

Preface

Thinking of immigrants and of immigration—how each is presently viewed in the United States, the positions of elected officials, the variation in opinions among members of the general public, and so on—many would say that we live in unusual times. Words and phrases that in the not too distant past were either not often used or were largely unknown to most individuals—such as anchor babies, birthright citizenship, border walls, and travel bans—have become commonplace. Likewise, rising nationalism—whether based on economic interests or a more general nativism—has evoked concerns that immigrants adversely affect the United States. It is not uncommon to hear or read that immigrants are a drain on social programs, are responsible for growing income inequality, compete with native-born workers and contribute to job loss and depressed wages, lead to increases in crime rates, may be terrorist threats, etc.

I contend that while we may be in a period of heightened tensions with respect to immigrants and immigration, we are living in fairly typical times. This book was completed in 2017. One hundred years earlier, the U.S. Congress voted to override President Woodrow Wilson's veto to pass the Immigration Act of 1917. The act is also known as the Literacy Act and is sometimes called the Asiatic Barred Zone Act. At the time, it was the most sweeping reform of immigration policy in U.S. history. As the names used to identify the act suggest, it imposed literacy tests on immigrants. It also expanded the classes of individuals ineligible for admission to the country and, perhaps most notoriously, the act barred all immigration to the U.S. from most of Asia and the Pacific Islands (i.e., from a geographic region that included Afghanistan, Borneo, India, Indo-China, Java, New Guinea, Siam (Thailand), Sumatra, those portions of Arabia in Asia, parts of Russian Turkestan, and many islands).

The 1917 Act was hardly the only attempt, or the first or the most recent, to restrict immigration to the United States. It was also not the first law that sought to influence the composition of immigrant inflows in an attempt to produce arrivals who were viewed by many Americans as being more acceptable or more appropriate additions to the country's population. Even though we are a century removed from this prior turn towards nativism, views on immigrants, and immigration more generally, appear

to have waxed and waned more than they have evolved to become more enlightened. In fact, it is hardly an overstatement to say that the history of U.S. immigration policy has been such that a deliberate preference was afforded to immigrants from Northern and Western Europe and that discrimination, prejudice, and bias have been exhibited against those who have wished to immigrate to the U.S. from many other source countries/regions. One result of this favoritism is that American culture developed to become more akin to the cultures of countries in Northern and Western Europe than, say, those which are located in Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, or Africa.

With respect to immigration, I find the differences in opinion that are often expressed with such certainty by so many Americans to be quite interesting. That a topic can elicit such variation in perspectives and such differences in views is fascinating in its own right. What is puzzling to me and, thus, what is more compelling is the question of how we find ourselves in our current state of differences. What has led us to a present where we continue to see a pronounced cleavage in views towards immigrants and immigration? This book seeks to address this question by examining the history of U.S. immigration policy and the corresponding influences that immigrant inflows may have had on American culture. In a few words, development of a better understanding of our past may allow for an improved understanding of how or why we arrived at our present. Further, a more complete understanding of the past and the present may prove beneficial as we collectively move towards our future.

I hope that the information provided here is of broad interest. My intent is to provide material that is accessible to members of academia, policy makers, and the general public. Lastly, while I have benefitted considerably from the support and generosity of others while completing this work, I take full responsibility for any errors of commission or omission.