Should English be the Official Language?

Read before you begin:

- “Why and When We Speak Spanish in Public” by Myriam Marquez (Language Awareness p. 542-43)
- “Should English Be the Law?” by Robert King (Language Awareness p. 529-38)
- “Saying ‘Adios’ to Spanglish” by Leticia Salais (Language Awareness p. 545-47)

Your task:

Choose one of these topics for your paper:

1. While it’s no secret that English is the common language of the United States, few of us know, as Myriam Marquez is quick to remind us, that our country has been “careful not to promote a government-mandated official language.” Why do you suppose that our federal government has chosen to keep its hands off the language issue? If it has not been necessary to mandate English in the past, why do some now feel a need to declare English the “official language” of the United States?

2. Robert D. King explains that “[i]n much of the world, ethnic unity and cultural identification are routinely defined by language.” To what extent is this true in the United States? Why is it sometimes difficult for nonnative speakers of English who immigrate to the United States to take ownership of Standard English? Write an essay in which you explore what it means to take ownership of language. Does one need this ownership to succeed?

3. Write an essay in which you frame the English-only debate as a political issue, a social issue, an economic issue, or some combination of the three. In this context, what do you see as the relationship between language and power?

4. Readers have strong feelings about and respond both positively and negatively to Leticia Salais’s views on Spanglish, bilingualism, childrearing, and her level of appreciation for her own heritage. Write an essay in which you defend or take issue with the way she has thought about her situation at various points in her life and the way she has acted as a result. Would you have acted in the same way? If not, how might you have approached the situation differently?

Mechanical requirements:

- The final product will be typed and double-spaced according to MLA format.
- The paper will be at least 4 pages long (That’s about 1400 words).

Due Dates:

1. Tuesday, October 23: Bring TWO printed copies of your rough draft for peer editing.
2. Thursday, October 25: Final copy of essay #4 is DUE!

This essay is worth 100 points.