

BILINGUAL EDUCATION, CIRCA 1920

World War I set off an intense wave of antiimmigrant hysteria. Then, as now, bilingual education was a contentious issue. Immigrants and their allies challenged laws that called for English-only instruction. Teachers were arrested in Iowa, Nebraska and Ohio for violating such laws. In 1923, the Supreme Court ruled that these laws, which existed in more than 20 states, were unconstitutional. Following is a reaction to that ruling that appeared in Onze Toekomst, a Dutch-language newspaper.

The opinion of the Supreme Court finally gives the right to different religious organizations and individuals to teach religion and other subjects in languages other than English. This means that we can now instruct in the lower schools in all the courses in Dutch or German or Polish or any other language. A courageous decision! Hurrah for American liberty! May she live long.

We are not for Dutch schools exclusively. That would not only be impossible, but it would be a crime against our children. It would be ungrateful to the land. It would be unpatriotic and therefore the American language should be first in our lower schools ... [The Dutch] want to be good Americans. They do not want to separate themselves from the nation. Instead, they want to share their gifts and blessings with the nation. But we will not throw our children head over heels into the maelstrom. The Dutch want their children to be as themselves and to maintain a spiritual tie with their ancestors. ... In order to do this, they need as an instrument their own language.