Americanism in the Twenty-First Century

Public Opinion in the Age of Immigration

This book explores public opinion about being and becoming American, and its implications for contemporary immigration debates. It focuses on the causes and consequences of two aspects of American identity: how people define being American and whether people think of themselves primarily as American rather than as members of a panethnic or national origin group. Importantly, the book evaluates the claim – made by scholars and pundits alike – that all Americans should prioritize their American identity instead of an ethnic or national origin identity. It finds that national identity within American democracy can be a blessing or a curse. It can enhance participation, trust, and obligation. But it can be a curse when perceptions of deviation lead to threat and resentment. It can also be a curse for minorities who are attached to their American identity but also perceive discrimination. The notion of American identity is a predisposition that the government has good reason to cultivate but also good reason to approach with caution.

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