

making the abandonment of their ancestral culture the price of acceptance in the educational system and in American society. Consistent with this general vision, the educational deficiencies and high drop-out rates of Hispanic students, for example, are blamed on such assaults on their culture and self-esteem.

Given this vision, the agenda of the ethnic activists is not one of transitional programs to acquire English-language skills, but rather a promotion of the foreign language as a medium of instruction throughout the curriculum, promotion of the study and praise of other aspects of the foreign culture in the schools, and (whether openly avowed or not) promotion of a sense of historic grievances against American society, both on their own behalf and on behalf of other presumed victims of American and Western civilization, at home and around the world. In short, the activist agenda goes well beyond language education, or even education in general, to encompass political and ideological issues to be addressed in the public schools at taxpayer expense—and at the expense of time available for academic subjects. This activist agenda has provoked counter-responses by various individuals and groups, including school teachers, parents, and such civic organizations as “U.S. English” and “LEAD” (Learning English Advocates Drive). The resulting clashes have ranged from shouting matches in school meetings to legal battles in the federal courts. Bilingual education has been characterized by the *Washington Post* as “the single most controversial area in public education.”¹³

Studies of the educational effectiveness of bilingualism and of alternative approaches have been as much shrouded in controversy as every other aspect of this issue. Yet the preponderant weight of the political system and the educational system has been solidly behind bilingualism, just as if it were a proven success, and its advocates have kept bilingual programs well-supplied with school children, through methods which often circumvent the parents of both foreign and native-born children.

In San Francisco, for example, thousands of English-speaking children with educational deficiencies were assigned to bilingual classes, blacks being twice as likely to be so assigned as whites. Hundreds of other youngsters, who in fact had a foreign language as their mother tongue, were assigned to bi-

lingual classes in a *different* foreign language.¹⁴ Thus a Chinese immigrant child could be assigned to a bilingual program because of speaking a foreign language—but then be put into a Spanish language class. Similarly, a Spanish-speaking child might be put into a Chinese language class—all this being based on where space happened to be available, rather than on the actual educational needs of the particular child. “Bilingual-education classes,” according to the leader of a Chinese American organization, have also been “used as a ‘dumping ground’ for educationally disadvantaged students or students with behavior problems.”¹⁵

In short, maintaining or expanding enrollment in bilingual programs has clearly taken priority over educating children. Moreover, the deception common in other programs promoted by zealots has also been common in bilingual programs. District administrators interviewed by the *San Francisco Examiner* “downplayed the number of black students assigned to bilingual classes, first estimating the number at three”—an estimate subsequently raised to about a hundred, though the real figure turned out to be more than 750. A civil rights attorney representing minority children characterized the whole approach as a “mindless” practice of “assigning kids to wherever there is space.” It is not wholly mindless, however. Children whose parents are poorer, less educated, and less sophisticated are more likely to be assigned, or to remain, in bilingual programs. “More vocal white parents manage to maneuver their kids out of bilingual classes,” as the civil rights attorney noted.¹⁶

The San Francisco situation is by no means unique. A national study of bilingual programs found large numbers of English-speaking minority students in programs taught in foreign languages and ostensibly designed for youngsters unable to speak English. Only 16 percent of all the students in such programs were students who spoke only Spanish—the kind of student envisioned when bilingual programs were instituted. A study in Texas found that most school districts automatically categorized as “limited English proficiency” students—eligible for bilingual programs—even those Hispanic children who spoke *only* English and whose parents only occasionally spoke Spanish at home. The study concluded that English was “the dominant language” of most of the students participating in