The 1905 Aliens Act was the first modern law to restrict immigration to British shores. In this book, David Glover asks how it was possible for Britain – a nation that had prided itself on offering asylum to refugees – to pass such legislation. Tracing the ways that the legal notion of the “alien” became a national-racist epithet indistinguishable from the figure of “the Jew,” Glover argues that the literary and popular entertainments of fin-de-siècle Britain perpetuated a culture of xenophobia. Reconstructing the complex socio-political field known as “the alien question,” Glover examines the work of George Eliot, Israel Zangwill, Rudyard Kipling, and Joseph Conrad, together with forgotten writers like Margaret Harkness, Edgar Wallace, and James Blyth. By linking them to the beliefs and ideologies that circulated via newspapers, periodicals, political meetings, Royal Commissions, patriotic melodramas, and social surveys, Glover sheds new light on dilemmas about nationality, borders, and citizenship that remain vital today.

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LITERATURE, IMMIGRATION, AND DIASPORA IN FIN-DE-SIÈCLE ENGLAND

A Cultural History of the 1905 Aliens Act

DAVID GLOVER
University of Southampton
In memory of Paul Harris and Loretta Loach
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Acknowledgements

This book has been part of my life for far longer than I care to remember, and the debts I have incurred are many and various. The research and writing could not have been completed without awards from the Arts and Humanities Research Council, the Leverhulme Trust, and the University of Southampton, all of whom enabled substantial periods of research leave, and I would like to thank them for their generous financial support. I was also extremely fortunate to be awarded a Visiting Fellowship at the American Bar Foundation, Chicago, in 2003, which helped me to think through some of the sociolegal aspects of this project, and I am extremely grateful to Director Bryant Garth and to the other Fellows and staff for all their help and hospitality. My editor at Cambridge University Press, Ray Ryan, has been a pleasure to work with; my thanks to him for his unwavering enthusiasm and exemplary patience throughout.

I owe a great deal to the expertise of librarians and archivists at a number of institutions; my thanks in particular to staff at Birmingham Central Library; British Library; British Library of Political and Economic Science; British Newspaper Library, Colindale; Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem; Hartley Library, University of Southampton; House of Lords Record Office, London; Library of Trinity College, Dublin; London Library; London Metropolitan Archives; National Archives at Kew; National Maritime Museum at Greenwich; New York Public Library; and Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archives. I am grateful to Damian Collier and A.P. Watt on behalf of The Literary Executors of the Estate of H.G. Wells for permission to reproduce a sentence from the first chapter of The War of the Worlds as an epigraph to my Introduction. I would also like to thank the Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem, for granting permission to quote from their collection of letters by Israel Zangwill.

Many friends and colleagues have helped to make this book possible. For good counsel, insightful suggestions, information, questions,
x

Acknowledgements

couragement, and invitations to speak, my thanks to Peter Bailey, John Barrell, Eitan Bar-Yosef, Devorah Baum, Johan Callens, Bryan Cheyette, Liam Connell, Nicholas Daly, Geoff Eley, David Feldman, Emma Francis, Ben Gidley, Paul Gilroy, Catherine Hall, Clare Hanson, Stephanie Jones, Desmond King, Tony Kushner, Jan Marsh, Nicky Marsh, Keith McClelland, Scott McCracken, Gail McDonald, Peter Middleton, Stephen Morton, Patrick Parrinder, Marcia Pointon, John Rignall, Meri-Jane Rochelson, Gemma Romain, Jacqueline Rose, Sonya Rose, Bill Schwarz, Alan Sinfield, Sujala Singh, Barbara Taylor, Jenny Bourne Taylor, Nadia Valman, Judith Walkowitz, and Catherine Wynne. I am especially grateful to David Amigoni, Stuart Hall, and David Trotter for supporting this project during critical periods. My thanks also to Peter Lawson, who was a very efficient and tenacious research assistant at a particularly busy moment.

My greatest debts are to my friend and former colleague, Lucy Hartley, who scrupulously and constructively read a rather tentative early draft in a very cold climate and helped me to see the wood for the trees; and to my partner, Cora Kaplan, who will greet the appearance of this book with enormous relief, not to say disbelief. Without her remarkable forbearance, scepticism, creativity, and plain good sense, this book would be much the poorer; I owe her my deepest thanks for sharing her ideas, doubts, and much else with me.