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978-0-521-51322-7 - Mass Migration Under Sail: European Immigration to the Antebellum United States

Raymond L. Cohn

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## Mass Migration Under Sail

### *European Immigration to the Antebellum United States*

Dr. Cohn provides an in-depth and comprehensive analysis of the economic history of European immigration to the antebellum United States, using and evaluating the available data as well as presenting new data. This analysis centers on immigration from the three most important source countries – Ireland, Germany, and Great Britain – and examines the volume of immigration, how many individuals came from each country during the antebellum period, and why those numbers increased. The book also analyzes where they came from within each country; who chose to immigrate; the immigrants' trip to the United States, including estimates of mortality on the Atlantic crossing; the jobs obtained in the United States by the immigrants, along with their geographic location; and the economic effects of immigration on both the immigrants and the antebellum United States. No other book examines so many different economic aspects of antebellum immigration.

Raymond L. Cohn is Professor of Economics at Illinois State University. Over the last twenty years, he has written for the following journals: *Explorations in Economic History*, the *Journal of Economic History*, *Social Science History*, and the *International Journal of Maritime History*. Dr. Cohn is also a member of the following associations, among others: the American Economic Association, the Economic History Association, and the International Maritime Economic History Association.

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RAYMOND L. COHN

*Illinois State University*



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*To Scotti, who has always been with me*

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## Preface

The genesis for this book came from the many years I have spent investigating economic aspects of European immigration to the United States during the antebellum period. Although my initial interest concerned the mortality experienced by the immigrants on the voyage, soon I began working on broader topics. However, writing this book quickly convinced me how little I really knew about many aspects of antebellum immigration. I have increased my knowledge of the economics of antebellum immigration many times over because I have been required to address topics I had not previously considered. The result is a comprehensive economic analysis of European immigration to the antebellum United States. I consider the immigrants in the various European countries, on the voyage, and in the United States, as well as analyze the reasons that immigration occurred and its effects on the United States. Thus, although parts of this book repeat the findings in some of my earlier work, much of the material and explanations are new.

Although my ancestors arrived in the United States well after the antebellum period, the years before the Civil War have always fascinated me. Fundamental changes occurred in the economy, as Jefferson's dream of a country of gentlemen farmers was overtaken by the reality of the growth of manufacturing and large cities. Immigration certainly played a part in these changes, a part I believe has never been fully appreciated. The effects of immigration during the antebellum years were considerable because it was the first time the volume of immigration became large, a development explored in this book. During these years, people also came to live permanently in a new place. The thought of going back to Europe, although certainly possible, was not very practical given the many days

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required to travel between the United States and Europe on a sailing ship. The permanence of the move to the United States during the antebellum years made immigration quite different from that at later times – or during the present day – when many people came to work and planned on (or at least strongly considered) going back to their homes at some future date. It is the large volume of permanent immigrants arriving during the antebellum years that caused immigration to have widespread effects on the United States for the first time.

Two important features of this book deserve mention. The first is the emphasis on presenting and discussing the available data on antebellum immigration. Although some of the data presented are new, most are available in various government publications. However, I have attempted to present as much data as possible in a logical manner in an effort to provide a reference for anyone searching for numerical information on European immigration to the antebellum United States. Of equal importance, the book also provides an analysis of the data, both as to its quality and its accuracy, so that the reader can appreciate its shortcomings. The second feature of the book is that I have written it in a manner that is as non-mathematical and non-econometric as possible. Although economic models and reasoning lie behind the analysis in the book, no formal models are presented or tested. My reasons are twofold. First, I want the book to appeal not only to my fellow economic historians but also to as many researchers as possible in other fields. Second, much of the discussion of the data emphasizes the uncertainty and imprecision in many of the numbers that exist. Empirical tests of economic models are only as good as the available data, and a number of problems exist with those for the antebellum period. In writing the book in the manner I have, I hope to interest more researchers who work in economic history and other fields in the subject of historical immigration, with the hope that they will improve or expand upon the arguments presented here.

In writing a book, the author always incurs a debt to a number of individuals who provide assistance along the way. In my case, three economic historians read each chapter as it was written and provided me with invaluable feedback. I want to especially thank these individuals: Drew Keeling, Cormac Ó Gráda, and Simone Wegge. Their comments vastly improved this book and kept me from making a number of errors. I also wish to thank two individuals who read the entire manuscript for Cambridge University Press and provided me with numerous helpful comments. I would be remiss if I did not also thank Marianne Hinds Wanamaker and Joel Mokyr, both of whom read an earlier draft of this

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manuscript and provided me with helpful comments. I did not incorporate every comment provided by the readers, so none of the previously mentioned individuals should be held responsible for anything said in this book or for any remaining errors. However, I always appreciated each person's willingness to help as well as his or her time and effort. I also thank the interlibrary loan staff at Milner Library for procuring copies of numerous books that are cited in the manuscript and Illinois State University for granting me the sabbatical that allowed me to begin writing the book. Finally, thanks go to my wife, Scotti, whose love, encouragement, patience, and willingness to listen have always been highly appreciated.