change.

The movement has proven highly effective in mobilizing those fears. Direct-mail appeals and newspaper ads use provocative questions (“Would you want . . . ?”) and scare scenarios (for example, comparisons to the former Yugoslavia) to frame the issue as that of protecting a priceless national heritage. Advocates orchestrate the movement carefully, picking and choosing their states, cycling and recycling leaders and members, and using money shrewdly. Progressives, who have scored no comparable victory in at least three decades on any issue, should take note.