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## Power, Policy, Profit: The Spanish Language in the United States

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## **Power, Policy, Profit: The Spanish Language in the United States**

### **Abstract:**

Over the past several decades, the Spanish language has been considered secondary to English in the United States. However, this paper argues that Spanish is one of the primary languages in the country because it is the second most spoken language, despite efforts to maintain a monolingual nation. Due to the impact of capitalism, if one's first language is not English, they are separated and viewed as inferior in society. After providing background on the history of Spanish in the United States, this paper explores the impact of power, Americanization, education, and cheap work on the Spanish language with data from various articles and the United States Census. Spanish continues to be a primary language in the United States, even with capitalism constantly attempting to exploit the language and those who speak it.

**Keywords:** Americanization, capitalism, cheap lives, colonization, exploitation, Spanish

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The United States does not have an official language, unlike most countries around the globe, although English is considered the primary language of the land (Ray, 2007). I argue that there are two primary languages, and that Spanish should also be counted as such. In this article, I provide a brief history of European language introduction to the U.S., explain the role of capitalism in the hemisphere's development, and discuss the colonial history and background. I use a world-ecological perspective, which I outline in the second section. Finally, I discuss the role of race (and its ideology) and power in the U.S. historically, looking specifically at policies around Americanization, education, and labor, and its impact on the Spanish language.

Across the world, America is known for having a variety of diverse individuals from different cultures, religions, and ethnicities. This dates back to immigrants arriving in the country for prosperity, religious freedom, and job opportunities. Instead of referring to the U.S. as a salad bowl, as some believe, or a melting pot, as even more people believe, the best metaphor is that America is like a quilted rug with unique patches that represent the diversity of individuals (Moe, 2011, p. 10). When stitched together, the patches are a masterpiece—the United States. The country is what it is today because of elements of different cultures that were (and continue to be)

introduced to society from countries around the globe. Many languages, an enormous part of culture, have been presented and are spoken across America. In the United States, English is the *lingua franca*, a primary language of the country. However, it is not the only one.

While the U.S. is most commonly associated with English, the language does not hold legal superiority over other languages. Socially, however, it is at the top of America's language hierarchy.<sup>1</sup> English is the most popular language, while Spanish is second. However, in the U.S., the Spanish language is not socially or culturally valued in the same regard as English. The racial hierarchy in the United States directly correlates to a language hierarchy whereby, white, English-speakers are superior. As the second most spoken language, I contend that Spanish is one of the primary languages in America, despite the language hierarchy and Americanization efforts to maintain a monolingual country. Spanish is spoken by 13.5% of people living in the United States and therefore is a primary language, alongside English (United States Census Bureau, 2019d).

Some people claim that the United States is the second largest Spanish-speaking country in the world, with over 44 million speakers (Kalkancı, 2019). However, this is contested and others believe it to be the fifth largest (Chomón Zamora, 2013, p. 1). Either way, it is in the top five. According to Chomón Zamora and the 2010 United States Census, America has the largest number of Spanish-speakers after Mexico, Colombia, Spain, and Argentina (Chomón Zamora, 2013, p. 1). Whether it is the second or fifth largest, it is evident that there is a large number of Spanish-speakers in the country. Further, there are twenty-one Spanish-speaking countries, and the United States has a greater Spanish-speaking population than over  $\frac{3}{4}$  of them. Based on 2020 data, out of

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<sup>1</sup> While "America" includes Canada, Mexico, the United States, Central America, and South America, in this paper I use it solely in reference to the United States. To differentiate, I use "the Americas" to talk about North, Central, and South America.

450 million Spanish-speakers worldwide, the United States holds nearly 10% of them (Lyons, 2020).

I refer to Spanish as a world language, instead of a foreign language, to demonstrate that is not only popular in America, but also around the globe. It is the most-spoken language in twenty-one countries and is universally accepted. Calling it a foreign language, implies that it is also distant and unfamiliar in America, with few speakers in the nation; however, quite opposite is true. Spanish was the first European language to arrive in present-day America, and therefore is older than English in the country. In 1508, the language was brought to Puerto Rico on a small ship by Juan Ponce de León (Arnade, n.d., p. 31). The British “founding” of Jamestown in 1607 and the failed attempt at Roanoke, Virginia in 1583 were the first colonial towns to speak English (Wiley, 2014, p. 2). In 1898 Puerto Rico became a US Territory and this shift in boundaries means that Spanish was introduced in America prior to English. Further, Spain founded St. Augustine, Florida in 1565 (Carroll, 1906, p. 103). This area was incorporated into the US in 1819 (Crutchfield et al., 2015, p. 51). The new boundaries provide another example of Spanish being the first European language in the country. Spanish was spoken before English and is the farthest thing from a foreign language in America.

### ***Colonialism and Historical Background***

In 1521, Spanish conquistadors destroyed the Aztec empire and established the area, which is present day Mexico, as a Spanish colony: New Spain (Carnegie & Howes, 2003, p. xvii). Over the next three centuries, the area changed in boundaries. First, it won independence from Spain and established itself as Mexico. Then, due to political issues and high tensions, a revolt against Mexico led to the creation of the Lone Star Republic. Finally, it was annexed into the United States as Texas in 1845 (Carnegie & King Howes, 2003, xviii-xix). Throughout all this time, Spanish speakers have resided in the area. In 1848, Mexico ceded California and New Mexico over to the

United States, as a result of the Mexican-American War. Consequently, 80,000 Spanish-speakers, who were once Mexican citizens, became part of the United States (Nostrand, 1975). This annexation of land contributed to the largest gain in Spanish-speakers in the United States at one time and therefore Spanish increased in popularity in the American Southwest. This was short lived, however, as the California Gold Rush, beginning within a year, encouraged citizens of European and Asian countries to move to the American Southwest, in search of riches (Carnegie & Howes, 2003, p. xxiii). Therefore, language diversity amplified, and Spanish no longer made up the majority in this part of the country.

English is the language of violence in the United States, not only because it is the *lingua franca*, but due to its blood-stained role in colonization. Although numerous European countries once held stake in the present-day United States, it eventually fell completely into the hands of the country. Whether it was due to war, purchases, or trades, they achieved their goal of Manifest Destiny. The result, however, is the reason why English is the language of violence. Their expansion left a bloody trail: the destruction of Native American homes and the slaughter of their people. A genocide occurred at the hands of English speakers, marking it as a weapon.

### ***Capitalism***

Understanding the role that capitalism and history have on the Spanish language is essential to comprehend the deployment of power and policy for profit. Capitalism is often seen only as a socioeconomic system where trade and industry are controlled by private owners, instead of by the state. However, authors Patel and Moore argue that it is also “a way of organizing the relations between humans and the rest of nature” (Patel & Moore, 2017, p. 3). Capitalism uses violence to exploit, creating cheap things as a result. In this context, being cheap has little to do with price. It refers to how Nature is organized and manipulated so it can be controlled by a broader web of life: certain humans, or Society. I capitalize the words Society and Nature for two reasons: First,

capitalizing them shows the importance and power that these terms hold in the world, as well as demonstrates the exploitation and violence occurring as a result of capitalism. Second, these words have a high level of abstraction, as Patel and Moore discuss below:

In this book, we use these words-*Nature* and *Society*-in a way that's different from their everyday use. We're capitalizing them as a sign that they are concepts that don't merely describe the world but help us organize it and ourselves. Scholars call concepts like these 'real abstractions.' These abstractions make statements about ontology-*What is?* -and about epistemology-*How do we know what is?* Real abstractions both describe the world and make it. That's why real abstractions are often invisible, and why we use ideas like world-ecology to challenge our readers into seeing Nature and Society as hidden forms of violence. These are undetonated words. Real abstractions aren't innocent: they reflect the interests of the powerful and license them to organize the world (Patel & Moore, 2017, p. 47).

As Patel and Moore mention, the organization of Nature and Society is a form of violence, which can be credited to capitalism. Human lives are divided into the two spheres, granting authority to one and oppression to the other. Society, independent from the rest of life, consists of rich, white men. Society declared that any individual who does not fit into the realm (women, Indigenous People, people of color, and colonized people) is therefore classified as Nature and their lives are cheapened as a result. The origin of the belief that white, elite men hold superiority can be traced back to René Descartes's "Meditations on the First Philosophy" in 1641. Descartes crafted the separation of humans and the dichotomy that exists today. His philosophy explains that "thinking things," like himself, are just that: things that think. "Extended things," on the other hand, do not think (Descartes, n.d., p. 16). He gives the example of a stone, which is a non-thinking object, an "extended thing." One would think that all humans would be categorized as a "thinking thing," but that was not the case. "Thinking things" and Society are synonymous in this case, and do not include all humans. Exactly like the creation of Nature, the "extended things" were controlled and exploited, so Society could profit. In fact, it is their obligation to operate on this "set of objects" (Williams, 1980, p. 77). Since non-elites are considered a part of Nature, it is acceptable to

manipulate them. While the two groups exist together, they are completely separate entities, as Descartes reasoned.

### ***Race***

The idea of race was created to divide and oppress people. Separating individuals by their race is a way to keep certain groups at the top and others at the bottom. However, race is strictly an ideology (Fields, 1990, p. 110). Since ideologies are based on experiences, individuals shape the concept of them. Therefore, experiences have shaped race as an ideology. Ideologies last for long amounts of time and are reproduced generationally. They are modified slightly, because of social interactions and shifts in society (Fields, 1990, p. 97). Since race is an ideology, it is a systemic issue. An individual does not have the ability to change it; the change must be enormous and span a large period of time. Over the course of many centuries, an ideology may hold different characteristics, but will never be completely dismantled. The first assumption that Fields discusses in her work is the idea of there being “only one race, the Negro race” (Fields 1990, 97). Many Americans accept the notion that the world is divided into black and white. This is not the case, however, as discrimination exists against other groups, as well. Native Americans were oppressed by colonizers for centuries, following their arrival in 1492. Society wants people to focus on race so the oppression of certain people can continue. However, many groups, such as Mexican-Americans, rally around their own racial identity to fight the oppression they incur. Further, Irish immigrants use the notion of race to their advantage in America, as they climbed the social hierarchy (Guglielmo, n.d., p. 2). While race is a socially constructed ideology, there can be real costs of it in American society.

When Europeans colonized the Indigenous population in the Americas, a racist system emerged that “ranked people according to their blood” (Patel & Moore, 2017, p. 185). Since Europeans controlled the marginalized people, they ranked themselves as the highest, Native

Americans next, and Africans at the bottom. In each colonial society—Spain, Great Britain, or France—there was a hierarchy. For example, Spanish missionary José de Acosta tiered “barbarians” (in reference to Native people) into three categories by their linguistic and social abilities (Pagden, 1982, pp. 162–164). Regardless of their ranking in this social order, they were still deemed lower than Europeans. Anybody who was not white and European held little importance in the eyes of the colonizers. Ranking individuals was a way for those on top to control those below them. This is the beginning of the racial hierarchy that has persisted for centuries since its emergence.

Throughout history, language has become linked to race (Leeman, 2004, p. 517). Languages that were solely European, such as English, German, Yiddish, and Italian, were warranted as superior. This language hierarchy was simple to create, with credit to the racial hierarchy that was previously established. These hierarchies cheapen the lives of those ranked low. Being exploited, inferior, and cheap are three things that happen simultaneously in life. All three characteristics go hand in hand as a result of capitalism (Patel & Moore, 2017, p. 54). This socioeconomic system shapes the social order that keeps anybody non-white oppressed. They are controlled, discriminated against, and used as scapegoats, for the benefit of Society. Capitalism is a clear contributor to the continuance of racism. The tactic of ranking people by race emphasizes the idea that white people are superior.

As their ancestors were native to the land, many Mexican-Americans were believed to have “Indian blood” (J. H. Hill, 2008, p. 121). Therefore, this group of people were treated as second tier. Due to the racial hierarchy, Mexican-Americans were seen as non-white, inferior, and as a part of Nature. With this group already being categorized, making their language second tier, as

well, was justified. Therefore, regardless of one's country of origin, speaking Spanish means that the individual is inferior.

### ***Data***

According to the 2019 Census, 13.5% of the American population speaks Spanish at home, while 78% speaks English at home (United States Census Bureau, 2019d). This number varies greatly depending on the individual state. In New Mexico, 26.5% of citizens speak Spanish at home, while only 66% speak English at home (United States Census Bureau, 2019b). In California, 28.8% of people speak Spanish at home, with 55.5% speaking English at home (United States Census Bureau, 2019a). Lastly, in Texas, 29.2% speak Spanish at home and 64% speak English at home (United States Census Bureau, 2019c). These three states have the largest number of Spanish-speakers in the country.

Spanish has been the most popular world language in America, since before the 1980s. After English, Spanish is the most spoken language and has remained that way for more than 40 years (Wiley & García, 2016, p. 53). As Spanish is the most spoken world language in America, it is understandable that it is also the most spoken world language in the home. However, this has not always been the case. According to data from 1910 to 1970, Spanish did not always hold the top slot (Wiley, 2014, p. 9). In 1910, only 528,842 of the “white foreign-born population” spoke Spanish. This number dropped to 359,520 by 1940 for the same group of people. However, by 1970, there were 410,580 United States foreign-born Spanish-speakers across all races. For all three time periods, languages such as German, Yiddish, and Italian surpassed Spanish in the number of foreign-born American speakers.

Since 1850, the number of Spanish-speakers in America has risen. In 1850, when the population of the United States was over 23 million, only 0.5% spoke Spanish. As the population increased, so did the number of Spanish-speakers. Over the next 50 years, the U.S. population

multiplied threefold, while the number of Spanish-speakers in the country enlarged fivefold. This trend continued for the next century (Macías, 2014, p. 48). The period from 1960 to 2000 saw the greatest jump in the percentage of Spanish-speakers, in America, compared to the total population. Over the course of these forty years, the percentage of Spanish-speakers went from 3.2% to 11.1% (Macías, 2014, p. 48). As 13.5% of Americans spoke Spanish at home in 2019, this data implies that the trend is likely to continue and even more Americans will be speaking Spanish every year (United States Census Bureau, 2019d). Even with efforts to Americanize and teach English in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the number of Spanish-speakers in America grew. The steady increase in the Spanish-speaking population, supports my argument that Spanish is a primary language in America.

### ***Power Through Language***

In this section, I argue that language has been used as a weapon of violence, or a force against those who have been cheapened by capitalism. I examine the class hierarchy, discrimination, and how language is used as a weapon when referring to Nature in specific ways.

Marianne Mithun explains how the exact number of Native American languages cannot even be recorded because of how fast they disappeared after European arrival (Mithun, n.d., p. 1). This group suffered the consequences of colonialization in many ways, including through the loss of their languages. They are not the only ones, however. Spanish-speakers, and therefore the Spanish language, are oppressed because of actions taken by English speakers. The use of power, through the use of the English language, has suppressed Spanish.

In America, those who speak English are in the majority and are part of Society. Although they are not always rich, white, or male, these people control those who speak a language other than English. There is a class hierarchy that exists similarly to the racial and language hierarchies. Since Spanish-speakers are low in the racial and language hierarchies, they are also low in the class hierarchy. Some white English-speakers may also be low-class, but are ranked higher than

Spanish-speakers, simply because of their first two traits. In America, although race is an ideology, skin color is constantly used to determine one's value (Fields, 1990, p. 110). While these people may not be at the top of the class hierarchy, they can still be classified as Society, because they exist to exploit those below them. Even if one knows English, fluency in any other language puts an individual into the minority. Society holds power over all minority groups. The oppressed are constantly maltreated by the oppressors. In this case, world language speakers are subjugated because of and by monolingual English-speakers.

Language is used, by certain people, as a tool to oppress other people. As it is used for all kinds of communication, language controls the lives of others and dictates how they are lived: "Language usage and communication patterns have been used by the dominant culture in the United States to oppress and discriminate against ethnic minority groups" (Torres-Rivera et al., 2008, p. 11). As English is the dominant language used across all spheres of life in America, discrimination occurs for non-English speakers. Spanish-speakers in the United States, therefore, are oppressed by the English-speakers (Chávez, 2014). The ideology that some languages are superior to others exists as a justification to oppress those who do not speak English (Fields, 1990, p. 110). Therefore, language is used as a form of power to dominate the marginalized populations, in this case, Spanish-speakers.

Fanon's novel, *The Wretched of the Earth*, takes place in Algeria during the postwar decolonization movement (Fanon, 2002). In it, he illustrates the way the colonizers described the colonized—as animals (Flores-Rodríguez, 2012, p. 28). This was done as a tactic explicitly to keep the colonized under control. It was easier for the colonizers to forget these people were humans too if they were called animals. Further, if they were referred to as animals, it was justified that they were also treated as such. The same occurred in the Americas, as Native people were

considered “barbarians” and “savages,” because they lacked cultural sophistication and Christian views (Pagden, 1982, p. 24). President Theodore Roosevelt was one person in particular who denoted the colonized as animalistic (Dorsey & Harlow, 2003). He compared them to beasts, and a threat to man. Roosevelt’s words held influence among the people, as he held political power in America. His references showed people across the country that colonized people should be manipulated and controlled to keep Society safe. Denoting them as animals emphasized the idea that they were creatures and a part of Nature, instead of a part of Society. In a similar way, Hill explains that using the phrase “Immigrants are animals” helps to establish the existence of this belief, whether it is commonly thought or not (J. H. Hill, 2008, p. 127). The link between immigrants, in this case Spanish immigrants, and animals are reinforced with this phrase. It is a way for those in power to subjugate those inferior and keep this power relation the way they want it.

### ***Americanization (Policy)***

In this section I argue how the Americanization process was used to oppress speakers of other languages, specifically Spanish-speakers. I look at the increase in immigrants, the Naturalization Act of 1906, and the National Americanization Committee. The last two were policies created in order to develop a monolingual country, thereby suppressing Spanish.

Americanization is the social process of forcing an immigrant to adapt to American ways. The Americanization process began at the turn of the twentieth century in response to a wave of immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe (Citrin et al., 1990, p. 536). As they were coming from places other than Great Britain, the majority were not literate in English, and the Americanization process was deemed necessary. However, the Americanization process affected immigrants from all countries around the globe. From 1900 to 1920, the number of immigrants in the United States jumped from 10.3% to 13.9%, reaching a peak between 1901 and 1910 with 8.8

million immigrant arrivals (Moe, 2011, p. 3-5). The opportunity to begin the Americanization process occurred within this time. Roosevelt's Naturalization Act of 1906 instituted an English language requirement for all who wanted to become citizens (Bloemraad, 2006, p. 941). Shortly after, in 1915, The National Americanization Committee was formed, their goal being to "bring American citizens, foreign-born and native-born alike, together on our national Independence Day to celebrate the common privileges and define the common duties of all Americans, wherever born" (H. C. Hill, 1919, p. 617). Both of these policies, implemented by the federal government, were ways of Americanizing citizens and immigrants alike. Learning American values and English, and then adopting them, were steps in Americanizing immigrants.

To create a homogenous nation, having a common language that each person understood and spoke was necessary. The chosen language was English. Americans spoke a variety of different languages, including German, Yiddish, and Italian for decades leading up to the 1900s. It was not until the turn of the twentieth century that the United States became legally linked to the English language (Leeman, 2004, p. 516). English fluency became a requirement for naturalization in 1906. The Naturalization Act of 1906 mandated that to become a naturalized citizen, one must "speak, read, and understand English language" (Olson & Woll, 2002). Therefore, if an immigrant was not fluent in English, citizenship in the United States was no longer an option: "Between 1900 and 1920, the proportion of immigrants who held U.S. citizenship fell dramatically from 67 percent to 49 percent" (Bloemraad, 2006, p. 929). This can be credited to the Naturalization Act of 1906. Immigration remained large, but many immigrants could no longer receive the citizenship that was promised earlier. This act slowed the increase in American citizens. From here, the connection between English and American citizenship grew.

The National Americanization Committee was tasked with a number of jobs, all centered around uniting the American citizens (H. C. Hill, 1919, p. 630). One thing that they were commissioned with was making the entire country have a common language: English. With help from the United States Census, the committee identified which people were proficient in English. As early as the 1920s, lists were compiled, based on data from the Census, of those who could not speak or read English (Leeman, 2004, p. 520). To help these people learn English, night classes were offered so every immigrant had the chance to communicate effectively in this language. Various organizations and businesses, besides the National Americanization Committee, were in charge of arranging the teachings (Leeman, 2004, p. 518). This is the epitome of the Americanization process. According to its definition, the Americanization process was effective. Linguistically, American immigrants evolved over time. The second generation Americans were typically bilingual and the third shifted to being monolingual English-speakers (Citrin et al., 1990, p. 536). This shift is a clear indication of what the Americanization movement is and how it ultimately succeeded.

### ***Education (Policy)***

In this section I argue that language in education largely resulted in the oppression of Spanish-speakers. I look at education through the Official English Movement, the effects it had on Spanish-speaking students, and the benefits of bilingual teachings. The introduction of English-Only education oppressed Spanish-speakers, especially students, who were directly impacted by it.

The Official English Movement, also known as the English-Only Movement, began as a result of Americanization. Dennis Chávez, serving as a New Mexican Senator from 1935 to 1962, argued in favor of English-only education (Lozano, 2013, p. 284). Growing up with Spanish as his first language, he recognized the importance of learning English and attributes fluency in it to his success. This argument, in favor of The Official English Movement, was widely believed across

the country. English, and only English, is tied to being a true American: “To the English-speaking majority in the mass public, bicultural education apparently implied a diminished respect for American culture as a whole” (Citrin et al., 1990, p. 537). They argue that education taught in any other language harms American values and society. Even though children are the most receptive to learning a new language, education in English-only is nearly impossible for those who do not speak it. Americanization, which advocates for English-only instruction, creates a prejudice against other cultures, as language is a huge part of it.

In the 1920s, education systems changed to English-only instruction. Other languages, that were once used to teach in public schools, were removed by fifteen states (Citrin et al., 1990, p. 537). Even though these languages were some students’ native tongues, the teachers were required to teach in English. When education became exclusively taught in English, the use of other languages began to decrease (Leeman, 2004, p. 518). Since the goal of Americanization was to unify citizens, when the use of other world languages diminished, the goal was achieved. By learning only in English, the children’s connection to their home cultures began to lessen. This too was a tactic to Americanize the next generation and ensure that they grow up as a “true American.”

The American education system directly reflects the language hierarchy in the country. While states are able to govern themselves in terms of public education’s curriculum, most funding comes from the national government. Schools are able to decide the curriculum, but there are stipulations on what they are allowed to teach. Further, strict budgets and inadequate funding in American school districts contributes to the lack of resources in order to study world languages. Some states allow world language requirements to be replaced by other electives, such as art classes (Lopez et al., n.d.). This implies that languages are held to a lesser degree and are deemed less important when compared to the typical “core classes” such as English, social studies, math,

and science. Even though America has no official language and contains numerous languages within its borders, learning a world language, such as Spanish, is not considered as necessary as learning other subjects. This set of beliefs is rooted in Americanization and the English-Only movement.

The process of Americanization and the Official English Movement, contributes to immigrants feeling that they are out of place, and an “other” in the country (Moe, 2011, p. 3). By mandating that only English is used among Spanish-speaking students, it teaches these children that their language is less important. The already established hierarchy, with Spanish-speakers below English-speakers, only hurts their self-confidence. By viewing themselves, and having peers view them, as an “other,” more feelings of inferiority emanate. To assimilate and become an American, immigrants often lose aspects of their old cultures and pick up those of America. Through ignoring language and therefore culture, the impact of English-only policies continuously harms Spanish-speakers’ sense of self-worth: “During each succeeding generation of Americans, people who consider the meaning of ‘Americanization’ struggle with the question of the relationship between the individual and society” (Moe, 2011, p. 17). As the quote suggests, this sentiment will continue with future generations. The large group of Spanish-speakers in America will likely endure feelings of inferiority for decades to come.

### ***Labor (Policy)***

In this section I argue that English-speakers have profited off of the work of Spanish-speakers for decades. I look at the Bracero Program and cheap work. Through labor, Spanish-speakers, and consequently their language, are controlled by white, English-speaking employers.

The Bracero Program was a guest worker program for Mexican citizens, allowing them to work on farms in the United States seasonally and eventually return home (Martin, 2002, p. 1128). The program existed during two time periods: 1917-1921 and 1942-1964, both of which were

during a World War (Martin, 2020). It was believed that the Mexican workers produced food that benefited the United States during the war, which is a reason for its enactment. Further, foreign labor is cheaper than domestic labor, which is a second, and more important motive for farmers to be in favor of this program. Wages were also higher in the United States than in Mexico, acting as an incentive to partake in the program (Martin, 2020). As a result, immigration from Mexico to the United States began increasing in 1942. It peaked in 1956, with 61,320 immigrants arriving, many of which remained in America after the program ended (Martin, 2020). It appeared that both employers and employees benefited from the Bracero Program.

However, the Bracero Program often resembled slavery. Those in the program were contained in labor camps, fenced off from the rest of America (Bacon, 2019). Conditions were terrible, benefits were denied and, occasionally, legal documents were stolen by employers. As slaves replaced the farmhands in the South, Mexican citizens did the same to local employers in states such as California. They were given wages, but low in comparison to the rest of the country. In the 1950's, although wages rose for Mexican farm workers, they were making less than half of those in cities (Bacon, 2019). Since they were immigrants, the minimum wage was lower than wages of American citizens. Companies profit when their workers are underpaid and exploited, because the company itself is able to keep higher earnings.

Capitalism, as an economic system, benefits when workers are exploited. Since Spanish-speakers are considered “extended things” it is justified that they are the ones who are subjugated. If an individual is considered to be Nature, someone in Society owns everything about them (Patel & Moore, 2017, p. 102). Nature was created so it could be manipulated and so Society remains in power. Exploitation of labor is fundamental in the commodity system (Patel & Moore, 2017, p. 95). Without immigrant labor, known as cheap work, capitalism could not possibly be sustained.

In all ways, Mexican citizens under the Bracero Program were exploited by their United States employers.

Even with the large number of Spanish-speakers in America from the Bracero program, the English-speakers were still able to manipulate them. They took advantage of those in the program and made money from their exploitation. Employers disrespected their language and culture, because in America, where English is the *lingua franca*, it did not matter. This continued to enforce the idea that Spanish-speakers are part of the inferior group of people. Employers thought little about how those in the Bracero Program were treated. What mattered to them was the final outcome, or the profit that they would receive (Patel & Moore, 2017, p. 97). The oppression and maltreatment of these people was not important in comparison to the product.

The cheap work from Mexican immigrants contributed to the belief that their lives are also considered cheap. Although the program ended, “U.S. immigration law and its enforcement have never eliminated Mexicans from the workforce, but indirectly control the conditions under which they live and work” (Bacon, 2019). Mexican workers greatly contribute to the United States economy with and without the Bracero program. In both instances, employers manipulated their lives, making them and their work cheap. Constantly, they were taken advantage of. If a person’s life as a whole is cheap, so is everything that is a part of them, including their language. Mexican workers are an enormous reason why Spanish is popular and a primary language in America. However, the exploitation of Mexican workers, under the Bracero Program, is a main reason why Spanish-speakers remain oppressed.

### ***Conclusion***

The hegemony that exists in America is one of the reasons why world language speakers, specifically Spanish, are oppressed. America’s beliefs regarding world languages, combined with social movements throughout American history, such as the English-Only movement, is an

enormous factor to why Spanish is valued to a lesser degree than English. In America, men, specifically white elites, control the rest of civilization. This type of control, which causes a lack of worth towards others in all hierarchies, is what makes lives cheap. In regard to Spanish-speakers, cheap lives are produced because of the language that the individual speaks.

Monolingual English-speakers perceive others as inferior, because of the hierarchical ranking of race, language, and class. They are Society, while those speaking other languages are Nature and therefore inferior (Patel & Moore, 2017, p. 39). As a result of capitalism, English is used as the default and languages are arranged in a hierarchy. In America, English-speakers control the Spanish-speakers, therefore making their lives and language inherently cheap. Spanish must be domesticated in order to conform to society's standards (Chávez, 2014, p. 37). This world language is suppressed and altered to accommodate monolingual people. English-speaking Americans see little value in it and therefore, the language can also be seen as cheap.

Language, specifically English is used as a weapon of violence in America. Since the beginning of colonialism, white men have manipulated the racial hierarchy and attempted to control the lives of those below them (Patel & Moore, 2017, p. 3). Colonizers used language to establish control over the people that they deemed inferior. Today, language is still used as a way to control and even silence minority groups (Torres-Rivera et al., 2008, p. 1). Gayatri Spivak asks, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (Spivak, 2008) The answer is no. The subaltern, synonymous to Nature, or those considered lowered, do not have a voice. With the oppression of their language, it is impossible to speak, resist control, or fight back against oppression. In America, this is evident when looking at Spanish-speakers. Many English-speaking Americans attempt to control the Spanish-speaker's language, the jobs they hold, and the places they live. Spanish-speakers are

consequently ranked low in society because Americans have declared English as the only acceptable language, despite Spanish being the second most spoken language.

For centuries, a main goal of the United States has been to Americanize immigrants and make them proud of their country. Even with an increase in the Spanish-speaking population, the Americanization of immigrants and the language hierarchy has caused Spanish to be viewed as inferior to English. In the United States, speaking English proficiently symbolizes that one is a true American and that the Americanization process was a success. The belief that English is the superior language in the country traces back to the separation between people, started by Descartes. Power, policy, and profits are three things that keep this separation alive today and contribute to the oppression of the Spanish language. Those who speak English are seen as superior, and part of Society. Those who speak any other language, such as Spanish, are viewed as Nature, and therefore inferior. This ranking of languages consequently results in the ranking of lives. Due to capitalistic ideals in America, if one does not speak English, their life is cheaper than one who does. Despite numerous efforts through power, policies, and profits, Spanish continues to be a primary, and widely spoken language across the United States.

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