AMERICAN STUDIES READER
SUMMER 2017
# AMERICAN STUDIES READER 2017

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Welcome Letter ......................................................................................................................... p.1  
Assignment Instructions ........................................................................................................... pp.2-3

### Part I: Language and Identity

**Jill Lepore**, “An American Language” ................................................................. pp.4-21  
from *A is For American* (2002)

**Charles Mitchell**, “A New Name for the United States?”  .................. pp.22-23  
from *The Monthly Anthology and Boston Review* (1804)

**Jake Jamieson**, “The English-Only Movement”  .................................................. pp.24-27  
from *Models for Writers* (2015)

**Gloria Anzaldúa**, “How to Tame a Wild Tongue” ............................................. pp.28-35  
from *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987)

### Part II: Talking Back

**bell hooks**, “Talking Back” ...................................................................................... pp.36-38  
from *Talking Back* (1989)

**Frederick Douglass**, “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” .................. pp.39-42  
from *Selected Speeches and Writings* (1999)

**Betty Friedan**, “Women Are People, Too!” ......................................................... pp.43-45  
from *Good Housekeeping* (1960)

**Grace M. McCoulf**, “Testimony on the Love Canal Area”  ........................... pp.46-48  
from the Ecumenical Task Force Collections (1979)

### Appendices

Active Reading ...................................................................................................................... pp.49-50  
C.E.I. Paragraph Format ................................................................................................. p.52  
Integrating Quotes: The “T.I.E.S.” Method ................................................................. p.53  
Citing Sources in Perfect MLA ...................................................................................... pp.54-55
WELCOME TO JUNIOR YEAR!

Today marks a significant and exciting transition in your high school career, for unlike your experiences in the 9th and 10th grades, coursework in the Upper Division (Grades 11-12) is interdisciplinary. Be prepared for teachers to push you to find connections between the disciplines—especially within the humanities—and to synthesize knowledge gained from examining multiple, and often opposing, viewpoints.

In preparation for the year ahead, the 11th-grade English and History teachers have created the following reader to get you thinking about our yearlong topic: “The Story of America.” Our goal is to draw your attention to the complex cultural, historical, social, and political events that have shaped the history of the United States and those who have told its story, from the early origins of our democracy to the current political movements spurred by social media. We also hope to show you the United States in a broader, global context by examining the ways in which our country has participated in the transcontinental flow of people, ideas, and power.

This year’s reader is divided into two thematic sections. In the first, you will find essays that focus on the relationship between language and identity. In “An American Language,” Harvard historian Jill Lepore investigates the link between Americans’ efforts to create a unified national identity and a uniquely “American” language during the decades following the War for Independence. Keep her argument in mind as you read Charles Mitchell’s passionate (albeit unsuccessful) call for renaming the United States of America, as well as Jake Jamieson’s critique of recent attempts to make English the official language of the United States. Then turn to Gloria Anzaldúa’s semi-autobiographical essay “How to Tame a Wild Tongue,” which explores the complex and frustrating dynamics of growing up within the linguistic and cultural “borderlands” of the American Southwest.

The second set of readings, beginning with bell hooks’ autobiographical essay “Talking Back,” focus on the ways in which Americans have used language as a means of asserting their identities in the face of marginalization and oppression. The selections by Frederick Douglass, Betty Friedan, and Grace M. McCoulf highlight a range of perspectives that stretch across time and place. As you read, pay attention to the stories each of these Americans tell and the ways they use language to persuade their audiences to listen.

We can’t wait to discuss these readings with you in the fall!

Mrs. Caruso, Honors American Literature
Mr. McConville, Honors United States History
Ms. Lasarow, AP English Language
Mr. Cecil, AP United States History
11th Grade Summer Assignment 2017
Grant College Prep and Digital Arts Magnet

It is important as college-bound students that you interact with texts in a meaningful way. Hence the Reader Response essay, which allows you to critique, praise, and connect with the works being studied. Essentially, you’re taking the components of your active reading and expanding on them in essay form.

A good Reader Response essay reflects a close reading of the text or texts, provides your well-considered opinions, and contains specific examples drawn from the texts (documented parenthetically with page numbers). A Reader Response essay is not a “book report,” a forum for general opinionating (“I thought it was really good,” or “I thought it was really terrible”), nor an opportunity to make statements of opinion that are not supported by evidence.

This summer, you will be writing TWO Reader Response essays: one about an essay in Part I, and one about an essay or speech in Part II. Both essays should be about 2 pages in length (4 pages total), typed in 12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced, and perfectly formatted using the conventions of MLA 8th edition. (Since this is an essay discussing how you feel about a text, it is acceptable to use personal pronouns—but still avoid the dreaded “you” unless it appears in quoted material.)

Combine your essays into a single document, titled “FirstNameLastName.Summer2017,” and submit it to Turnitin.com by 11:59pm on Monday, August 7th.

The class ID and password will be sent to your grantmagnet.net email account over the summer, so make sure you’re checking your email frequently. If you lose your login information or forget your password, email Mr. Cecil (max.cecil@grantmanget.net) as soon as possible.

Finally, print ONE reading from Part I and ONE reading from Part II, actively read them, and be prepared to turn them in to your English teacher on Tuesday, August 15th (the first day of school).

To summarize what you need to accomplish this summer:

1. Actively read every essay or speech included in this reader.
2. Write a Reader Response essay about one essay in Part I, and one essay or speech in Part II.
3. Combine your essays into a single document and submit them to Turnitin.com by 11:59pm on Monday, August 7th.
4. Give your active readings to your English teacher on Tuesday, August 15th.
HOW TO WRITE A READER RESPONSE ESSAY

Your Reader Response essay should be typed in 12-point Times New Roman font, double-spaced, and perfectly formatted using the conventions of MLA 8th edition. Structure your essay as described below:

**The Introduction:** The first sentence of your paper should mention the title of the work to which you are responding, the author, and the main thesis of the text. (Just in case you didn’t notice, these are the elements of a F.A.T.t. sentence!) Next, write a brief summary of the text in question. Keep it simple; assume your reader is already familiar with the essay or speech.

**The Body Paragraphs:** For the body of your essay, write 2-3 paragraphs that respond to the following questions. (Don’t forget the C.E.I. method of developing a perfect persuasive paragraph!) Some of these questions can be combined, and you needn’t answer all of them. Instead, go in depth on the questions that align with your reaction to the text.

- **How much does the text agree or clash with your view of the world?** Use several quotes to illustrate how the text agrees with and supports (or disagrees with and refutes) what you think about the world, about right and wrong, and/or about what you think it means to be an American. Do not write “I agree with everything the author wrote,” since everybody disagrees about something, even if it’s a tiny point.

- **To what extent do you find the author’s claims and arguments persuasive?** Identify moments in the text where you were persuaded, or where the author failed to convince you, and try to figure out why this was the case. Were you persuaded by the author’s evidence? Did the author’s points fit together logically? Is he or she guilty of fallacious reasoning?

- **How well does the text address things that you, personally, care about and consider important to the world?** To what extent does the text address things that are important to your family, your community, your ethnic group, your faith tradition, or to people in your economic or social class? If the text does not seem relevant to you, who does (or did) the text serve? Why should we still care about what these authors say? Use quotes to support your answers to any of these questions.

**The Conclusion:** To sum up, what is your overall reaction to the text? Would you read something else like this, or by this author, in the future? Why or why not? To whom would you recommend this text?
On July 23, 1788, the people of New York spilled out onto the streets of the city, streets that had been specially swept and watered the night before. In the summer sun, five thousand New Yorkers formed a procession a mile and a half long, while thousands more watched from sidewalks, windows, doorways, and rooftops. The Federal Procession was meant both to stir and to display the people's passions in support of the Constitution, drafted in Philadelphia in 1787, already ratified by ten out of the thirteen states, and now being debated at New York's ratifying convention in Poughkeepsie. Meanwhile, in Manhattan, marchers expressed their support for the Constitution with a splash of panache and a fair bit of wit. A contingent of confectioners carried a ten-foot-long "federal cake," one foot for each state that had ratified. Thirty-one skinners, breeches makers, and glovers wore "buckskin waistcoats, faced with blue silk, breeches, gloves, and stockings, with a buck's tail in their hats," and waved a standard bearing the motto "Americans, encourage your own manufactures." The butchers' stage carried a thousand-pound ox and a flag reading, "Skin me well, dress me neat, and send me
aboard the federal fleet." Even the solitary equine veterinarian was
dressed in "an elegant half shirt, with a painted horse on his breast," over
which was written, "Federal Horse Doctor." From early morning until
nearly dusk, a parade of trumpeters, artillery pieces, mounted horses,
floats, and citizens from physicians to upholsterers trod its way down
Broadway through Hanover Square, and, still more slowly, back again. At
the end of it all, Noah Webster, who marched with the rest, warmly
summed it up in his diary: "Very brilliant, but fatiguing."¹

Webster trudged along the streets of New York that day as a member of
the New York Philological Society, "whose flag & uniform black dress," he
noted with pride, "made a very respectable figure." The society, founded
in March 1789, "for the purpose of ascertaining and improving the American
Tongue," had spent much of July preparing for the grand procession,
where, dressed in black, the philologists marched in a division with other
pen-pushers—lawyers, college students, merchants, and traders. Perhaps
they hoped to keep their distance from more muscular marchers whose
displays they could not hope to rival. But if the philologists could not bear
the weight of a federal cake or pull a half-ton ox, they did manage to carry
four symbolic props: a flag ("embellished with the Genius of America,
crowned with a wreath of 13 plumes, ten of them starred, representing the
ten States which have ratified the Constitution. Her right hand pointing to
the Philological Society, and in her left, a standard, with a pendant,
inscribed with the word, CONSTITUTION"); a copy of "Mr. Horne
Tooke's treatise on language" (an influential linguistic tract); a scroll "con-
taining the principles of a Federal language" (the text of which unfortu-
nately has not survived); and an extraordinarily elaborate coat of arms.
Designed in part by Webster himself, the coat of arms depicted three
tongues; a chevron; an eye over a pyramid inscribed with Gothic, Hebrew,
and Greek letters; a crest and key; and a shield ornamented with oak and
flax, supported, on one side, by Hermes with a wand and, on the other, by
Cadmus in a purple robe (holding, in his other hand, papyrus covered by
Phoenician characters).²

In the aftermath of the bloody War for Independence, New York's
philologists hoped that peace-time America would embrace language and
literature and adopt, if not a federal cake, a federal, national language.
Winning the war had gained the former colonies their political independ-
ence from Britain, ratifying the Constitution would unify the states under
a national government, but what would hold ordinary Americans
together? Inhabitants of the thirteen "united" states were both too much
like the English and not enough like one another. Americans in the 1780s
shared very little by way of heritage, custom, and manners, and what little
they did share, they shared with England. What, then, made them Ameri-
can? Noah Webster and his supporters believed that Americans needed,
first, a national government and, second, a national language.

That any group of people form a "nation" is a kind of fiction, an act
of imagination. A common ethnicity, heritage, and culture make this act
of imagination a bit less strenuous, and a common language can make it
a great deal easier. As early as the seventh century Isidore of Seville
observed: "Nations have arisen from tongues, not tongues from nations."²⁹
Yet national boundaries and language boundaries are rarely one and the
same. Spain is not a nation of only people who speak "Spanish," nor do all
Spanish speakers live there. According to one recent estimate, "there are
some four to five thousand languages in the world but only about 140
nation-states."²⁹ Much as their governments might claim, or wish other-
wise, all the world's nations are multilingual to one degree or another.
Why, then, do so many people believe, and some insist, otherwise?

A "nation" is a relatively recent Western invention. And the idea that
languages define nations—that how we speak and write and even spell is a
necessary marker of our national character—is an assumption or really an
invention that many people now take for granted but that first became commonplace and assumed special prominence during Noah Webster’s lifetime. By 1849, six years after Webster’s death, the French minister Paul de Bourgeon could declare with confidence that “this principle of the division of nationalities by their languages thus appears to be in truth the ruling political idea of our times.”

During the early modern era, when modern nation-states were founded, the idea that languages define nations had a special resonance. In Europe, nations fully emerged as political bodies only when vernacular languages began to stabilize. Before the invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century, books that circulated in manuscript were usually written in Latin and read only by scholars and nobles; literacy among the common people, who spoke a variety of vernacular languages and dialects, remained very low. With printing came not only a proliferation of print and a sharp rise in literacy rates but also printing in vernacular tongues. Over time a single French dialect out of the many spoken in France came to be favored by printers, and that “French” became a national standard. That the people of France began increasingly to read and eventually to speak something that came to be called the French language made it easier for them to consider themselves as belonging to a single nation. They might continue to speak different dialects and even different languages, but the fiction of linguistic uniformity made the fiction of nationalhood easier to swallow: the French are French because they speak French.

The new United States could adopt no such seemingly simple solution. An American is an American because he speaks . . . English? In the aftermath of the American Revolution, Americans faced the same problem many postcolonial nations face today: speaking the language of the now-despised mother country. As one American put it in 1787, “In most cases, a national language answers the purpose of distinction: but we have the misfortune of speaking the same language with a nation, who, of all people in Europe, have given, and continue to give us fewest proofs of love.” Noah Webster believed he had found the solution. “Language, as well as government should be national,” he insisted. “America should have her own distinct from all the world. Such is the policy of other nations, and such must be our policy.”

On that sultry New York summer day in 1788, a phalanx of philologists dressed in black and carrying a flag, a scroll, a treatise, and an extraordinary coat of arms insisted that a national language was nearly as necessary to national unity as the Constitution itself, a main but missing ingredient in a half-baked nation. Were they right?

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Our Pretended Union

Noah Webster was an ardent Federalist, an admirer of the Constitution and a vigorous proponent of its ratification. He admired the Constitution so much that he liked to take credit for it, even though he wrote not a line of it and was nowhere to be found among the fifty-five delegates to the convention in Philadelphia in 1787 who debated and revised a document initially drafted by James Madison. (Although Webster was at the time in Philadelphia, serving as schoolmaster and delivering lectures on language). What Webster liked to take credit for was not the text of the Constitution but the idea of it. In 1785 he had published a pamphlet in Hartford, titled Sketches of American Policy, that included an essay on a “Plan of Policy for improving the Advantages and perpetuating the Union of the American States,” and later in life he claimed that this essay contained “the first public proposition urging ‘the establishment of a National Constitution.’”

At the time Webster wrote his Sketches of American Policy, very many Americans were eager for a new plan of union. Since 1777 the thirteen states had been united under a legal pact called the Articles of Confederation, but especially because Article II declared that “each state retains its sovereignty, freedom and independence,” America under the Articles was basically a loose alliance of wholly independent states over which the Continental Congress had almost no authority. When the war ended in 1783, terms of peace had to be negotiated with all thirteen states, and after the peace, the states only fragmented further. With no executive or judicial body, and with a legislative body lacking any real power, the federal government was unable to intervene in the disputes between states that became all too common in the war’s aftermath, not least because seven of the thirteen colonies printed their own money, nine had their own navies (likely to seize the ships of other states), most passed tariff laws against neighboring states, and many quarreled over boundaries. Ey ing this state of affairs, Alexander Hamilton complained that the Articles had created “little, jealous, clashing, tumultuous commonwealths, the wretched nurseries of unceasing discord,” while George Washington called the Continental Congress “a half-starved, limping government, that appears to be always moving upon crutches, and tottering at every step.”
Noah Webster agreed. "Our pretended union is but a name," he declared in his Sketches of American Policy, "and our confederation, a cobweb." Before the Philadelphia convention met in 1787, most critics of the existing government had called for revisions to the Articles that would give more power to the Continental Congress, including the power to tax. Webster, however, believed increasing the powers of Congress required a wholesale reconstitution of the federal government and the establishment of a wholly national union. "Must the powers of Congress be increased?" he asked, and answered: "This question implies gross ignorance of the nature of government. The question ought to be, must the American states be united?" If yes, "there must be a supreme head, in which the power of all the states is united."

Webster was neither the first nor the only pundit to advocate abandoning the Articles in favor of a federal constitution (his own distant relation Pelatiah Webster had earlier published A Dissertation on the Political Union and Constitution of the Thirteen United States of North America). And, although Noah Webster urged modeling the national constitution on state constitutions (specifically, on the Connecticut constitution), his "Plan of Policy for Improving the Advantages and Perpetuating the Union of the American States" was more polemic than plan. Stil, he did write with passion about national union. In his Sketches, Webster contended that "three principles... have generally operated in combining the members of society under some supreme power: a standing army, religion and fear of an external force." None of these "can be the bond of union among the American states." Americans would never allow a standing army, a weapon of despots. The Protestant religion might bring peace and harmony to the United States, but it would never compel union as do religions of "superstition" by keeping people in ignorance. And America, remote from Europe, need not fear invasion or conquest. "We must therefore search for new principles in modelling our political system," Webster concluded. "We must find new bonds of union to perpetuate the confederacy."

In Webster's mind, those new bonds of union would derive in large part from a strong national government that would serve as the "supreme power" necessary to hold the states, and the people, together. Yet, he hinted, something more was needed. The Articles of Confederation were not all that weakened the Union, weaving it together with the slender threads of a cobweb. Poor education, which fueled local prejudices, especially between New Englanders and southerners, pulled the nation apart. And, just as ignorant Americans cherished the ways in which they were different from one another, they also stupidly aspired to be more like Europeans. "Nothing can be more ridiculous," Webster complained, "than a servile imitation of the manners, the language, and the vices of foreigners... Nothing can betray a more despicable disposition in Americans, than to be the apes of Europeans." And nothing, but nothing, nauseated Webster more than those preposterously affected Americans who "must, in all their discourse, mingle a space of sans souci and je ne sais quel quoi."

"America is an independent empire," Webster insisted, "and ought to assume a national character." A national constitution would strengthen political union, but Americans must also constitute themselves as a distinct and united people. "We ought not to consider ourselves as inhabitants of a single state only," he implored his readers, "but as Americans, as the common subjects of a great empire." To develop a "national character," America must first cast off its cultural subservience to Europe and, second, eradicate local prejudices. Language, Webster believed, was the stone that could kill both those birds: if Americans could be shamed into silencing their pretentious je ne sais quoi and coached out of their provincial twangs and draws, the resulting national, homegrown American language would go a long way toward establishing a national character. It was a nice, neat plan, one that Webster had first contemplated in 1783, even before he'd come up with the idea for a national constitution.

**Our Political Harmony**

The Revolutionary War officially ended with the signing of the Peace of Paris in 1783. That same year young Noah Webster published his American spelling book. It was, he asserted, an act of passionate patriotism: "The author wishes to promote the honour and prosperity of the confederated republics of America." Webster's readers received the book in the spirit in which it was offered: Timothy Pickering, quartermaster general of the Continental army, wrote to his wife, "I think the work will do honor to his country." It's tempting to close Webster's spelling book with a number of other patriotic post-Revolutionary schemes promoting a distinctive national language. In 1787 the Marquis de Chastellux observed that Americans were
considering abandoning English altogether and adopting Hebrew as the national language, both to distance themselves from Britain and to signal themselves as a chosen people. Meanwhile, an English observer reported that American revolutionaries had contemplated making French the national language as a means of "revenging themselves on England." Greek too was apparently considered. Yet as one commentator remarked in 1815, "ninety-nine, out of a hundred, and more probably nine hundred and ninety-nine, out of a thousand, Americans, never heard" of such plans.\textsuperscript{13}

Webster's solution was both more practical and infinitely more popular: he proposed to teach Americans to spell and speak the same as one another, but differently from people in England, thereby creating an "American language," which over the years would become "as different from the future language of England, as the modern Dutch, Danish and Swedish are from the German, or from one another."\textsuperscript{14}

Not only was Webster's solution more practical than adopting Hebrew, French, or Greek as the national language, but it also remedied another problem altogether. To Webster's way of thinking, the obstacle to the formation of a "national character" wasn't simply that Americans spoke English, the language of the people who "give us fewest proofs of love," but that they spoke it differently from one another. Variant pronunciation between northerners and southerners, Webster observed, "affords much diversion to their neighbours," while "the language of the middle States is tinctured with a variety of Irish, Scotch and German dialects which are justly censured as deviations from propriety and the standard of elegant pronunciation." A uniform, national standard for spelling, Webster believed, would create a uniform, national standard of pronunciation and "decriminalize those odious distinctions of provincial dialects, which are the objects of reciprocal ridicule in the United States." More than mere mockery was at stake. "Small differences in pronunciation at first excite ridicule—a habit of laughing at the singularities of strangers is followed by disrespect," and soon enough Virginians come to despise New Englanders, and vice versa. "Our political harmony is therefore concerned in a uniformity of language."\textsuperscript{15}

Webster could attempt to standardize spelling because before the eighteenth century very few standards existed. Before the advent of printing, spelling was altogether personal and erratic; by Webster's lifetime it had become less so, but spelling still varied by region and even by individual (a writer might even spell the same word two different ways on the same page). This highly irregular state of affairs was a good part of what had led several European nations to establish language academies to dictate both spelling and usage. (It was in an attempt to standardize orthography, for instance, that the Académie Française, founded in 1635, codified French's diacritical marks over accented vowels.)\textsuperscript{16}

Webster believed the establishment of an American academy to regulate the language was unlikely. Although he expected that "the reformation of the language we speak will come some time or other be thought an object of legislative importance," in the meantime, a humble fourteen-shilling spelling book would have to do, and it might even achieve the same end.\textsuperscript{17}

If every American learned proper pronunciation by reading Webster's spelling book, all Americans would eventually speak and spell alike. And what, other than a national government, could be more important for national unity?
Speaking the Same Language

"All America waits anxiously for the Plan of Government," Webster wrote in his diary from Philadelphia on September 18, 1787, as Benjamin Franklin presented the Constitution of the United States to the Pennsylvania Assembly. The day before, thirty-nine of the remaining forty-two delegates to the Constitutional Convention had signed the final draft (thirteen of the original fifty-five had already gone home), and Franklin, upon signing, had memorably declared, "Thus I consent, Sir, to this Constitution, because I expect no better, and because I am not sure it is not the best." 18

Whether it was the best, or at least good enough, was for Americans to decide. In order for the Constitution to become law, nine out of the thirteen states were required to ratify it, but Federalists knew that nothing less than unanimous ratification was necessary to establish a stable government. Immediately after it was signed, the plan was made public, printed throughout the states in broadsides, posted at church doors and taverns, read aloud on town squares. A torrent of essays and pamphlets rained upon the nation as proponents of the Constitution rushed to publish arguments endorsing its ratification, most notably the eighty-five essays known as the Federalist Papers, written by John Jay, Alexander Hamilton, and James Madison. (At the request of a convention delegate, Webster added his own contribution to this flood of print; his Examination into the Leading Principles of the Federal Constitution was published in Philadelphia in October 1787, just a month after the signing.) 19 Meanwhile, opponents of the Constitution, known as the Antifederalists, published their own forceful tracts, disputing the Federalists' claims point by point. The bells that rang in Philadelphia on September 18, 1787, heralded not only the new Constitution but also nearly two years of rancorous debate about America, its people, and the nature of government.

Beginning in December 1787, state ratifying conventions were assembled to debate the Constitution's merits. Everywhere Federalists argued that the Constitution was a necessary reform from the excesses of revolution. At the New York State ratifying convention, Hamilton asserted that in the drafting of the Articles of Confederation, "The zeal for liberty became predominant and excessive," but that the Constitution represented "a principle of strength and stability in the organisation of our government, and vigor in its operations." Antifederalists meanwhile claimed that in the interests of such stability, the Constitution took so much power away from the states as to create a tyrannical national government. In New York, John Lansing denounced the Constitution as "a triple headed monster, as deep and wicked a conspiracy as ever was invented in the darkest ages against the liberties of a free people." Many Antifederalists, like Richard Henry Lee of Virginia, considered the Constitution a reversal of the Revolution. "The really astonishing," Lee declared, "that the same people who have just emerged from a long and cruel war in defense of liberty, should now agree to fix an elective despotism upon themselves and their prosperity." 20

Among Antifederalists' prime objections to the Constitution was its provision for a small elite to represent the people of a vast nation. Prevailing eighteenth-century political philosophy, most famously articulated by
Montesquieu, warned that a republican government could only exist in a small, homogeneous country. Only where the people were so alike and living in such close proximity as to share common, if not identical, concerns could a representative government work. Antifederalists argued that in establishing a republic so sprawling and heterogeneous as the United States, the people would inevitably fragment into factions, each concerned with its narrow self-interest rather than with the good of the whole.

"Republics are proverbial for factions," Noah Webster would write in his definition of faction, in his 1828 dictionary. Indeed, this pervasive fear of factions in large republics had influenced the framing of the Articles of Confederation, which essentially created an alliance of small republics, the states, in order to avoid the kind of factionalism that was expected to result from uniting them into a single large republic of peoples with dueling interests.

In Federalist Number 10, James Madison provided the Federalists' most important response to this objection. He began with a definition (which Webster later quoted in his 1828 dictionary): "By a faction I understand a number of citizens, whether amounting to a majority or minority of the whole, who are united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, adverse to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community." He then proceeded to reverse Montesquieu's argument by declaring that a republic could thrive only in a large territory, where there would be so many different people and so many conflicting interests as to prevent any one faction from becoming tyrannical. "Extend the sphere [of a republic] and you take in a greater variety of parties and interests; you make it less probable that a majority of the whole will have a common motive to invade the rights of other citizens; or if such a common motive exists, it will be more difficult for all who feel it to discover their own strength and to act in union with each other." Moreover, in a large republic, the challenges of leading such a diverse people, and the small ratio of representatives to constituents, would bring only the most talented, most impartial men to Congress. A larger republic, Madison argued, offers "a greater option" of representatives "and consequently a greater probability of a fit choice."

Madison considered factions inevitable. "The latent causes of faction," he declared, "are . . . sown in the nature of man." Everywhere, there will always be "men of factious tempers, of local prejudices, or of sinister designs." Only a large republic could dilute their influence.

While Madison turned factions to his favor, another Federalist strategy was to denounce the factiousness of the American people, to argue, in effect, that Americans were already one people, ripe for a political union that would do no more than formalize already existing bonds and a system of government in which their common interests would be ably represented by like-minded citizens. It was here that the question of language inevitably arose. In Federalist Number 2, John Jay gave thanks that "Providence has been pleased to give this one connected country, to one united people—a people descended from the same ancestors, speaking the same language, professing the same religion, attached to the same principles of government, very similar in their manners and customs." ¹²

Yet writing in 1790, Thomas Paine in The Rights of Man seemed to be describing a different nation when he observed: "If there is a country in the world where concord, according to common calculation, would be least expected, it is America. Made up, as it is, of people from different nations, accustomed to different forms and habits of government, speaking different languages, and more different in their modes of worship, it would appear that the union of such a people was impracticable." (Only a republican government, Paine believed, could unite such a sprawling, diverse nation: "By the simple operation of constructing government on the principles of society and the rights of man, every difficulty retires, and the parts are brought into cordial union.") ¹³

Which was the real America? And how many languages did Americans speak? Was America John Jay's nation of "one united people . . . speaking the same language" or Tom Paine's republic of "people from different nations . . . speaking different languages"?

Part of the answer lies in a happy provision of the Constitution itself: it required the new government to take a census every ten years. At the first national census, in 1790, census takers on horseback counted 3.9 million people: 3.1 million whites, 60,000 free blacks, and 700,000 slaves. Of the white population, at least one-quarter were of non-English European descent, and about one-fifth were non-native English speakers. The census failed to count Indians at all; their population in the thirteen states was probably about 150,000, and if they are added to the total population, it is closer to 4 million. ¹⁴

To put it another way, the total white population of the United States in 1790 was 3.1 million, about 2.3 million of whom were of English descent (the remaining 800,000 whites were principally of German, French, Dutch, Scottish, and Irish extraction) and about 2.5 million of whom
spoke English as their first language (the majority of the remaining 600,000 whites were native German or French speakers). Of the 760,000 blacks living in the United States, about one-fifth, or 152,000, were African-born. Free blacks and most slaves born in America probably spoke English (a Virginian observed as early as 1724 that "the Native Negroes generally talk good English without Idiom or Tone"), while many of those born in Africa spoke only their native tongues. Meanwhile, the 150,000 Indians living east of the Mississippi spoke a variety of native American languages; very few spoke English as a first language.85

The number of non-native English speakers in the United States in 1790, then, was about 902,000 (600,000 whites, 152,000 African-born slaves, and 150,000 Indians), out of a total population of about 4 million. Roughly, nearly 1 out of every 4 people living in the United States in 1790 did not speak English as a first language (though many of those probably spoke English with greater or lesser facility).

Contrast this with linguistic diversity in the United States today. The Census takers in 1900 counted 230.4 million Americans, of whom 188.6 million spoke only English. Of the remaining 31.8 million Americans, the largest group was Spanish speakers (17.3 million), followed by French, German, Italian, and Chinese speakers (about 1 million of each). In 1990, then, 1 out of every 6 people living in the United States did not speak English as a first language (though, again, many also spoke English with great facility).86

In other words, the percentage of non-native English speakers in the United States was actually greater in 1790 than in 1990.

Anecdotal evidence better illustrates the situation that the numbers confirm. Advertisements for runaway slaves and indentured servants placed in the Pennsylvania Gazette from 1725 to 1775 include notices for "an Irish servant boy, named William Wiley, ... can talk a little Dutch" (1771); "a likely Negro man ... named Francisco; he speaks Spanish and Dutch well, but not much English" (1762); "A German Apprentice Lad, born in Makunzht, named George Schwartz ... Speaks but little English" (1762); "a Dutch servant man named FREDERICK LUDERTZ ... As he speaks the French language very fluently, he may try to pass for a Frenchman" (1767); "a Servant Man named Thomas Robards, a Welsh Man, and speaks good English and Welsh, and some Irish" (1734); "an English indentured servant man, named Edward Davis ... talks Dutch and Welsh" (1771); and "a Negro Man named JIM ... speaks Dutch and English plain" (1763).27

Pennsylvania was an unusual place: two-fifths of its residents spoke German. In 1751 the Philadelphian Benjamin Franklin famously complained about Pennsylvania's German newspapers, German legal documents, and German street signs and asked, "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?" Even as late as 1821 the Niles' Weekly Register attacked Pennsylvania Germans for their continued loyalty to their native tongue: "It is out of the question that the German can ever be the prevailing language in the United States—the descendants of the Germans should, therefore, learn the English, and mix themselves with the mass of the society in which they live—the common home of us all."28

But even outside Pennsylvania the United States housed French- and German-language schools, and many Americans attended non-English church services and read non-English newspapers. The Articles of Confederation were themselves printed in French in 1777, not merely for the eyes of Gallic allies across the ocean, and the Continental Congress printed numbers of its proceedings in German. Benjamin Franklin must have been disheartened to discover that soon after he presented the Constitution to the Pennsylvania Assembly in September 1787, it was printed as Die Constitution in no fewer than four German editions. And when, in 1786, Noah Webster proposed giving a series of lectures on the English language in Albany, New York, a resident discouraged him on the grounds that his proposed audience would be uninterested in the topic: "The Inhabitants are all, or principally the descendants of the first settlers from Amsterdam who have been taught to read and write their native language, and as in the case with all nations, are strongly prejudiced in favor of it. The English tongue has ever been disagreeable and the majority of them now speak it more from necessity than choice."29

If, for many eighteenth-century Americans, English was not a native tongue, why was Webster so concerned about small differences in pronunciation among English speakers rather than with bigger differences between languages? Because, for him English dialects were the linguistic equivalent of political factions, a kind of "local prejudice" that could rend the Union apart. Foreign languages, especially non-European languages, simply did not concern him; of one thing he was certain: "The English is the common root or stock from which our national language will be derived." Webster would have been the first to admit that John Jay was premature in calling the nation monolingual in 1787, but he believed the
extinction of all languages other than English inevitable: all others "will gradually waste away—and within a century and a half, North America will be peopled with a hundred millions of men, all speaking the same language." For Webster, Americans who did not speak English did not belong to the nation. And they could not participate in what Webster and his contemporaries called the republic of letters, the sphere of printed public discourse—of newspapers, pamphlets, and books—that made self-government possible. Webster's business wasn't to teach Americans English; it was to reform the language of those who already spoke it.

There iz no alternativ

In 1785 and 1786 Noah Webster traveled from Boston to Charleston, and back again, selling his spelling book, lobbying for copyright laws, and delivering his taresomes lectures on language. Life on the road was difficult. Outside Baltimore, Webster's stage broke down, forcing him to hire a horse ("I curse all stage Waggons," he scrawled in his diary). Near Bladensburg, Virginia, he beat his "dull horse" so fiercely that he cracked his cane ("a little vexatious matter"), and near Annapolis another hired horse took fright, injuring Webster in the fall. On board the George, sailing to South Carolina, he had to fish for his supper—and failed ("Harpoon a porpoise, but in a hurry & confusion, lose both the harpoon & the porpoise"). Arriving in Charleston, he found little comfort ("the weather is hot & the Musketo's troublesome"). But Webster's tour of the new nation wasn't all misery and mosquitoes. In Baltimore he hired a French master and began studying the language, after which he peppered his diary with the very French phrases he had earlier found so pretentious (July 30, 1785—"Finish my last Lecture avec eclat"; August 16, 1785—"Ne rien de Nouvelles"). And, everywhere he went, Webster hobnobbed with America's elite. In May 1786, after finishing his business with the Virginia legislature (where, he later claimed, he gave James Madison the idea for a federal government), Webster rode his dull horse "to Genl Washington's seat, 9 miles from Alexandria, down the River Potowmac." Delighted to be "treated with great attention," he enjoyed a pleasant Friday evening playing whist with Washington and his wife ("who is very social").

Everywhere, Webster looked for a wealthy bride. "Take tea with Miss Ray," he wrote from Albany, "a ten thousand pounds." And everywhere, he read his lectures on language—or as many as he could scare up an audience for at two shillings a head. In Williamsburg "6 gentlemen only" showed up for his first lecture. "The Virginians," Webster concluded, "have...Great contempt for Northern people." In Baltimore he delivered his lectures to "a crowded audience, whose applause is flattering" ("More taste for science in those States than below"). In Philadelphia in February 1786 his lectures drew as many as "100 reputable characters," and in New York the next month, they were attended by David Ramsay "& many other members of Congress." Among those in attendance at Webster's Philadelphia lectures was one reputable character who was to influence him greatly, Benjamin Franklin.

Intrigued by Webster's interest in orthography, Franklin told Webster about his own "idea of reforming the English alphabet" and showed him a copy of a pamphlet he had written in 1788, A Scheme for a New Alphabet and Reformed Mode of Spelling, in which Franklin proposed deleting the letters c, w, y, and j and adding six new letters. In his 1783 spelling book, Webster had mocked all proposals "to alter the spelling of words, by expunging the superfluous letters." He had wanted to standardize and Americanize spelling, not simplify it. Writing favour F-a-v-o-r seemed to him ridiculous. "This appears to arise from the same pedantic fondness for singularity that prompts to new fashions of pronunciation." Webster didn't dispute the irregularity of English spelling, only the wisdom of trying to change it. "Our language is indeed pronounced very differently from the spelling; this is an inconvenience we regret, but cannot remedy. To attempt a progressive change, is idle; it will keep the language in perpetual fluctuation without an effectual amendment. And to attempt a total change at once, is equally idle and extravagant, as it would render the language unintelligible." Yet, in reading Franklin's Scheme, Webster found himself persuaded. "Your Excellency's sentiments upon the subject," he wrote Franklin in May, "backed by the concurring opinion of many respectable gentlemen and particularly of the late chairman of Congress [David Ramsay], have taught me to believe the reformation of our alphabet still practicable." Why reform the alphabet? Because, as Webster had admitted in his spelling book, "Our language is...pronounced very differently from the spelling." If spelling does not dictate pronunciation, Webster's entire project—to eradicate dialect by standardizing spelling—makes little sense.
Even if all Americans learned to spell using his speller, they would not all learn to speak alike. Uniform spelling does not produce uniform pronunciation. A New Englander might read lecture as leetor, but teaching a Virginian to spell it l-e-c-t-i-r-e would not prevent him from pronouncing it lector; an observation no doubt brought home to Webster after night on his lecture tour, especially by Virginians with their "Great contempt for Northern people." The problem was not only the absence of American spelling books but also the inexact English system of spelling. So long as the principles behind spelling were flawed, pronunciation would remain variable, no matter how many people bought Webster's books.

In May 1786, inspired by Franklin and newly confident of success in reforming the alphabet, Webster drafted "a plan for the purpose of reducing the orthography of the language to perfect regularity," which he eventually published as an appendix to his 1789 collection of lectures, the Dissertations. The basic premise of Webster's "Essay on the Necessity, Advantages and Practicability of Reforming the Mode of Spelling, and of Rendering the Orthography of Words Correspondent to the Pronunciation," as well as of Franklin's Scheme, was to redesign the alphabet "so as to give a distinct character to every distinct sound, and to let no one sound be signified by more than one character."36

The lack of a one-to-one correspondence between the alphabet and the sounds of the English language is a problem, of course, with which every schoolchild wrestles. Learning to spell through t-h-e-o-u-g-h and bureau b-u-r-r-e-u is no mean feat. (The notorious difficulty of English spelling was perhaps most famously deplored by George Bernard Shaw, who observed that English writers might just as well spell fish g-h-o-t-i, using the gh of laugh, the o of women, and the t of nation.)37

In early modern Europe, rising literacy rates following the invention of the printing press had highlighted this problem as it existed, to a greater or lesser degree, in all European languages, and English writers had sought to reform English orthography for centuries before the likes of Franklin and Webster tackled the task.38 Most earlier proposals traced the alphabet's flaws to its foreign origins. The English language is written with the Roman alphabet, a modified version of the Greek alphabet, which in turn
is derived from an ancient Phoenician writing system, brought to Greece, according to legend, by Cadmus, the mythological brother of Europa, who also built the city of Thebes. (Recall that the flag carried by the New York Philological Society at the Federal Procession in 1788 depicted Cadmus in a purple robe holding papyrus covered by Phoenician characters.) European considered the Greek-derived alphabet a perfect writing system since it matched each character to a sound (rather than to an idea, a syllable, or a phrase). But the imported Greek alphabet is a poor fit for English or any other language other than Greek since the sounds of the Greek language are different. Some English sounds (like sh) require more than one letter, and some letters (like g) have more than one sound. To remedy the situation, English spelling reformers hoped to invent a “perfect” or “philosophical” alphabet, one that exactly matched letters with sounds.

As Benjamin Franklin saw it, one problem with using a Greek-derived alphabet to write English was that it was too much like using a nonalphabetic system like Chinese. English writers needed not only to learn the twenty-six letters of the alphabet, and their sounds, but also all the sounds of combinations of letters. Franklin suspected that the Chinese script “might originally have been a literal Writing like that of Europe, but through the Changes in Pronunciation brought on by the Course of Ages and through the obstinate Adherence of that people to old Customs, and among others to their old manner of Writing, the original Sounds of Letters and Words are lost, and no longer considered.” Following many English writers, Franklin believed that the situation for the English language was dire: “If we go on as we have done a few Centuries longer, our words will gradually cease to express Sounds, they will only stand for things, as the written words do in the Chinese Language.”

From the perspective of many Europeans and Americans, the Chinese system required so much memorization, and was so difficult to learn, that literacy was restricted to a few, and communication and the advance of learning were greatly limited. Later American spelling reformers even argued that the Chinese script condemned the Chinese to despotic government, suggesting that a republican government required a “perfect alphabet.”

By way of remedying English, Franklin prescribed eliminating redundant letters, like c, “k supplying its hard sound, and s the soft,” and adding new letters to represent sounds that otherwise require two letters; he proposed, for example, introducing the character th to replace th as in think.

Webster’s more conservative proposal operated on the same principles. He recommended “the omission of all superfluous or silent letters; as a in bread,” and “a substitution of a character that has a certain definite sound, for one that is more vague and indeterminate” (by which mean, near, speak, grieve, zeal would become mean, near, speak, gree, zeal). In a departure from Franklin, Webster eventually argued against the invention of entirely new letters, since “a trifling alteration in a character, or the addition of a point would distinguish different sounds, without the substitution of a new character.” (He proposed diacritical marks not unlike those used by the French.) Still, Webster’s plan was much like Franklin’s, and neither differed greatly from previous proposals.

Webster sent a rough draft of his plan to Franklin in May 1786. Franklin responded with both alacrity and enthusiasm. “Our Ideas are so nearly similar,” he replied, “that I make no doubt of our easily agreeing on the plan.” Eager to see a corrected orthography put into practice, Franklin asked Webster to return to Philadelphia as soon as possible to discuss the plan in person (“Sounds, till such an alphabet is fix’d, not being easily explain’d or discourses’d of clearly upon Paper”) and offered him his “Dictionary on his scheme of a Reform.” In the hope that Webster would rejoin on the question of new characters, Franklin offered him a special set of types he had ordered cast in his new alphabet.

Yet, however similar Webster’s ideas were to Franklin’s and earlier English proposals, for Webster—but not for Franklin—altering orthography was a uniquely American endeavor. Franklin’s Scheme, written in London before the American Revolution, was addressed to all English writers, on both sides of the Atlantic, to whom he proposed a “perfect alphabet” as an improvement in the interests of education and efficiency. Webster’s plan was for Americans only, to strengthen their own republic of letters. The day after sending Franklin his “plan of a new Alphabet,” Webster listed its six advantages:

1. It will render the acquisition of the language easy both for natives and foreigners. All the trouble of learning to spell will be saved.

2. When no character has more sounds than one, every man, woman, and child who knows his alphabet can spell words, even by the sound, without ever seeing them.

3. Pronunciation must necessarily be uniform.
A sample of Webster's reformed spelling, 1790. (Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society)

4. The orthography of the language will be fixed.

5. The necessity of encouraging printing in this country and of manufacturing all our own books is a political advantage, obvious and immense.

6. A national language is a national tie, and what country wants it more than America?246

In his 1789 “Essay,” Webster greatly elaborated on these last two points, the two that were furthest from Franklin’s vision. “A capital advantage of this reform in these states,” Webster argued, “would be, that it would make a difference between the English orthography and the American. This will startle those who have not attended to the subject, he conceded, “but I am confident that such an event is an object of vast political consequence.” Why create an artificial distinction between English and American orthography? For Webster, distinctive spelling was yet another means to free the former colonists from the shackles of the mother tongue. Not only would it require, eventually, “that all books should be printed in America,” but even more significantly, Americans would benefit from knowing, at a glance, whether a writer was an American or an Englishman. “A national language is a bond of national union,” Webster insisted, echoing his earlier call for the eradication of dialect. “Every engine should be employed to render the people of this country national, to call their attachments home to their own country, and to inspire them with the pride of national character.”46

In his “Essay,” Webster asked of superfluous letters and other irregular spellings, “Ought the Americans to retain these faults which produce innumerable inconveniences in the acquisition and use of the language, or ought they at once to reform these abuses, and introduce order and regularity into the orthography of the AMERICAN TONGUE?” In his Collection of Essays and Pugilistic Writings, he answered emphatically, “There is no alternative.”47

Kamra Ius

After his tour of the nation in 1785 and 1786 and his residence in Philadelphia in 1787, Webster moved to New York to found a Federalist paper, The American Magazine. In April 1788, four months before the Federal Procession, he took out a notice in the magazine announcing the formation of the New York Philological Society. “Since the separation of the American States from Great Britain,” Webster declared, “the objects of such an institution are become, in some measure, necessary and highly important.” For much of the spring and summer of 1788, a handful of members of the newly formed society met regularly, on Monday evenings. Their “highly important” work, however, consisted largely of listening to Webster’s lectures and promoting his publications. In April the society adopted bylaws and a constitution and listened to Webster read his “Dissertation concerning the Influence of Language on Opinions and of Opinions on Language.” In May, Webster visited Connecticut. In June the society heard Webster read “a Philological Dissertation.” In July the society chose officers, listened to Webster read his “4th Lecture,” prepared for the Federal Procession, and formally endorsed Webster’s spelling book, producing a letter recommending it “to the use of schools in the United States, as an accurate well digested system of principles and rules, calculated to destroy the
various false dialects in pronunciation in the several states, an object very desirable in a federal republic." In the fall of 1788 the society didn't do much of anything except, in October, appoint Webster "Examiner in Philology." Meanwhile, Webster didn't hesitate to employ the society for promotional purposes, instructing the printers Hudson & Goodwin in September to advertise the spelling book with the notice "The Philological Society in New York recommend this work with a view to make it the Federal school book." In December, Webster left New York for Boston, and with its leader, the society soon disbanded.49

Meanwhile, his proposal for spelling reform faltered. In 1768 a friend had warned Benjamin Franklin that his Igles Alfabet would never make it into "kumyn ins." And she was, of course, quite right. Noah Webster, in his 1789 "Essay," insisted that schemes like Franklin's had failed "rather on account of their intrinsic difficulties, than on account of any necessary impracticability of a reform." The problem with Franklin's plan, as with all earlier proposals, was the introduction of new characters, an innovation that would always meet resistance. Webster's more modest plan was, he believed, more likely to meet with success. As he saw it, "The only steps necessary to ensure success in the attempt to introduce this reform, would be, a resolution of Congress, ordering all their acts to be engrossed in the new orthography, and recommending the plan to the several universities in America; and also a resolution of the universities to encourage and support it." Eventually, "curiosity would excite attention to it, and men would be gradually reconciled to the plan." Webster's optimism about the prospects of success for his new alphabet in the republic of letters knew no bounds. From his lecture circuit he wrote to a friend, "There is no longer a doubt that I shall be able to effect a uniformity of language and education throughout this continent."45

Despite his optimism, Webster's plan was unsuccessful. When he published his lectures and essay on orthography in 1789 as Dissertations on the English Language, they did not sell well; as he complained to Timothy Pickering, the paper on which they were printed must "be sold for wrapping paper." Webster also included several essays written in reformed spelling in his 1790 Collection of Essays and Fugitive Writings, but that, too, sold badly. Of five hundred copies printed, priced at $1.67, fewer than two hundred ever left the bookshop. Not many people read the Fugitive Writings, and the few who did were not particularly enthusiastic about Webster's spelling. A review in the Columbian Magazine ended on a particularly nasty note: "We shall conclude with two articles of advice to Mr. Webster. The first is, to reform his own language, before he attempts to correct that of others; the second, to learn to deliver his opinions with a less dictatorial air."

Nor did Webster's spelling find much private support. In September 1790, after receiving the Fugitive Writings, Ezra Stiles wished Webster well but warned of his spelling, "I suspect you have put in the pruning knife too freely for general Acceptance." In Boston, Jeremy Belknap wrote to Ebenezer Hazard: "I join with you in reprobating the . . . new mode of spelling recommended and exemplified in the fugitiv Essays, ov No-ur Webstur eskwer junter." In December 1791, Webster glumly reported to Timothy Pickering, "Some of my Essays found a sale, perhaps a third; the remainder will probably be a dead loss."51

Publication of the English editions of the Dissertations and Fugitive Writings in 1797 must have done little to improve Webster's spirits or fill his purse. The London Critical Review wryly observed that "his proposal for a reformation of spelling may rather be called a scheme for the corruption of it." Regarding Franklin's earlier Scheme, the reviewer gave thanks that "the Americans, however, have not followed, in this respect, the advice of the deceased philosopher, and of his surviving admirer." And the London Monthly Review regretted Webster's "very peculiar and unsightly mode of spelling, founded on a rule of pronunciation adopted by the author, but which, notwithstanding its plausible reasons for it, more mature experience will most probably induce him to abandon." Yet even as Webster matured, his "Essay" haunted him. As late as 1809 a reviewer recalling it scoffed, "The perusal of this essay must strike every reflecting mind with a sense of the mildness of the municipal regulations of this land of liberty, which permitted the writer to roam abroad, unrestrained by a straight waistcoat, and a keeper."58

Noah Cobweb

The failure of Webster's radical spelling reform may be explained, in part, by his character. Webster was, to say the least, a difficult man. One historian summed up Webster's breathtaking unpopularity among his own contemporaries this way: "Benjamin Franklin Bache called him a 'self-exalted
pedagogue' and 'an incurable lunatic.' William Cobbett . . . called him 'a
spiteful viper' and a 'prostitute wretch.' . . . Jefferson described him as 'a
mere pedagogue of very limited understanding.' Many of these remarks
were partisan, but there are more. A printer Webster worked with called
him 'a pedantic grammarian . . . full of vanity and ostentation.' One
Bostonian complained, 'I wish . . . he were not so confident in his own
merit, but would be content to address the public as though there were
some equal to himself.'

Moreover, for all his work with language, Webster on paper fails to
charm, and apparently he was no more eloquent in person. Jeffersonian
orator and Webster's Yale classmate Abraham Bishop said of Webster that
his 'head is like a vendue master's room, full of other people's goods,' and
urged, 'As Mr. Webster is very apt to give advice to others, I leave him with
a word of advice, which is, to prosecute to conviction and sentence of
death the man or men who ever told him that he had talents as a writer.'
A student of Webster's during his schoolmastering days confided to her
diary, 'In conversation he is even duller than in writing, if that is possible.'
And William Dunlap, himself a member of the New York Philological Soci-
ety, wrote a play about the society in which Webster appears as 'Noah
Cobweb' (a name drawn from Webster's apt phrase 'our confederation, a
cobweb'), about whom another character remarks, 'What a curst boring
fellow now that is! You may read Pedant in his very phiz.'

Webster's reputation as an arrogant, self-promoting pedagogue may
have weakened the New York Philological Society's credibility. In Boston,
Ebenezer Hazard wrote to Jeremy Belknap in August 1788: 'I do not know
all the members of the Philological Society, though I have understood that
they are not numerous. The Monarch [Webster] reigns supreme . . . How
they will succeed in establishing a 'Federal Language,' time must deter-
mine.' Time did determine. Within just a few months after Belknap
offered his skeptical appraisal, the New York Philological Society was no
more.

Noah Webster, of course, labored on with undaunted enthusiasm.
When he published his spelling book in 1783, at the end of the War for
Independence, he had declared uniform American pronunciation a pro-
posal consistent with the spirit of the age: 'Greater changes have been
wrought in the minds of men in the short compass of eight years past,
than are commonly effected in a century.' When he marched in New
York's Federal Procession with his fellow philologists in July 1788, dressed
in black and carrying a flag, a scroll, a treatise, and an extraordinary coat
of arms, he insisted that a federal language was nearly as necessary to

national unity as the new Constitution itself. And when he published his
essay on reformed spelling in 1789, the timing, he believed, was equally
auspicious. Having recently ratified the Constitution, and having been
inspired by the revolution in France, Americans were uniquely positioned
to take the bold step of adopting a new way of spelling. 'NOW is the time,'
Webster declared, 'and this is the country.'

1. AN AMERICAN LANGUAGE


6. Sylvius, American Museum 2 (August 1787): 118. NW, Dissertations on the English Language (Boston, 1789), 179.

7. NW, Sketches of American Policy (Hartford, Conn.: Hudson and Goodwin, 1785), 39-48. Biographies of Webster include: Chauncey A. Goodrich, "Life and Writings of Noah Webster," American Magazine (1848): 5-32; William Chauncey Brewster, "Memoir," in A Dictionary of the English Language, rev. ed. (New York: Huntington and Savage, 1845); Horace E. Scudder, Noah Webster (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1881); John S. Morgan, Noah Webster (New York: Mason Charter, 1975); Richard Rollins, The Long Journey of Noah Webster (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1980); Richard M. Scudder, Noah Webster (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984); and a fascinating essay on Webster in Joseph Ellis, After the Revolution: Profiles in Early American Culture (New York: Norton, 1979). One of Webster's earliest biographers once wrote that Webster "liked to think he had a hand in quite many every important measure in the political and literary history of the country" (Scudder, Noah Webster, 6). His claim about the Constitution first appeared in NW, "To the Public" in the New York Herald in 1796 (Herald, New York, July 20, 1796; reprinted in LNW, 198). See also NW to James Kent, October 20, 1804, (ANW, 90-93); NW, 142; to Jedidiah Morse, May 15, 1797, LNW, 248; NW to James Madison, August 20, 1804; and James Madison to NW, October 12, 1804, in NW, A Collection of Papers on Political, Literary, and Moral Subjects (New York, 1843), 168-70.


9. NW, Sketches, 32, 34.


11. NW, Sketches, 30, 44-46.


14. NW, Dissertations, 22-23.

15. NW, Grammaratical Institute, 5-7; NW, Dissertations, 19-20.


17. NW, Grammaratical Institute, 6.


25. The 1990 census can be found at www.census.gov.
31. This and all subsequent details and quotations about Webster's tour come from his diary entries for May 2, 1785–July 1, 1786 (ANW, 211–30). Webster's lecture series was clearly aimed as a means to sell his books (see NW to Hudson and Goodwin, April 3, 1786, NW box 1).
32. Franklin had actually given Webster permission to use a room in the University for lecturing" (ANW, 224). Franklin's Scheme is reprinted in Albert Henry Smith, The Writings of Benjamin Franklin (New York: Macmillan, 1906), 5:169–77, and is hereafter cited as Franklin, Scheme. Franklin had published his scheme in his Political, Miscellaneous, and Philosophical Pieces in London in 1770. That Franklin showed a copy to NW is reported in Timothy Pickering to John Gardner, July 4, 1786, NLNW, 1:104.
33. Webster more strongly believed that writing "favored" as favor was inaccurate. "Thus they wrote the words favor, honour, &c. without a. But it happens unluckily that, in these words, they have dropped the wrong letter— they have omitted the letter that is sounded and retained one that is silent" (NW, Grammatical Institute, I:11–12).
34. NW to BF, May 24, 1786, NLNW, 49–50. In March, Webster wrote to Washington, "Dr Franklin has extended his views to a very simple plan of reducing the language to perfect regularity" (NW to GW, March 31, 1786, NLNW, 1:110). Webster found Franklin persuasive elsewhere as well. When he published his Dissertations in 1786, he dedicated them to Franklin, praising his eloquence. His pen follows his thoughts, and consequently leads the reader, without study, into the same train of thinking." (NW, Dissertations, dedication).
35. NW to BF, May 24, 1786. Unfortunately the "rough draft" of a new alphabet Webster submitted to Franklin for adoption, amendment, or rejection in May 1786 has not survived. Nor have any copies. Webster complained that putting a new alphabet down on paper was painstaking labor, "particularly for me, who am no penman and cannot form the characters exactly as I wish." He sent one copy to Ramsay and no doubt kept one for himself, but both have disappeared, and perhaps to spare himself a tiresome task, he apparently made no more (Timothy Pickering to John Gardner, July 4, 1786). When Webster wrote to Timothy Pickering about the plan, he failed to enclose a copy, urging him instead to visit Franklin to examine his. All that survives is the essay Webster eventually published in 1789, as an appendix to his Dissertations on the English Language. Very probably the 1789 essay differs considerably from the rough draft Webster submitted to Franklin in 1785 and from the lecture he delivered in 1787.
36. NW to Timothy Pickering, May 24, 1786, NLNW, 51–52. Franklin, in his Scheme, boasted that his new alphabet had "no letter that is not sounded; and...that there be no distinct sounds in the language without letters to express them" (BF, Scheme, 173; emphasis in original). Webster's "Essay" lamented that in English, "the same letters are often representing different sounds, and the same sounds often expressed by different letters" (NW, Dissertations, 351).
39. BF to Mary Stevenson, July 20, 1768, PBF, 15.178.
40. Following in the tradition of BF, the American spelling reformer Thomas Emeeke declared in 1813 that an English speaker must "trust to his memory like the Chinese, whose alphabet contains thousands of characters." Embree believed that the Roman alphabet required 273 combinations of letters to make all the "sounds" in the English language; he suggested an alphabet that could do it in 13 (Thomas Emeeke, Orthography Corrected [Philadelphia, 1813]). Joseph Neef, in his 1806 American spelling reform proposal, writing in the voice of a fictional Cadmus, attacked Webster's modest spelling reform as he cited an American schoolmaster. "You pity the Chinese, you laugh at the truly laughable absurdity of their writing system. But first look at your own writing system. Is not the knowledge of which I am speaking, an exclusive appendage among your literati, as well as in China? Nay, even your learned people do not themselves agree about the matter; since they gravely and very ridiculously dispute, whether honour, favor, has, should not rather be spelled honor, favor, lay, and so forth" (Neef, Sketch of a Plan and Method of Education [Philadelphia, 1808], 34). For nationalist reformers like Ewing, the Chinese language, paradoxically had its virtues too. Even as Franklin and others laughed and disdained the Chinese language as cumbersome, chaotic, and ultimately meaningless, many Americans nonetheless admired the fluid and closed nature of the Chinese written language. By refusing to change their script, the Chinese had managed to conserve the language itself, to halt the creep of local dialects and to block foreign imports. A writer in Partre in 1816 said: "The Chinese adopt no custom to improve their language; they do not take advantage of the experience of others: and their language contains no words derived from a foreign source. Hence their dialect is unadulterated; but who would weigh so frivolous an advantage against their ignorance so gross, so long continued, and so deeply rooted? Yet their example may so far supply us with a motive for imitation as to keep our language from being deformed by the affected use of foreign terms in their primitive state and attitude" ("On Language," Partre, December 29, 1816).
41. BF, Scheme, 170–73.
42. NW. Dissertations, 304–06. Webster’s reformed spelling looks very much like that of James Elphinston, whose 1787 treatise English Speech and Spelling (a copy of which Webster borrowed from Franklin) attempted to fix “English Speech in English Orthography to secure the unfolding Jester or Truth” (Elphinston, English Speech). On NW’s borrowing Elphinston from BF, see NW to BF, undated, NLNW 2, 454.
43. BF to NW, June 18, 1786, NLNW, 2, 457. Webster wrote, “He thinks himself too old to pursue the plan; but has honored me with the offer of the manuscript and types, and expressed a strong desire that I should undertake the task” (Dissertations, 407). Franklin’s “dictionary” may have really only been a short word list (see editor’s note in PBF, 15:173–74). Webster’s plan would not require Franklin’s special types, since Webster preferred placing accent marks over existing letters to the invention of new letters. “If any objection can be made to this scheme,” Webster wrote of Franklin’s proposal, “it is the substitution of new characters, for th, sh, ng, &c.” For those, Webster proposed instead “a small stroke, connecting the letters . . . as these combinations would thus become single letters, with precise definite sounds and suitable names” (NW, Dissertations, 405).
44. Although Franklin’s spelling scheme was not nationalistic, Christopher Lecky argues persuasively that it did have a political purpose: “the occultation of class” (“Phonetics and Politics: Franklin’s Alphabet as a Political Design,” Eighteenth-Century Studies 18 (1984): 1–34).
45. NW to Timothy Pickering, May 25, 1786, LNW, 52.
46. NW. Dissertations, 387–98; emphasis mine in the first quote, NW’s in the second. In his “Essay,” Webster supplied a list of advantages nearly identical to the one he had sent Pickering three years before, adding only that his reform would also greatly reduce the price of books since it “would diminish the number of letters about one sixteenth or eighteenth.” Webster wasn’t the only American to propose a new national alphabet. In 1791 Joseph Chambers published “An Attempt to Form a Complete System of Letters,” whose success he assured, believed, because “The united states have exhibited to the world a singular felicity, in shaking off the shackles of antiquated prejudices” (Joseph G. Chambers, Elements of Orthography, or an Attempt to Form a Complete System of Letters, Universal Arsenal and Columbian Magazine (August 1791): 114).
47. When Chambers published his proposed in book form in 1812, he dedicated it “To the Most Excellent President, and Honorable Congress of the United States: And to the Worthy Governors, and Legislators of the States; Together with all other Eminent and Patriotic Citizens,” hoping that his system would be considered “an experiment worthy of, and especially adapted to the characteristic liberality of sentiment, and enterprising genius of United America” (Joseph G. Chambers, Elements of Orthography [Zanesville, Ohio, 1812]). In 1788 James Ewing proposed a patronymically named Columbusian alphabet of thirty-three characters and, nine years later, Abner Kneeland expressed confidence that Americans would abandon their twenty-six-letter alphabet in favor of his set of thirty-five characters because “the United States has changed from a Monarchical government to a republican, from dependence to independence. And why not change in other respects?” (James Ewing, The Columbusian Alphabet [Trenton, N.J.: Matthias Day, 1798]; Abner Kneeland, A Brief Sketch of a New System of Orthography [Waltham, N.H., 1807]; Joseph Neef, Sketch of Plan and Method of Education [Philadelphia, 1893], 35). The same year William Pelham suggested borrowing the French system of accenting vowels and, in his proposal, supplied the entire accenting text of Samuel Johnson’s Rasselas as a demonstration (William Pelham, A System of Notation [Boston: W. Pelham, 1808]). In 1813 Thomas Embree promoted a corrected orthography closely modeled after Franklin’s own, and three years later, Samuel Boyle proposed a twenty-six-character alphabet that, demonstrating a prepossession failure of imagination, invented no new characters, instead using the numbers 1 through 9, “2, aw, 3 ah, 4 hoo, 5 eth, 6 the, 7 eth, 8 eh, 9 eng” (Thomas Embree, Orthography Corrected [Philadelphia: Dennis Heartt, 1813]. Samuel Boyle, Orthography Corrected [Richmond, Va., 1816], 7). A notable exception to the nationalist tenor of the pre-1812 proposals is Jonathan Fisher’s “philosophical alphabet.” Fisher graduated from Harvard in 1795 and the same year, while studying at Harvard Divinity School, invented his philosophical alphabet in order to save paper. He used it all his life as a pastor in Blue Hill, Maine. See Rand N. Smith, “The Philosophical Alphabet of Jonathan Fisher,” American Speech 50 (1975): 36–49; Rand N. Smith, The Language of Jonathan Fisher, 1788–1847 (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1985); and Mary Ellen Chase, Jonathan Fisher: Maine Parson, 1788–1847 (New York: Macmillan, 1945).
50. Mary Stevenson to BF, September 20, 1786, Writings of Benjamin Franklin, 5:215. NW. Dissertations, 394, 395. NW to Mrs. Mary Cox, April 14, 1786, NLNW, 1:144. On the prominent backing Webster had lined up, see Timothy Pickering to John Gardner, July 4, 1786. As Webster wrote to Washington, “Should I ever attempt it, I have no doubt that I should be patronized by many distinguished characters” (NW to GW, March 31, 1786). BF to NW, June 18, 1786. To Franklin Webster replied that he was “more and more convinced from the present sentiments and spirits of the Americans that a judicious attempt to introduce it needs but the support of a few eminent characters to be carried into effect” (NW to BF, June 23, 1786, LNW, 32–53). Ramsay was a particular supporter of Webster’s. In his memoirs, Webster called Ramsay “a gentleman who, through life, manifested a particular friendship for N.W.” (ANW, 144), and when Ramsay published his popular history of the American Revolution, in 1769, he praised Webster: “The principles of their mother tongue were first unfolded to the Americans since the revolution by their countryman Webster. Pursuing an unbroken track, he has made discoveries in the genius and construction of the English language, which had escaped the researches of preceding philologists” (The History of the American Revolution [Philadelphia, 1798], 2:392).
think that they can receive instructions from that quarter" (Timothy Pickering to NW, July 29, 1786). The financial consequences for Webster were newly serious. On October 26, 1789, he married Rebecca Greenleaf, and pledged to support his family properly. He wrote in his diary on his wedding day, "I begin a profession, at a late period of life," and pledged himself to earn a living as a lawyer (ANW, October 26, 1786). NW to GW, September 2, 1790, LNW, 85–86. Review of NW, Collection of Essays and Fugitive Writings, in Universal Asylum and Columbian Magazine (November 1790): 333.


54. Ebenezer Hazard to Jeremy Belknap, August 26, 1788, NNLW, 1:185.

55. NW, A Grammatical Institute, 3. NW, Dissertations, 405–6.
2. A New Name for the United States? 1803

In 1800 the United States of America had grown to encompass 16 states and 5.3 million residents. As a young and expanding nation, the US struggled to forge its own political path separate from the traditional European powers such as Great Britain, France, or Spain. In the early nineteenth century Dr. Charles Mitchell of New York City suggested that a new name, “Fredonia,” would also help the United States forge a distinct identity. Although Dr. Mitchell was quite serious about his proposal, lexicographer John Pickering described the idea as “deservedly ridiculed” in 1816. Perhaps the idea does seem bizarre to us today, but Mitchell’s idea speaks to the newness of the American nation and the various ideas for its improvement in the public sphere. After all, in 1789 the Senate agreed to use the title, “His Highness the President of the United States of America, and Protector of the Liberties.” The House of Representatives rejected that title as too aristocratic, but that struggle suggests that “Fredonia” was not the only strange idea swirling around the political culture of the Early Republic.

THE portion of terraqueous globe comprehended by the great Lakes, the Saint Lawrence, the Ocean and the Mississippi, has no general denomination by which it can be conveniently distinguished in geography. Its subdivisions and local names are appropriate enough and sufficiently well understood. But there is still wanting one broad and universal appellation, to designate and characterize the whole appropriated and unappropriated territory of the United States.

It was a great oversight in the Convention of 1787, that they did not give a name to the country for which they devised a frame of government. Its citizens are suffering every day for lack of such a generic term. Destitute of a proper name for their own soil and region, they express themselves vaguely and awkwardly on the subject. By some it is termed “United States;” this however is a political, and not a geographical title. By others it is called “America,” and the inhabitants “Americans.” But these epithets equally belong to Labrador and Paraguay and their natives. “New England” and “New-Englanders” are two uncouth terms employed by certain other writers and speakers. In some parts of Europe, we have been distinguished as “Anglo-Americans;” and this appellation is in some respects worse, and in no respect better than either of the others.

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34 Building the United States

What are we to do? Are we never to have a geographical distinction? Is the land to be forever called “United States,” and its people “United States men?” And even then, on a supposition that the union should cease must the region it occupies be nameless? It is in the power of the people to find and adopt fitting names for their country and themselves, by common consent. These ought to be expressive, concise, nervous and poetical. And any new word possessing these qualities, may serve to designate this part of the planet we inhabit – From such a word as a radical term, all others proper for distinguishing the people, &c. may be derived.

To supply this sad deficiency in our geographical and national nomenclature, the following project is respectfully submitted to the consideration of our map-makers, engravers, printers, legislators and men of letters. The authors of it are citizens of the United States, and are zealous for their prosperity, honour, and reputation. They wish them to possess a name among the nations of the earth. They lament that hitherto and at present the country is destitute of one.

Let the extent of land ceded to our nation by the treaty of 1783, be distinguished henceforward on charts, globes, and in elementary books by the name of

FREDON:

the etymology of this is obvious and agreeable: it may mean a free-gift; or any thing done freely; or the land of free privileges and doings. This is the proper term to be employed in all grave, solemn, and prose compositions, and in ordinary conversation. It is better adapted than “Albion” is to England.

If, however, any of the favorites of the Muses desire a poetical name for this tract of earth, it is easy to supply them with one which sounds and pronounces to great advantage. Such an one is

FREDONIA:

which will meet the ear more excellently than Italia, Gallia, Parthia, Hispania, Germania, or even Britannia itself. – America and Columbia will retain their present signification of extending to the whole Western hemisphere.

The citizens and inhabitants of the United States when spoken of generally, without reference to any particular state, may be known and distinguished as

FREDONIANS:

And that such a person being asked in Europe or any other part of the world, from what country he comes or to what nation he belongs, may correctly and precisely answer that he is a FREDONIAN. And this will meet the ear
much more nobly than "a Frenchman, a Spaniard, a Portuguese," "a Turk" and the like.

Again, a monosyllabic name is perfectly easy to be obtained from the same root; and to him who thinks the last word too long or lofty, it will be wholly at his option to call himself

FREDE;

and in this respect he will put himself on a par with a "Mede" and "a Swede." Moreover, should an adjective be desired to qualify expressions and facilitate discourse, there is such a thing immediately ready for use in

FREDISH;

and thereby, we can speak of "a Fredish ship," or a "Fredish man," or a "Fredish manufacture or production," after the same manner and according to the same rule, by which we employ the adjectives, British, Spanish, Danish, Turkish, Turkish, and the like. Thus, our nation is in possession of a prosaic word for its whole territory, FREDON; a poetical word for the same, FREDONIA; a grave and sonorous generic title for its people, property and relations, FREDONIA; a short and colloquial appellation, FREDE; and a convenient universal epithet, FREDISH. A language so rich and copious is scarcely to be found; and it is hoped our citizens will make the most of it.

In case any of our countrymen should wish to express himself according to this novel dialect, the following is offered as an example, alluding to a recent subject of public discussion.

"It has been a favourite object with a certain class of men to involve FREDON in a war with Spain, France or both of them, about the right of deposit on the Mississippi. The outrageous conduct of the Intendant at New-Orleans was indeed very provoking, but the FREDONIAN SPIRIT, though roused by just indignation, was too temperate and magnanimous to rush immediately to arms. It was thought most wise and politic for the administration to attempt a negociation in the first instance, and accordingly, one of the FREDISH ships was ordered to be got in readiness to carry an envoy extraordinary from America to Europe. Should war become necessary for the national honour and security, our public enemies will find to their sorrow that the FREDES will make brave soldiers and gallant sailors. Never will they quit the hardy contest until their deeds shall be worthy of being recorded in immortal verse, equally honourable to the bards and the heroes of FREDONIA."

The radical word is also well adapted to songs and rhymes. And this is a great convenience and felicity in a national point of view. Observe, how prettily our poets can make it jingle: for instance, if the subject is warlike, then

56 Building the United States

"Their Chiefs, to glory lead on
The noble sons of FREDON."

Or if it is moral sublimity,

"Nor Plato, in his PHEDON
Excels the Sage of FREDON."

Should it be commercial Activity,

"All Nations have agreed on
The Enterprize of FREDON."

Perhaps it may refer to our exports; why then

"The Portuguese may feed on
The wheat and maize of FREDON."

It may be desirable to celebrate our Agriculture, as in the following distich,

"No land so good as FREDON
To scatter grain and seed on."

On the supposition that a swain wishes to compliment his country-women, he may inform them that

"The graceful Nymphs of FREDON
Surpass all Belles we read on."

And indeed if it is his desire to ejaculate in a serious strain, it may be written

"In this fair land of FREDON
May right and justice be done."

We give these as samples of what may be accomplished in this way, adding that the poet may easily contrast his country with SWEDEN, or compare it to EDEN, if he is puzzled for a rhyme.

On the whole, we recommend these words to the serious consideration and speedy adoption of our fellow-citizens; that our common and beloved portion of the earth, may thereby acquire a NAME, and be famous among the NATIONS.

M.
An eighth-generation Vermonter, Jake Jamieson was born in Berlin, Vermont, and grew up in nearby Waterbury, home of Ben & Jerry's ice cream. He graduated from the University of Vermont in 1996 with a degree in elementary education and a focus in English. He wrote the following essay while he was a student at the University of Vermont, but it has since been updated. As a believer in the old axiom "If it isn't broken, don't fix it," Jamieson feels that the official-English crowd wants to fix a system that seems to be working just fine. In this essay, he tackles the issue of legislating English as the official language for the United States.

1. A common conception among many people in this country is that the United States is a giant cultural “melting pot.” For these people, the melting pot is a place where people from other places come together and bathe in the warm waters of assimilation. For many others, however, the melting pot analogy doesn’t work. They see the melting pot as a giant cauldron into which immigrants are placed; here their cultures, values, and backgrounds are boiled away in the scalding waters of discrimination. One major point of contention in this debate is language: Should immigrants be pushed toward learning English or encouraged to retain their native tongues?

2. Those who argue that the melting pot analogy is valid believe that people who come to America do so willingly and should be expected to become a part of its culture instead of hanging on to their past. For them, the expectation that people who come to this country will celebrate this country’s holidays, dress as we do, embrace our values, and most importantly speak our language is not unreasonable. They believe that assimilation offers the only way for everyone in this country to live together in harmony and the only way to dissipate the tensions that inevitably arise when cultures clash. A major problem with this argument, however, is that no one seems to be able to agree on what exactly constitutes “our way” of doing things.

3. Not everyone in America is of the same religious persuasion or has the same set of values, and different people affect vastly different styles of dress. There are so many sets of variables that it would be hard to defend the argument that there is only one culture in the United States. What seems to be the most widespread constant in our country is that much of the population speaks English, and a major movement is being staged in favor of making English the official language. Making English America’s official language would, according to William F. Buckley, involve making it the only language in which government business can be
conducted on any level, from federal dealings right down to the local level (71). Many reasons are given to support the notion that making English the official language is a good idea and that it is exactly what this country needs, especially in the face of growing multilingualism. Indeed, one Los Angeles school recently documented sixty different languages spoken in the homes of its students (National Education Association, par. 4).

Supporters of English-only contend that all government communication must be in English. Because communication is absolutely necessary for a democracy to survive, they believe that the only way to ensure the existence of our nation is to make sure a common language exists. Making English official would ensure that all government business, from ballots to official forms to judicial hearings, would have to be conducted in English. According to former senator and presidential candidate Bob Dole, “Promoting English as our national language is not an act of hostility but a welcoming act of inclusion.” He goes on to state that while immigrants are encouraged to continue speaking their native languages, “thousands of children [are] failing to learn the language, English, that is the ticket to the ‘American Dream’” (qtd. in Donegan 51).

For those who do not subscribe to this way of thinking, however, this type of legislation is anything but the “welcoming act of inclusion” that it is described to be. For them, anyone attempting to regulate language is treading dangerously close to the First Amendment and must have a hidden agenda of some type. Why, it is asked, make a language official when it is already firmly entrenched and widely used in this country and, according to United States General Accounting Office statistics, 99.96 percent of all federal documents are already in English without legislation to mandate it (Underwood, par. 2)? According to author James Crawford, the answer is quite plain: discrimination. He states that “it is certainly more respectable to discriminate by language than by race.” He points out that “most people are not sensitive to language discrimination in this nation, so it is easy to argue that you’re doing someone a favor by making them speak English” (qtd. in Donegan 51). English-only legislation has been described as bigoted, anti-immigrant, mean-spirited, and steeped in nativism by those who oppose it, and some go so far as to say that this type of legislation will not foster better communication, as is the claim, but will instead encourage a “fear of being subsumed by a growing ‘foreignness’ in our midst” (Underwood, “At Issue” 65).
6. For example, when a judge in Texas ruled that a mother was abusing her five-year-old girl by speaking to her only in Spanish, an uproar ensued. This ruling was accompanied by the statement that by talking to her in a language other than English, the mother was “abusing that child and…relegating her to the position of house maid.” This statement was condemned by the National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE) for “labeling the Spanish language as abuse.” The judge, Samuel C. Kiser, subsequently apologized to the housekeepers of the country, adding that he held them “in the highest esteem,” but stood firm on his ruling (qtd. in Donegan 51). One might notice that he went out of his way to apologize to the housekeepers he might have offended but saw no need to apologize to the hundreds of thousands of Spanish speakers whose language had just been belittled in a nationally publicized case.

7. This tendency of official-English proponents to put down other languages is one that shows up again and again, even though it is maintained that they have nothing against other languages or the people who speak them. If there is no malice toward other languages, why is the use of any language other than English tantamount to lunacy according to an almost constant barrage of literature and editorial opinions? In a recent publication of the “New Year’s Resolutions” of various conservative organizations, a group called U. S. English, Inc., stated that the U. S. government was not doing its job of convincing immigrants that they “must learn English to succeed in this country.” Instead, according to this publication, “in a bewildering display of irrationality, the U. S. government makes it possible to vote, file a tax return, get married, obtain a driver’s license, and become a U. S. citizen in many languages” (Moore 46).

8. Now, according to this mindset, not only is speaking any language other than English abusive, but it is also irrational and bewildering. What is this world coming to when people want to speak and make transactions in their native language? Why do they refuse to change and become more like us? Why can’t immigrants see that speaking English is right and anything else is wrong? These and many other questions are implied by official-English proponents as they discuss the issue.

9. Conservative attorney David Price wrote that Official-English legislation is a good idea because many English-speaking Americans prefer “out of pride and convenience to speak their native language on the job” (13). Not only does this statement imply that the pride and convenience of non-English-speaking Americans is unimportant, but that their native tongues
are not as important as English. The scariest prospect of all is that this opinion is quickly
gaining popularity all around the country.

10. As of early 1996, six official-English bills and one amendment to the Constitution have
been proposed in the House and Senate. There are twenty-two states, including Alabama,
California, and Arizona, that have made English their official language, and more are debating
it every day (Donegan 52). An especially disturbing fact about this debate is that official-
English laws always seem to be linked to other anti-immigrant legislation, such as proposals to
“limit immigrant and restrict government benefits to immigrants” (“English-Only Law Faces
Test” 1).

11. Although official-English proponents maintain that their bid for language legislation is
in the best interest of immigrants, the facts tend to show otherwise. A decision has to be made
in this country about what kind of message we will send to the rest of the world. Do we plan to
allow everyone in this country the freedom of speech that we profess to cherish, or will we
decide to reserve it only for those who speak the same language as we do? Will we hold firm to
our belief that everyone is deserving of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness in this country?
Or will we show the world that we believe in these things only when they pertain to ourselves
and people like us?

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How to Tame a Wild Tongue

"We're going to have to control your tongue," the dentist says, pulling out all the metal from my mouth. Silver bits plop and tinkle into the basin. My mouth is a motherlode.

The dentist is cleaning out my roots. I get a whiff of the stench when I gasp. "I can't cap that tooth yet, you're still draining," he says.

"We're going to have to do something about your tongue," I hear the anger rising in his voice. My tongue keeps pushing out the wads of cotton, pushing back the drills, the long thin needles. "I've never seen anything as strong or as stubborn," he says. And I think, how do you tame a wild tongue, train it to be quiet, how do you bridle and saddle it? How do you make it lie down?

"Who is to say that robbing a people of its language is less violent than war?"
—Ray Gwyn Smith

I remember being caught speaking Spanish at recess—that was good for three licks on the knuckles with a sharp ruler. I remember being sent to the corner of the classroom for "talking back" to the Anglo teacher when all I was trying to do was tell her how to pronounce my name. "If you want to be American, speak 'American.' If you don't like it, go back to Mexico where you belong."

"I want you to speak English. Pa' ballar buen trabajo tienes que saber hablar el inglés bien. Qué vale toda tu educación si
How to Tame a Wild Tongue

*todavía hablas inglés con un 'accent,'" my mother would say, mortified that I spoke English like a Mexican. At Pan American University, I, and all Chicano students were required to take two speech classes. Their purpose: to get rid of our accents.

Attacks on one's form of expression with the intent to censor are a violation of the First Amendment. *El Anglo con cara de inocente nos arrancó la lengua.* Wild tongues can't be tamed, they can only be cut out.

Overcoming the Tradition of Silence

_Abogadas, escupimos el oscuro._

_Peleando con nuestra propia sombra_ el silencio nos sepulta.

*En boca cerrada no entran moscas.* "Flies don't enter a closed mouth" is a saying I kept hearing when I was a child. *Ser habladora* was to be a gossip and a liar, to talk too much. *Muchachitas bien criadas,* well-bred girls don't answer back. *Es una falta de respeto* to talk back to one's mother or father. I remember one of the sins I'd recite to the priest in the confession box the few times I went to confession; talking back to my mother, *hablar pa' trás,* repelar. *Hocicona,* rebelona, chismosa, having a big mouth, questioning, carrying tales are all signs of being *mal criada.* In my culture they are all words that are derogatory if applied to women—I've never heard them applied to men.

The first time I heard two women, a Puerto Rican and a Cuban, say the word "*nosotras,*" I was shocked. I had not known the word existed. Chicanas use *nosotras* whether we're male or female. We are robbed of our female being by the masculine plural. Language is a male discourse.

*And our tongues have become dry* the wilderness has dried out our tongues and we have forgotten speech.

—Irena Klepfisz

—even our own people, other Spanish speakers *nos quieren poner candados en la boca.* They would hold us back with their bag of *reglas de academia.*

How to Tame a Wild Tongue

Oyé como ladra: el lenguaje de la frontera

_Quien tiene boca se equitoca._

—Mexican saying

"Pochó, cultural traitor, you're speaking the oppressor's language by speaking English, you're ruining the Spanish language." I have been accused by various Latinos and Latinas. Chicano Spanish is considered by the purist and by most Latinos deficient, a mutilation of Spanish.

But Chicano Spanish is a border tongue which developed naturally. Change, *evolución,* *enriquecimiento de palabras nuevas por invención o adopción* have created variants of Chicano Spanish, *un nuevo lenguaje.* *Un lenguaje que corresponde a un modo de vivir.* Chicano Spanish is not incorrect, it is a living language.

For a people who are neither Spanish nor live in a country in which Spanish is the first language; for a people who live in a country in which English is the reigning tongue but who are not Anglo; for a people who cannot entirely identify with either standard (formal, Castilian) Spanish nor standard English, what recourse is left to them but to create their own language? A language which they can connect their identity to, one capable of communicating the realities and values true to themselves—a language with terms that are neither _español ni inglés,_ but both. We speak a patois, a forged tongue, a variation of two languages.

Chicano Spanish stems out of the Chicanos' need to identify ourselves as a distinct people. We needed a language with which we could communicate with ourselves, a secret language. For some of us, language is a homeland closer than the Southwest—for many Chicanos today live in the Midwest and the East. And because we are a complex, heterogeneous people, we speak many languages. Some of the languages we speak are:

1. Standard English
2. Working class and slang English
3. Standard Spanish
4. Standard Mexican Spanish
5. North Mexican Spanish dialect
6. Chicano Spanish (Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California have regional variations)
7. Tex-Mex
8. *Pachuco* (called *caló*)
My "home" tongues are the languages I speak with my sister and brothers, with my friends. They are the last five listed, with 6 and 7 being closest to my heart. From school, the media and job situations, I've picked up standard and working class English. From Mamagrande Locha and from reading Spanish and Mexican literature, I've picked up Standard Spanish and Standard Mexican Spanish. From los recién llegados, Mexican immigrants, and braceros, I learned the North Mexican dialect. With Mexicans I'll try to speak either Standard Mexican Spanish or the North Mexican dialect. From my parents and Chicanos living in the Valley, I picked up Chicano Texas Spanish, and I speak it with my mom, younger brother (who married a Mexican and who rarely mixes Spanish with English), aunts and older relatives.

With Chicanas from Nuevo México or Arizona I will speak Chicano Spanish a little, but often they don't understand what I am saying. With most California Chicanas I speak entirely in English (unless I forget). When I first moved to San Francisco, I'd rattle off something in Spanish, unintentionally embarrassing them. Often it is only with another Chicana tejana that I can talk freely.

Words distorted by English are known as anglicisms or pochismos. The pocho is an anglicized Mexican or American of Mexican origin who speaks Spanish with an accent characteristic of North Americans and who distorts and reconstructs the language according to the influence of English. Tex-Mex, or Spanglish, comes most naturally to me. I may switch back and forth from English to Spanish in the same sentence or in the same word. With my sister and my brother Nune and with Chicana tejana contemporaries I speak in Tex-Mex.

From kids and people my own age I picked up Pachuko. Pachuco (the language of the zoot suiters) is a language of rebellion, both against standard Spanish and standard English. It is a secret language. Adults of the culture and outsiders cannot understand it. It is made up of slang words from both English and Spanish. Ruca means girl or woman, vato means guy or dude, cule means no, simón means yes, churo is sure, talk is periqueter, pigionear means petting, que gacho means how nerdy, ponche ágila means watch out, death is called la pelona. Through lack of practice and not having others who can speak it, I've lost most of the Pachucito tongue.

Chicano Spanish

Chicanos, after 250 years of Spanish/Anglo colonization have developed significant differences in the Spanish we speak. We collapse two adjacent vowels into a single syllable and sometimes shift the stress in certain words such as maiz/maisy, cobete/cuete. We lose certain consonants when they appear between vowels: lado/lato, mojado/mojo. Chicanos from South Texas pronounced j as j as in jale (jale). Chicanos use "archaisms," words that are no longer in the Spanish language, words that have been evolved out. We say semos, true, baiga, ansina, and malden. We retain the "archaic" j as in jalad, that derives from an earlier b, (the French balar or the German balen which was lost to standard Spanish in the 16th century), but which is still found in several regional dialects such as the one spoken in South Texas. (Due to geography, Chicanos from the Valley of South Texas were cut off linguistically from other Spanish speakers. We tend to use words that the Spaniards brought over from Medieval Spain. The majority of the Spanish colonizers in Mexico and the Southwest came from Extremadura—Hernán Cortés was one of them—and Andalucía. Andalucians pronounce ll like a j, and their d's tend to be absorbed by adjacent vowels: tirado becomes tirao. They brought el lenguaje popular, dialectos y regionalismos.4)

Chicanos and other Spanish speakers also shift ll to y and z to s.5 We leave out initial syllables, saying tar for estar, toy for estoy, bora for abora (cubanos and puertorriqueños also leave out initial letters of some words.) We also leave out the final syllable such as pa for para. The intervocalic y, the ll as in tortilla, ella, botella, gets replaced by tortia or tortiya, ea, bota. We add an additional syllable at the beginning of certain words: atocar for tocar, agastar for gastar. Sometimes we'll say lavaste las vacías, other times lavates (substituting the ates verb endings for the ate).

We use anglicisms, words borrowed from English: bola from ball, cajeta from carpet, máquina de lavar (instead of lavadora) from washing machine. Tex-Mex argot, created by adding a Spanish sound at the beginning or end of an English word such as cookin' for cook, watchin' for watch, parkin' for park, and rapin' for rape, is the result of the pressures on Spanish speakers to adapt to English. We don't use the word vosotros/as or its accompanying verb form. We don't say claro (to mean yes), imaginete, or me
How to Tame a Wild Tongue

emociona, unless we picked up Spanish from Latinas, out of a book, or in a classroom. Other Spanish-speaking groups are going through the same, or similar, development in their Spanish.

Linguistic Terrorism

Deslenguadas. Somos los del español deficiente. We are your linguistic nightmare, your linguistic aberration, your linguistic mestizaje, the subject of your burla. Because we speak with tongues of fire we are culturally crucified. Racially, culturally and linguistically somos buérfanos—we speak an orphan tongue.

Chicanas who grew up speaking Chicano Spanish have internalized the belief that we speak poor Spanish. It is illegitimate, a bastard language. And because we internalize how our language has been used against us by the dominant culture, we use our language differences against each other.

Chicana feminists often skirt around each other with suspicion and hesitation. For the longest time I couldn’t figure it out. Then it dawned on me. To be close to another Chicana is like looking into the mirror. We are afraid of what we’ll see there. Pena. Shame. Low estimation of self. In childhood we are told that our language is wrong. Repeated attacks on our native tongue diminish our sense of self. The attacks continue throughout our lives.

Chicanas feel uncomfortable talking in Spanish to Latinas, afraid of their censure. Their language was not outlawed in their countries. They had a whole lifetime of being immersed in their native tongue; generations, centuries in which Spanish was a first language, taught in school, heard on radio and TV, and read in the newspaper.

If a person, Chicana or Latina, has a low estimation of my native tongue, she also has a low estimation of me. Often with mexicanas y latinas we’ll speak English as a neutral language. Even among Chicanas we tend to speak English at parties or conferences. Yet, at the same time, we’re afraid the other will think we’re agringadas because we don’t speak Chicano Spanish. We oppress each other trying to out-Chicano each other, vying to be the “real” Chicanas, to speak like Chicanos. There is no one Chicano language just as there is no one Chicano experience. A monolingual Chicana whose first language is English or Spanish is just as much a Chicana as one who speaks several variants of Spanish. A Chicana from Michigan or Chicago or Detroit is just as much a Chicana as one from the Southwest. Chicano Spanish is as diverse linguistically as it is regionally.

By the end of this century, Spanish speakers will comprise the biggest minority group in the U.S., a country where students in high schools and colleges are encouraged to take French classes because French is considered more “cultured.” But for a language to remain alive it must be used. By the end of this century English, and not Spanish, will be the mother tongue of most Chicanos and Latinos.

So, if you want to really hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself. Until I can accept as legitimate Chicano Texas Spanish, Tex-Mex and all the other languages I speak, I cannot accept the legitimacy of myself. Until I am free to write bilingually and to switch codes without having always to translate, while I still have to speak English or Spanish when I would rather speak Spanglish, and as long as I have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate.

I will no longer be made to feel ashamed of existing. I will have my voice: Indian, Spanish, white. I will have my serpent’s tongue—my woman’s voice, my sexual voice, my poet’s voice. I will overcome the tradition of silence.

My fingers
move sly against your palm
Like women everywhere, we speak in code . . .
—Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz

“Vistas,” corridos, y comida: My Native Tongue

In the 1960s, I read my first Chicano novel. It was City of Night by John Rechy, a gay Texan, son of a Scottish father and a Mexican mother. For days I walked around in stunned amazement that a Chicano could write and could get published. When I read I Am Joaquin I was surprised to see a bilingual book by
How to Tame a Wild Tongue

a Chicano in print. When I saw poetry written in Tex-Mex for the first time, a feeling of pure joy flashed through me. I felt like we really existed as a people. In 1971, when I started teaching High School English to Chicano students, I tried to supplement the required texts with works by Chicanos, only to be reprimanded and forbidden to do so by the principal. He claimed that I was supposed to teach "American" and English literature. At the risk of being fired, I swore my students to secrecy and slipped in Chicano short stories, poems, a play. In graduate school, while working toward a Ph.D., I had to "argue" with one advisor after the other, semester after semester, before I was allowed to make Chicano literature an area of focus.

Even before I read books by Chicanos or Mexicans, it was the Mexican movies I saw at the drive-in—the Thursday night special of $1.00 a carload—that gave me a sense of belonging. "Vámonos a las vistas," my mother would call out and we'd all—grandmother, brother, sister and cousins—squeeze into the car. We'd wolf down chile and bologna white bread sandwiches while watching Pedro Infante in melodramatic tear-jerkers like Nosotros los pobres, the first "real" Mexican movie (that was not an imitation of European movies). I remember seeing Cuando los hijos se van and surmising that all Mexican movies played up the love a mother has for her children and what ungrateful sons and daughters suffer when they are not devoted to their mothers. I remember the singing-type "westerns" of Jorge Negrete and Miguel Aceves Mejía. When watching Mexican movies, I felt a sense of homecoming as well as alienation. People who were to amount to something didn't go to Mexican movies, or bailes or tune their radios to bolero, rancherita, and corrido music.

The whole time I was growing up, there was norteño music sometimes called North Mexican border music, or Tex-Mex music, or Chicano music, or cantina (bar) music. I grew up listening to conjuntos, three- or four-piece bands made up of folk musicians playing guitar, bajo sexto, drums and button accordion, which Chicanos had borrowed from the German immigrants who had come to Central Texas and Mexico to farm and build breweries. In the Rio Grande Valley, Steve Jordan and Little Joe Hernández were popular, and Flaco Jiménez was the accordion king. The rhythms of Tex-Mex music are those of the polka, also adapted from the Germans, who in turn had borrowed the polka from the Czechs and Bohemians.

I remember the hot, sultry evenings when corridos—songs of love and death on the Texas-Mexican borderlands—reverberated out of cheap amplifiers from the local cantinas and wafted in through my bedroom window.

Corridos first became widely used along the South Texas/Mexican border during the early conflict between Chicanos and Anglos. The corridos are usually about Mexican heroes who do valiant deeds against the Anglo oppressors. Pancho Villa's song, "La cucaracha," is the most famous one. Corridos of John F. Kennedy and his death are still very popular in the Valley. Older Chicanos remember Lydia Mendoza, one of the great border corrido singers who was called la Gloria de Tejas. Her "El tango negro," sung during the Great Depression, made her a singer of the people. The everpresent corridos narrated one hundred years of border history, bringing news of events as well as entertainment. These folk musicians and folk songs are our chief cultural mythmakers, and they made our hard lives seem bearable.

I grew up feeling ambivalent about our music. Country-western and rock-and-roll had more status. In the 50s and 60s, for the slightly educated and agringado Chicanos, there existed a sense of shame at being caught listening to our music. Yet I couldn't stop my feet from thumping to the music, could not stop humming the words, nor hide from myself the exhilaration I felt when I heard it.

There are more subtle ways that we internalize identification, especially in the forms of images and emotions. For me food and certain smells are tied to my identity, to my homeland. Woodsmoke curling up to an immense blue sky; woodsmoke perfuming my grandmother's clothes, her skin. The stench of cow manure and the yellow patches on the ground; the crack of a .22 rifle and the rick of cordeles. Homemade white cheese sizzling in a pan, melting inside a folded tortilla. My sister Hilda's hot, spicy menudo, chile colorado making it deep red, pieces of panza and hominy floating on top. My brother Carito barbecuing fajas in the backyard. Even now, 3,000 miles away, I can see my mother spicing the ground beef, pork and venison with chile. My mouth salivates at the thought of the hot steaming tamales I would be eating if I were home.
Si le preguntas a mi mamá, "¿Qué eres?"

"Identity is the essential core of who we are as individuals, the conscious experience of the self inside."
—Kaufman

Nosotros los Chicanos straddle the borderlands. On one side of us, we are constantly exposed to the Spanish of the Mexicans, on the other side we hear the Anglos' incessant clamoring so that we forget our language. Among ourselves we don't say nosotros los americanos, o nosotros los españoles, o nosotros los hispanos. We say nosotros los mexicanos (by mexicanos we do not mean citizens of Mexico; we do not mean a national identity, but a racial one). We distinguish between mexicanos del otro lado and mexicanos de este lado. Deep in our hearts we believe that being Mexican has nothing to do with which country one lives in. Being Mexican is a state of soul—not one of mind, not one of citizenship. Neither eagle nor serpent, but both. And like the ocean, neither animal respects borders.

Dime con quien andas y te dirá quien eres.
(Tell me who your friends are and I'll tell you who you are.)
—Mexican saying

Si le preguntas a mi mamá, "¿Qué eres?" te dirá, "Soy mexicana." My brothers and sister say the same. I sometimes will answer "soy mexicana" and at others will say "soy Chicana" o "soy tejana." But I identified as "Raza" before I ever identified as "mexicana" or "Chicana."

As a culture, we call ourselves Spanish when referring to ourselves as a linguistic group and when coping out. It is then that we forget our predominant Indian genes. We are 70 to 80% Indian. We call ourselves Hispanic or Spanish-American or Latin American or Latin when linking ourselves to other Spanish-speaking peoples of the Western hemisphere and when coping out. We call ourselves Mexican-American to signify we are neither Mexican nor American, but more the noun "American" than the adjective "Mexican" (and when coping out).

Chicanos and other people of color suffer economically for not acculturating. This voluntary (yet forced) alienation makes for psychological conflict, a kind of dual identity—we don't identify with the Anglo-American cultural values and we don't totally identify with the Mexican cultural values. We are a synergy of two cultures with various degrees of Mexicaniness or Angloiness. I have so internalized the borderland conflict that sometimes I feel like one cancels out the other and we are zero, nothing, no one. A veces no soy nada ni nadie. Pero basta cuando no lo soy, lo soy.

When not coping out, when we know we are more than nothing, we call ourselves Mexican, referring to race and ancestry; mestizo when affirming both our Indian and Spanish (but we hardly ever own our Black ancestry); Chicano when referring to a politically aware people born and/or raised in the U.S.; Raza when referring to Chicanos; tejanos when we are Chicanos from Texas.

Chicanos did not know we were a people until 1965 when Cesar Chavez and the farm workers united and I Am Joaquin was published and la Raza Unida party was formed in Texas. With that recognition, we became a distinct people. Something momentous happened to the Chicano soul—we became aware of our reality and acquired a name and a language (Chicano Spanish) that reflected that reality. Now that we had a name, some of the fragmented pieces began to fall together—who we were, what we were, how we had evolved. We began to get glimpses of what we might eventually become.

Yet the struggle of identities continues, the struggle of borders is our reality still. One day the inner struggle will cease and a true integration take place. In the meantime, tenemos que bacer la lucha. ¿Quién está protegiendo los ranchos de mí gente? ¿Quién está tratando de cerrar la fisura entre la indígena y el blanco en nuestra sangre? El Chicano, sí, el Chico que anda como un ladrón en su propia casa.

Los Chicanos, how patient we seem, how very patient. There is the quiet of the Indian about us. We know how to survive. When other races have given up their tongue, we've kept ours. We know what it is to live under the hammer blow of the dominant norteamericano culture. But more than we count the blows, we count the days the weeks the years the centuries the
eons until the white laws and commerce and customs will rot in the deserts they've created, lie bleached. *Humildes* yet proud, *quietos* yet wild, *nosotros los mexicanos*—Chicanos will walk by the crumbling ashes as we go about our business. Stubborn, persevering, impenetrable as stone, yet possessing a malleability that renders us unbreakable, we, the *mestizas* and *mestizos*, will remain.
How to Tame a Wild Tongue


11. "Hispanic" is derived from Hispanis (España, a name given to the Iberian Peninsula in ancient times when it was a part of the Roman Empire) and is a term designated by the U.S. government to make it easier to handle us on paper.

12. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo created the Mexican-American in 1848.

13. Anglos, in order to alleviate their guilt for dispossessing the Chicano, stressed the Spanish part of us and perpetrated the myth of the Spanish Southwest. We have accepted the fiction that we are Hispanic, that is Spanish, in order to accommodate ourselves to the dominant culture and its abhorrence of Indians. Chávez, 88-91.
A socialist-feminist scholar, theorist, and essayist, bell hooks is one of the foremost public intellectuals of our time. Her first book, Ain’t I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism (1981), began when she was nineteen, offers a searing analysis of racial and sexual politics, racist practices within feminism, and the need for black women and their male allies to build a strong women’s movement. She expands this argument in Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center (1984), claiming that if feminism is to be a successful mass movement, it must include the voices of marginalized women. Hooks is the author of many other books on feminist struggle and the representations of black women in popular culture, including Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black (1990), Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics (1990), Breaking Bread (with Cornel West, 1991), Black Looks (1992), Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations (1994), and Killing Rage: Ending Racism (1995). Her essays treat a broad range of contemporary issues, such as date rape, censorship, misogyny in rap music, and sexist and racist violence in film. Known also for her writing about pedagogy, hooks asserts in Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom (1994) that only a radical teaching style will produce the kinds of new knowledge that will lead students toward revolutionary change for the twenty-first century.

Born Gloria Watkins, hooks grew up in the segregated South in a family and community that loved her but could not always understand her need to speak and write. She has written extensively and movingly about her struggles as an outspoken child often punished for insubordination. Her decision to adopt a pseudonym while writing an early volume of poetry was an important strategy that freed her voice. Bell Hooks was the name of her great-grandmother, a woman known for speaking her mind and a figure who represented for her granddaughter courage and strength; the choice to refuse capitalization was a means of distinguishing her voice from her grandmother’s. Hooks studied at Stanford University, where she wrote a Ph.D. dissertation on the novels of Toni Morrison. A teacher as well as a writer, she has taught at Oberlin College and Yale University and is currently Distinguished Professor of English at City College in New York. Much of her life story can be found in A Woman’s Right Song (1993), a collection of poems; Sisters of the Yam (1993), a study of “black women and self recovery”; Bone Black: Memories of Girlhood (1996), a coming-of-age memoir; and Wounds of Passion: A Writing Life (1997), an exploration of the links between sexuality and writing.

In all of her work, hooks addresses the urgent need for discursive and political resistance to sexism, racism, and cultural imperialism. The essay included here, “Talking Back,” reveals the complexities that many women of color experience in engendering language, silence, and voice. She calls upon black women to “talk back”—speak the truth, reject self-censorship—to family members and friendship networks, racist feminists, white supremacists. Black women traditionally have not been silenced, hooks asserts, revising Virginia Woolf’s and Tillie Olsen’s arguments across racial differences; instead, they have been taught a self-denying kind of domestic discourse, “the right speech of womanhood.” It is time to “change the nature and direction of our speech,” she proclaims, without dishonoring the women whose speech she both learned and unlearned—for “it was in this world of woman talk . . . that I made speech my birthright.”

In the world of the southern black community I grew up in, "back talk" and "talking back" meant speaking as an equal to an authority figure. It meant daring to disagree and sometimes it just meant having an opinion. In the "old school," children were meant to be seen and not heard. My great-grandparents, grandparents, and parents were all from the old school. To make yourself heard if you were a child was to invite punishment, the back-hand lick, the slap across the face that would catch you unaware, or the feel of switches stinging your arms and legs.

To speak then when one was not spoken to was a courageous act—an act of risk and daring. And yet it was hard not to speak in warm rooms where heated discussions began at the crack of dawn, women’s voices filling the air, giving orders, making threats, fussing. Black men may have excelled in the art of poetic preaching in the male-dominated church, but in the church of the home, where the everyday rules of how to live and how to act were established, it was black women who preached. There, black women spoke in a language so rich, so poetic, that it felt to me like being shut off from life, smothered to death if one were not allowed to participate.

It was in that world of woman talk (the men were often silent, often absent) that was born in me the craving to speak, to have a voice, and not just any voice but one that could be identified as belonging to me. To make my voice, I had to speak, to hear myself talk—and talk I did—daring in and out of grown folks’ conversations and dialogues, answering questions that were not directed at me, endlessly asking questions, making speeches. Needless to say, the punishments for these acts of speech seemed endless. They were intended to silence me—the child—and more particularly the girl.
child. Had I been a boy, they might have encouraged me to speak believing that I might someday be called to preach. There was no "calling" for talking girls, no legitimised rewarded speech. The punishments I received for “talking back” were intended to suppress all possibility that I would create my own speech. That speech was to be suppressed so that the “right speech of womanhood” would emerge.

Within feminist circles, silence is often seen as the sexist “right speech of womanhood”—the sign of woman’s submission to patriarchal authority. This emphasis on woman’s silence may be an accurate remembering of what has taken place in the households of women from WASP backgrounds in the United States, but in black communities (and diverse ethnic communities), women have not been silent. Their voices can be heard. Certainly for black women, our struggle has not been to emerge from silence into speech but to change the nature and direction of our speech, to make a speech that compels listeners, one that is heard.

Our speech, “the right speech of womanhood,” was often the soliloquy, the talking into thin air, the talking to ears that do not hear you—the talk that is simply not listened to. Unlike the black male preacher whose speech was to be heard, who was to be listened to, whose words were to be remembered, the voices of black women—giving orders, making threats, fusing—could be tuned out, could become a kind of background music, audible but not acknowledged as significant speech. Dialogue—the sharing of speech and recognition—took place not between mother and child or mother and male authority figure but among black women. I can remember watching fascinated as our mother talked with her mother, sisters, and women friends. The intimacy and intensity of their speech—the satisfaction they received from talking to another, the pleasure, the joy. It was in this world of women’s speech, loud talk, angry words, women with tongues quick and sharp, tender sweet tongues, touching our world with their words, that I made speech my birthright—and the right to voice, to authorship, a privilege I would not be denied. It was in that world and because of it that I came to dream of writing, to write.

Writing was a way to capture speech, to hold onto it, keep it close. And so I wrote down bits and pieces of conversations, confessing in cheap diaries that soon fell apart from too much handling, expressing the intensity of my sorrow, the anguish of speech—for I was always saying the wrong thing, asking the wrong questions. I could not confine my speech to the necessary corners and concerns of life. I hid these writings under my bed, in pillow stuffings, among faded underwear. When my sisters found and read them, they ridiculed me, mocked me, poked fun. I felt violated, ashamed, as if the secret parts of my self had been exposed, brought into the open, and hung like newly cleaned laundry, out in the air for everyone to see. The fear of exposure, the fear that one’s deepest emotions and innermost thoughts will be dismissed as mere nonsense, felt by so many young girls keeping diaries, holding and hiding speech, seems to me now one of the barriers that women have always needed and still need to destroy so that we are no longer pushed into secrecy or silence.

Despite my feelings of violation, of exposure, I continued to speak and write, choosing my hiding places well, learning to destroy work when no safe place could be found. I was never taught absolute silence. I was taught that it was important to speak but to talk a talk that was in itself a silence. Taught to speak and yet beware of the betrayal of too much heard speech, I experienced intense confusion and deep anxiety in my efforts to speak and write. Reciting poems at Sunday afternoon church service might be rewarded. Writing a poem (when one’s time could be “better” spent sweeping, ironing, learning to cook) was luxurious activity, indulged in at the expense of others. Questioning authority, raising issues that were not deemed appropriate subjects brought pain, punishments—like telling me I wanted to die before her she would lead you to end up in a mental institution. “Little girl,” I would be told, “if you go up right out there at Western State.”

Madness, not just physical abuse, was the punishment for too much talk if you were female. Yet even in this fear of madness haunted me, hanging over my writing. For this terrible madness which I feared, which I was sure was the destiny of daring women born to intense speech (after all, the authorities emphasized this point daily).

Safety and sanity were to be sacrificed if I was to experience that defiant speech. Though I railed them both, deep-seated fears and anxieties characterized my childhood days. I would speak but I would not ride a bike, play hardball, or play in the school play. Writing about the ways we were traumatized in our growing-up years, psychoanalyst Alice Miller makes the point in *For Your Own Good* that it is not clear why rather than backward, we move forward in the process of self-realization. Certainly, when I reflect on the trials of my growing-up years, the many punishments, I can see now that in resistance I learned to be vigilant in the nourishment of my spirit, to be tough, to courageously protect that spirit from forces that would crush it.

While punishing me, my parents often spoke about the necessity of breaking my spirit. Now when I ponder the silences, the voices that are not heard, the voices of those wounded and oppressed individuals who do not speak or write, I contemplate the acts of persecution, torture—the terrorism that breaks spirits, that makes struggle impossible. I write these words to bear witness to the primacy of resistance and the strength and power that emerges from sustained resistance and the profound conviction that these forces can be healing, can protect us from dehumanization and despair.

These early trials, wherein I learned to stand my ground, to keep my spirit intact, came vividly to mind after I published * Ain’t I A Woman*. The book was sharply and harshly criticized. While I had expected a climate of critical dialogue, I was not expecting a critical avalanche that had the power in its intensity to crush the spirit, to push one into silence. Since that time, I have had stories about black women, about women of color, who write and publish (even when the work is quite successful) having nervous breakdowns, being made mad because they cannot bear the ductive. Surely, the absence of a humane critical response has tremendous impact on the writer from any oppressed, colourized group who endeavors to speak. For us, true speaking is not solely an expression of creative power; it is an act of resistance, a political gesture that challenges politics of domination that would render us nameless and voiceless. As such, it is a courageous act—as such, it represents a threat. To those who wield oppressive power, that which is threatening must necessarily be wiped out, annihilated, silenced.

Recently, efforts by black women writers to call attention to our work serve to highlight both our presence and absence. Whenever I pursue women’s bookstores, I am struck not by the rapidly growing body of feminist writing by black women, but by the paucity of available published material. Those of us who write and are published
remain few in number. The context of silence is varied and multi-dimensional. Most obvious are the ways racism, sexism, and class exploitation act to suppress and silence. Less obvious are the inner struggles, the efforts made to gain the necessary confidence to write, to rewrite, to fully develop craft and skill—and the extent to which such efforts fail.

Although I have wished writing to be my life-work since childhood, it has been difficult for me to claim “writer” as part of that which identifies and shapes my everyday reality. Even after publishing books, I would often speak of wanting to be a writer as though these works did not exist. And though I would be told, “you are a writer,” I was not yet ready to fully affirm this truth. Part of myself was still held captive by dominating forces of history, of familial life that had charted a map of silence, of right speech. I had not completely let go of the fear of saying the wrong thing, of being punished. Somewhere in the deep recesses of my mind, I believed I could avoid both responsibility and punishment if I did not declare myself a writer.

One of the many reasons I chose to write using the pseudonym bell hooks, a family name (mother to Sarah Oldham, grandmother to Rosa Bell Oldham, great-grandmother to me), was to construct a writer-identity that would challenge and subdue all impulses leading me away from speech into silence. I was a young girl buying bubble gum at the corner store when I first really heard the full name bell hooks. I had just “talked back” to a grown person. Even now I can recall the surprised look, the mocking tones that informed me I must be kin to bell hooks—a sharp-tongued woman, a woman who spoke her mind, a woman who was not afraid to talk back. I claimed this legacy of defiance, of will, of courage, affirming my link to female ancestors who were bold and daring in their speech. Unlike my bold and daring mother and grandmother, who were not supportive of talking back, even though they were assertive and powerful in their speech, bell hooks as I discovered, claimed, and invented her was my ally, my support.

That initial act of talking back outside the home was empowering. It was the first of many acts of defiant speech that would make it possible for me to emerge as an independent thinker and writer. In retrospect, "talking back" became for me a rite of initiation, testing my courage, strengthening my commitment, preparing me for the days ahead—the days when writing, rejection notices, periods of silence, publication, ongoing development seem impossible but necessary.

Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible. It is that act of speech, of "talking back," that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of our movement from object to subject—the liberated voice.

1989
What to the Slave is the Fourth of July? (1842)
Frederick Douglass

Born into slavery in Maryland, Frederick Douglass was taught to read and write even though it was illegal for anyone to teach a slave those skills. Douglass went on to write that “knowledge is the pathway from slavery to freedom.” After two unsuccessful attempts to escape bondage Douglass finally succeeded in September 1838. During the 1850s, Frederick Douglass typically spent about six months of the year traveling and giving abolitionist lectures as well as speaking and writing from his home. On July 5, 1852, Douglass delivered an address commemorating the anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence to the Ladies of the Rochester Anti-Slavery Sewing Society.

1. Mr. President, Friends and Fellow Citizens:

2. . . . This, for the purpose of this celebration, is the 4th of July. It is the birthday of your National Independence, and of your political freedom. This, to you, is what the Passover was to the emancipated people of God. It carries your minds back to the day, and to the act of your great deliverance; and to the signs, and to the wonders, associated with that act, and that day. This celebration also marks the beginning of another year of your national life; and reminds you that the Republic of America is now 76 years old. I am glad, fellow-citizens, that your nation is so young. Seventy-six years, though a good old age for a man, is but a mere speck in the life of a nation. Three score years and ten is the allotted time for individual men; but nations number their years by thousands. According to this fact, you are, even now, only in the beginning of your national career, still lingering in the period of childhood. I repeat, I am glad this is so. There is hope in the thought, and hope is much needed, under the dark clouds which lower above the horizon. . . .

3. Fellow-citizens, I shall not presume to dwell at length on the associations that cluster about this day. The simple story of it is that, 76 years ago, the people of this country were British subjects. . . . Your fathers esteemed the English Government as the home government; and England as the fatherland. This home government, you know, although a considerable distance from your home, did, in the exercise of its parental prerogatives, impose upon its colonial children, such restraints, burdens and limitations, as, in its mature judgment, it deemed wise, right and proper.

4. But, your fathers, who had not adopted the fashionable idea of this day, of the infallibility of government, and the absolute character of its acts, presumed to differ from the home government in respect to the wisdom and the justice of some of those burdens and restraints. They went so far in their excitement as to pronounce the measures of government
unjust, unreasonable, and oppressive, and altogether such as ought not to be quietly submitted to. . . .

5. Pride and patriotism, not less than gratitude, prompt you to celebrate and to hold [this day] in perpetual remembrance. I have said that the Declaration of Independence is the ring-bolt to the chain of your nation’s destiny; so, indeed, I regard it. The principles contained in that instrument are saving principles. Stand by those principles, be true to them on all occasions, in all places, against all foes, and at whatever cost. . . .

Friends and citizens, I need not enter further into the causes which led to this anniversary. Many of you understand them better than I do. . . . My business, if I have any here today, is with the present. . . . We have to do with the past only as we can make it useful to the present and to the future. To all inspiring motives, to noble deeds which can be gained from the past, we are welcome. But now is the time, the important time. Your fathers have lived, died, and have done their work, and have done much of it well. You live and must die, and you must do your work. You have no right to enjoy a child’s share in the labor of your fathers, unless your children are to be blest by your labors. You have no right to wear out and waste the hard-earned fame of your fathers to cover your indolence. . . .

6. Fellow-citizens, pardon me, allow me to ask, why am I called upon to speak here today? What have I, or those I represent, to do with your national independence? Are the great principles of political freedom and of natural justice, embodied in that Declaration of Independence, extended to us? and am I, therefore, called upon to bring our humble offering to the national altar, and to confess the benefits and express devout gratitude for the blessings resulting from your independence to us? . . .

7. [No,] I am not included within the pale of this glorious anniversary! Your high independence only reveals the immeasurable distance between us. The blessings in which you, this day, rejoice, are not enjoyed in common. — The rich inheritance of justice, liberty, prosperity and independence, bequeathed by your fathers, is shared by you, not by me. The sunlight that brought life and healing to you, has brought stripes and death to me. This Fourth [of] July is yours, not mine. You may rejoice, I must mourn. To drag a man in fetters into the grand illuminated temple of liberty, and call upon him to join you in joyous anthems, were inhuman mockery and sacrilegious irony. Do you mean, citizens, to mock me, by asking me to speak to-day? . . .
9. Fellow-citizens; above your national, tumultuous joy, I hear the mournful wail of millions! whose chains, heavy and grievous yesterday, are today rendered more intolerable by the jubilee shouts that reach them. . . . To forget them, to pass lightly over their wrongs, and to chime in with the popular theme, would be treason most scandalous and shocking, and would make me a reproach before God and the world. . . .

I shall see this day and its popular characteristics from the slave's point of view.

Standing, there, identified with the American bondman, making his wrongs mine, I do not hesitate to declare, with all my soul, that the character and conduct of this nation never looked blacker to me than on this 4th of July! Whether we turn to the declarations of the past, or to the professions of the present, the conduct of the nation seems equally hideous and revolting. America is false to the past, false to the present, and solemnly binds herself to be false to the future. Standing with God and the crushed and bleeding slave on this occasion, I will, in the name of humanity which is outraged, in the name of liberty which is fettered, in the name of the constitution and the Bible, which are disregarded and trampled upon, dare to call in question and to denounce, with all the emphasis I can command, everything that serves to perpetuate slavery—the great sin and shame of America! . . .

10. What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer: a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciations of tyrants, brass fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade, and solemnity, are, to him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy—a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages. There is not a nation on the earth guilty of practices, more shocking and bloody, than are the people of these United States, at this very hour. . . .

11. Allow me to say, in conclusion, notwithstanding the dark picture I have this day presented of the state of the nation, [that] I do not despair of this country. There are forces in operation, which must inevitably work the downfall of slavery. "The arm of the Lord is not shortened," and the doom of slavery is certain. I, therefore, leave off where I began, with hope. While drawing encouragement from the Declaration of Independence, the great principles it contains, and the genius of American Institutions, my spirit is also cheered by the obvious
tendencies of the age. Nations do not now stand in the same relation to each other that they
did ages ago. No nation can now shut itself up from the surrounding world, and trot round in
the same old path of its fathers without interference. The time was when such could be done.
Long established customs of hurtful character could formerly fence themselves in, and do their
evil work with social impunity. Knowledge was then confined and enjoyed by the privileged few,
and the multitude walked on in mental darkness. But a change has now come over the affairs
of mankind. Walled cities and empires have become unfashionable. The arm of commerce has
borne away the gates of the strong city. Intelligence is penetrating the darkest corners of the
globe. It makes its pathway over and under the sea, as well as on the earth. Wind, steam, and
lightning are its chartered agents. Oceans no longer divide, but link nations together. From
Boston to London is now a holiday excursion. Space is comparatively annihilated. Thoughts
expressed on one side of the Atlantic are distinctly heard on the other. The far off and almost
fabulous Pacific rolls in grandeur at our feet. The Celestial Empire, the mystery of ages, is
being solved. The fiat of the Almighty, “Let there be Light,” has not yet spent its force. No
abuse, no outrage whether in taste, sport or avarice, can now hide itself from the all-pervading
light. . . .
Women are People, Too! (1960)
Betty Friedan

Betty Friedan was an American feminist, writer, and activist. She was an eminent member of the women's rights movements publishing The Feminine Mystique in 1963. The book is commonly credited for sparking the second wave of the feminism in the U.S. in the 20th century. The article below, published in Good Housekeeping in 1960, inspired women across the nation and served as the foundation for her seminal text.

1. It is not easy to put into words a feeling and a problem that women find harder to talk about than almost anything — including sex. It is in fact such a complex and elusive problem that — as prevalent as it is — there is not as yet a psychological term to describe it. Essentially, this feeling or problem is a strange stirring, a dissatisfied groping, a yearning, a search that is going on in the minds of women. This is not easy to put into words because those women who struggle with it struggle alone, afraid to admit that they are asking themselves the silent question "Is this all?" as they make the beds, shop for groceries and new curtains, eat peanut-butter sandwiches with the children, chauffeur Cub Scouts and Brownies to and from meetings, or lie beside their husbands at night.

2. There are no words for this search in the millions of words written for women about women these past 20 years in columns, articles, and books by experts that tell us that our role as women is to seek fulfillment as wives and mothers. The voices of tradition and the voices of Freudian sophistication tell us that we can desire no greater destiny than to glory in our role as women, in our own femininity. They tell us how to catch a man and keep him; how to breast-feed children and handle toilet training, sibling rivalry, adolescent rebellion; how to buy a dishwasher, cook Grandmother’s bread and gourmet snails, build a swimming pool with our own hands; how to dress, look, and act more feminine, and make marriage more exciting; how to keep our husbands from dying young and our sons from growing into delinquents.

3. They tell us — the psychologists and psychoanalysts and sociologists who keep tracing the neuroses of child and man back to mother — that all our frustrations were caused by education and emancipation, the striving for independence and equality with men, which made American women unfeminine. They tell us that the truly feminine woman turns her back on the careers, the higher education, the political rights, the opportunity to shape the major decisions of society for which the old-fashioned feminists fought.
4. Now a thousand expert voices pay tribute to our devotion from earliest girlhood to finding the husband and bearing the children who will give us happiness. They tell us to pity the "neurotic," "unfeminine," "unhappy" women who once wanted to be poets or physicists or Presidents, or whatever they had it in them to be. For a woman to have such aspirations, interests, goals of her own, the experts keep telling us, impairs not only her ability to love her husband and children but her ability to achieve her own sexual fulfillment.

5. How can a woman shut her ears to all the voices of the experts and listen instead to the voice inside herself that tells her something else? This is the question women are asking themselves and seeking to answer all over the country. I know, because in the past few years I have interviewed thousands of them. Sometimes a woman says, "I feel empty, somehow," or "useless," or "incomplete," or she says it is "as if I do not exist."

6. Sometimes she goes to a doctor with symptoms she cannot describe: "I have a tired feeling" ... "I get so angry with the children it scares me" ... "I feel like crying without any reason." She may spend years on the analyst's couch, working out her "adjustment to the feminine role," her blocks to "fulfillment as a wife and mother." And an inner voice may say, "That's not it."

7. A woman may live half her lifetime before she has the courage to listen to that voice and know that it is not enough to be a wife and mother, because she is a human being herself. She can't live through her husband and children. They are separate selves. She has to find her own fulfillment first.

8. It is such a simple truth — but each woman who has struggled through to discover it for herself is pioneering on the front edge of woman's evolution. For never before in history have women been able to ask the simple questions, "Who am I? What do I want?" But once a woman faces the question "Who am I?" — as women are doing today without much help from the experts and against the cry of "take it easy," "don't be different," "be a part of the crowd" — she finds her own answer. It is both harder and easier for a woman to find the answer that is right for her — because she has no model to follow in this search, no clearly planned career pattern, no organization. She has to ask herself the right questions even to start her search.
The pattern of woman's search for self-fulfillment is so new that experts, blinded by the clear-cut male labels of "education," "career," "family," sometimes don't recognize it at all. A woman doesn't have to seek fulfillment by established routes, for why should a woman's pattern be the same as a man's? Or why should it be like that of any other woman? But every woman who makes the search helps another get started. Every woman helps to paint the new picture of femininity that all women need and only women themselves can paint.

No woman knows where her search for self-fulfillment will take her. No woman starts that search today without struggle, conflict, and taking her courage in her hands.

Maybe growth does not come without conflict. When every woman learns to listen without fear to the voice inside her instead of smothering it, it may lead — perhaps even more surely than rockets into space — to the next step in human evolution. This could come about when women begin to use the education, the freedom, the labor-saving appliances, the added years of life which have become available to them in recent decades.

Who knows what women can be when they finally are free to become themselves? Who knows what women's intelligence will contribute when it can be nourished without denying love? Who knows what sons and daughters will become, when their mothers' fulfillment makes girls so sure they want to be feminine that they no longer have to look like Marilyn Monroe to prove it, and makes boys so unafraid of women they don't have to worry about their masculinity? Who knows of the possibilities of love, when men and women share not only children, home, and garden, not only the fulfillment of their biological role, but the separate, human knowledge of separate human beings?
Love Canal is an aborted canal project branching off the Niagara River about four miles south of Niagara Falls, New York. It is also the name of a fifteen-acre, working-class neighborhood of around 800 single-family homes built directly adjacent to the canal. From 1942 to 1953, the Hooker Chemical Company, with government sanction, began using the partially dug canal as a chemical waste dump. At the end of this period, the contents of the canal consisted of around 21,000 tons of toxic chemicals. Hooker capped the 16-acre hazardous waste landfill in clay and sold the land to the Niagara Falls School Board, attempting to absolve itself of any future liability by including a warning in the property deed.

1. My name is Grace McClouf. I am a housewife and a mother of two small children. I live in the Love Canal. The Love Canal is a chemical dumpsite used by at least one major chemical company to dispose of hundreds of hazardous wastes over a period of 30 years.

2. Hundreds of problems have occurred over recent months all resulting from the Love Canal. The families affected have mental, physical, and psychological problems directly stemming from the hazardous dumpsite. The Love Canal tragedy has occurred, and because it occurred, many eyes across the country have been opened. The Love Canal has served as an education for other areas thought to be similar in make up. The Love Canal is fortunate enough to have a fine team of residents who have educated themselves and are able to travel to other areas to lecture on the problems of such sites. With an educated population pushing the politics and bringing to light all potential problems related to hazardous dumping, the politics can help with new and more effective laws—laws which will be and must be enforced to their fullest! With such powerful laws, the chemical industry must find alternate legal ways to dispose of waste. Laws are great but laws are useless unless they are enforced, and when enforced, they must bring the offenders to their knees and make sure any offender is liable for all problems caused.

3. It has come time for the Federal Government to perform its primary function—to serve the interest of the people. It is time to show the entire United States population that there is a budget other than the Foreign Aid Budget. The American People see only the billions shipped out to strangers but never see the aid given to the needy citizens who are the ones paying the taxes—the same taxes going overseas. Who needs it more?
4. We, the people, have been very patient in our efforts to obtain basic human rights. After all, we consist solely of innocent third party victims. We did nothing wrong. We are the victims, but in reality, we are treated like the wrong doers! Can you tell us why?

5. People around the nation as well as groups in the State of New York realize this is critical to our country’s future. Some of these organizations who support the permanent relocation of residents affected by the Love Canal and the clean up of our environment are: Operation Clean, United Auto Workers Union, Sierra Club, AFL-CIO, Niagara-Orleans Council of Churches, Bloody Run Association, West Valley Nuclear Association, Buffalo Workers Union, Small Business Association, Goodyear Local 277, Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers Union Local 593, Union Carbide Local 8-250, Mission Peace for the Children, and in whole, the National Council of Churches. In addition, the national coverage of our plight has reached the Phil Donahue Show and ABC Close Up. The national response to our plight is remarkable. The people are more concerned than the Federal Government.

6. We are the victims, and we want only what is right. The way the problem is being handled by the State and by the courts, we must sit and rot in this deteriorating environment. We are left with the responsibility of deciding to have another child here and worrying about weighing the odds of conceiving a child with a birth defect. Why should we be trapped into such a corner? New York State is telling us to practice birth control. We must watch our families deteriorate and our health suffer. Our children are sick, our homes are valueless and we have boarded up homes for our neighbors. The entire meaning of family and been corroded. We are now at our limit. We can wait no longer. While the industries and local governments who created this problem stall and point their finger at the next guy, the victims suffer. While our state and Federal Government drag their feet and do nothing, we, the victims, are left to die. Well, we are through waiting. We are through being insulted with the States ideas of help and with the states ideas of remedy. Their remedy is actually taking two steps backwards. The guilty parties are dragging us down. Our lives are ruined. Well, it’s our turn to drag down a few guilty parties.

7. We have mentioned our supporters earlier. I don’t believe I have to count the total number of
votes they represent. The National Council of Churches alone represents millions of votes and believe me, they are our best supporters. We have grown from a tattered neighborhood group to real power, but that is just a grain of sand on a beach. We will get what should have been ours from the start—safe and healthy homes to raise our families in without fear of the unknown. We are determined to overcome the obstacles. There is more money spent on trivia with us here than would be needed to buy our homes and get us out. Remove the people then decide what you will do with the area.

8. We the people of Love Canal are worried, sick and very disappointed with our government who is supposed to be there working for the people and not against us. We want our children and grandchildren to have a future worth living for.
Active Reading

“Reading is to the mind what exercise is to the body.”
~Joseph Addison

To be an effective reader who fully grasps what one reads, who thinks critically about it, and who is able to apply it their own life, you need to do more than sit passively with the book in your hand. In other words, you need to be actively engaged and involved with the text in front of you.

This is no different from the rest of your life. Consider this: do you most effectively learn a musical instrument or a sport by watching someone else play, or by actively working at it and practicing yourself?

Similarly, effective reading is a mental process that requires you to actively interact with the text by identifying, clarifying, making connections, synthesizing, evaluating, and creating new ideas. This kind of reading is a skill, and becoming a successful active reader will require both an understanding of the purpose of this process and a commitment to incorporating into one’s daily life.

- **Identifying**, as we are using it here, means to pick out the main ideas in the text you are reading, as well as any unfamiliar vocabulary terms.
- **Clarifying** means to define new terms and comprehends the meaning of the main ideas.
- **Making Connections** means to show you understand how different main ideas in the text relate to one another, and also to link these ideas to other reading you have done, to other classes, to personal experiences, etc.
- **Synthesizing** means to take all the information you have read and critically examined and put it together as a meaningful whole.
- **Evaluating** means to think critically about what you are reading and reason out what to accept or reject from the author’s claims.
- **Creating** means to compose a personalized argument that supports a new meaning of the material.
To help train yourself to be an active reader, there are several things you will be asked to do. To start, you’ll need 3 colored pens:

**Red Pen: Identifying/Clarifying Key Terms**
Use a red pen to circle or underline vocabulary terms, which includes words that are unfamiliar to you as well as essential key terms required for discussing the main ideas of the text.
- Don’t forget to define the vocabulary in the margins. Make sure it’s clear which definition goes with which word (an arrow or line can work well for this).
- If you’ve looked up a word but you’re still unclear about what the author means in that particular sentence or passage, try defining the word in context. In other words, try rewriting the sentence in your own words using the definition (or synonyms) you found.
- Even if you think you understand all the vocabulary in a text, identifying and defining the words that are most essential to the author’s main ideas will help you think more clearly and deeply about what the author is trying to communicate.

**Blue Pen: Identifying/Clarifying Main Ideas**
Blue pen should be used to identify the main ideas in a section of the reading.
- Do not underline everything! Only underline key words or phrases that you think are the main and most important ideas the author wants to get across.
- Remember that underlining alone accomplishes nothing; you must paraphrase *in your own words* what the author is saying in the margins. Remember that this is a summary, meaning that it should be brief (just a few words or a phrase). You are *not* rewriting the whole passage here.
- Identifying the main ideas in a reading does not necessarily mean you need to summarize each paragraph. You should identify the main ideas when:
  - ✓ The author presents a new idea.
  - ✓ You come across a passage that is essential to understanding the whole text.
  - ✓ You don't understand what the author is saying.

**Black Pen: Responding/Analyzing Main Ideas**
Black pen is for analyzing and responding to the text. Underline the part of the text you want to respond to, and then use the space in the margin to make your notes. These kinds of annotations can include:
- *Clarifying Questions* (i.e. a question that can be supported with a factual answer). A good active reader might pause and research the answer, and come back and annotate the text once they’ve found it.
- *Analytical Questions* (i.e. a question that can help you to gain further insight into a text). A good active reader not only asks analytical questions, but also tries to answer them.
- Your *evaluation/opinion* of a particular passage or idea
- *Examples to support* the author's point
- *Examples or counter-arguments to refute* the author's point
- *Inferences or predictions* about what might happen next (in fiction) or what the author might say next (in a non-fiction text)
- *Connections* to other classes, texts, or personal experiences (Use your outside/prior knowledge to interact directly with ideas stated in the text!)
HOW “FAT?” IS YOUR SENTENCE?

F = Focus
A = Author’s Name
T = Title
t = Text Type (news article, editorial, book, etc)

1. TEXT REFERENCE FIRST

- In the editorial “When the Juvenile System Becomes a Cure That Kills,” John Hurst reveals the trials and tribulations of an adolescent in the troubled reformatory system in California.

- In his editorial “When the Juvenile System Becomes a Cure That Kills,” John Hurst explores the failures of the juvenile system through the eyes of a young, disturbed girl.

- John Hurst’s editorial “When the Juvenile System Becomes a Cure That Kills” explores the failures of the juvenile system, through the eyes of a young, disturbed girl.

2. AUTHOR REFERENCE FIRST

- John Hurst described the trials and tribulations of an adolescent in the troubled reformatory system of California in his editorial “When the Juvenile System Becomes a Cure That Kills.”

- John Hurst, the author of the editorial “When the Juvenile System Becomes a Cure That Kills,” implies, through a young girl’s experiences, that the strictness in the reformatories could be a reason why the patients become suicidal.

3. TITLE REFERENCE FIRST

- “When the Juvenile System Becomes a Cure That Kills” is an editorial written by John Hurst that conveys one girl’s story about how the harsh rules in a juvenile system result in suicide.

- “When the Juvenile System Becomes a Cure That Kills,” an editorial by John Hurst, reveals the cruel disciplinary actions of the juvenile system that causes patients in a reformatory to become depressed and suicidal.

4. FOCUS FIRST

- Ridiculously strict rules cause young people retained in California reformatories to commit suicide, suggests reporter John Hurst in his editorial entitled “When the Juvenile System Becomes a Cure That Kills.”
Developing a Perfect Persuasive Paragraph: C.E.I.

A simple strategy that can help you to develop a perfect persuasive paragraph is C.E.I.:

CLAIM: A statement which expresses a single, arguable idea

CONTEXT: Background information or context that the reader will need to understand the evidence.

EVIDENCE: Specific examples or details that support the claim

INTERPRETATION: The significance of both the claim and the evidence.

Sample Student Paragraph:

Schools must acknowledge the fact that, although technology is the “modern” way of learning, technological advances create a deficiency of valuable life skills.

As a result of technology, many children have actually grown less intelligent and cultured; in addition, the technology they engage in deprives them of learning via “hands-on” methods.

According to Yale professor David Gelertner, “our skill-free children are overwhelmed with information, even without the Internet” (par. 5).

The rise of technology has not improved education intelligence, or schools in general. Children who spend all of their time simply sitting around playing video games develop a lack of skills. Moreover, this loss of skills results in the inability to perform tasks that students a hundred years ago (without the benefit of technology) could do perfectly well, such as rudimentary tasks like the proper way to clean and sort laundry. Simply because children have the opportunity to utilize technology does not mean that it is beneficial.

Here it is as it would appear in your essay:

Schools must acknowledge the fact that, although technology is the “modern” way of learning, technological advances create a deficiency of valuable life skills. As a result of technology, many children have actually grown less intelligent and cultured; in addition, the technology they engage in deprives them of learning via “hands-on” methods. According to Yale professor David Gelertner, “our skill-free children are overwhelmed with information, even without the Internet” (par. 5). The rise of technology has not improved education intelligence, or schools in general. Children who spend all of their time simply sitting around playing video games develop a lack of skills. Moreover, this loss of skills results in the inability to perform tasks that students a hundred years ago (without the benefit of technology) could do perfectly well, such as rudimentary tasks like the proper way to clean and sort laundry. Simply because children have the opportunity to utilize technology does not mean that it is beneficial.
INTEGRATING QUOTES: THE “T. I. E. S.” METHOD  
(stolen liberally from a variety of sources)  

Warning: Don’t Drop That Quote!  
A “dropped” or “floating” quote is one which is simply plopped into a paragraph with no integration with your own words. It’s as if you copied and pasted the quote in. To avoid this, use smooth “T.I.E.S.” between quotations and your own writing. You needn’t use the whole sentence. Chop the quote down to the nugget of meaning that best fits your sentence or paragraph structure.  

T.I.E.S.: Tag, Introduce, Embed, Split  
(all quotes are cited using MLA guidelines)  

❖ Tag: Quote first, context second.  
  o “But the 1950s were not, in the end, as calm and contented as the politics and the popular culture of the time suggested,” cautions historian Alan Brinkley, author of American History: A Survey (817).  
  o “Secretly, of course—I was all for the Burmese,” Orwell confides (par. 2).  
  o “Can’t repeat the past? Why of course you can!” counters Gatsby (116).  

❖ Introduce: Context first, quote second.  
  o According to historian Alan Brinkley, “the 1950s were not, in the end, as calm and contented as the politics and popular culture of the time suggested” (817).  
  o Orwell confides he “was all for the Burmese” (par. 2).  
  o In response to Nick’s gentle suggestion regarding Daisy, Gatsby exclaims, “Can’t repeat the past? Why of course you can!” (116).  

❖ Embed: Context, quote, context.  
  o Although the 1950s appeared “calm and contented,” this was more of an image created by the “politics and popular culture of the time” rather than reality (Brinkley 817).  
  o Orwell was "all for the Burmese" and hated working as an agent of the British Empire in Burma (par. 2).  
  o After Nick suggests Gatsby “Can’t repeat the past,” Gatsby counters, “Can’t repeat the past? Why of course you can!” before wildly searching for Daisy (116).  

❖ Split: Quote, context, quote (note: be sure that the quote is long enough to split)  
  o “But the 1950s were not, in the end,” Alan Brinkley argues, “as calm and contented as the politics and the popular culture of the time suggested” (817).  
  o “Secretly,” Orwell confides, “I was all for the Burmese” (par. 2).  
  o “Can’t repeat the past?” repeats Gatsby, “Why of course you can!” (116).  

A note on block quotes:  
Generally, long quotations are to be avoided. When a long quotation (4 lines or longer) is absolutely essential (generally, only in a formal paper), it should be set off from the text. Still, it is important to introduce the quotation. A block quote is preceded by a colon and indented 10 spaces. Please note that the quote DOES NOT END THE PARAGRAPH. You must cite the significance!  

George Orwell had a difficult time acting as a police officer in Lower Burma. As demonstrated in the following excerpt from Shooting an Elephant, he was frustrated by his conflicting need to maintain law and order while remaining faithful to the idea that the Burmese had the right to be free:  
  All this was perplexing and upsetting. For at that time I had already made up my mind that imperialism was an evil thing and the sooner I chucked up my job and got out of it the Better. Theoretically--and secretly, of course--I was all for the Burmese and all against their oppressors, the British (par. 2)  
Orwell’s assertion that he was not on the side of his own country . . .
CITING SOURCES IN PERFECT MLA!
(brazenly stolen and gratefully adapted from the amazing writing center at The University of Indiana, Ina Greenwood at Kean University, and the Purdue Online Writing Lab)

To avoid plagiarism, you must give credit whenever you use . . .
- another person’s idea, opinion, or theory;
- any facts, statistics, graphs, drawings—any pieces of information—that are not common knowledge;
- quotations of another person’s actual spoken or written words; or
- paraphrase of another person’s spoken or written words.

Strategies for Avoiding Plagiarism
1. Put in quotations everything that comes directly from the text, especially when taking notes.
2. Paraphrase, but be sure you are not just rearranging or replacing a few words. Instead, read over what you want to paraphrase carefully; cover up the text with your hand, or close the text so you can’t see any of it (and so aren’t tempted to use the text as a “guide”). Write out the idea in your own words without peeking.
3. Check your paraphrase against the original text to be sure you have not accidentally used the same phrases or words, and that the information is accurate.

Some examples to compare...

The original passage: Students frequently overuse direct quotation in taking notes, and as a result they overuse quotations in the final [research] paper. Probably only about 10% of your final manuscript should appear as directly quoted matter. Therefore, you should strive to limit the amount of exact transcribing of source materials while taking notes. Lester, James D. Writing Research Papers. 2nd ed., 1976, pp. 46-47.

A legitimate paraphrase: In research papers students often quote excessively, failing to keep quoted material down to a desirable level. Since the problem usually originates during note taking, it is essential to minimize the material recorded verbatim (Lester 46-47).

An acceptable summary: Students should take just a few notes in direct quotation from sources to help minimize the amount of quoted material in a research paper (Lester 46-47).

A plagiarized version: Students often use too many direct quotations when they take notes, resulting in too many of them in the final research paper. In fact, probably only about 10% of the final copy should consist of directly quoted material. So it is important to limit the amount of source material copied while taking notes.

***AN IMPORTANT NOTE ABOUT PLAGIARISM: This example has been classed as plagiarism, in part, because of its failure to deploy any citation. Plagiarism is a serious offense in the academic world. However, plagiarism is a difficult term to define; that its definition may be contextually sensitive; and that not all instances of plagiarism are created equal—that is, there are varying “degrees of egregiousness” for different cases of plagiarism.
**Citing books, articles, and other sources, parenthetically in your paper**

Use the table below to learn how to format various types of MLA reference tags.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of citation</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Author's name in text</td>
<td>Magny develops this argument by stating she “caused the fire” (67-69).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author's name in reference</td>
<td>This argument has been developed elsewhere (Magny 67-69).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quotation found in indirect or &quot;secondhand&quot; source</td>
<td>Philosopher Alain states that &quot;admiration is not pleasure but a kind of attention. . .&quot; (qtd. in Magny 66).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material found in indirect source</td>
<td>Alain's words seem to dissociate admiration from pleasure (in Magny 66).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two authors' names in reference</td>
<td>The most notorious foreign lobby in Washington is the &quot;Sugar Mafia&quot; (Howe and Trott 134).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference to volume and page in multi volume work</td>
<td>As a painter Andrea was &quot;faultless&quot; (Freedberg 1: 98).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference to whole volume</td>
<td>In his second volume, Freedberg gives an account of Andrea's whole painting career.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two works by same author on list of works cited</td>
<td>Frye connects Burgess' <em>A Clockwork Orange</em> to romance tradition (Secular Scripture 110).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two locations in same source</td>
<td>Dabundo deals with this problem (22, 31).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two sources cited</td>
<td>This controversy has been addressed more than once (Dabundo 27; Magny 69).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal interview; name given in text</td>
<td>Parsons talked about the need for physical education teachers to understand the relationship between physical activity and fitness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate author</td>
<td>Many different types of organizations in the United States are involved in mediation and dispute resolution (Natl. Inst. for Dispute Resolution).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic source that uses paragraph numbers</td>
<td>The semiconductor workplace is highly toxic (Ross, par. 35).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic source that uses chapter and section numbers</td>
<td>&quot;Once we start using a tool extensively, it also starts using us&quot; (Rawlins, ch. 1, sec. 1).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Chart adapted from: [http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/DocMLACitation](http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/DocMLACitation)*