The English-first movement in America was reinforced by the political identification of the American language with Americanism, but it began locally at least a generation before the establishment of the United States, as a defensive reaction to German immigration in Pennsylvania, and it continues unabated in areas with large non-English speaking populations. Many English-speaking Americans in the eighteenth century, as now, reacted to nonanglophones with suspicion, if not outright fear and intolerance of those considered racially inferior to the Anglo-Saxon stock. However, politeness occasionally led their nativist concern to be expressed as anxiety over the preservation of American ideals and a desire to assimilate foreigners, newcomers, and conquered peoples. Ethnic, religious, and political battle lines were drawn, and language early on became an important nativist issue as well as a cultural and philosophical concern.

Writing in the American Magazine (1758, 631), one observer—most likely the review’s editor, the Philadelphia cleric and educator William Smith—warned that the presence of a large number of nonanglophone immigrants should prompt efforts to defend English in America from the encroachments of minority tongues: “For as we are so great a mixture of people, from almost all corners of the world, necessarily speaking a variety of languages and dialects, the true pronunciation and writing of our own language might soon be lost among us, without . . . a previous care to preserve it in the rising generation.” As we shall see from remarks he published elsewhere, which are cited below, Smith was thinking of the German population of Pennsylvania, who were accused by their English neighbors of everything from sedition and stealing jobs from Anglo settlers to popery and causing bad weather (Feer 1952, 403). Other voices, particularly in areas with a significant nonanglophone population, agreed that the English language needed official protection. Noah Webster complained that French phrases were entering English at an alarming rate, and he was disturbed as well that “the language in the middle States is tinctured with a variety of Irish, Scotch and German dialects” (1783, 7).

The German Question

According to Albert B. Faust (1909, 2:147-48), the children of Pennsylvania’s Germans picked up English quickly in the eighteenth century, a phenomenon of assimilation noted by observers of many immigrant groups in the twentieth century as well. The consequent language loss among the young people prompted organized efforts to preserve German in the Pennsylvania colony, largely through the institutions of the schools and churches, though the main factors supporting German were social isolation, most prevalent in rural areas, and continued immigration: earlier German settlers had to keep up their language to deal with the newer Germans coming into Pennsylvania.
The German community also lamented the contamination of its language with English words. One eighteenth-century visitor from Europe complained that “the language which our German people make use of is a miserable, broken, fustian, salmagundi of English and German. . . . People come over from Germany forget their mother tongue in part while seeking in vain to learn the new speech” (quoted in Von Hagen 1976, 103). The German press in Pennsylvania spurred efforts to defend the language against the encroachment of English.

Just as German speakers reacted to the threat posed by English, Pennsylvania’s Anglo-Saxons frequently voiced their fears of being swamped by German immigrants. While in the 1730s Benjamin Franklin published some of the first German books and the first German newspaper in America, and in 1749 his English Academy in Philadelphia became the first non-German school where German was taught (Bartel 1976, 98), by midcentury Franklin regarded the German settlement in Pennsylvania—which at the time had reached roughly one-third of the colony’s population—with some apprehension. Writing in 1751 to his fellow printer James Parker, Franklin expressed his fear that Pennsylvania “will in a few Years become a German Colony: Instead of their Learning our Language, we must learn their’s [sic], or live as in a foreign country” (Franklin 1959, 4:120). Franklin complained that the Germans, whom he also called the Dutch, worked for lower wages, thereby taking jobs away from English workers, and he suspected them of disloyalty to the Crown: “How good Subjects they may make, and how faithful to the British Interest, is a Question worth considering” (4:121). Franklin berated the American Germans for speaking a nonstandard variety of their own language and for refusing to learn English, making communication with them impossible.* And Franklin, who considered the Spanish, Italians, Russians, Swedes, and all Germans except Saxons to be a “swarthy” racial group distinct from the English, objected to continued German immigration into the Pennsylvania colony: “Why should the Palatine Boors be suffered to swarm into our Settlements, and by herding together establish their Language and Manners to the exclusion of ours? Why should Pennsylvania, founded by the English, become a Colony of Aliens, who will shortly be so numerous as to Germanize us instead of our Anglifying them, and will never adopt our Language or Customs, any more than they can acquire our Complexion” (4:234). Franklin’s widely publicized comment on the “Palatine Boors” haunted him for years, eventually costing him a Philadelphia county election in 1764, when he came in next-to-last in a field of fourteen (10:394).

On balance, however, Franklin was a moderate on the German question. In 1753 the English naturalist and former Quaker Peter Collinson sent his friend Franklin a list of radical recommendations for assimilating Pennsylvania’s Germans. Collinson favored establishing English schools in German areas; making English a requirement for holding public office; requiring English for deeds and contracts; offering a bounty for intermarriage between Germans and English and the settling of Germans in the less populated colonies of Georgia, North Carolina, and Nova Scotia; and prohibiting both the local German press and the importing of German books (5:21). Franklin, who was of course a printer in possession of a font of German type, supported all of Collinson’s recommendations except those encouraging intermarriage and limiting the printing and sale of German-language materials.
William Smith’s Bilingual Education

Franklin’s friend William Smith, who became the first provost of the Philadelphia College, Academy and Charitable School (the forerunner of the University of Pennsylvania) in 1750, as well as the editor of the American Magazine in 1757, held views identical to Collinson’s and similar to those held today by many supporters of English-first. As an educator, Smith was active in the movement to establish English schools among the Germans. Smith feared that the French settlers in Ohio would seduce Pennsylvania’s “uncultivated Race of Germans,” and in a 1755 pamphlet he called for parliamentary action to restrain and forcibly assimilate the colony’s German population. Complaining that the Germans had become “insolent, sullen, and turbulent” — Smith’s evidence for this was their alignment with the Quakers in a recent election — Smith warned as well of their “Popish” leanings and concluded, “I know nothing that will hinder them, either from soon being able to give us Law and Language, or else, by joining with the French, to eject all the English Inhabitants” from their own colony (Smith 1755, 29).

Smith assumed that ignorance of English was prima facie evidence of low intelligence, a view that remains common: opponents of New Mexican statehood a century later repeatedly set the alleged low level of intelligence of the territory’s Hispanics against the intellectual achievements of the rest of the nation, and twentieth-century psychologists attributed the supposed inferior intelligence of the new immigrants from central and southern Europe directly to their lack of English. Smith was optimistic that Pennsylvania’s Germans, whom he characterized despite their high literacy rate as “a Body of ignorant, proud, stubborn Clowns (who are unacquainted with our Language, our Manners, our Laws, and our Interests),” could be assimilated if German immigration to the colony were cut off. Nonetheless, he urged Parliament to enact a law that would “suspend the Right of Voting for Members of Assembly from the Germans, till they have a sufficient Knowledge of our Language and Constitution,” an educational mission that he estimated would take about twenty years to complete (40).

As a further incentive for learning English, Smith, like Collinson, hoped “to make all Bonds, Contracts, Wills, and other legal Writings void, unless in the English Tongue.” And although Smith himself had helped establish a German newspaper in the colony (Franklin 11:294-95n.), he urged Parliament to discourage the printing of potentially seditious material by banning all foreign language newspapers and periodicals in Pennsylvania, or if that was considered too harsh, at least requiring them to publish “just and fair” English translations alongside the originals (42; such requirements became law much later, and only temporarily, during World War I). An anonymous line-by-line attack on Smith’s anti-Quaker pamphlet managed to agree with only one of his points: the writer judged Smith’s English—only proposals to be a “certainly proper and necessary” way of dealing with the Germans (An Answer to an Invidious Pamphlet 1755, 78), though the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania’s early constitutions (1776, 1790) repudiated such thinking with their uncompromising stand on freedom of the press.

Like his contemporaries, William Smith assumed that a common language was a prerequisite for national unity, and despite his legal recommendations, his primary efforts were in the area of schooling. Smith proposed sending teachers and ministers among the Germans “to bind them to us by a common Language, and the Consciousness of a common Interest” (41). Smith commented privately to Franklin that the Germans needed
an English education because they were unused to liberty, and he maintained that bilingual schools were necessary to bring English to the Germans (Franklin 5:215-18). In a subsequent pamphlet, Smith suggested extending the benefits of the English language to Native Americans in order to secure their loyalty in the struggle against the French. He boasted that an Indian chief friendly to the British cause had sent his two sons to the Philadelphia Academy, “where now they begin to read and to speak English” (Smith 1756, 49).

In 1753, working with the newly founded British Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (SPCK) among the Germans in Pennsylvania, Smith planned a school that would bring together English- and German-speaking children in the same classrooms, to be taught by bilingual instructors, or at least by teachers willing to learn whichever language they lacked. Instruction would take place in both languages, and bilingual catechisms would be distributed among the poor. It is clear, though, that Smith’s motivations were political as well as religious. He was alarmed at the prospect of a large body of Germans living separately in the English colony, maintaining their own language and customs. Smith sounded a theme that would be frequently repeated over the next two centuries: by being taught English the Pennsylvania Germans would learn “to feel the meaning and exult in the enjoyment of liberty, a home and social endearments.” Through intermarriage and the acquisition of a common language, Smith hoped to create better British subjects resistant to the blandishments of the French. More important, perhaps, from the point of view of language, Smith’s schools would bring English to those most able to adopt it: “The old can neither acquire our Language, nor quit their national manners. The young may do both” (Smith 1879, 1:30). The ultimate result of Smith’s bilingual education, then, would not be the creation of a bilingual citizenry. Rather, Smith’s goal was to assimilate Germans to the point where “all the narrow distinctions of extraction, &c., will be forgot — forever forgot — in higher interests” (1:31).

The German language would certainly be one of the distinctions of extraction to be lost in Smith’s “bilingual” schools. Smith says as much when he evokes the glories of the republican Rome of Cincinnatus in describing the melting-pot society that he envisions for Pennsylvania: “Difference of manners, language & extraction, was now no more [in Rome]. . . . The rising generation acquired a conformity in all things. No distinction remained but between a virtuous and vicious citizen” (1:33). Repeatedly, Smith stressed the importance of a universal knowledge of English. Nonanglophone Germans would remain “strangers to the sacred sound of liberty in the land where they were born [Germany], & uninstructed in the right use & value of it in the country where they now enjoy it.” Without English, he insisted, “it is scarce possible to remove any prejudices they once entertain,” while he perceived the maintenance of German as a subversive activity, allowing “such prejudices . . . daily [to] increase among them, unknown to us” (1:36).

In a description of the SPCK charity schools printed by Benjamin Franklin in 1755, we find one of the earliest statements of the common argument that a knowledge of English is essential for economic success in America. The purpose of the schools “is to qualify the Germans for all the Advantages of native English Subjects. But this could not have been done without giving them an Opportunity of learning English, by speaking of which they may expect to rise to Places of Profit and Honor in the Country” (Weber
The English-only question. 3. Defending the native tongue, 5

1905, 44). Smith had an additional motive in advocating German-English schools: the use of the new Philadelphia Academy to train Pennsylvania Germans to teach in them. He warned that teachers recruited from abroad are not to be trusted. On the other hand, Smith’s home—grown teachers would be bilingual in English and “High Dutch,” and they would “be educated under the Eye of the public in the colonies where they are wanted; & thus we will not only be certain of their principles, but also have them complete masters both of the English & German languages” (Smith 1879, 1:35).

While Smith was supported by a number of influential Germans, including Henry Muhlenberg, the “virtual founder of the Lutheran church in America” (Dictionary of American Biography [hereafter DAB], s.v.), his assimilationist leanings drew opposition from Christopher Sauer, the German printer whose newspaper and other publications helped form popular opinion among the German Americans of Pennsylvania. In 1754 Sauer alerted the readers of the Pennsylvanische Berichte that the charity school scheme sought to deprive them of their religion, their language, and their ethnicity: “German ministers are urged to learn to preach in English so that the Germans may by degrees become one nation with the English, and be provided with English clergymen.” Sauer decried suggestions that the Germans would prove disloyal in a political crisis. He observed, “The Irish, the Swedes and the Welsh keep their languages, yet for all are not looked upon as a disloyal people.” Why, Sauer asked, are they not sent English teachers as well? (Weber 1905, 38-39).

Sauer’s assessment of the evangelical as well as the assimilationist motives of the founders of the charity schools is undoubtedly correct. The statements of many of Pennsylvania’s Anglos bear this out. In 1756, for example, Smith wrote to the bishop of Oxford, “Till we can succeed in making our Germans speak English & become good Protestants, I doubt we shall never have a firm hold of them” (Smith 1879, 1:146). And the Rev. Thomas Barton proposed in 1764 that a law requiring Germans “to give their children an English Education, which could not be deemed an abridgment of their liberty (as British Subjects),” would inevitably lead to their conversion to the Church of England (Weber 1905, 62).

Sauer’s continued attacks in the press, together with faltering financial support from England, contributed to the failure of the SPCK schools, the first of which opened in 1755. They proved to be largely monolingual English schools after all (the school in Lancaster, an area of heavy German settlement, taught English, Latin, and Greek), and in 1757 the complaint was lodged against them by a leader of the Reformed Church that “the Directors try to erect nothing but English schools, and care nothing for the German language” (Weber 1905, 59), bearing out Sauer’s contention that the English hoped to strip the Germans of their language and literature. In all, there were about thirteen such schools, never gathering more than one thousand pupils, and all had closed by 1764.

Professing English Only

The idea of German-English schools did not die with the 1760s. Benjamin Rush (1951, 1:365-66) advocated the retention of German in Pennsylvania: “The German youth will more readily acquire knowledge in the language in which they have been taught to express their first ideas than in any other.” Rush also felt that Germans could not defend their property or attain eminence in the country without a knowledge of English acquired through German. This bilingual approach he deemed “the only possible means,
consistent with their liberty, of spreading a knowledge of English among [the Germans].” Interestingly, Rush (1951, 1:493) foresaw as well a day when English and Spanish would dominate the hemisphere: “When we consider the influence which the prevalence of only two languages, viz., the English and the Spanish, in the extensive regions of North and South-America will have upon manners, commerce, knowledge, and civilization, scenes of human happiness and glory open before us which elude from their magnitude the utmost grasp of the human understanding.” Rush served on the board when the German-sponsored, bilingually oriented Franklin College (named after its primary benefactor, Benjamin Franklin, and later merged to form Franklin and Marshall College) opened its doors in Lancaster in 1787.

Rev. Joseph Hutchins was appointed Franklin College’s first professor of English language and belles lettres. The college trustees asked Hutchins “to show that the College is founded for cultivating the English language as well as for other literary purposes,” though they were so outraged by the insensitive, hectoring, English-only sermon Hutchins delivered at the institution’s opening ceremonies that the publication of his remarks was deferred for nearly twenty years.

In his blunt comments belittling German and lamenting the handicaps German students brought with them to the classroom, Hutchins demonstrated an extreme insensitivity to the clientele he was supposed to educate. Hutchins set out by characterizing Franklin College as “unluckily instituted under some peculiar disadvantages” because its students all came from German backgrounds ([1787] 1806, 9). He then warned his audience that, despite their wishes, English must replace German in the inevitable Americanization of their children:

> Whatever impediments you throw in the course of spreading [the English] language in its true pronunciation and elegance among your children, will be so many obstructions to their future interest in private and public life . . . to their future eminence in the public councils of America . . . and to that national union with their fellow citizens of the United States, which [all] are anxiously wishing to promote. As the limited capacity of man can very seldom attain excellence in more than one language, the study of English will consequently demand the principal attention of your children. (14-15)

Despite his abrasiveness, Hutchins’s words were prophetic: Franklin soon became a monolingual English school.

Speaking two years before Webster put into print his own ideas about Federal English, Hutchins strongly advocated the idea of a national American language. He acknowledged that, were he in Germany, he would support the universal study of German. However, since despite their German antecedents, the Franklin students were American, they would have no choice but to function in English, which had already come to be viewed as the nation’s official language: “Although the English language is nervous, copious, and beautiful, yet I do not recommend your preference of it on that account; but solely because it is the national language of the United States; because it is the language of those laws and of the courts of judicature, by which your posterity must be governed, and their privileges secured” (16).
Hutchins acknowledged that German might be studied as a secondary language, though his negative characterization of such study seems surprising in one whose professional interest purportedly lay in philology. Rather, he expressed what was already the typical American attitude that proficiency in languages is an educational frill: all “English Americans ... must allow a skill in languages to be frequently a useful, and at all times an ornamental part of a liberal education” (16). Hutchins himself proudly admitted knowing no German, a fact that did not endear him to the Franklin community. He further angered his audience by acknowledging that he had not understood the sermon delivered in German at the opening ceremonies by Henry Muhlenberg, by then one of Pennsylvania’s most prominent citizens, and by insisting that Germans in America could hardly object to making English the language of their religion.

But object they did. German immigration to the United States continued strong through the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. With the failure of the SPCK schools, and the faltering early history of Franklin College, German continued to function as Pennsylvania’s second language. In fact, though, a shift to English was occurring at a slow but regular pace. In many areas, according to Kloss (1940, 230-31), trilingualism was becoming a way of life. Though English commonly served as the language of religion and the sciences in Philadelphia in the early 1800s, and somewhat later in the middle and southwestern part of the state, High German persisted in the press and the arts, and Pennsylvania German, or Pennsylvanish, remained the language of everyday communication for many German Americans in the state up to World War I. Official state publications were routinely issued in German as well as English, including the minutes of the state constitutional conventions of 1776 and 1789-90. Sessions laws were published in German as well as English from 1786 to 1856 (Kloss 1977, 143). And German schools continued to exist: neither section 44 of the 1776 constitution, nor article 7 of the 1790 constitution, both dealing with the common schools, prescribes an official language of instruction, though one section of article 7, guaranteeing the rights of religious societies, implies protection for the German parochial schools of the commonwealth.

The Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention of 1837-38

The language issue surfaced again in Pennsylvania during discussions to amend article 7 at the constitutional convention of 1837-38, at a time when the nativist movement was beginning to gain some ground in the Northeast. At the convention, the writer and lawyer Charles Jared Ingersoll proposed the establishment of free public schools to provide for education “in the English and German languages” (Pennsylvania 1837, 5:186). Ingersoll argued that the constitution’s silence on the question of German in the schools had too often resulted in the imposition of English in the classroom and banishment of German. This he regarded as “an act of despotism” worthy of tsarist Russia: “Who is the conqueror, except it be Nicholas of Russia, in the instance of the poor Poles, who would obliged his victims to un—learn their mother tongue, and to learn another?” (259).

Ingersoll faulted English education for ignoring the German population, thereby making them the least-educated ethnic group in the state: “They were obliged to be educated by their masters, and ... they were obliged to be educated in a language they did not relish” (254). Citing a letter from the philologist and legal philosopher Pierre Du
Ponceau complaining of the degeneration of German in the commonwealth, Ingersoll called for integrating the Germans into the public schools, enabling them “there to read and write their own vernacular, instead of dictating to them our own tongue” (189). Ingersoll reminded the convention that there were no monolinguai nations: even in England, France, and Germany several languages existed side by side, and he insisted that English and German would not interfere with each other if German were to be thus encouraged in Pennsylvania.

Opposition to Ingersoll’s amendment mounted quickly, and the debate lasted several days. Misreading Ingersoll’s coordinate wording which called for schools in “English and German” — a pairing that suggests an approach similar to our notion today of bilingual education — delegate James Dunlop warned that the disjunctive “English or German” in Ingersoll’s amendment might be taken as giving school districts the choice of excluding German, and while he admitted that multilingualism existed throughout the world, he reminded the convention that no other nation willingly supported two languages: “We would look upon them as being deranged, to think of such a thing.” Even unofficial multilingualism in Dunlop’s view creates distrust and causes both “public excitement” and dirty partisan politics (227).

Delegate Benjamin Martin objected that German could not be favored without considering the Scotch, Irish, Spanish, or French, who might also wish their children to learn in their own vernacular.* Both Almon Read and Joseph R. Chandler preferred leaving the choice of language up to the local school district. Chandler further observed that Spanish was becoming increasingly important for political and commercial dealings with neighboring nations, and that there were sections of Pennsylvania where only Welsh was spoken (219, 243). Chandler characterized bilingual education as “mongrel education.” Noting the difficulty of finding qualified bilingual teachers, he added, “and when they are found, they seldom either teach the German or the English in such manner as any person would desire to have their children taught.” Though he accepted the existence of German schools in areas where German prevailed, Chandler favored education in the national language: “Do not let us fix upon any portion of the commonwealth, the evil of living within a language. . . . The Saxon, the Russian, the French and the Irish, when they come among us, should come into our language, as well as into our country” (195). And though he claimed to admire the German language as much as anyone, Chandler would prohibit German schools in order to protect the English language from corruption. He did “not wish to see our own language destroyed by the introduction of any foreign idiom, any more than he wished to see our institutions altered in order to correspond with those of Germany” (243).

There was some debate among the convention delegates over the extent to which German immigrants had either maintained their native language or shifted to English. It was a question that had concerned Pennsylvanians for close to a century. In 1750 the Swedish botanist Peter Kalm observed the deviation of Swedish in America from the Old World variety and predicted that Swedish in the New World was doomed to extinction (Kalm [1937] 1966, 2:683-87). Kalm found Dutch disappearing as well, particularly among the young, who “scarcely ever spoke anything but English and . . . became offended if they were taken for Dutch, because they preferred to pass for English” (626). Similarly, the bishop of the Swedish churches in America, Israel Acrelius, noted as early as 1758 that there was a school on every Pennsylvania hillside, and that “none, whether
boys or girls, are now growing up who cannot read English, write, and cipher” (Weber 1905, 22).

This is clearly an exaggeration — both as to the number of schools and as to the number of English-speaking Germans — as are Benjamin Franklin’s complaints that the Germans know no English at all. But in 1820 Edward Everett’s North American Review (“German Emigration,” 12) cites the visiting German writer Von Furstenwarther complaining that German is disappearing from the churches of Pennsylvania and from its towns, and that what remains of the language has become a corrupt dialect of English. (The reviewer, most likely Everett himself, who had recently returned from studying in Germany, then criticizes the quality of Von Furstenwarther’s German.) Von Furstenwarther further decries the negative attitude toward German prevalent among the young: “The children of German parents are commonly ashamed of the country and language of their fathers, so that in the third generation, at the present day, the traces of their origin disappear.” This the reviewer finds laudable, and after an ironic comment on the difficulties of bilingual debate in the Dutch parliament, he turns the question of official language against another American language minority in order to make a joke about the U.S. Congress: “Were our leaders in Congress, who think it incumbent on themselves to make a long speech on every subject that comes up, obliged to translate their harangue, first into Chickahominy, and then into Kickapoo, we apprehend it would prove a damper.” In advocating universal English in the states, the writer goes on to raise the fear of Babel in a comment that is particularly telling if he is indeed Everett, who held the chair of classical Greek at Harvard and was the master of several classical and modern languages: “We recommend to all German and other emigrants . . . instead of wishing to cherish and keep up their peculiarities of language and manners, to get over and forget them as soon as possible; remembering, that from the days of the tower of Babel to the present, confusion of tongues has ever been one of the most active causes of intellectual and political misunderstanding and confusion” (18).

In 1837 we find constitutional convention delegate James Clarke insisting that the German intelligentsia universally favored assimilation. According to Clarke, the German clergy want all Germans to speak English. And delegate Thomas S. Cunningham, who longed for a monolingual United States, agreed that most Germans “learn their children the English language” because of the advantages it offers them (Pennsylvania 1838, 5:224).

James Dunlop, the English-first delegate who praised the German language and who came closest to claiming that some of his best friends were German, insisted that virtually all the young Germans in the state spoke English; that the Germans did not want any special favors for their language; and that he saw no need for maintaining the German language in Pennsylvania. It was not so much their language that Dunlop resented as the power of the German voting bloc to elect only Germans to the governorship, while excluding those, like himself, of Scots—Irish descent (228-29). Andrew J. Cline agreed that “most of the enlightened Germans had given up all desire of perpetuating the German language,” acknowledging that German was used not for learning or literature, in Pennsylvania, but only for religious studies (244-45; Ingersoll too rejected the claim that the Germans no longer used their language in their worship [259]).
In contrast, delegate Charles A. Barnitz observed, probably correctly, that only the urban Germans had adopted English, and that German remained very much alive in the countryside, where “we may as well have these schools in the Greek language as the English” (271). Joseph Konigmacher, of Lancaster, refuted assertions that most Germans were shifting to English, though he opposed Ingersoll’s bilingual education amendment (284). Joshua F. Cox insisted that while most of his constituents who were of German descent spoke English, they wanted their children to be educated in German: “They retained a very natural attachment to the mother tongue, and did not like to see it neglected or disused” (266).

The delegates to the 1837–38 convention were also split then—as we are in the United States today—on the relative value of immersion and bilingual education as ways of spreading English across the land. Charles Barnitz insisted that children “must be instructed in that language which they have been accustomed to hear” (278). Robert Fleming agreed that immersion would not work: “If the Germans are sent to an English school and, at home, have nothing but German, they will improve but very little in English studies” (242).

Delegate James Merrill recognized that while many of Pennsylvania’s Germans had learned English, many others had not. However, Merrill saw the position of English as secure: “Nobody can suppose that the German can ever supersede the English in this state, or in this country.” He therefore favored German-language schools, warning that German-speaking children immersed in English-language schools would surely fail (199; for a confirmation of such predictions, see chapter 5). His eloquent argument in favor of transitional bilingual education — naturally he does not use this modern name for the practice — has been applied over and over in the past two centuries: “If it is our object to make our people become homogeneous, will you do it by coercing this class of our citizens to come into this system of English education at the outstart, or will you give their minds a start in their own language? Give them a chance to obtain some intelligence in their own language, and then they will be more able to see the necessity of coming into the language of the state” (199).

Many delegates claimed to agree with Ingersoll that German schools should be permitted, but argued either that the state constitution already permitted them, or that the matter should be dealt with not in the constitution but in the legislature. Supporting Ingersoll’s amendment, Charles Barnitz maintained that unless German-language schooling were explicitly authorized in the constitution, local school officials would interpret it as being prohibited (240-41). Daniel Saeger pointed out that in some parts of Pennsylvania, the school law had already been narrowly interpreted as forbidding German public schools because they were not explicitly permitted, and other delegates confirmed that this was the case in their districts. Daniel Saeger agreed that a constitutional basis for such schools would appease German residents who were reluctant to pay taxes for the state-sponsored English-language schools which they did not use (215). Delegate James M. Porter suggested that German public schools would also serve to attract pupils away from the parochial schools (this argument supported bilingual public schools in Ohio later in the century), though he supposed no constitutional mandate to be necessary because Pennsylvania schools were already bilingual where the population required it. Porter lamented the decline of German in the New World, though delegate Sturdevant did not feel that German—language schools could correct this. Porter
concluded that it did not matter what language children were educated in, so long as they were educated.

Surprisingly little time is spent during the debate on the Ingersoll amendment in celebrating English as the language of liberty. Rather, the emphasis is on the utility of English as what we now call a language of wider communication, and as the means of unifying the American population. Many delegates did remark that a knowledge of English was requisite for performing the duties of citizenship (these duties are neither specified nor elaborated). Delegate Thomas H. Sill praised German as a copious and learned language, but objected that if a child were to learn only one language in school, then English would be the most useful “because it is the prevailing language of the country, and all business, both of the general government and of this state, is conducted in that language, as well as the business of the courts of justice” (201-02). Sill saw English as necessary in order for citizens to function beyond the German neighborhood or to represent the German population at the state and national level. He reminded the convention that German instruction was already permitted in Pennsylvania’s German communities, but he warned that passing Ingersoll’s amendment to Article VII would set a dangerous precedent of support for two languages in the state: it would acknowledge “that there are, and ought to be two languages and, in some degree, two communities of people kept up for all time to come, in the commonwealth of Pennsylvania” (202).

Sill opposed both the active suppression of German and the designation of English as the official language of instruction in the schools, but he cited a speech made by the educator and biblical scholar Calvin Ellis Stowe (the husband of the future novelist Harriet Beecher Stowe) at Columbus, Ohio, praising the Prussian school system for requiring the national language, German, and not the local dialects. According to Stowe, a student of many languages, “This uniformity of language is of great importance to a nation’s prosperity and safety; it is necessary, as a common bond of union and sympathy, between the different parts of the state; and without it, a nation is a bundle of clans, rather than a united and living body.” Stowe is cited as further warning that “the facility of business and the progress of intelligence require uniformity of language, and parents have no right to deprive their children of the advantages, which a knowledge of the prevailing speech of the country affords” (203). Sill himself viewed monolingualism as essential: “I think that the whole people of this state should be amalgamated as soon as that end can possibly be accomplished; and that they should be made one people in sentiment — in principle — in language” (202).

Perhaps most damaging to Ingersoll’s position was the opposition of U.S. Representative William Hiester, an assimilated German who objected to the bilingualism prevalent in the Louisiana legislature, found the need for German schools declining each year, and argued strongly for unhyphenating all hyphenated Pennsylvanians: All the public records of every kind are kept in the English language, and it seems right to me that the Germans should be made to accommodate themselves to it. . . . I believe that all intelligent Germans entertain the opinion, that it would be much better to dispense with the German language in the schools. I hope to see the day when the people of this commonwealth will not be distinguished by the title of German and English, and when we shall be known only by the common title of Pennsylvanians. (281)

The convention eventually rejected Ingersoll’s bilingual amendment by a vote of 51 to 68. It similarly rejected proposals to require German of local officials in German
areas of the state, though the convention supported, with virtually no opposition, the publication of its journal in German as well as English. Had the debate on revising article 7 of the Pennsylvania constitution taken place a year later, there might have been more support for authorizing German as a language of instruction in the schools. In December 1837, one month after the Pennsylvania constitutional debate, the Ohio General Assembly published Calvin Stowe’s report on European education. This widely circulated study (the Pennsylvania House of Representatives reprinted it in 1838, at the request of the state commissioner of education), which, as delegate Sill reported to the convention, praised the Prussian system of education in the national language as the most advanced in the world, also acknowledged the necessity of bilingual education. In his report, Stowe observed with evident approval that in the Polish region of Prussia, both German and Polish were taught in the elementary schools. In fact, Stowe concluded his report with a summary of the special needs of the children of non-English speaking immigrants to the United States in which he supports bilingual education as a means of ensuring a smooth transition to the national language of his own country:

It is essential that [the children of immigrants] receive a good English education. But they are not prepared to avail themselves of the advantages of our common English schools, their imperfect acquaintance with the language being an insuperable bar to their entering on the course of study. It is necessary, therefore, that there be some preparatory schools, in which instruction shall be communicated both in English and in their native tongue. The English is, and must be, the language of this country, and the highest interests of our State demand it of the Legislature to require that the English language be thoroughly taught in every school which they patronize. Still, the exigencies of the case make it necessary that there should be some schools expressly fitted to the condition of our foreign emigrants, to introduce them to a knowledge of our language and institutions. A school of this kind has been established in Cincinnati. . . . The instructions are all given both in German and English, and this use of two languages does not at all interrupt the progress of the children in their respective studies. (Stowe 1838, 46)

Both a German-language revival in the 1850s and a resurgence of German immigration later in the century kept the issue of German in the Pennsylvania schools before the public. In 1852 the state superintendent of schools affirmed that “if any considerable number of Germans desire to have their children instructed in their own language, their wishes should be gratified,” though he added that no one could force school directors to implement German classes (Kloss 1940, 1:268–69). In 1857 the state school superintendent repeated the opinion that directors could not be compelled to cause German to be taught, noting that only 7,000 of the state’s 541,000 pupils were German-speaking, and that bilingual education did not work well: “The teaching of German and English in the same school and the transition of German pupils to the English is attended with great embarrassment. An adequate remedy is very desirable; but probably time and the increasing prevalence of the English language in the common conversation will prove to be the only available one” (269-70).
Bilingual schools persisted in the heavily German city of Lancaster until 1895, and in 1905 Pennsylvania required the publication of official notices in German, Italian, and Yiddish newspapers (Kloss 307; see chapter 4 for a discussion of court challenges to the validity of such publication orders in other states). In 1918 German was banned from all Pennsylvania schools. That law was repealed in 1921, however, though Pennsylvania did join with the majority of the United States in mandating English instruction from English texts (except for foreign languages taught as such) for all private as well as public schools.

**Bilingual Louisiana**

The legal history of Louisiana shows a similar shift from early protection of languages other than English (French was not initially a minority language in Louisiana) to a more decidedly English-first policy by the later nineteenth century. Settled originally by the Spanish around 1542, Louisiana was claimed by the French in 1682, ceded to Spain in 1762, and returned to France in 1800 before it was sold to the United States in 1803 (Kloss 1977, 107).

The Territory of Louisiana, or Orleans, as it was also called, was clearly multilingual long before it became a state in 1812. There is no official recognition of French in the state’s first constitution of 1812, which ordains that “the laws, the public records and the judicial and legislative written proceedings of the State shall be promulgated, preserved and conducted in the language in which the constitution of the United States is written” (Louisiana 1845, Journal, 313). However, both the first constitution and the accompanying motion to annex West Florida were ordered printed “in the two languages,” a phrase whose lack of specificity indicates that the equivalent status of French and English for all other purposes was accepted as a matter of course (Louisiana [1814] 1844, 5, 10). Indeed, until 1830 the majority of Louisiana’s population was of French descent.

The proceedings of the 1812 Louisiana constitutional convention were printed in French and English, as well, and the French journal was reprinted for the convenience of delegates to the second constitutional convention, in 1845, where the issue of official recognition of French proved controversial. The 1845 convention passed without discussion Article 103, a continuation of the 1812 requirement that laws and public records be written in English, and there was apparently no hesitation in passing Article 132, which read, “The constitution and laws of this State, shall be promulgated [that is, ‘published’ or ‘printed’] in the English and French languages.”* However, there was considerable opposition to the proposed amendment requiring two major legislative officers to be bilingual: “The secretary of the senate and clerk of the house shall be conversant with the French and English languages; and members may address either house in the French or English language.”

Explaining his amendment, Bernard Marigny told the delegates that while French was clearly on the decline in the state legislature, the proposal would prove a courtesy for the older members of government who had not learned English. Opponents to Marigny’s amendment labeled the measure unnecessary. George S. Guion remarked that “the day is not distant when every citizen will speak [English]” (Louisiana 1845, Proceedings, 870). Thomas H. Lewis observed that the French-speaking legislators always addressed their colleagues in English (836), and he objected that requiring bilingual competence for the
secretary and clerk would not “force the French language to be employed, if in the nature of things, it was destined to fall into disuse” (865). Thomas M. Wadsworth claimed that if French were to be privileged, Spanish should be protected as well (866). Wadsworth facetiously supported the right of legislators to speak in any language at all—“a member might address the chair in Choctaw” (835)—but he clearly favored English-only, arguing, as had been done earlier in the German debate in Pennsylvania, that the youth of the state were already abandoning French in favor of English: “We have a national language, and that language must predominate. It will be the language of the rising generation of French descent” (867).

Marigny pointed out that French was not protected in the 1812 constitution because at the time the French had a three-fourths majority of the state population. He complained bitterly that “within the last thirty-three years . . . the Anglo-Saxon race have invaded everything,” and boasted, “We could have become Americans without you.” Marigny described his colleagues’ hostility to French as a none too subtle attack on the “civil system of law” (866; Louisiana at the time operated under a combination of the French code civile and the English common law). His passionate defense of the measure ensured its passage, though there was no support for another proposal to create French criminal courts (bilingual civil courts already existed) or for a move requiring bilingualism of all appointed or elected officials and their staffs.

The language articles of the 1845 constitution were continued without change in the 1861 secessionist state constitution, including the provision for writing laws in the language of the U. S. Constitution, despite the fact that the convention had repudiated the Constitution in favor of that of the Confederate States of America (Louisiana 1861). After the Civil War, the Louisiana constitution was rewritten once again, and during the debates some delegates clearly opposed French language rights. Alfred C. Hills, who was new to the state, felt Americans should speak English or go back where they came from:

I believe the English language is the official language of this country. I believe in a homogeneous people, in one language and one system of law, and I believe that the publication of the laws of this State, or the proceedings of any convention, or any English court, in the French language, is a nuisance and ought to be abolished in this State or any other. . . . If there are any in the State who cannot speak, read or write the language, they should learn to do so before they reside in the country any longer. (Louisiana 1864, Proceedings, 47)

Delegate John Henderson, Jr., declared his patriotism by claiming, “I never will vote for any other language but the American” (47), while A. Cazabat challenged the notion that English was the constitutional language of the state, urging that French be permitted as a courtesy to Louisiana’s many wealthy and concerned nonanglophone citizens (48). In practice, this courtesy was observed: French was recognized as an important Louisiana language, if not an explicitly official one. Opening prayers at the 1864 convention sessions were conducted in English and French, convention proceedings were printed in French, as usual, and the constitution itself was ordered to be printed in
English, French, and German newspapers. Support for Spanish and Irish, called for by several delegates, was not forthcoming at all.

Language first emerged as a school issue at the 1864 convention. The committee on education recommended that English be the sole language of instruction in the state’s schools. Delegate Alfred Hills explained that the education committee had not sought to prohibit French, but rather to require English, “because we have schools in the State now in which no language except French is taught, and the result is the children grow up unable to speak English, and we wish to provide against this evil” (Debates, 478). Cazabat’s attempt to include French as an official language of instruction was defeated (Louisiana 1864, Journal, 138), though the measure finally adopted as article 142 was then amended so as not to exclude French entirely: “The general exercises in the common schools shall be conducted in the English language” (Debates, 479).

Support for French was not as strong in 1864 as it had been at previous conventions, though this may simply reflect an increase in assimilation rather than an attempt, as Kloss (1977, 114) suggests, to punish the Louisiana French for favoring secession. The laws and proceedings of the state of Louisiana were still required to be written in the language of the U. S. Constitution, though they were no longer to be “promulgated” in French as well, and the secretary and clerk were no longer required to be bilingual. Instead, according to Article 128, which was adopted without discussion, English was named as the only language that could be required of public officials: “The Legislature shall pass no law excluding citizens of this State from office for not being conversant with any language except that in which the constitution of the United States is written” (Journal, 182).

By 1870 earlier bilingual provisions in many Louisiana legal matters were replaced by English-only requirements, though statutes mandating bilingual publication of legal notices, and in some cases publication in German as well, continued to proliferate until 1914, when English-only laws took over nationwide (see Kloss 1940, 1:190-213, for details of the various statutes). After 1864 constitutions and school legislation permit French language schools “where the French language predominates, if no additional expense is incurred thereby,” although, as was the case with Pennsylvania, in 1921 the Louisiana constitution once again required only English in the schools (Kloss 1940, 1:165-67). However the Louisiana constitution of 1974 implies protection of French once again in guaranteeing the right to preserve “historic linguistic and cultural origins” (Grant 1978, 10).

A Federal Case
The states accommodated their ethnic populations to a greater or lesser extent, all the while defending English as the “native” tongue of the land, but little or no action was taken at the federal level in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to support minority languages. From the outset, lawmakers and public officials frequently sought to address the large number of German speakers in their native language, not so much to assure language maintenance (that was the goal of some, but clearly not all, German Americans) as to appeal to an ethnic voting bloc and to ensure communication between government and the citizenry.

In the 1770s the Continental Congress printed German translations of some of its proceedings, including the Articles of Confederation, and German Americans actively
supported the Revolution. (French translations of the Articles and other documents were printed as well in an attempt to attract Quebec to the Union.) Kloss (1977, 27) maintains that German was the language of command of the German battalions, which consisted of young, American-born Germans. However, nativists opposed making any concessions to ethnic groups and from the outset advocated an English-only approach as a means of defending not simply the native tongue but the native American as well. (The term native American became widespread in the early to mid-nineteenth century, in association with the Native American, or Know Nothing, party. It generally referred not to the American Indian, its primary sense now, but to native-born, typically Anglo-Saxon Protestant, Americans.)

**The German Vote**

On 13 January, 1795 a proposal in Congress to print all federal laws in German as well as English lost by only one vote—or so it has been made to seem by pro-German historians and English-only activists: in actuality, the final vote on whether or not to translate federal laws into German, which took place after another congressional debate one month later, is not recorded. The translation proposal itself originated as a petition to Congress on 20 March, 1794 from a group of Germans living in Augusta, Virginia. A House committee responding to that petition recommended publishing federal statutes (in English) and distributing them to the states, together with the publication of three thousand sets of laws in German, “for the accommodation of such German citizens of the United States, as do not understand the English language” (American State Papers ser. 10, v. 1:114). According to the succinct report in the Aurora Gazette on the House debate over the proposal on 13 January, 1795, “A great variety of plans were proposed, but none that seemed to meet the general sense of the House” (22 January, 1795, p. 3). A vote to adjourn and sit again on the recommendation failed, 42 to 41. This was clearly interpreted by the House as a vote of no confidence both in the committee’s recommendation to publish laws in German and in its recommendation on the distribution of the sets of laws once they were published. A new committee was then formed and asked to report again, and the House adjourned. It is from this close vote, not on an actual bill but on adjournment, that the so-called German vote legend has probably been based.

On 16 February, 1795 the House once again considered the question of promulgating the laws, and among the issues, once again, was translating federal statutes into German. This time, some of the actual debate has been preserved. Representative Thomas Hartley argued that “it was perhaps desirable that the Germans should learn English; but if it is our object to give present information, we should do it in the language understood. The Germans who are advanced in years cannot learn our language in a day. It would be generous in the Government to inform those persons. Many honest men, in the late disturbances [the Whiskey Rebellion], were led away by misrepresentation; ignorance of the laws laid them open to deception.”

William V. Murray, who opposed translating into German, countered “that it had never been the custom in England to translate the laws into Welsh or Gaelic, and yet the great bulk of the Welsh, and some hundred thousands of people in Scotland, did not understand a word of English” (Annals of Congress 4:1228-29). The House finally
approved publication of current and future federal statutes in English only. The bill was agreed to by the Senate and signed by President Washington the following month.

The January vote on adjournment became known as “the German Vote” or “the Muhlenberg Vote,” after the first Speaker of the House of Representatives, Pennsylvania’s Frederick Augustus Muhlenberg, a Federalist and son of Henry Muhlenberg, well known as a pro-English German. Although the roll call vote does not survive, tradition has it that Muhlenberg stepped down to cast the deciding negative. Tradition notwithstanding, too much weight should not be given to the fact that the Speaker was not in the chair on this occasion. It was, of course, common for the Speaker to step down, and Muhlenburg did so on many other occasions during the Third Congress. Even a positive vote on the adjournment issue would not necessarily have led to approval of German translations of the laws, a concession which the Congress has repeatedly refused to make ever since.

On a number of occasions during the nineteenth century the Congress again rejected motions to print laws or other documents in German as well as English. Nonetheless, this January 1795 vote has been transmuted by English-first supporters (with the help of some inaccurate nineteenth-century German accounts of the event) into a myth that German came close to replacing English as the national language of the United States (Kloss 1977, 28; Kloss 1940 1:86-92). A correspondent in a recent Ann Landers column alluded to this myth as a fact that demonstrated the tenuous position of English in the new nation, although the date was changed to the more patriotically crucial year of 1776.

**Federal English-Only Votes**

German was not the only language dealt with by the Congress. In 1810 legislators rejected a petition from Michigan to translate the laws into French, arguing that such an action would confuse the law and discourage assimilation to English: "Great inconvenience and confusion might result from having two separate texts for the same law, susceptible, as they necessarily would be from the imperfection of all languages, of different and perhaps opposite interpretations. The policy of legalizing any other than the prevailing language of the country is also objectionable, on the ground that it would tend to encourage and perpetuate the other dialects which partially prevail in different parts of the Union, and which, it is believed, ought rather to be discouraged."

On a more political note, the Congress concluded that a national language might prove even more important than an informed citizenry: "In a Republic, where the operations of Government are the result of the combined opinions of its citizens, it is important that the people at large should possess, not only enlightened, but similar views of the public interest; and it is not, therefore, of more consequence that information should be generally disseminated, than that the avenues to it should be common" (Annals of Congress 21:1886).

In December 1837 nine hundred members of the Native American Association, a group dedicated to opposing immigration and Catholicism, met and drafted a memorial to Congress warning of the danger posed by foreigners and urging that they be denied citizenship. According to the group’s report, which accused Europe of dumping its paupers and criminals on the United States, the framers of the Constitution could not have imagined that by allowing immigration they would “place a large portion of the
power of this Government in the hands of adventurers from every clime, before they could have time to acquire a knowledge of our language, much less before they could have learned the first principles of a republican government” (Native American 1838, 3). Congress did not act on this or other similar anti-alien measures (Bennett 1988, 51).

In 1843 Alexander Ramsey of Pennsylvania (later governor of Minnesota and U.S. Senator from that state), who was of German and Scottish extraction, introduced a proposal to print fifteen thousand copies of President Polk’s annual message in English, and another three thousand copies in German. Rep. John Slidell of Louisiana insisted that French was “the constitutional language” of his state (as we noted earlier, French was not mentioned in the Louisiana constitution until 1845). Accordingly, Slidell amended Ramsey’s bill to add two thousand copies in French, and a South Carolina representative called for copies in Low German as well. Charles Jared Ingersoll, who had earlier supported bilingual education in Pennsylvania, favored this measure as well, remarking that bilingualism was common both in Europe and in his home state. However, other representatives opposed both the Ramsey-Slidell bill and an expanded version introduced by Ramsey after his initial version failed. Rep. Henry Murphy of New York argued, facetiously, that he was “at a loss himself to discover in what way advantage was to be derived to this country by printing these documents in these different languages, unless it was by combining the copiousness and richness of all into one, and making from the whole an American language” (Congressional Globe 1843, 43-44), while others feared the excessive costs of printing federal documents in what might be an ever-increasing number of languages, and Rep. Samuel Beardsley of New York expressed dismay that the House might “break in upon its established practice, and fall back and adopt the language of a foreign country” (44). Rep. Daniel Barnard of New York was perhaps most direct in his nativism, and least patient with nonanglophones, holding “it to be the duty of every American citizen who may have had the misfortune to be born in any country but this, and educated in any other land, when he comes here and takes upon himself American citizenship, to devote himself to learning the English language” (45).

Ramsey’s motion was tabled without a vote, and subsequent attempts to authorize German translations of federal documents met with derision. In 1844 a proposal by Rep. John Wentworth of Illinois to print two thousand copies of the president’s message in German was facetiously amended to include “every other tongue talked in the United States of America.” It went down to defeat amid outcries of “What! In the Cherokee?” and in “the Old Congo language” (Congressional Globe 1844, 7). Similar moves were defeated in 1845, 1846, and 1847. In 1862 a proposal to print twenty-five thousand copies of the Patent Office Report on Agriculture for 1861 in German brought forth the opposition comment from Rep. Justin Morrill of Vermont that Germans knew English better than the members of any other immigrant group. Morrill characterized the proposal as “utterly subversive of the true doctrine of the country.” Ignorant of the long if largely unsuccessful history of previous considerations of printing in German, Morrill feared, “for the first time in the whole history of our Government, a departure . . . from the sound and correct principle which has heretofore been acted on, of printing our documents in the English language” (Congressional Globe 1862, 1821). The measure passed, but on reconsideration several days later Rep. Eliakim Walton of Vermont worried “whether we are to have a national language or not,” while Rep. Horace Maynard
of Tennessee echoed his concern over “whether, in point of fact, we have any legal language or not.” The decision to print the reports in German was reversed by voice vote (1843).

Not every nineteenth-century language observer shared the nativists’ fears of German and the other minority languages. In an essay published in 1855, Charles Astor Bristed, the grandson of John Jacob Astor, explaining the American linguistic situation to a British audience, dismissed fears that the supremacy of English in the New World was in any way threatened by nonanglophones: “As to foreign intruders, we may partly infer their destiny from the fate of the languages which existed in the colonies simultaneously with, or even anterior to the English” (1855, 76). Bristed celebrated the disappearance of Swedish in New Jersey, Spanish in Florida, and Dutch in New York, and he observed that French hung on in New Orleans only through the isolation of the Creoles: “Whenever they have wished to gain influence and power . . . their adoption of the English tongue has been the first requisite. And the same holds good with regard to the more recent [French] emigrants” (76).

Bristed allowed that German emigration had lately become “excessive” and he admitted that the German language constituted the only true rival of English: “Whole districts of [New York City] are peopled by [Germans]; in street after street you see only German signs outside of the shops, and hear only Teutonic accents inside of the houses” (77). But according to Bristed, the new German would be as quick to die out as the old had: “We have seen that where the German language was originally established — in Pennsylvania — it was so far from making any encroachments on the English, that the English sensibly encroached on it. . . . The descendants of the original settlers have preserved it [German] at the expense of much loss both of power and progress” (77). Echoing Hutchins’s earlier admonition to the German community of Pennsylvania, Bristed told his British readers, “If the German citizens of America wish to take that part in the affairs of the country to which their numbers, their abilities, and their education entitle them, the first condition will be their adoption of the general speech of the country. . . . We conclude, then, that the supremacy of the English language in the United States is menaced by no serious danger” (77). Nonetheless, as we shall see in the following chapters, from the 1870s to 1923 many Americans did not doubt that the English language continued to be menaced by an ever clearer and more present danger.