Discussion questions for ‘At War with Diversity’

You now know a lot, probably more than you realize, about language and immigration in the United States, well beyond Wisconsin. This book rightly made a splash when it appeared and it’s still important, but you can engage with it … challenge some things he argues and develop and provide new support for others:

1. How does Crawford understand U.S. language policy past and present? How has that worked? What advantages and disadvantages does it have?
2. How did the American population regard official English legislation at the time he was writing?
3. On p. 6, he gives a set of arguments for ‘official English’. What are they and what support is there for them?
4. What is his hypothesis on p. 10? Why is it important and interesting? (I think it is both, whether he’s right or wrong.)
5. He sketches several historical scenarios involving communities that we have not discussed — e.g., Cajuns, Californios, Puerto Ricans, Hawaiians. How do they compare with the Wisconsin situations of language and indigenous people and immigrant people we have discussed?
6. The Ben Franklin quote (p. 11) is famous, in part because Crawford repeats it in this book. What does the quote tell us about language and immigration past and present? About broader social issues in the U.S.? (Same holds for the Roosevelt quote on p. 8.)
7. On p. 21 and elsewhere, Crawford makes some statements about German and WWI. He’s hardly alone and some have been much more strident, like Don Heinrich Tolzmann on the “persecution and victimization of German-Americans” in this era (1995:ix), and that “[t]he Anti-German Hysteria certainly ranks as one of the most brutal inquisitions in American history” (1995:1073). Given what you know, how do you interpret Crawford’s view? If he asked you for advice on a new edition, what would you tell him?
8. Where does the modern English Only movement come from? Is it connected to anti-immigrant and racist groups in his view? Who is the Federation for American Immigration Reform?
9. Crawford notes (esp. pp. 26-27) that earlier immigrants (often earlier by a generation or two) sometimes lead efforts for English only or other anti-immigrant-language legislation. How should we understand that? Are there Wisconsin parallels?
10. What’s the answer to this question he raises: “What kinds of bilingual accommodations are reasonable and necessary to ensure minorities’ access to government and education?”
11. What is his big picture assessment of linguistic diversity in the United States?
12. Later in the book (that is, beyond the part you’re reading), Crawford writes that (p. 66) that all languages other than English in the U.S. “would gradually die out in this country”, save for “the replenishing effects of immigration”. Is that right? Explain.
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