

Language Matters

If Oakland, California, can't find answers to the language dilemma, then who can?

by **Leo Sorenson**

The Ebonics issue — like everything else in Oakland — is all about race, federal dollars and political power.

Elitists on the Oakland school board have decided that the bilingual billions spent to teach Mexican children to speak Spanish should be shared with blacks. The Rev. Jesse Jackson saw this immediately upon his arrival in Oakland: We must share resources — the bilingual money, he said.

Black vs brown: the Hispanic politicians want all the bilingual billions for themselves. They want the United States to be like the Canadian province of Quebec, officially bilingual.

You may have noticed that Asian immigrants don't want bilingual dollars. They want their children to learn English so they can go to U.C. Berkeley. Try to force an Asian child into a bilingual class.

Personally, I am multi-lingual, and believe it would be

Leo Sorenson lives in Oakland, California, where he is a member of the New Oakland Committee. His comment appeared in the Oakland Tribune January 16, 1997. Reprinted by permission.

wonderful if everyone were at least bilingual; but I believe we must have one common language, English, in which to conduct our government business and in which to vote, ballots in English only.

I am co-founder of English Language Advocates and E Pluribus Unum, national foundations dealing with language and unity. It is clear that a common language is the single most unifying force in any nation.

As a political observer and activist, it has been apparent to me for more than 10 years that blacks have wanted to share the bilingual billions. Their answer is Ebonics.

Over \$4 billion is spent in California, and over \$10 billion is squandered each year in the U.S. to teach Mexican children in Spanish. This is done against the over-whelming will of Mexican immigrant parents who see bilingual education as government-sponsored child abuse designed to keep them in linguistic ghettos.

Is it any wonder the blacks want some of that money?

While the Ebonics idiocy goes on, parents of all races are scrambling to get their children out of the Oakland public school system. "Please, give us choice and vouchers," they say.

As a member of a tiny 5

percent minority — white male over 50 — I will be affected by this tragedy. It will affect my life, my children's lives and the lives of my grandchildren because the widespread use of race politics

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will profoundly alter the future of Oakland, of California, of the U.S. and, in fact, the entire world unless we in Oakland come to our senses.

The Oakland school board would be well-advised to join the New Oakland Committee as part of our panel established to "ERACISM" in Oakland. If we in Oakland — labeled "The Most Integrated City in the United States" — cannot find an answer to all of us minorities living together in racial harmony, then who do you expect to give us the answer, the government?

With love and respect toward all. **TSC**

Australia's Cultural Identity

Lessons about multiculturalism from Canada

by Robert Birrell

Opinions vary as to whether most Australians share a core cultural identity, or if they do whether it is something to celebrate. Some critics would like to see the very notion of a collective cultural identity banished. Others believe Australia's social diversity is now such that it is fanciful to imagine a shared cultural identity. A growing minority like the idea, but argue that it will have to be based on the ideal of diversity itself.

I will return to these issues later. First, there are some strictly empirical issues to examine. The most important is whether any distinctive national culture can survive in an economically diminutive country like Australia which is on the receiving end of the multi-national TV, film, magazine and newspaper networks.

Globalization of the Media and Identity in Canada

Some opening comments on the situation in Canada will set the scene. If the Canadian experience is any guide then it would seem that our fate is to be subsumed into a global (probably North American) oriented culture. Currently, the great bulk of the product screened to Canadian TV viewers and film buffs is of U.S. origin. It is estimated that barely two percent of the TV drama watched by English-Canadian viewers is Canadian in content (Collins, 1990, 239) and that only 3 to 5 percent of the theatrical screen time is devoted to Canadian films (Goldman and Winter, 1991, 149). In any case the limited TV drama product and films produced in Canada are often intended for the North American market and thus not readily differentiated from U.S. output. In one devastating study of a sample of

Canadian residents living near the U.S. border, 78 percent were unable to name the author of the last Canadian book they had read and 56 percent could not name their favorite Canadian TV program or did not have one (Goldman and Winter, 1991, 153). It has reached the point where some observers find it difficult even to conceive of Canadians "being able to produce Canadian dramas that mass Canadian audiences will watch" (Collins, 1990, 334). This is partly because Canadian TV broadcasters can buy American drama product at a tenth or less of cost for Canadian material and partly because it is thought that Canadians actually prefer the American product.

The Importance of Cable TV

This dominance of U.S. TV product in Canada has occurred despite a history of Canadian government efforts to prevent it. The federal government has sought to maintain control over the TV and radio broadcasting media, precisely in order to maintain an independent Canadian cultural identity. To this end it has legislated to maintain Canadian ownership of the broadcasting system, and has required a degree of Canadian content on the free-to-air TV networks (around 50 percent in the evening hours, including some drama). However this has been circumvented somewhat on the commercial networks by the practice of sandwiching "Canadian" content around prime time U.S. material. As to drama, an indication of the limits of this legislation is that in 1985-86 the leading Canadian private network, CTV, was showing an average of just 1.5 hours of Canadian drama per week (Collins, 1990, 77).

In addition, the local content requirements have in effect been by-passed on the cable networks. By the early 1980s about 60 percent of Canadian TV households were cable subscribers. The penetration of homes by the cable networks was a remarkable 75 percent (Hollins, 1984, 95). The cable TV operators have to be Canadian-owned, and are required to provide priority access to Canadian networks. But

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