

INTRODUCTION

Latinos and the Bilingual Education in the United States.

Latinos or Hispanics have become the most important minority group in the United States. With an approximate population of 40 million (according to the U. S. Census Press release dated on June 14, 2004) some even dare to say that Hispanics in the United States are an actual nation inside the world's hegemonic power ("Consolidan en EU la *potencia hispana*" Mural). Nowadays, Latinos are seen everywhere across the nation, even in states with no traditional settlement and Spanish language, with its varied dialects, is heard on the streets, but also on television and radio.

Due to a massive wave of migration beginning in the 1960's, the United States has watched its society transform into a more diversified one. The precarious conditions of Latin American economies, has been the main cause of a constant migration flow into the United States.

"More specifically, deindustrialization, unemployment, and a drop in real per capita incomes in Latina America over the past twenty or twenty-five years, caused by the precipitous decline in the values of traditional exports and other shifts in the global economy, plus the attendant political and civil strife in the region, have driven recent migration to the United States. Once here, people from more than twenty Spanish-speaking countries and hundreds of regions that previously had little contact end up crowded into the same neighborhoods and begin creating communities based on their shared language and shared new experiences in this country... such contacts predispose people to a feeling of kinship with other Spanish speakers they have never seen: an imagined community" (Geoffrey Fox 5).

Latinos are an incipient economic and political force. Their economic power is not only benefiting the country they currently live in, but the ones they emigrated from as well. However, the progress of the Latino community in the United States has been a difficult one, regarding its acceptance and assimilation. As Wayne Cornelius expresses:

“Although, a large body of evidence suggests that most Mexican and other post-1970 Latino immigrants to the United States have been fully incorporated into the U.S. economy, mostly filling low-wage, low-skill jobs that native-born Americans typically avoid. To many native-born residents, however, the economic benefits of a large, flexible, relatively low-cost supply of immigrant labor are offset by the *noneconomic* costs of a rapidly expanding and increasingly settled immigrant presence. Thus, despite an increasingly tight domestic labor market in the United States, public concern about “excessive” Latino immigration has persisted... ethnocultural objection to the most recent wave of Latino immigration underlies persistent U.S. public concern about immigration levels, regardless of the state of the macroeconomy” (165).

Most recently, authors like Samuel P. Huntington, have expressed their fears to the “Hispanic threat”. Huntington latest book, *Who are we: The challenges to America’s National Identity* discusses the significance of American national identity and the current threat that is facing due to large-scale Latino immigration, which Huntington warns could “divide the United States into two peoples, two cultures, and two languages”.

Cultural differences are viewed as a danger for the premises of American values. Particularly, Bilingual Education programs have been under recent assault. Due to the significant growth of the community in the past three decades and the large number of children requiring education, schools are demanded to perform accordingly. Multiculturalism in the United States has permitted the instauration of Bilingual Education; despite this measure, Hispanics continue ranking very low on academic charts

and the drop out rate remains very significant. Some argue that social, cultural, economical and geographical issues interfere on Latinos feeble academic performance and acculturation. On the other hand, Spanish language has become a strong spoken and written language around the world, as in the United States. Acculturation of Latinos to the American mainstream has been inconsistent due mainly to a persistent migration from south of the border. Conforming thus, a considerable cultural group which maintains its language and many other aspects of their cultural background. Indeed, Bilingual educational programs in the United States aim to the integration of students into the American culture but, also on the preservation of their own cultural identities. This preservation and the constant growth of the Latino community are reshaping the face of this Nation.

Clearly, the intention of this study is to examine the impact of Bilingual Education on the Latino community, as well as, to analyze the constant growing performance of Hispanic culture and Spanish language in the United States by answering these specific questions:

1. Is Bilingual Education achieving its primary goal of providing Limited English Proficient (LEP) children with the tools for a fair start at school?
2. Is Bilingual Education helping Latinos fully integrate into the American mainstream culture?
3. Is Bilingual Education inciting to place Spanish as a second national language?

4. Could this be construed as the ultimate empowerment of the Latino identity?
5. Could a strong Latino identity within the United States pose a threat to the American values?
6. Should the State allow the consolidation of an ethnic identity other than the traditional one?

These questions should be answered on this study however; many other questions will arise, as we unravel certain moral and political issues that shape the current face of the United States society. I will intend to provide sufficient data which will help conclude that Bilingual Education programs are publicly discredited on the basis of a social feeling of distrust towards Latino integration and not on pedagogical failures.

This investigation is organized as follows: Chapter 1 presents a theoretical framework that provides an insight into the often-misleading concepts of ethnicity, identity and multiculturalism. The characteristics and features of the Latinos and their performance in United States' society is the subject analyzed in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 discusses the origins and development of Bilingual Education in the United States. Finally, Chapter 4 provides a further insight on the connection of the Hispanic community to bilingual education by examining the case of the state of California -which holds the largest concentration of Hispanic population-.