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NO FOREIGN DESPOTS ON SOUTHERN SOIL: THE AMERICAN PARTY IN
ALABAMA AND SOUTH CAROLINA, 1850-1857

by

Robert N. Farrell

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate School
and the Department of History
at The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts

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May 2017

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ABSTRACT

NO FOREIGN DESPOTS ON SOUTHERN SOIL: THE AMERICAN PARTY IN ALABAMA AND SOUTH CAROLINA, 1850-1857

by Robert N. Farrell

May 2017

During the 1850s in the South, the American Party, also known as the Know Nothing Party, rallied southerners culturally and politically around nativism, an anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic ideology. This thesis studies nativism in the Deep South and challenges existing scholarship by Tyler Anbinder and William Darrell Overdyke. Anbinder claims that southern Know Nothings held little in common with their northern counterparts and exhibited only regional characteristics. Overdyke maintains that the American Party in the Deep South participated in the national organization, but he argues that nativism appeared only as an incidental component.

An analysis of private papers, speeches, and newspapers from Alabama and South Carolina reveals a different reality. Alabama and South Carolina are excellent representative case studies because their port cities attracted significant, but not exceptional, levels of immigration to the South. These states provide a mainstream picture of southern cultural and political nativism, indicating that southern Know Nothings shared core nativist ideals with northern members of the American Party. Southerners sympathized with nativist fears of criminal immigrants and the Catholic Church. Furthermore, Dixie Know Nothings used nativist ideology to explain the growing influence of abolitionism in America, which became a powerful political issue in the South. Though northerners maintained that Catholics and immigrants supported

slavery, southern Know Nothings contended that they exerted abolitionist influences on the nation. Nativist ideology threatened to alter the southern political landscape by pushing southern nativists into an alliance with Fire Eaters and forced Democrats to radicalize their own states' rights policies.

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This thesis required the aid of numerous people to complete. Without the hard work of archivists, librarians, and history professors, I doubt that this study comes to fruition. Archivists and librarians provided invaluable aid during the research process. I've found that they always seem to know about another resource that I had not considered, and these collections were typically relevant and important for my research. Therefore, many thanks are owed to the archivists and librarians at the Alabama Department of Archives and History, the College of Charleston, the Rubenstein Library at Duke University, the McCain Library and Archives at the University of Southern Mississippi, the Mobile Public Library, the Mobile Municipal Archives, the South Carolina Department of Archives and History, the South Caroliniana Library at the University of South Carolina, and the University of South Alabama for making this thesis better than it would have been without their help.

I would like to especially thank the staff at the Alabama Department of Archives and History and the South Caroliniana Library for going above and beyond the call of duty while providing much-appreciated advice and assistance. Special thanks are also owed to my history professors at the University of Southern Mississippi. They frequently took time out of their busy schedules to make me a better writer, teacher, and historian. I'd like to especially thank my thesis committee for their time and efforts. Thank you, Dr. Susannah J. Ural, Dr. Chester M. Morgan, and Dr. Heather Marie Stur for your patience and much-needed guidance. I'd like to point out that any errors in this thesis are my sole responsibility, and do not reflect on the efforts of those who have helped me along the way.

DEDICATION

I'd like to dedicate this thesis to my friends and family. To my friends who I count as family, especially Beau and Keri Buhring, Christine Clolinger, Alex Kudla, Alana Malone, and David Mullek, I know it could not have been fun hearing me complain throughout this process. Your understanding, patience, love, and support are greatly appreciated. To my fellow graduate students who shared the journey, especially Jonathan Harton, Rick Lovering, Olivia Moore, Anna Ricki Nelson, Nick Schaefer, Emily Smith, and Sam Taylor, thank you all for the long dinners at The Hog or the Keg and the mutual support and encouragement. I'd especially like to thank Tracy Barnett for encouraging me to drop the "also," "thoughts," and "buts" from my writing, forcing me to go outside my apartment on occasion, and preventing me from speaking what's actually on my mind. You've been a wonderful friend and colleague.

Most importantly, I'd like to dedicate this thesis to my family. The prayers, love, and support provide by my grandmother, aunts, uncles, and cousins are greatly appreciated. But, most of all, I'd like to dedicate this work to my parents, Bobby and Mary Lynn Farrell, though to me they're just "mom" and "dad." This thesis does not happen without your support. To dad: I've studied something, gotten to work, and wrote something. I now Know Something about the Know Nothing Party. To mom: maybe one day I'll be able to repay your love and support. In the meantime, please remember to prop open Heaven's back door so I can sneak in! To my friends and family, I dedicate this thesis to you. Thank you for everything.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>ADAH</i>	Alabama Department of Archives and History
AL	Alabama
NC	North Carolina
USA	The University of South Alabama
UNC	The University of North Carolina
USC	The University of South Carolina
SC	South Carolina
SCDAH	South Carolina Department of Archives and History

CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION

“Let the American Party throw away its follies, but remain true to its ends. Though it fail to command office, it cannot fail to have power.” – Joseph A. Woodward¹

On September 6, 1855, Samuel F. Rice expounded upon the merits of a new political option. Rice maintained that existing political parties failed to offer viable solutions to abolitionist hostility besetting the South. Rice argued that the Whig and Democratic Parties allowed abolitionists to immigrate to America and corrupt national politics. This foreign influence of abolitionism threatened the Union, and both parties demonstrated an inability to meet the danger. Rice emphasized the foreignness of abolitionism and its link to the dangers of immigration. The stress on foreign influence and abolitionism is significant as he made his speech in front of the only party that he thought could fight abolitionism: The American Party. Rice observed that, “all the North, except the Abolition party, had a profound interest in preserving the Union, and in protecting themselves against the *social* evil of foreign immigration and from the humiliation and disasters which would inevitably result to them and their country, from the ascendancy of foreign influence and the Abolition party.”² Rice’s speech encapsulates the appeal of nativism to southerners. According to southern nativists, the foreign-born population in the United States allowed the evils of abolitionism to gain considerable power in the North, which threatened the existence of the South. Rice maintained that

¹ Joseph A. Woodward, “The Relations of the North and South Considered in Connection with the Principles of the American Party,” An Address Delivered at Talladega, September 6, 1855, Before the American Party of Talladega County (Montgomery: Barrett and Wimbish’s Book and Job Office, 1855), J. L. M. Curry Pamphlet Collection, 1730-1902, Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH), Montgomery, Alabama.

² Samuel F. Rice, “Address Before a Mass Meeting of the American Party of Talladega County,” September 6, 1855 (Montgomery: Barrett and Wimbish’s Book and Job Office, 1855), Curry Collection. Emphasis original.

only the American Party, also known as the Know Nothing Party, correctly identified the true source of the threat to southern institutions and the Union. Only Know Nothings proved willing to defend the Constitution and the Union against abolitionist tyranny created by immigrants and Catholics. This expression of nativism, however, did not suddenly appear in the South in 1855, nor was it used to distract voters from sectional tensions. Rather, Rice and other Know Nothings in Alabama and South Carolina tapped into a strong cultural tradition of antipathy towards Catholics and immigrants.

Samuel F. Rice offers a case study for the American Party in the South. Originally a member of the Southern Rights Party and advocate for immediate secession of Alabama, Rice joined the Know Nothings in 1855. His support of nativist ideology as a solution to abolitionist hostility reveals the appeal that anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic values held for many southerners.³ Indeed, southern culture and changing demographics during the mid-nineteenth century cultivated nativist ideals in Alabama and South Carolina. Know Nothings took advantage of these values and used them to create a powerful political agenda that appealed broadly to southerners during the mid-nineteenth century.

Alabama and South Carolina show that Know Nothings below the Mason-Dixon Line shared core nativist ideals with northern Know Nothings. These states provide excellent representative case studies because their port cities attracted significant, but not exceptional, levels of immigration to the South. They had a visible foreign-born

³ *The Lancaster Ledger*, July 26, 1854, Lancasterville, South Carolina, "Chronicling America," Library of Congress, Washington D.C.; *Mobile Daily Register*, July 28, 1851, Mobile, AL, University of South Alabama Library (USA), Mobile, AL; and Rice, "Americanism and Southern Rights," September 6, 1855, Curry Collection.

population that provoked nativist fears, but without extreme demonstrations. Thus, Alabama and South Carolina offer a mainstream picture of nativism and Know Nothings in the South.⁴ Previous historians discounted southern political expressions of nativism because they did not mirror nativist policies found in the North because of the South's emphasis on states' rights ideology.⁵ Despite sectional differences, however, both northern and southern Know Nothings used nativism to justify their public policies. While immigration never displaced slavery as the most significant political issue in the South, Know Nothings found a powerful political voice that centered on the dangers of foreign influence in the South.

The southern branch of the American Party significantly challenged the Democratic Party during the mid-1850s. The appeal of nativist philosophy and existing discontent with Democrats threatened to alter the existing political landscape in a fundamental manner. To secure an alliance with Fire Eaters, who shared important ideological outlooks with the American Party, mainstream Democrats radicalized their states' rights policies regarding slavery. Mainstream Democrats claimed that Know Nothings threatened to undermine states' rights, especially in regards to the state's ability

⁴ For an overview of the American Party in a southern state with some of the largest foreign-born populations in the South during the 1850s, see Ralph A. Wooster, "An Analysis of the Texas Know Nothings," *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* Vol. 70, (January 1967): 414-423; and John David Bladek, "Virginia is Middle Ground: The Know Nothing Party and the Virginia Gubernatorial Election of 1855," *Virginia Historical Society* Vol. 106, (Winter 1998): 35-70. These journal articles also contend that nativist ideology played an important role for southern Know Nothings.

⁵ Tyler Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings and the Politics of the 1850s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) and William Darrell Overdyke, *The Know-Nothing Party in the South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1950). This thesis challenges scholarship by Tyler Anbinder and William Darrell Overdyke. Anbinder claims that southern nativism proved weak or non-existent. Know Nothings, therefore, held little in common with their northern counterparts and exhibited only regional characteristics. According to Overdyke, the American Party in the Deep South participated in the national organization, but nativism appeared only as an incidental component.

to regulate voting rights. Weakening this right would allow abolitionists to impose their agenda upon the South. Southern Democrats portrayed the national American Party as a sinister plot concocted by northern abolitionists.

Southern Democrats became unwilling to compromise on slavery and demanded southern unity instead of preserving the Union. Nativism, therefore, played a more important role in southern politics than historians realized.⁶ The failure of the American Party in the South obscures its effect on southern and national political power. Joseph A. Woodward, an independent politician from South Carolina, recognized the power of the Know Nothing Party by arguing, “let the American Party throw away its follies, but remain true to its ends. Though it fail to command office, it cannot fail to have power.”⁷ While southern Know Nothings lost to the Democratic Party, the American Party posed a genuine threat to existing political institutions. Despite the Know Nothing Party’s failure in the South, its political battles with Democrats contributed to secession and the outbreak of the Civil War. The southern branch of the Know Nothing Party, therefore, allows historians to understand 1850s politics more fully. Unable to reach common ground on the issue of slavery with northern politicians, the American and Democratic Parties in the South contributed to increasing sectionalism of American politics, which opened the door for the Republican Party to gain control of the federal government. This analysis of the southern branch of the American Party, therefore, fills a void in the historiography by considering the nature of southern Know Nothings and its impact on American history.

⁶ Anbinder, xii.

⁷ Woodward, “The Relations of the North and South,” September 6, 1855, Curry Collection.

In *Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings and the Politics of the 1850s*, Tyler Anbinder, the leading scholar on Antebellum nativism, argues that the American Party built itself around northern abolition and temperance ideology. The first manifestation of the American Party was the Order of the Star Spangled Banner. Instead of actively running candidates in the group's name or formulating political platforms, this secret society limited itself to encouraging existing parties to enact nativist policies. As discontent with Whigs and Democrats increased, the order transitioned into an official political party. Though the American Party initially kept elements of secrecy, which led to the party's christening as the Know Nothing Party, it officially became an open political organization in 1855. Anbinder maintains, however, that the northern wing of the American Party increased in popularity and viability after it linked anti-slavery and temperance goals with its anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic agenda.⁸

The Know Nothing Party helped destroy the two-party system, which included the Whig and Democratic Parties. The Whig Party consisted of a variety of members with diverse values. Indeed, the sole factor that united the party centered on its animosity towards President Andrew Jackson. Whigs believed that Jackson abused executive power and Democrats needed to be prevented from continued abuse of power.⁹ The Whig Party ultimately fractured along sectional lines as a result of the Compromise of 1850. While southern Whigs insisted on protections for slave owners emigrating into the western territories, northern Whigs began to oppose the expansion of slavery. The fracture of the Whig Party and increasing anti-party sentiment left former Whigs with few political

⁸ Anbinder, 20-24, 43-48.

⁹ William J. Cooper, Jr. and Thomas E. Terrill, eds., *The American South: A History*, 4th Edition (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.: 2009), 176-177, 190.

options. They either had to join a new political party or their former adversaries, the Democrats. Many former Whigs chose to join the American Party rather than their previous opponents. The failure of the Know Nothing Party, however, allowed the nascent Republican Party to gain control of the federal government, which led to the outbreak of the Civil War.¹⁰

Anbinder ignores southern Know Nothing Party members, claiming they bore little resemblance to the northern wing. He argues that southern Know Nothings disregarded nativism and many southern lodges admitted Catholics. Dismissive of the southern American Party, Anbinder claims, “The history of the Know Nothing party in the South does not shed light on the collapse of the second party system, the extent to which nativism motivated antebellum voters or the role of anti-immigrant sentiment in the rise of the Republican party.”¹¹ Anbinder thus presents only a cursory overview of southern Know Nothings’ role in national events, such as the 1855 Philadelphia Convention.¹² Despite dismissing the importance of the American Party in the South, Anbinder’s scholarship remains the starting point for any study of Antebellum nativist political parties.

William Darrell Overdyke’s *The Know-Nothing Party in the South* provides the only book-length study of the southern branch of the American Party. Though dated, Overdyke’s scholarship remains important as the only substantial treatment of southern Know Nothings. Overdyke argues that slavery played an insignificant role for the

¹⁰ Anbinder, xv, 17-19.

¹¹ Anbinder, xii.

¹² This convention formulated the American Party’s first national political platform, and included delegates from both North and South.

national American Party. He maintains that Know Nothings avoided former party divisions and gained popularity by remaining neutral on slavery. Like Anbinder, Overdyke minimizes the importance of nativism for southern Know Nothings. Acknowledging that Know Nothing politicians endorsed nativist programs, he argues that they employed nativism to mask the slavery issue, and because they viewed the American Party as the only means of healing sectional divisions, made Unionism, not nativism, their primary concern.¹³ Both Anbinder's and Overdyke's work, however, requires refinement.

Contrary to the assertions of Anbinder and Overdyke, nativism did play an important role in southern culture and politics. Antebellum Alabama and South Carolina newspapers contained frequent expressions of anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic sentiments. To counter American Party influence, even Democrats in these states embraced nativist sentiments. Moreover, unable to ignore the slavery question during the 1850s, northern and southern branches of the American Party attempted to resolve the sectional tensions it spawned. Southern Know Nothings argued that a correlation existed between increasing immigration to the United States and the growing power of abolitionism in the North. While southern Know Nothings never displaced slavery as the predominant issue, they did exert considerable influence over the national party's approach to the question in 1855. Like their counterparts among Whigs and Democrats, northern and southern Know Nothings sought common ground on the issue, and their failure, like that of the Whigs, led to their party's demise. An understanding of southern Know Nothings, therefore, reveals much about the functioning of political parties in

¹³ Overdyke, v-vi, 51-56, 293-294.

America during the 1850s, including the extent to which nativism motivated Antebellum voters.

Other scholars contend that nativism played an important role in the southern American Party. In “America for Americans: The Southern Know Nothing Party and the Politics of Nativism, 1854-1856,” John David Bladdek argues that anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic bias formed the cornerstone of southern Know Nothing ideology. While the American Party in the South committed itself to preserving slavery and Unionism, as well as opposing political corruption, it did so by demonstrating genuine nativist and anti-party sentiment. In opposition to Anbinder, Bladdek also argues that southern Know Nothings reveal much about the collapse of the two-party system.¹⁴ The American Party not only replaced the Whig Party as the opposition party, their political failure allowed Democrats to emerge as the single ruling party in the South.¹⁵ Bladdek’s study, however, does not demonstrate the extent of nativism within southern culture. Know Nothings did not use nativism simply for political expediency. Rather, nativism appears as a crucial component of southern culture and society. The American Party offered a political outlet for these ideas and values.

The work of other scholars support Bladdek’s conclusions. In “Unintended Consequences: The Rise and Fall of the Know Nothing Party in Alabama,” Jeff Frederick examines how southern members of the American Party interpreted immigrants as a

¹⁴ For more details on the demise of the Whigs and rise of the Know Nothings in the South, see Michael F. Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

¹⁵ John David Bladdek, “America for Americans: The Southern Know Nothing Party and the Politics of Nativism, 1854-1856” (PhD diss., University of Washington, 1998), 1-297, accessed August 30, 2016, <http://lynx.lib.usm.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/304461699?accountid=13946>.

threat to their political and economic interests. Alabama Know Nothings believed that northern immigrants tipped the population balance in favor of northern states, upsetting the balance of power in the United States House of Representatives. Therefore, changing demographics due to immigration made Congressional abolition more plausible in the eyes of southerners. Furthermore, Frederick contends that Alabama Know Nothings caused the Democrats to consolidate their party, which led to a more unified South.¹⁶ Frederick does not, however, explain in detail how and why Democrats consolidated their party. Know Nothings not only succeeded in converting prominent Democrats in Alabama, they also threatened to undermine the Democrats' political alliance with Fire Eaters. This threat to split the Democratic Party provided a realistic possibility of altering the political landscape in the South. To stave off this threat, Democrats further radicalized their message concerning states' rights and resistance to compromise on slavery. This radicalization further sectionalized the Democratic Party and contributed to secession and the outbreak of the Civil War.

Southern nativist concerns about the dangers of foreign immigration demonstrate the influence of former Whigs in the Know Nothing Party. James Broussard notes the importance of Whigs for the American Party in "Some Determinants of Know-Nothing Electoral Strength in the South, 1856" arguing that the Know Nothing Party consisted primarily of former Whigs. In addition, voting success was directly related to the size of the foreign-born population. In places with large immigrant populations, southerners

¹⁶ Jeff Frederick, "Unintended Consequences: The Rise and Fall of the Know Nothing Party in Alabama," *Alabama Review* 55, (January 2002): 3-31.

proved willing to believe that foreigners threatened the existence of slavery.¹⁷ While Broussard's assertion that the southern Know Nothing Party consisted primarily of former Whigs remains true, it disregards the important role played by former Democrats, such as Percy Walker, Samuel F. Rice, and William Russell Smith in the American Party. These former Democrats gave credibility to the new party in the eyes of southern constituents.

A variety of historians provide important background information concerning southern society during the nineteenth-century. In *The Irish in the South, 1815-1877*, David T. Gleeson examines how Irish immigrants, one of the largest foreign-born populations in the South, managed to assimilate to both American and southern culture.¹⁸ Not only does Gleeson offer vital information concerning the lives and importance of Irish immigrants in the South, he also examines their response to significant Know Nothing threats during the 1850s.¹⁹

Anne Firor Scott takes a gendered approach to analyze southern society and women's roles in southern culture and politics in *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930*. In the nineteenth-century, women's participation in public life effected changes in southern society. Political parties took advantage of women's public

¹⁷ James H. Broussard, "Some Determinants of Know-Nothing Electoral Strength in the South, 1856," *Louisiana History* Vol. 7, (Winter 1966): 5-20.

¹⁸ David T. Gleeson, *The Irish in the South, 1815-1877* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

¹⁹ Indeed, Gleeson's analysis of the South's societal composition is heavily relied upon in Chapter II of this thesis. For additional information concerning Irish-American assimilation, see Susannah Ural Bruce, *The Harp and the Eagle: Irish-American Volunteers and the Union Army, 1861-1865* (New York: New York University Press, 2006). Dr. Ural's framework of dual loyalties proves especially helpful for comprehending southerners' loyalties to their country and their region. For more information concerning southern Irish-American assimilation, see: David T. Gleeson, *The Green and the Gray: The Irish in the Confederate States of America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

activities on behalf of social reform to advance political agendas. Moreover, southern politicians acted to preserve patriarchal relationships, which they considered to be essential to maintain slavery.²⁰ Southern Know Nothing opposition to foreign, Catholic, and abolitionist threats arose from deeper fears concerning the integrity of patriarchal institutions. Northern abolitionists threatened these institutions and appeared to successfully influence existing national parties with the aid of Catholics and immigrants. Southern Know Nothings, therefore, sought a third option to contain the threat against southern patriarchal institutions.

To acquire an accurate portrayal of 1850s political parties, historians must move beyond a strict political narrative and analysis of voting patterns. Historians cannot understand political parties without examining the dominant culture from which they emerged. Incorporating an analysis of societal composition, cultural ideals, gender, and ideology provides a fuller, more accurate narrative.²¹ Nativism demonstrated a cultural component in the South, which gave it political value in the 1850s. Moreover, the societal composition and economics of American society fostered growing anxiety among southerners. Not only did immigrants and Catholics threaten political institutions in the eyes of southern Know Nothings, southern Know Nothings also feared immigrants threatened southern economic institutions as well. Slavery transformed the southern

²⁰ Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995). Also, see Elizabeth R. Varon, *We Mean to Be Counted: White Women & Politics in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998). Varon supports Scott with her scholarship by arguing that white, elite women in Virginia played an active and distinct role in southern political life by petitioning the government, hosting social gatherings for political leaders, and participating in public reform campaigns. In short, separate gendered spheres coexisted peacefully with a sense of female civic duty in the nineteenth-century South.

²¹ For a discussion on the importance of ideology, see Eric Foner: *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970).

cotton economy into a world economic power during the 1850s, which moved southerners to increasingly demand protections for the institution from the federal government. Thus, any threats from abolitionists and their perceived allies, such as Catholics and immigrants, encouraged southern politicians to support an uncompromising political agenda.²² Finally, while Antebellum society proscribed women from voting or running for office, women still influenced the political process, albeit, indirectly. Society expected women to raise each generation of Christian statesmen and to participate in social reform movements. These movements relied on political parties to reform society through forced legislation.²³ Southerners also believed that they must protect traditional gender roles to maintain slavery. Thus, threats to the status quo, culturally and politically, promised to undermine cherished economic and social institutions.²⁴ Finally, politicians and religious leaders expressed their ideas through gendered language, which offers an unopened window into the world of nativist Antebellum politics.²⁵

To provide a comprehensive picture of southern Know Nothing activities and ideology, materials from Alabama and South Carolina archives will not be given separate treatment. Though differences existed between Know Nothings in these states, their priorities displayed enough similarities to justify grouping them together in a unified

²² Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2014) and Walter Johnson, *Soul by South: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

²³ Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860" *American Quarterly* 18 (1966): 151-174.

²⁴ Scott, 14-19.

²⁵ For an excellent study that uses gender and women's experiences to re-interpret a traditionally male-dominated narrative of the Vietnam War, see Heather Marie Stur, *Beyond Combat: Women and Gender in the Vietnam War Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). Dr. Stur utilized women's experiences and gendered language employed by American society to re-evaluate the definition of combat and how the U.S. government justified military force in Vietnam. In a similar way, gendered language can help re-evaluate the motivations of nineteenth century political parties and agendas.

description.²⁶ In addition, to heed Joan Wallach Scott's warning about re-affirming the marginal status of women compared to men, women's voices and an analysis of gendered language used by the Know Nothing and Democratic Parties will be woven throughout this thesis instead of receiving separate treatment.²⁷ Thus, gender offers another useful tool used in this thesis to analyze Antebellum politics in the South.

Although previous historians claim that nativism never played an important role in nineteenth-century southern politics, a sampling of materials from southern archives reveals the opposite. Private papers, speeches, and newspapers of Know Nothings and Democrats demonstrate that nativism was a powerful force in southern culture and politics. Some challenges concerning southern archival materials exist. Tyler Anbinder found multiple record books containing American Party membership information, though only one described the founding of a northern Know Nothing lodge in detail. Membership lists furnish the most important insight from log books, and they allowed Anbinder to compare Know Nothing membership against American society. Unfortunately, lodge records do not exist in Alabama and South Carolina archives. Thus, it is impossible to provide a conclusive analysis of the role that class played for southern Know Nothings. The lack of lodge records, however, should not prevent historians from reaching an understanding of the southern Know Nothing Party. Though a comparison of membership statistics between northern and southern Know Nothings or the class composition of southern Know Nothings proves impossible in this case, lodge books are

²⁶ South Carolina Know Nothings, for example, faced a Democratic Party with an exceptionally strong monopoly on state government power.

²⁷ Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 3.

only a small part of the picture. Though Anbinder downplays the importance of newspapers and pamphlets, these sources provide historians crucial insight into nineteenth-century southern politics.²⁸

Nineteenth-century newspapers, a relatively untapped resource, offer several important insights. First, newspapers describe societal values. A newspaper needed the financial support of its readership, and stiff competition existed during the nineteenth-century. Therefore, editors could not stray too far from community values. Second, these papers included more than simply news stories. Editors also included humorous anecdotes, jokes, and religious exhortations. As a result, newspapers reveal cultural assumptions and stereotypes held by their readers. Third, most of the stories and editorials centered on contemporary local and national political ideas and debates. Thus, historians can use newspapers to gauge public sentiment during the 1850s.

The “Chronicling America” project from the Library of Congress proves especially important as it furnishes digitized newspapers from the 1850s. *The Lancaster Ledger* from Lancasterville, South Carolina, initially demonstrated sympathy for the Know Nothing cause, though it later reversed course and opposed them. *The Edgefield Advertiser* from Edgefield, South Carolina, on the other hand, opposed the Know Nothing Party from the beginning. In Alabama, microfilm collections at the University of South Alabama and Mobile Public Libraries offer local newspapers that supported and opposed the American Party. *The Mobile Daily Advertiser* advanced Know Nothing

²⁸ Anbinder, xii. Anbinder claims that these sources create an incomplete picture of the American Party.

interests as early as 1854, while *The Mobile Daily Register* ardently opposed the new party.

Pamphlets offer the public voice of politicians during the nineteenth-century. Political institutions and values prove mostly public in nature, and voters' opinions are largely informed by public statements. In addition, historians can supplement speeches and political tracts with newspaper publications to better understand nineteenth-century political debates. The J. L. M. Curry Pamphlets Collection and the Alabama Pamphlets Collection, housed in the Alabama Department of Archives and History, provide historians crucial speeches and political tracts for Know Nothings and Democrats. Furthermore, they also include materials related to other states besides Alabama and South Carolina, which allows for a national comparison.

Private letters and diaries provide invaluable information concerning the private motivation of politicians and voters associated with the southern American and Democratic Parties. These private collections supplement the evidence provided by newspapers and pamphlets. The C. C. Clay Papers, housed in the Rubenstein Library at Duke University, offer insight into southern opposition to the Know Nothing Party. The Francis Lieber Papers, housed in the South Caroliniana Library at the University of South Carolina, give unique insights provided by German immigrants who observed Know Nothings in Alabama. Furthermore, the published diary of David Gavin, a prominent Know Nothing planter in South Carolina, furnishes unique insights into the underlying worldview of southern Know Nothings.²⁹

²⁹ The University of North Carolina published this diary, though David Gavin did not have a public audience in mind when he wrote it.

Though useful, memoirs must be approached with a careful, critical eye since authors tailored these sources for public consumption. In some cases, an individual's perception of his or her life is colored by later events. Nonetheless, through their attempt to reconstruct society as they understood it, memoirs contain valuable depictions of cultural assumptions of nineteenth-century people. The memoir of William Russell Smith, an ardent Know Nothing from Tuscaloosa, Alabama, reveals the strength and extent of nativism in the South. Memoirs also allow historians to incorporate a gendered perspective. The memoirs of Caroline Howard Gilman, Rebecca Harding Davis, and Nancy Bostick De Saussure contribute to a reconstruction of nineteenth-century southern society.

Finally, to reach a better understanding of the society in which the southern Know Nothing party appeared, historians must utilize census and naturalization data. Population and immigration statistics have already been expertly presented by Gleeson. Other sources, however, supplement Gleeson's work, which examines only Irish immigrants in the South. Citizenship petitions, housed by the South Carolina Department of Archives and History, demonstrate the frequency that immigrants applied for citizenship and assist historians in evaluating the process of assimilation.³⁰ In addition, the Mobile Municipal Archives provide valuable passenger lists from 1838 to 1860. These lists help gauge when the greatest number of foreigners entered America through the port of Mobile, Alabama. Though not all foreign-born immigrants settled in Mobile, residents observed their presence, which shaped nativist perceptions. It must be noted, however, that

³⁰ The Alabama Department of Archives and History furnishes the same information for Mobile, Alabama.

citizenship petitions and passenger lists contain their own weaknesses as source materials. Both records remain largely incomplete and do not always provide the same information, such as country-of-origins and occupation.³¹ As a result, these materials must be used in conjunction with other sources, like Gleeson's data and census records. The conclusions based on a statistical analysis of these sources, though they provide helpful insights into southern society, cannot be considered as conclusive. Therefore, a statistical analysis of southern society remains just one, albeit important, tool among many to analyze the American Party in Alabama and South Carolina.

The chapter layout of this thesis aims to fulfill two goals. First, it seeks to examine the manner in which southern Know Nothings understood their party and its objectives. This understanding cannot be reached without a comparison to the American Party's primary opposition in the South, the Democratic Party. The manner in which southern Know Nothings distinguished themselves from their opponents and the methods Democrats used to attack the American Party, proved crucial for defining the Know Nothing role in southern and national politics. Second, this thesis aims to analyze the relationship between southern nativism and growing sectionalism within the Democratic Party. Northern attitudes concerning slavery were not the only factors that contributed to radicalizing southern Democrats. Debates between Democrats and nativists in Alabama and South Carolina significantly affected the political outlook of the national Democratic Party.

Chapter II contends that historians need to rethink the strength of southern nativism. Southerners commonly expressed nativist sentiments, and the American Party

³¹ The Passenger Lists also contain a gap in the data from 1850-1855.

in the South tapped into this cultural force as a powerful political issue. This chapter begins with an examination of nineteenth-century southern society and culture in Alabama and South Carolina. To understand any political party, historians must analyze the society and culture from which it emerged. This section relies on census and immigration data presented by historian David T. Gleeson, who provides a well-researched analysis of statistical data concerning native and foreign-born population sizes in the South. He also presents an outstanding breakdown of Irish immigrants' economic backgrounds. This chapter also includes an analysis of citizenship petitions and passenger lists from Alabama and South Carolina.³²

After establishing the importance of nativism in southern society and culture, Chapter II concludes with an examination of American Party ideology in Alabama and South Carolina. Nativism provided the cornerstone of southern Know Nothing policies. Pamphlets, newspapers, and diaries reveal that nativist rhetoric held powerful appeal for the southern public. Know Nothings in the South believed a link existed among immigrants, Catholics, and abolitionism. Two important terms for this chapter, "fanaticism" and "nativism," demonstrate the perceived link between foreign influence and abolitionism. In the context of the nineteenth-century, southerners understood fanaticism to mean either abolitionism or Free Soilerism, and they often used these terms interchangeably. Nativism in the South usually refers to anti-immigrant sentiment, but this notion demonstrated a close relationship to anti-Catholic prejudice. Therefore, the two ideas were sometimes used interchangeably. For the purpose of simplicity, this thesis

³² Memoirs, private papers, and newspapers also provide important, personal reconstructions of society, which provide narratives that humanize the statistical data.

will separate the two sentiments into distinct, but related ideologies. Finally, the American Party in Alabama and South Carolina became part of a larger conservative trend in the South, which generally attempted to impose limitations on democratic advancements on white males in American society.

Chapter III analyzes the Democratic Party's response to the American Party and argues that Southern Democrats experienced a significant challenge from Know Nothings. Newspapers and pamphlets in 1854 and 1855 reveal that the Democratic Party faced an uncertain future. Know Nothings won numerous elections in Alabama and South Carolina from 1854 to 1855, and public sentiment appeared to turn against the Democrats. In response, southern Democrats began to utilize a complex mix of egalitarian, nativist, and patriarchal cultural values to formulate their counterarguments. In the context of the nineteenth-century, the terms, "egalitarian" or "democratic," referred only to white males. Though more white males became eligible to participate in political institutions, American politics continued to exclude women and African Americans. Thus, use of the term "egalitarian" in this chapter is meant in the nineteenth, not twenty-first, century context. Furthermore, Democrats revealed an anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant mentality, despite their condemnation of religious and immigrant proscription policies that were advocated by the American Party.³³ This mentality reveals genuine nativist sympathy among the primary opponents of the American Party.

Chapter III concludes by analyzing the growing relationship between mainstream Democrats and Fire Eaters. Though initially threatened, the Democratic Party solidified

³³ In the context of the American Party, proscription refers to public policies designed legally to exclude Catholics and immigrants from the political process.

its relationship with Fire Eaters by 1857. Democrats claimed that the American Party threatened states' rights just as much as abolitionists because of their efforts to implement a national platform. Implementing a national platform, according to southern Democrats, necessitated giving the federal government unprecedented power over states. Democrats, therefore, warned the South against the dangers of consolidation. When southerners referred to consolidation, they intended to warn Americans against the dangers of a strong, centralized federal government. Specifically, southerners feared that a strong federal government might heed abolitionist calls to interfere with slavery in the South or western territories. Democratic success in the South, therefore, reveals the inability of the American Party to convince the majority of southern constituents that a strong connection between abolitionism and immigration existed. While southerners sympathized with nativist sentiments, the growing threat of abolitionism and the Republican Party became more important to southern voters. Though Know Nothings posed a greater danger to Democratic hegemony than previously recognized by historians, southerners ultimately proved unwilling to risk their political institutions and economic well-being on a new political party with possible links to abolitionists and clear intentions to consolidate the nation.

According to Samuel Rice, immigrants posed a real threat to southern interests and institutions. Immigrants making their way to America, most of them Catholic, did not seem likely to support southern interests, and most actively threatened them through their support of northern abolitionists. He sarcastically argued that:

if our opponents are correct in their high estimate of foreigners, why do they not at once reduce the period for naturalization from five years to one year, or one month, and import without delay enough of them to vote down the Abolition party, and to deliver the South and the republic from all troubles and dangers? If foreigners are indeed the friends of slavery and of Southern Rights, they ought to be brought over the ocean speedily and in large quantities, for they are needed.³⁴

Know Nothings, such as Rice, emerged from a society naturally sympathetic to nativist fears. In their quest for political dominance, they presented the spectre of abolitionists imposing Catholic tyranny upon the South with the support of foreign-born immigrants. Their solution centered on curbing the political power of these foreign threats, and embracing the Protestant nature of American society.

³⁴ Rice, "Address Before the American Party," September 6, 1855, Curry Collection.

CHAPTER II – BEWARE FOREIGN INFLUENCE: AMERICAN PARTY IDEOLOGY
IN ALABAMA AND SOUTH CAROLINA

“There is danger from foreign influence, and the sooner it is boldly met the better.” – Jeremiah Clemens³⁵

On July 5, 1855, the American Party staged a large rally in Mobile, Alabama, to garner support for the upcoming state elections. Attended or endorsed by respected city leaders, such as former Alderman U.T. Cleveland and former mayor C.C. Langdon, the crowd adopted the national American Party platform, and nominated candidates for state governor, House of Representatives, and Senate. Demanding, “the principle shall be sustained that ‘Americans shall rule America,’” Know Nothing leaders warned their audience to beware the dangers of foreign influence to liberty, republican values, and slavery.³⁶ The nativist policies outlined at this political rally were not new in the South. Rather, Know Nothing leaders in Alabama and South Carolina drew upon cultural principles long accepted by their constituents. Linking nativism to conservative and patriarchal values, southern Know Nothings expanded their political power.

The demographics of southern immigration and society, combined with conservative cultural values, fostered nativist animosity in the South.³⁷ Know Nothings in Alabama and South Carolina used nativist and patriarchal ideology found in southern

³⁵ Jeremiah Clemens, “Letter from Honorable Jeremiah Clemens Defining His Position on the American Question,” July 12, 1855 (Guntersville: J.E. Peebles, 1855), Jeremiah Clemens Letters, 1842-1860, Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH), Montgomery, Alabama.

³⁶ *The Mobile Daily Advertiser*, July 6, 1855, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library: Local History and Genealogy, Mobile, AL.

³⁷ Tyler Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings and the Politics of the 1850s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); and William Darrell Overdyke, *The Know-Nothing Party in the South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1950). Prior historians downplayed or disregarded southern expressions of nativism within political conflicts because it did not follow the same pattern as northern Know Nothings.

culture to create a powerful political ideology. Though nativist politics looked different in the North than in the South, the American Party in both sections used anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant ideology to justify their public policies. While anti-Catholic bias certainly existed in the South, it remained more prominent culturally than politically. Furthermore, states' rights ideology affected nativist political policies in the South to a much greater extent than in the North. Nevertheless, nativism became a potent political force in the South as well as the North during the 1850s.

Southern Society and Culture

Born in Scotland, Gavin Yuille married Annie Lan on August 10, 1817.³⁸

Emigrating to the United States on May 9, 1827, Yuille entered his new country through New York City. Eventually relocating to Mobile, Alabama, in 1832, Yuille began making his reputation in his new community as a baker.³⁹ Attempting to make a new life in the South, Gavin Yuille's experience was shared by countless others. Indeed, to understand the American Party fully, the societal composition and cultural values from whence it emerged must be analyzed.⁴⁰

³⁸ Gavin Yuille Family Papers, 1808-1931, ADAH, Montgomery, AL; and "Gavin Yuille," Accessed January 25, 2017, <http://person.ancestry.com/tree/54063296/person/13728954307/facts>.

³⁹ "Gavin Yuille;" and Gavin Yuille Family Papers.

⁴⁰ Examining the data provided by David T. Gleeson, *The Irish in the South, 1815-1877* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), passenger lists, citizenship petitions, and census records can offer a glimpse into the effects exerted by foreign-born members of southern society.

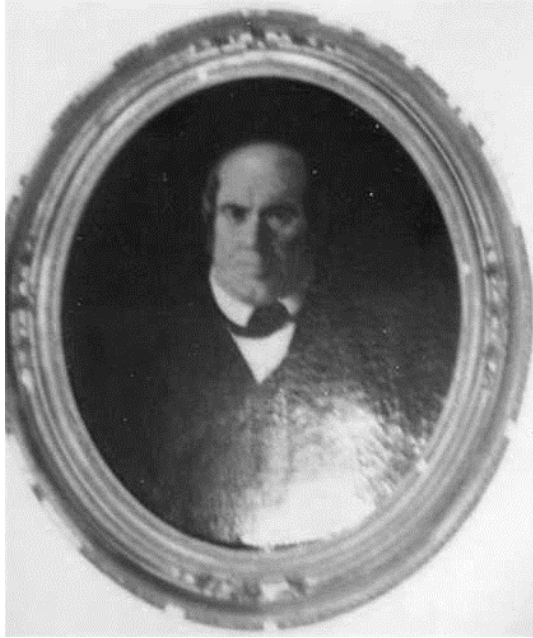


Figure 1. Oil Painting Portrait of Gavin Yuille⁴¹

Although smaller than northern immigrant populations, the Irish population constituted a surprisingly visible portion of the population in Alabama and South Carolina. In 1850, the Irish numbered 3,639 in Alabama and 4,051 in South Carolina. Moreover, their numbers increased during the next decade. In 1860, the Irish numbered 5,664 in Alabama and 4,996 in South Carolina.⁴² Though the foreign-born population in both Alabama and South Carolina increased during the 1850s, their overall population in each state remained around one percent.⁴³ While the overall number of immigrants in Alabama and South Carolina increased, their overall proportion of the population remained consistent.⁴⁴ Yuille, though from Scotland, was an early foreign-born migrant

⁴¹ "Gavin Yuille."

⁴² Gleeson, 26.

⁴³ United States Bureau of the Census, 1850 (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1850), Accessed September 9, 2016, <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/1853/dec/1850a.html>; and United States Bureau of the Census, 1860 (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1860), Accessed September 9, 2016, <http://www.census.gov/library/publications/1864/dec/1860a.html>.

⁴⁴ Gleeson, 26-27. In 1850, the Irish consisted of .78% of the population and 1.26% of the white population in the South. They composed .47% of the population in Alabama and .85% of the state's white

to the South. Like many of his fellow immigrants, he first arrived in New York City before making his way South.⁴⁵ Though New Orleans provided the cheapest entry to the South, Yuille and many Irishmen entered through the ports of Mobile, Alabama, and Charleston, South Carolina. The cotton boom during the 1840s enticed many immigrants to Mobile, and the easy links to northern ports made Charleston an easy destination for immigrants.⁴⁶

Much like their northern brethren, the Irish in the South gravitated towards cities. Charleston and Mobile became homes to the second and third largest Irish populations in the South respectively. Only in New Orleans, Louisiana did the Irish outnumber the populations in the major port cities of Alabama and South Carolina.⁴⁷ As a result, Alabama and South Carolina provide pertinent case studies for the American Party in the South. These port cities attracted significant, but not extreme, numbers of immigrants to the South. Therefore, Alabama and South Carolina provide a mainstream experience of immigration to the South.

In 1850, the Irish numbered 2,359 in Charleston, five and a half percent of the city's total population and almost twelve percent of the white population. In Mobile, the Irish numbered 2,009 in 1850, which consisted of almost ten percent of the total population and fifteen and a half percent of the white population in the city.⁴⁸ Like the

population. In South Carolina, the Irish composed .60% of the state's population and 1.48% of its white population. In 1860, the Irish composed .98% of the South's population and 1.56% of its white population. In Alabama, the Irish grew to .59% of the population and 1.08% of its white population. The Irish also increased in South Carolina, growing to .71% of the total population and 1.70% of the white population.

⁴⁵ Gavin Yuille Family Papers.

⁴⁶ Gleeson, 27-29.

⁴⁷ Gleeson, 35. The Irish in New Orleans, Louisiana, numbered 20,200 in 1850 and 24,398 in 1860.

⁴⁸ Gleeson, 36. 11.8% & 9.8%.

states' overall population, the Irish in Charleston and Mobile grew throughout the 1850s. In 1860, they numbered 3,263 in Charleston, which composed eight percent of the total population and fourteen percent of the white population. In Mobile, the Irish numbered 3,307, which consisted of slightly more than eleven percent of the total population and almost sixteen percent of the white population.⁴⁹ In addition, in 1860 sixty-five percent of South Carolina's Irish population resided in Charleston, and fifty-eight percent of Alabama's Irish populace lived in Mobile. Thus, the Irish experience, like Gavin Yuille's, in these two states was primarily urban.⁵⁰

This urban experience directly influenced Know Nothing organizations in the South. In 1855, Oscar Lieber, a geologist from South Carolina, described rural Alabama Know Nothings to his father, Francis Lieber. Oscar argued that Know Nothing organizations in rural regions functioned more as a poor man's social club, similar to the Freemasons. He maintained that:

They like to have something to bring them together. They want to see one another more than they otherwise would. The masonic secrecy about it has its fascinations also for the vulgar mind. The novelty of the thing too draws many to it. What I could see about it is this. Given a man joins them and then leaves and becomes a democrat. He is then bound to serve his party – the democratic. How then can he be still bound by an oath to the enemy, or if he is, how can he become a full, serviceable democrat? Strictly speaking, then, a man would not, in reality, be able, ever to leave that conspiracy.⁵¹

Lieber indicates that rural members of Know Nothing lodges held distinct views from the political agenda of the American Party and committed themselves to the Democratic

⁴⁹ Gleeson, 36. 11.3% & 15.9%.

⁵⁰ Gleeson, 35-36.

⁵¹ Francis Lieber immigrated from Germany to the United States in 1827. Letter from Oscar Lieber to his father, Francis Lieber, May 22, 1855, Francis Lieber Papers, 1800-1872, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina (USC), Columbia, South Carolina.

Party, which Lieber saw as a violation of their Know Nothing loyalty oath. Therefore, the primary function for American Party lodges in rural areas proved more social than political. In urban areas, however, American Party political ideology became more prominent and independent of other parties. This success resulted, in part, due to the more visible presence of foreign-born residents in city environments, and demonstrates the urban nature of the American Party movement in the South.

Immigrants did not have to settle in southern cities or states to make their presence felt.⁵² Simply passing through the port of Mobile, for example, influenced the native population's receptivity to Know Nothing ideology. An elite southern woman recalled that "emigrants often were from Norway or Poland or Germany, and wore their national costumes, as European peasants still did then."⁵³ The noticeable appearance and linguistics differences displayed by immigrants alerted native-born citizens of their presence and contributed to Know Nothing arguments concerning the dangers of foreign influence.

⁵² While providing invaluable insights into the composition of southern society during the mid-nineteenth century, the limitation of Gleeson's work centers on the exclusive focus on the Irish immigrant experience. Thus, passenger lists and citizenship petitions offer helpful, albeit imperfect, supplementary information to Gleeson's expert evaluations.

⁵³ Rebecca Harding Davis, *Bits of Gossip* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin & Company, 1904), 4, University of North Carolina, Digital Collections, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

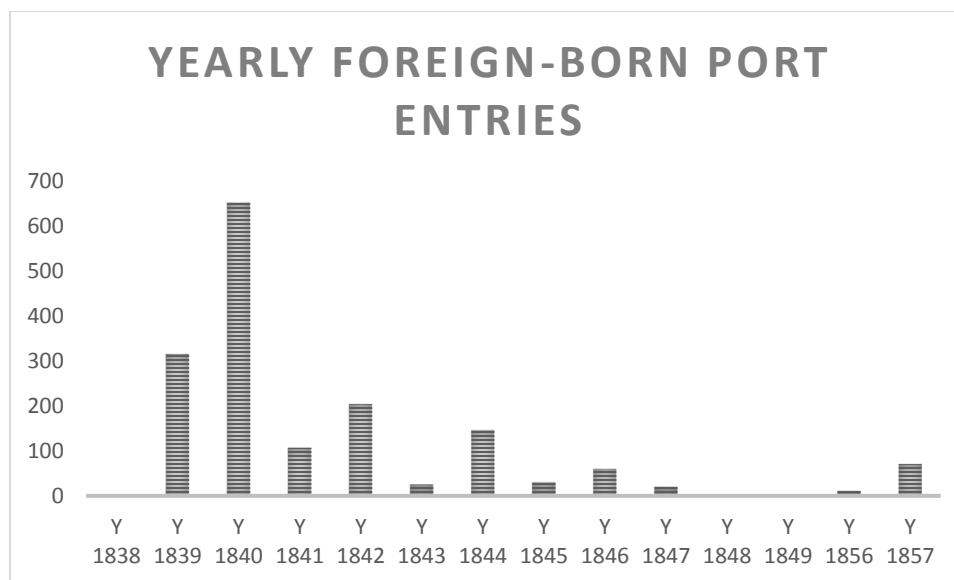


Figure 2. Yearly Foreign-Born Port Entries for Mobile, Alabama⁵⁴

From 1838-1849 and 1856-1857, at least 1,652 foreign-born passengers traveled through Mobile.⁵⁵ Thirty-three percent of these travelers were unskilled workers and thirty-three percent listed themselves as white-collar workers.⁵⁶ Foreign-born visitors to Mobile did not always perform “monotonous physical labor” or unskilled labor, which was the norm for most Irish immigrants.⁵⁷ Immigration patterns in Mobile, therefore, challenged Know Nothing claims of an influx of European paupers who did not contribute to society.

⁵⁴ Lucille Mallon Connick, ed., *Lists of Ships' Passengers, Mobile, AL 1838-1839-1840*, Volume I (Mobile: Lucille Mallon Connick, 1988), Mobile Municipal Archives, Mobile, AL; and Lucille Mallon Connick, ed., *Lists of Ships' Passengers Mobile, AL 1841-1860*, Volume II (Mobile: Lucille Mallon Connick, 1989), Mobile Municipal Archives, Mobile, AL. “Y” represents “year.”

⁵⁵ Passenger lists for Mobile, Alabama, are conservative. Ship captains did not keep uniform records, nor did they always list the country-of-origins or occupation of a foreign-born traveler. When determining percentages for occupation and country-of-origins, only those clearly listed as foreign-born along with their occupation or country-of-origin were used. Thus, fewer foreign-born travelers were used to determine the breakdown of occupations and country-of-origin than the total number who arrived in the Port of Mobile.

⁵⁶ The breakdown of occupations into Farmer, Unskilled, Semi-Skilled, Skilled, and White-Collar was based on Gleeson, 195-196.

⁵⁷ Gleeson, 46.

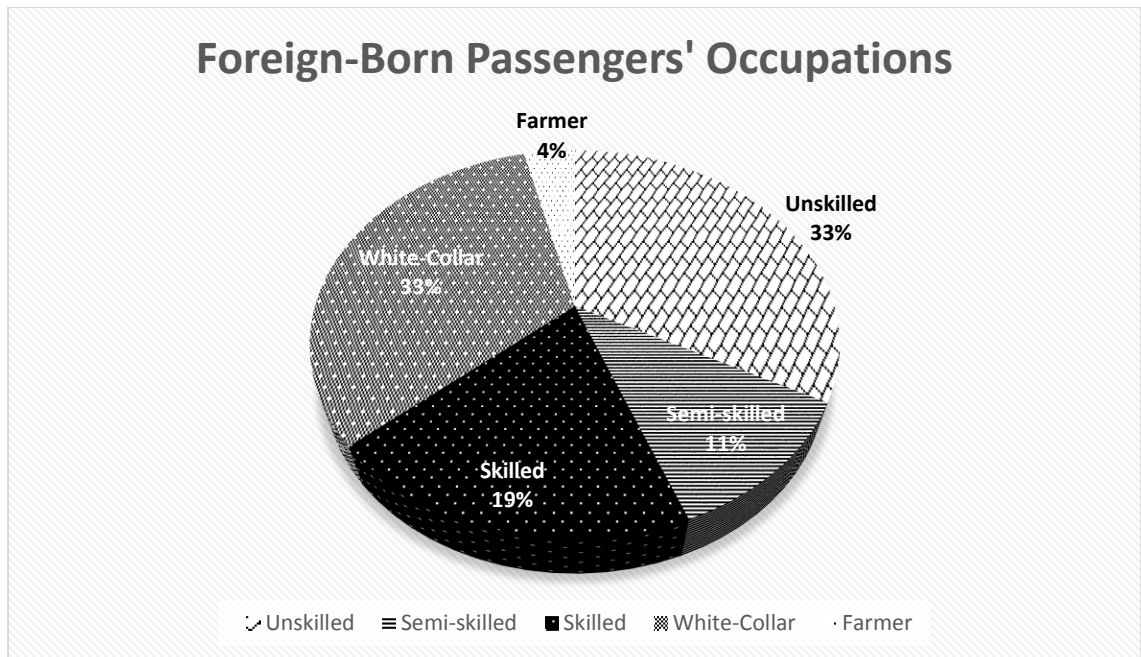


Figure 3. Breakdown of Foreign-Born Passenger Occupations⁵⁸

Most of the foreign-born passengers did conform to common patterns regarding country-of-origins. Thirty-nine percent of foreign-born passengers who traveled through the port of Mobile listed Ireland as their native country.⁵⁹ Popularly seen as a Catholic country, Irish men and women were typically perceived as practitioners of Roman Catholicism by native-born Americans. This religion, genuinely practiced by many Irish immigrants, offended native-born Protestants.⁶⁰ The large presence of Irish passengers in Mobile likely cemented Irish stereotypes held by native-born residents. Thus, nativist

⁵⁸ Connick, ed., *Lists of Ships' Passengers*, Volumes I and II, Mobile Municipal Archives.

⁵⁹ Connick, ed., *Lists of Ships Passengers*, Volumes I and II, Mobile Municipal Archives. While Germany placed a distant second at seventeen percent in terms of country-of-origin, France, another country perceived as a Catholic nation, ranked third at eleven percent.

⁶⁰ Dale T. Knobel, *Paddy and the Republic: Ethnicity and Nationality in Antebellum America* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1986), 160-162.

claims that the influx of European Catholics provided cause for alarm appeared plausible to the native-born populace.⁶¹

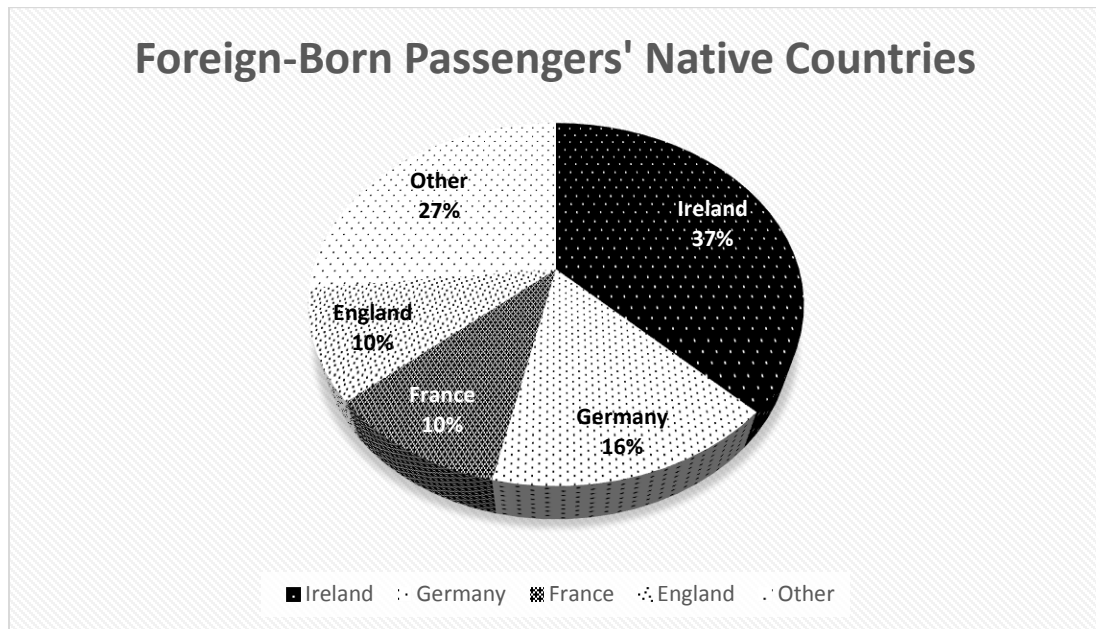


Figure 4. Breakdown of Native Countries for Foreign-Born Passengers⁶²

⁶¹ Gleeson, 26-27. Moreover, though passenger lists for 1850-1855 were not available, Gleeson's work indicates that a larger number of foreign-born travelers pass through Mobile, Alabama during the 1850s.

⁶² Connick, ed., *Lists of Ships' Passengers*, Volumes I and II, Mobile Municipal Archives. Countries listed as "Other" include: Spain (5%), Italy (4%), Cuba (3%), Scotland (2%), Holland (2%), Malta (2%), Sardinia (1%), Poland (1%), Canada (1%), Sweden (1%), and Portugal (1%).

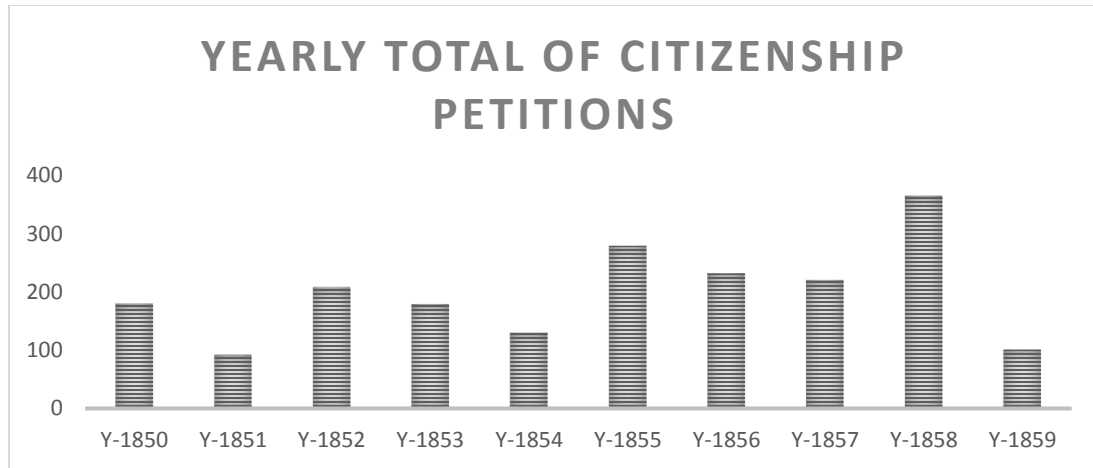


Figure 5. Yearly Total of Citizenship Petitions for Alabama and South Carolina⁶³

Some southern immigrants sought citizenship, and most foreign-born residents of Alabama and South Carolina applied for citizenship from 1855-1858, submitting 1,096 applications.⁶⁴ The peak year for citizenship applications was 1858, with 365 applications. These years coincide with peak Know Nothing activity in these states.⁶⁵ Overall, foreign-born residents mirrored the general immigration statistics regarding country-of-origins. The majority of citizen-applicants, forty-one percent, listed Ireland as their native country with the second largest group, Germans, composing twenty-four

⁶³ Clinton P. King and Mariem A. Barlow, eds., *Naturalization Records, Mobile, Alabama, 1833-1906* (Baltimore: Gateway Press, Inc., 1986), ADAH; Anderson County, Clerk of Court, Citizenship Petitions, 1829-1910, South Carolina Department of Archives and History (SCDAH), Columbia, SC; Charleston County, Clerk of Court, Citizenship Petitions, circa 1855-1940, SCDAH; Chester County, Clerk of Court, Citizenship Petition Books, 1802-1868, SCDAH; Fairfield County, Clerk of Court, Citizenship Petitions, 1806-1876, SCDAH; Greenville County, Clerk of Court, Citizenship Petitions, 1839-1909, SCDAH; Kershaw County, Clerk of Court, Citizenship Petitions, 1807-1908, SCDAH; Marlboro County, Clerk of Court, Citizenship Petitions, 1805-1882, SCDAH; Newberry County, Clerk of Court, Citizenship Petitions, 1808-1890, SCDAH; South Carolina Court of Common Pleas (Pickens County), Citizenship Petitions, 1851-1871, SCDAH; South Carolina Court of Common Pleas (Spartanburg County), Citizenship Petitions, circa 1809-1867, SCDAH; and South Carolina Court of Common Pleas (Union County), Citizenship Petitions, circa 1802-1910, SCDAH.

⁶⁴ Comparing citizenship petitions with census records furnishes insight on the proportion of immigrants who desired to become citizens and their corresponding economic standing in southern society. This examination provides context for Know Nothing arguments that immigrants lacked a genuine attachment to U.S. institutions.

⁶⁵ Without private papers from immigrants who applied for citizenship or clerks of courts during this time period, an explanation for this intriguing pattern cannot be conclusively stated.

percent of the applicants. However, diverging from normal immigration patterns, the majority of foreign-born residents who applied for citizenship in South Carolina listed Germany as their native country. Forty-five percent of the Palmetto State’s foreign-born population originated in Germany, while thirty-six percent originated in Ireland.

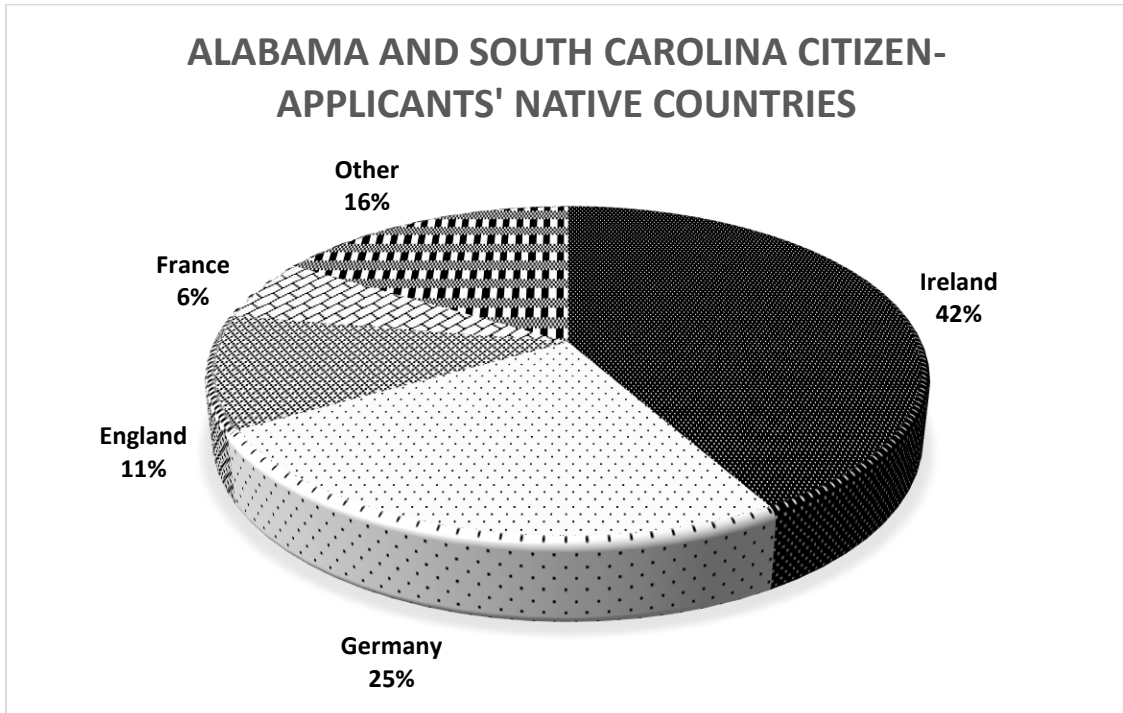


Figure 6. Breakdown of Native Countries for Citizen-Applicants in Alabama and South Carolina⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Anderson County, Citizenship Petitions, SCDAH; Charleston County, Citizenship Petitions, SCDAH; Chester County, Citizenship Petition Books, SCDAH; Fairfield County, Citizenship Petitions, SCDAH; Greenville County, Citizenship Petitions, SCDAH; Kershaw County, Citizenship Petitions, SCDAH; Marlboro County, Citizenship Petitions, SCDAH; Newberry County, Citizenship Petitions, SCDAH; South Carolina Court of Common Pleas (Pickens County), Citizenship Petitions, SCDAH; South Carolina Court of Common Pleas (Spartanburg County), Citizenship Petitions, SCDAH; and South Carolina Court of Common Pleas (Union County), Citizenship Petitions, SCDAH. Countries included as part of “Other” include: Sweden (3%), Scotland (2%), Austria (2%), Italy (2%), Spain (2%), Switzerland (1%), Denmark (1%), Russia (1%), Poland (1%), Portugal (1%), Norway (1%), and Greece (1%).

SOUTH CAROLINA CITIZEN-APPLICANTS' NATIVE COUNTRIES

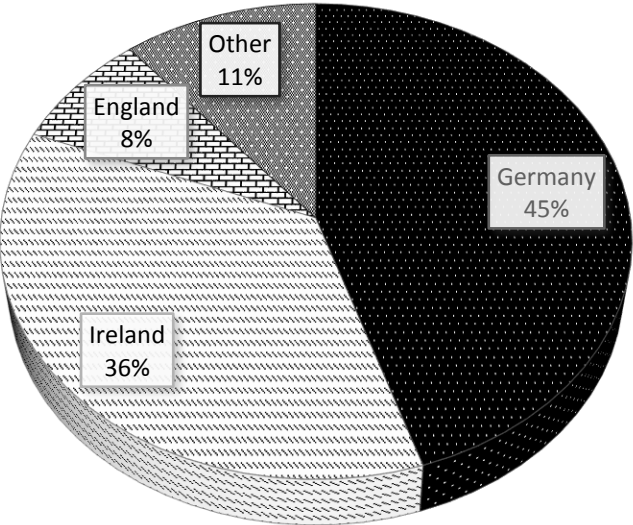


Figure 7. Breakdown of Native Countries of Citizen-Applicants in South Carolina⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Anderson County, Citizenship Petitions, SCDHA; Charleston County, Citizenship Petitions, SCDHA; Chester County, Citizenship Petition Books, SCDHA; Fairfield County, Citizenship Petitions, SCDHA; Greenville County, Citizenship Petitions, SCDHA; Kershaw County, Citizenship Petitions, SCDHA; Marlboro County, Citizenship Petitions, SCDHA; Newberry County, Citizenship Petitions, SCDHA; South Carolina Court of Common Pleas (Pickens County), Citizenship Petitions, SCDHA; South Carolina Court of Common Pleas (Spartanburg County), Citizenship Petitions, SCDHA; and South Carolina Court of Common Pleas (Union County), Citizenship Petitions, SCDHA. Countries included as “Other” include: Scotland (3%), Austria (2%), Denmark (1%), France (1%), Poland (1%), Sweden (1%), Hungary (1%), and Spain (1%).

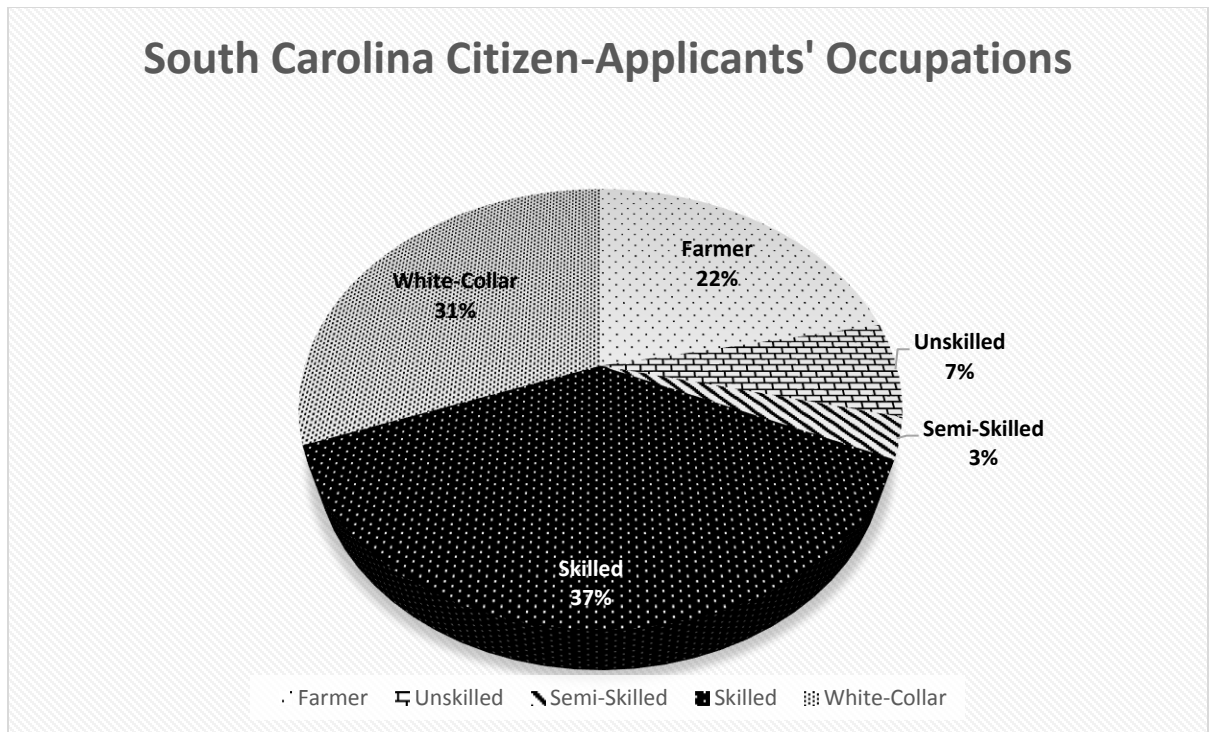


Figure 8. Breakdown of Occupations for Citizen-Applicants in South Carolina⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Anderson County, Citizenship Petitions, SCDHA; Charleston County, Citizenship Petitions, SCDHA; Chester County, Citizenship Petition Books, SCDHA; Fairfield County, Citizenship Petitions, SCDHA; Greenville County, Citizenship Petitions, SCDHA; Kershaw County, Citizenship Petitions, SCDHA; Marlboro County, Citizenship Petitions, SCDHA; Newberry County, Citizenship Petitions, SCDHA; South Carolina Court of Common Pleas (Pickens County), Citizenship Petitions, SCDHA; South Carolina Court of Common Pleas (Spartanburg County), Citizenship Petitions, SCDHA; and South Carolina Court of Common Pleas (Union County), Citizenship Petitions, SCDHA.

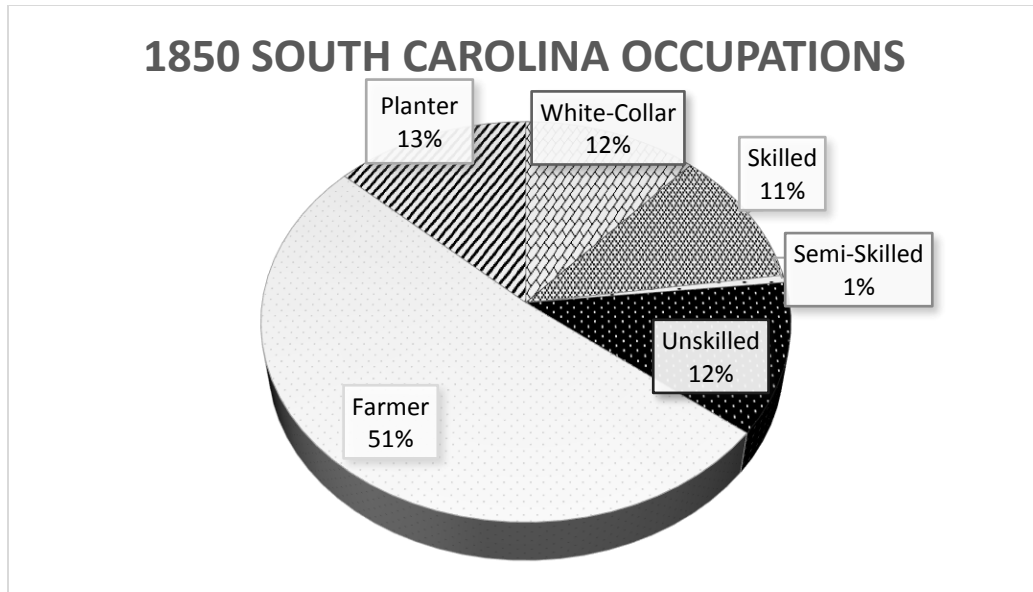


Figure 9. 1850 Census Breakdown of South Carolina Occupations⁶⁹

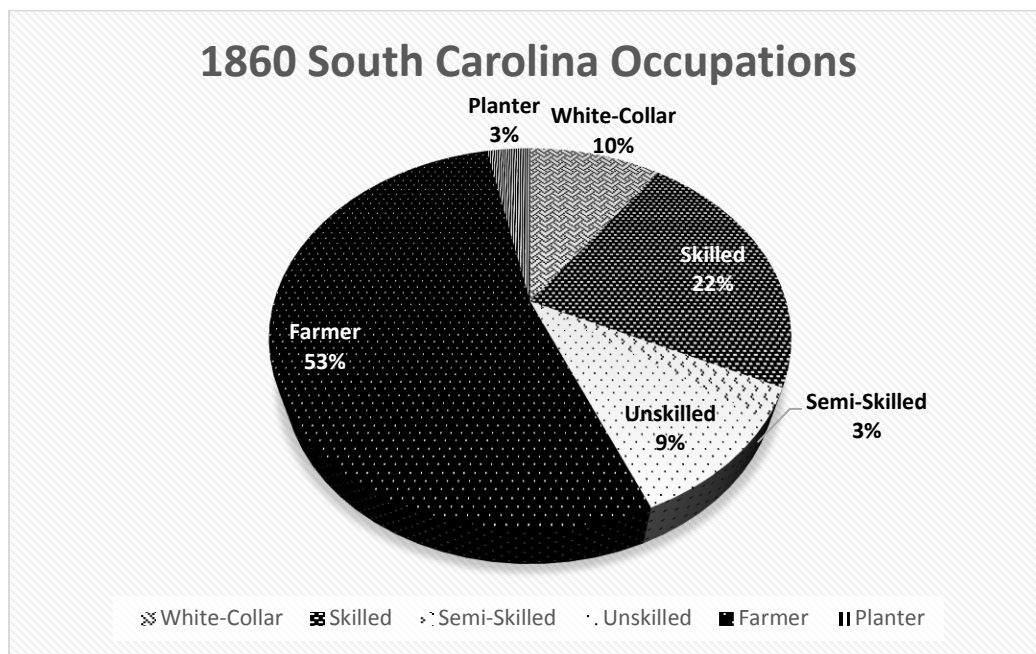


Figure 10. 1860 Census Breakdown of South Carolina Occupations⁷⁰

⁶⁹ United States Bureau of the Census, 1850.

⁷⁰ United States Bureau of the Census, 1860.

Sixty-nine percent of immigrants who applied for citizenship in South Carolina held skilled, white-collar jobs.⁷¹ Thus, immigrants who applied for citizenship tended to hold better paying, middle-class jobs than the general population, which mostly consisted of yeoman farmers.⁷² The occupations of citizen-applicants reflect their more urban, rather than rural experience. Thus, the mere presence of foreign-born and Catholic residents did not provide a sufficient cause for nativist suspicions among the southern population. Not only did foreign-born residents compose a small proportion of the southern population, immigrants residing in the South could also obtain success and respectability. Gavin Yuille, for example, bought seventy-two acres of land in Baldwin County in 1845 and joined the Freemason Society.⁷³ Even after his death on September 17, 1849, the family bakery prospered for another three generations.⁷⁴

The residential and economic circumstances of citizen-applicants in South Carolina and foreign-born passengers in Alabama provide some insights into southern politics during the 1850s. Foreign-born citizens usually favored the Democratic Party, and the southern Know Nothing Party consisted mostly of former Whigs.⁷⁵ Southern

⁷¹ Records from Mobile, Alabama did not list occupations for those applying for citizenship.

⁷² United States Bureau of the Census, 1850; and United States Bureau of the Census, 1860. When examining the 1850 and 1860 census data for South Carolina, farmers compose the majority of occupations. Here, the term “farmer” connotes a different occupation than “planter.” Both the 1850 and the 1860 Census listed them as separate occupations. Thus, most farmers in South Carolina did not hold the same wealth as planters, skilled, and white-collar occupations.

⁷³ Gavin Yuille Family Papers; and “Gavin Yuille,” Accessed January 25, 2017, <https://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=74583564&ref=acom>. Gavin Yuille’s membership in the Free Masons was inferred based on the Free Mason symbol engraved on his tombstone.

⁷⁴ Letter to Robert Yuille, January 5, 1851, Gavin Yuille Family Papers. Demonstrating the expansion of wealth and the bakery’s reputation, his son, Gavin B. Yuille, catered a party along the Coosa River near Talladega, Alabama. Gleeson, 51-54; Gavin Yuille Family Papers; and “Gavin Yuille,” <https://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=74583564&ref=acom>.

⁷⁵ Gleeson, 94-100; and James H. Broussard, “Some Determinants of Know Nothing Electoral Strength in the South, 1856, *Louisiana History* Vol. 7 (Winter 1966): 7.

Whigs demonstrated great diversity of thought and ideology. Some Whigs believed that Jackson and his successors abused federal executive power, especially through Jackson's response to the Nullification Crisis. Other Whigs remained disappointed that Democrats did not eliminate federal protectionist tariffs. Still, others desired a more robust federal Congress that would support the American System or government-sponsored internal improvements. The primary unifying factor centered on their opposition to President Andrew Jackson and his policies.⁷⁶

Most Whigs lived in more commercially oriented towns and counties.⁷⁷ Due to the predominantly commercial outlook of southern Whigs, most can be considered as members of the Antebellum middle class.⁷⁸ In general, this class proved naturally suspicious of political parties and considered all party politics to be corrupt. The white middle class in the South, however, still voted and participated in politics. Almost all middle-class voters in the South supported moral reform, economic diversification, and slavery. While social reform drew the middle-class into politics, their pursuit of social respectability limited their desire to compromise. Instead, this economic class of southerners desired parties to take a firm, principled stand on cherished values. Thus,

⁷⁶ William J. Cooper, Jr. and Thomas E. Terrill, eds., *The American South: A History*, 4th Edition (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.: 2009), 176-177.

⁷⁷ Cooper and Terrill, 190.

⁷⁸ Jonathan Daniel Wells and Jennifer R. Green, eds., *The Southern Middle Class in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011), 182. In the context of the mid-nineteenth-century South, the middle class can be defined as white families headed by male workers. Typically, their occupations centered on non-farm and non-manual labor. These middle-class workers were not the wealthiest members of society, but businessmen and professionals of moderate means. Other definitions, however, have been offered by historians and defining the southern middle-class in exact terms remains challenging.

anti-political party sentiment made the southern middle-class more receptive to radical solutions to regional and national political issues.⁷⁹

The number of immigrants in Alabama and South Carolina were not enough to cause the same alarm in the South that was found in the North. Moreover, as the Yuille family demonstrates, foreign-born residents in the South found respectable occupations and positions in society. Thus, Know Nothing assertions that hordes of impoverished immigrants were inundating America proved untrue.⁸⁰ Foreign-born residents in the South, however, became influential beyond their numbers due to their tendency to reside in urban areas, which made them more visible in society. The demographics of the South, therefore, required cultural values to foster nativist sentiment in Alabama and South Carolina. Southern culture did prioritize nativist suspicions and allowed the American Party to challenge southern Democrats.

Though the presence of foreigners and Roman Catholics did not present a sufficient cause for the development of nativist ideology, southern culture proved naturally disposed towards such sentiments. The mostly conservative nature of southern culture allowed for the emergence of a viable American Party in Alabama and South Carolina.⁸¹ One Alabamian argued that the Constitution was the bible of conservatism

⁷⁹ Wells, 181, 190. This outlook may have caused the southern middle-class to support the American Party during its early years. Anti-party sentiment combined with radicalization of Democratic ideology concerning the slavery question could explain the defeat of southern Know Nothings. Without Know Nothing membership records, however, a class-based explanation of southern Know Nothings remains impossible to determine conclusively.

⁸⁰ *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, August 18, 1854, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library.

⁸¹ For further discussion on the conservative nature of southern culture, see Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999); Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal*

and that “to preserve that sacred instrument . . . to secure it from the deadly assaults of abolitionism, nullification, and political Don Quixotism is the great object of the conservatives of this country.”⁸² As part of their efforts to preserve conservative values, southerners, especially Whigs, proved generally suspicious of growing democracy and political inclusiveness for white males in American society. Though some respectable Democrats, such as Percy Walker, joined the American Party, most Know Nothings belonged to the Whig Party before becoming Know Nothings.⁸³ These Whigs supported the limitation of political rights. David Gavin, a prominent South Carolina planter, bemoaned that he “cannot really rejoice for a freedom which allows every bankrupt, swindler, thief and scoundrel, traitor and seller of his vote to be placed on a equality with myself, which allow, men openly to talk, plan, and threaten to take away my property, threaten and abuse my person, and even destroy my property with impunity.”⁸⁴ Southerners, like Gavin, typically equated progressive democracy and expanded suffrage for white men with mobocracy or even anarchy.⁸⁵ Such attitudes stemmed from conservative values that emphasized a specific social hierarchy in the South.

of Colonial Virginia (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1975); Loren Schweninger, *Families in Crisis in the Old South: Divorce, Slavery, and the Law* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Mark M. Smith, *Mastered by the Clock: Time, Slavery, and Freedom in the American South* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York: Knopf, 1956); and Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South*, 25th Anniversary Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁸² *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, December 21, 1854, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library.

⁸³ Broussard, “Some Determinants,” 7.

⁸⁴ David Gavin, July 4, 1856, *David Gavin Diary (In Two Volumes), Volume I: September 10, 1855 – February 18, 1863* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1947), 43-44, McCain Library and Archives, University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

⁸⁵ Gavin, May 1, 1857, *Gavin Diary*, 78, McCain Library and Archives.

Southern culture insisted on proper roles within society.⁸⁶ Following societal customs, a woman from South Carolina refused to adopt Irish orphans because it was improper to raise children from a different nationality alongside her own children. Even into the early twentieth-century, this decision was remembered as good judgment. Thus, not even charity and goodwill could expect to surpass the boundaries of societal expectations.⁸⁷ These clearly delineated spaces within southern culture found their clearest expression through traditional patriarchal institutions. Though women in the 1850s participated in public benevolent societies, many southerners viewed such activities with suspicion or outright hostility. Though women exerted an important, albeit indirect, influence on southern culture and politics, their role largely centered on upholding patriarchal ideals to maintain slavery in the South. Slavery demonstrated an intimate relationship with the ideal of a southern lady. In order to protect the institution of slavery, southern politicians elevated the dignity and importance of patriarchal family structures. White men expected women, children, and slaves to recognize their subordinate role in society.⁸⁸ Patriarchal cultural values demonstrate the hierarchy of southern society. Clear categories existed in southern society, and these boundaries demarcated lesser public involvement for women, slaves, immigrants, and Catholics in the South.

⁸⁶ For further discussion on the hierarchical nature of southern society, see Fox-Genovese, 22-27, 29-30; Glymph, 31-58; Heyrman, 135-160; Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995); Elizabeth R. Varon, *We Mean to be Counted: White Women and Politics in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18 (1966): 151-174; and Deborah G. White, *Ar'n't I a Woman? Female Slaves in the Plantation South*, rev. ed. (New York: Norton, 1999).

⁸⁷ Nancy Bostick De Saussure, *Old Plantation Days: Being Recollections of Southern Life Before the Civil War* (New York: Duffield & Company, 1909), 55, UNC, Digital Collections, Chapel Hill, NC.

⁸⁸ Scott, 14-19.

Southern society demanded that women play a complementary role that supplemented the authority of male politicians.⁸⁹ In the commencement address at the Baptist Female College in Greenville, South Carolina, Reverend J. M. C. Breaker claimed, “The influence which woman is suited to exert over the happiness and destinies of our race, is second only to that of Deity himself!”⁹⁰ Breaker, however, expected educated white women to wield a profound influence on the lives of men only in the domestic sphere. While warning the students against sinful public activity, Breaker told women to fill the world with pure influences and tame the rough characteristics of men in the home. The ideal patriarchal order that Breaker described, however, contained elements that undermined his vision.⁹¹ The moral superiority that Breaker attributed to women practically mandated that they spread their virtue beyond the domestic sphere, a reality accepted, though sometimes reluctantly, by southerners.⁹² Southern society accepted educated white women’s public participation in the South. A local Democratic newspaper in Mobile noted that women’s education furnished the means to enhance the world by improving newspapers, pulpits, and Congress.⁹³ While women could not directly participate in politics as office holders or voters, southern society assumed that women’s political participation proved essential to maintaining virtue in public life.⁹⁴

⁸⁹ For a discussion on the complementarity of male and female authority over slaves, see Glymph, 33-36.

⁹⁰ J. M. C. Breaker, “Woman: Her True Mission and Education,” An Address Delivered Before the Baptist Female College of Greenville, South Carolina at the Commencement, July 23, 1858 (G. E. Elford, Book and Job Printer, 1858), South Caroliniana Library, USC.

⁹¹ Breaker, “Woman,” South Caroliniana Library.

⁹² For a discussion regarding the Cult of Domesticity and its contradictions, see Welter, “Cult of True Womanhood,” 174.

⁹³ *Mobile Daily Register*, April 14, 1853, Mobile, AL, University of South Alabama Library (USA), Mobile, AL.

⁹⁴ For a discussion on nineteenth-century women’s participation in the political process in the South, see Varon, 1-2.

Participation of educated white women in public causes, however, held political and religious ramifications, which fostered anxiety regarding women who participated in public spheres.

In 1854, a conflict concerning the governance of the city hospital in Mobile erupted between the Sisters of Charity and the city council. While denouncing the City Ordinance of 1852, which made provisions for the governance of the city hospital, an unnamed Alderman contended that “the Ordinance of 1852 makes the unfortunate white man a slave.”⁹⁵ Not only did the law allow the hospital to demand labor from patients to pay their bills, it also required the city council to employ four members of the Sisters of Charity to run the hospital. The Alderman continued to link this provision with slavery by arguing, “Is it a consolation to the disconsolate widow and the fatherless child to know that misfortune has placed or may at any moment place them upon a level with our negro slaves?”⁹⁶ This ordinance posed multiple threats to traditional southern values. First, the legal requirement that male political leaders place Catholic women in a position of public power violated ideal patriarchal and religious relationships. Even worse, this same requirement allowed these Catholic nuns to force a white man, woman, or child to perform labor commonly associated with slavery. Thus, a mix of anti-Catholic and chauvinistic attitudes influenced the city council to attack the Sisters of Charity.

On April 7, 1854, Alderman Sherwin, sustained by Alderman U. T. Cleveland, presented sixteen charges against the Sisters of Charity’s hospital administration and

⁹⁵ *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, May 5, 1854, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library.

⁹⁶ *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, May 5, 1854, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library.

recommended a thorough investigation of the nuns' administration of the hospital.⁹⁷ After several days of examining witnesses and taking testimony, the special committee sustained only the second charge against the Catholic nuns: that the hospital became an instrument of propagating Catholic principles. The minutes that recorded the testimony, however, prove inconclusive. Some former Protestant patients told stories of drunken nurses, better treatment for Catholics, and Catholic proselytism directed at Protestant patients. Other witnesses maintained that the Sisters of Charity kept the hospital cleaner than their predecessors, did not attempt to convert Protestants and did not fail to give comfort or assistance to Protestant patients.⁹⁸ Despite the inconsistencies in the evidence and the fact that the committee determined that fifteen out of sixteen charges were fabricated or unsubstantiated, the majority report determined that a sufficient reason to change the system of governance existed. The majority report, sustained by Mayor C.C. Langdon and R.H. Slough, forced the Sisters of Charity to resign their commission as administrators of the city hospital.⁹⁹ Southern culture appeared inclined to accept native-born, white, Protestant men as political leaders, while it fostered suspicion towards the participation of women, Roman Catholics, and the foreign-born.

⁹⁷ *The Mobile Daily Advertiser*, July 6, 1855, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library. U. T. Cleveland later joined the American Party, which supports the claim that he acted during this conflict based on nativist motivations. *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, July 4, 1854, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library.

⁹⁸ *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, July 4, 1854; July 11, 1854; and July 12, 1854, Mobile AL, Mobile Public Library.

⁹⁹ *The Mobile Daily Advertiser*, July 6, 1855, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library, C. C. Langdon later joined the American Party, which supports the claim that he acted during this conflict based on nativist motivations. *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, July 1, 1854, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library.

Religion, especially Protestant Christianity, profoundly affected southern culture.¹⁰⁰ Antebellum Alabamian A. A. Mitch reflected on the importance of Christianity to southern life by declaring, “I do not wish you to think that it is my goodness that leads me often to write on religious subjects, no! It is that I feel myself the great importance of preparing for eternity, I feel conscious that all my relations and friends should also be engaged in this important work.”¹⁰¹ This work for eternity composed an important component of southern culture. Rebecca Davis insisted that “the Almighty, you must remember, was always present . . . He [a farmer] appealed to God when he lay down to sleep and when he arose, when he ate or when he fasted, when he wanted rain and when he had too much rain . . . He held that this Supreme Power took a personal interest in his crops, his rheumatism, and his choice of a wife.”¹⁰² This belief in the genuine presence of God in society found public and private expressions. Praying to God, David Gavin appealed, “but with all the sickness and accidents of the year I have reason to be thankful to the Good One that it is no worse, Lord ennoble [sic] me to be thankful for thy kindness to me and mine . . . ennoble [sic] me to be contented with my station in life and perform my duty as a good citizen and Christian.”¹⁰³ Gavin’s ability to link private Christianity with public citizenship reflects the dominant culture in the South. Though a diverse range of religious denominations existed in nineteenth-century America, southerners, such as Mitch, Gavin, and Davis, often utilized religion to interpret contemporary events and

¹⁰⁰ For a discussion on the relationship between Christianity and American society, see: Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989); and Heyrman, 26-27.

¹⁰¹ A.A. Mitch, Private Letter, July 29, 1845, Bolling Hall Papers, 1813-1897, ADAH.

¹⁰² Davis, 98, UNC.

¹⁰³ Gavin, November 21, 1857, *Gavin Diary*, 115, McCain Library and Archives.

societal developments. These religious attitudes, though they challenged cultural norms at times, ultimately reinforced traditional societal roles in the South.¹⁰⁴ These norms often equated good Christianity with good citizenship.

Southern attitudes toward religious observance demonstrated a more conservative nature than in the North. Though southerners demanded some public religious observances, they also displayed a strong, individualistic attitude concerning private religious practice. In addition, southerners often demanded that organized religions supplement and reinforce, rather than undermine, patriarchal power. Unlike northern expressions of religion after the Second Great Awakening, southerners ultimately discouraged women from preaching to men and forbade any religious criticism of slavery in the South.¹⁰⁵ This individualistic attitude assisted the Democratic Party in formulating their objections to Know Nothing policies concerning proscriptive regulations directed towards Catholics. Despite the strong individualistic nature of southern religious practice, southern cultural traditions also fostered a strong public presence of religion.

Accepting the separation of church and state proved complicated. The Charter and Ordinances of the City of Wetumpka, Alabama, mandated a twenty-five dollar fine for conducting any secular business or public recreation on the Sabbath. Merchants and shopkeepers who sold their wares on Sundays received a fifty dollar fine.¹⁰⁶ Municipal law in Mobile also outlawed all secular business and public recreation on the Sabbath.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Heyrman, 166-167, 180-197.

¹⁰⁵ Heyrman, 180-197, 208-216. For an examination of religious differences in the North, see Hatch, 4, 9-10.

¹⁰⁶ "Charter and Ordinances of the City of Wetumpka, AL" (Wetumpka: Hardy & Stephens, Printers, 1852), Lewis E. Parsons Papers, 1831-1891, ADAH.

¹⁰⁷ C.E. Bolles, ed., "A Digest of the Various Acts of the Legislature Incorporating the City of Mobile: Together with the Special and Private Acts, Incident to the Government of Said City with a Complete Index" (Mobile: Thompson and Harris, 1849), Mobile Municipal Archives.

In Charleston, city officials banned all business and pleasure on Sundays and mandated a twenty dollar fine for violators of this ordinance.¹⁰⁸ Though these ordinances technically protected all religious observances, a clear bias in favor of Protestant Christianity existed. These laws practically mandated all citizens to observe the Sabbath publicly according to Protestant Christian traditions. Indeed, southerners viewed such observations as a marker of good citizenship. The mayor of Mobile argued that “the recognition and the duty of a due observance of the Christian Sabbath is an *American* principle.”¹⁰⁹ His message primarily addressed foreigners, Jews, and Catholics who still opened for business or engaged in perceived drunken frivolity on Sundays. He claimed that the Protestant majority should not be overruled by the foreign and Catholic population.¹¹⁰ In addition, public demonstrations of religious observance carried political implications.

Being a good Christian and American citizen mutually reinforced one another. Alabama Democratic Senator Clement C. Clay, Jr. contended, “Patience under the detested tyranny of man is rebellion to the sovereignty of God – allegiance to that power which gives us the forms of men commands us to maintain the rights of man.”¹¹¹ Likewise, Alabama Governor Henry W. Collier’s Thanksgiving Proclamation declared that “it is the duty of a Christian people to acknowledge the supremacy of God and obey his government; it is their privilege to offer thanksgiving and supplication to the Gracious and Almighty Ruler of the World . . . to demand of us, as a nation, the constant exercise

¹⁰⁸ Charleston City Council, “Digest of the Ordinances of the City Council of Charleston, From the Year 1783 to July 1818,” SCDAH.

¹⁰⁹ *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, December 8, 1854, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library.

¹¹⁰ *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, December 21, 1854, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library.

¹¹¹ C. C. Clay, Jr., Private Notebook, C. C. Clay Papers, 1811-1925 (Bulk 1821-1915), Rubenstein Library, Duke University, Durham, NC.

of the highest virtues of Patriotism and Christianity.”¹¹² More importantly, American republican values and liberty depended upon Protestant Christianity. A failure to observe the Sabbath, for example, eventually led to the failure of self-government.¹¹³ By equating Protestant with American, southern culture fostered nativist sentiments among the native-born population.

The strong identification of American with Protestant led to attitudes in southern culture towards Roman Catholics that ranged from mockery to outright hostility. Southerners openly mocked the newly formulated Catholic dogma concerning the Immaculate Conception. The *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, a local newspaper that supported the American Party, linked this Catholic dogma with paganism saying, “It is the fashion of these practical times to speak disparagingly of the barbaric splendor and gorgeous fictions of heathen worship, but yet multitudes annually flock to Rome from all parts of Christendom to witness its ordinary pageants; to say nothing of this extraordinary occasion, which will doubtless surpass anything seen there in many years.”¹¹⁴ In addition to portraying the Catholic faith as irrelevant or heretical, southern culture also portrayed Roman Catholicism as dangerous. The Methodist-Episcopal Church warned its congregations that Rome was the beast sent by Satan described in the biblical Book of Revelation. Papal aggression threatened civil and religious liberty and sending children to “Popish” schools only facilitated Papal intervention in American affairs.¹¹⁵

¹¹² *Mobile Daily Register*, November 11, 1850, Mobile, AL, USA.

¹¹³ *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, January 28, 1855, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library.

¹¹⁴ *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, December 6, 1854, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library. The Dogma of the Immaculate Conception contends that Mary, mother of Jesus Christ, was born without the stain of Original Sin

¹¹⁵ “Minutes of the Alabama Conference, of the M.E. Church, South, Held in Tuscaloosa, Alabama,” December 7-16, 1853, Together with the Annual Sermon, Preached Before the Conference, by

Southerners especially feared the temporal power of the Pope. They argued that Popes claimed the right to depose kings and release subjects from fealty to their government. Such authority, nativists argued, deprived King John of his legitimate right to rule England in the early thirteenth century A.D., condemned the Magna Charta, and opposed religious toleration.¹¹⁶ As evidence, nineteenth-century newspapers reported on Catholic writers, such as Paul Sarpl, who claimed that the Pope was the temporal monarch of the world. The Pope, according to Sarpl, held the power to establish and destroy civil governments.¹¹⁷ These attitudes led to conflict between Protestants and Catholics before the Know Nothing Party gained control of any state or municipal offices in Alabama or South Carolina.

An example of conflict between Protestants and Catholics in southern society occurred in Charleston in 1853. Reverend E. Leahey, a former Catholic Trappist Monk, arrived in Charleston to speak on the alleged unchristian treatment of women in Catholic confessionals. His advertisements alluded to the scandalous nature of his address when they banned women and children from attending. Leahey promised the Charleston City Council that he would prove that the Catholic Church was a church of abominations. At this city council meeting, Protestant and Catholic aldermen argued whether the city should provide police protection and ensure the premise in case of vandalism from a Catholic mob. Catholic Alderman, John Bellinger, convinced the council that the sponsor

Thomas O. Summers (Mobile: Evening News Job Office, 1854), J. L. M. Curry Pamphlet Collection, 1730-1902, ADAH.

¹¹⁶ *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, February 18, 1855, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library.

¹¹⁷ *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, January 28, 1855, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library.

and Leahey should undertake this speech at their own risk. As a result, Leahey fled the city due to the threat of mob vengeance.¹¹⁸

Many Protestants accused Bellinger and the city council of obfuscating the First Amendment right to freedom of speech and religion. Protestant clergyman, John Bachman, argued that

as a native American citizen, and an inhabitant of Charleston for nearly forty years, I have recently felt deeply grieved that an attempt has been made, resulting in partial success, by a Roman Catholic Alderman, to deprive one who professes to be a Protestant clergyman of the privilege of free discussion in matters of religion; and he, as a member of the City Council, voting against his being protected from a Roman Catholic mob.¹¹⁹

Bachman claimed that the bullying tactics of Catholic foreigners prevented the city council from protecting law and order. Bellinger's interference, according to Protestant clergymen, revealed that Catholicism proved incompatible with American and southern institutions. Protestant Reverend Gildersleeve contended that "this loyalty [to the Catholic Church] implies *subjection* to a priesthood, most of whom are of foreign origin, and all of whom . . . take an oath of allegiance to a foreign power, which Jesuitical casuistry alone can interpret as compatible with true fealty to our National and State governments."¹²⁰ Both Bachman and Gildersleeve made a point to connect Catholicism with dangerous foreign influences. Indeed, within southern culture, a strong link between Catholicism and foreign influence existed.

¹¹⁸ John Bachman, *A Defense of Luther and the Reformation Against the Charges of John Bellinger, M.D., and Others: To Which are Appended Various Communications of Other Protestant and Roman Catholic Writers Who Engaged in the Controversy* (Charleston: William Y. Paxton, 1853), 1-49, South Carolina Historical Society, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC.

¹¹⁹ Bachman, 44, College of Charleston.

¹²⁰ Bachman, 257, College of Charleston, Emphasis Original.

Southern suspicions of the foreign-born population did not suddenly emerge because the Know Nothing Party fabricated a political issue for political expediency. In 1844, an anonymous letter chastised Henry Gourdin, Chairman of the American Republican Association of Charleston for attacking the nation's naturalization laws. According to Gourdin, existing naturalization laws improperly and even dangerously gave citizenship to foreigners. He maintained that foreigners could not truly love American institutions and that they would increase poverty and ignorance in the nation.¹²¹ Such assertions derived, in part, from southern cultural outlooks concerning the foreign-born population.

Cultural stereotypes in the South generally depicted the Irish, the most prominent immigrant group in the South, as drunken, rowdy, and ignorant.¹²² These images appeared in local newspapers. The *Mobile Daily Register* attributed the demise of Irish laborers, not to cholera, "but upon examination of a whiskey barrel from which they had been drinking freely, it was found to contain a quantity of copperas."¹²³ Even Irish women, according to southerners, could not refrain from creating a drunken spectacle, which proved a cause for concern due to the additional violation of southern gender norms. The *Mobile Daily Register* reported that "Ann Dugan and Mary Sullivan, two incorrigible disciples of Bacchus, were arraigned for being found inebriated in the streets."¹²⁴ Moreover, this cultural attitude believed that such drunken and unladylike

¹²¹ "Letter to Henry Gordin, Esq., Chairman of the American Republican Association of Charleston, On the Question of Altering the Naturalization Laws of the United States," N.p., 1844, South Caroliniana Library, USC.

¹²² For a discussion on nineteenth-century cultural Irish stereotypes, see Knobel, 3-13.

¹²³ *Mobile Daily Register*, January 10, 1850, Mobile, AL, USA.

¹²⁴ *Mobile Daily Register*, April 11, 1851, Mobile, AL, USA.

behavior often led to violence in the streets. In one instance, two Irishmen named Donnelly and Kelly were found in “rather a Bacchanalian condition,” which led them to begin a deadly fight with a Frenchman.¹²⁵ In a separate case, Irishwomen fought each other in the streets, which resulted in a fine for public disorderliness.¹²⁶ Finally, cultural stereotypes portrayed the Irish as unintelligent. The *Mobile Daily Register*, which ardently opposed the Know Nothing Party, attempted to define an Irishman as “a machine converting potatoes into human nature.”¹²⁷ Likewise, the *Edgefield Advertiser*, the local states’ rights newspaper for Edgefield, South Carolina, described in an article titled, “Irish Stupidity,” how an Irishman confused terrapins and snuffboxes. The newspaper reported that the dim Irishman supposedly exclaimed in his native drawl, ““faith, honey, divil the bit did ye drame of cumin’ to Ameriki, to see snuff boxes crawl!””¹²⁸ Another Irishman reportedly mistook his church’s collection box for the ballot box.¹²⁹ In short, like northerners, southerners demonstrated an inclination to view their foreign-born neighbors as less than equal to native-born citizens. Sometimes, this outlook led to specific targeting of foreign cultural practices for public condemnation.

At the end of 1854, the mayor of Mobile announced his plan to enforce more effectively the city’s ordinance mandating the observation of the Sabbath. This ordinance stipulated that no worldly business or public recreation could take place on Sundays.¹³⁰ The mayor claimed that he simply realized that public opinion demanded enforcement of

¹²⁵ *Mobile Daily Register*, November 20, 1850, Mobile, AL, USA.

¹²⁶ *Mobile Daily Register*, April 2, 1851, Mobile, AL, USA.

¹²⁷ *Mobile Daily Register*, May 16, 1851, Mobile, AL, USA.

¹²⁸ *The Edgefield Advertiser*, June 30, 1852, Edgefield, SC, “Chronicling America,” Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

¹²⁹ *The Edgefield Advertiser*, August 11, 1852, Edgefield, SC, “Chronicling America.”

¹³⁰ Bolles, 468-469, Mobile Municipal Archives.

existing laws. However, he revealed that his message centered on the foreign-born community. He said, “Whilst I am free to admit, that a large portion of our foreign population cordially sympathize in this American sentiment, yet, it is a notorious fact, that wherever there is found a departure from this principle, it can be traced to foreign influence – the introduction of foreign customs, foreign doctrines, foreign vices.”¹³¹

While the mayor continued to invite immigrants to Mobile, he insisted that they observe its laws and Protestant customs. According to an editorial in support of the mayor’s decree, the populace generally applauded the announcement. The editor complained that German Jews kept their own Sabbath on Saturday instead of Sunday, and Catholics attended “Mass in the morning and play all day.”¹³² Thus, the open drinking saloons, Jewish stores, and Catholic shops desecrated the Sabbath by remaining open for business on Sundays. The editor argued that “the position which the mayor, at the risk of losing the favor of the German Jews, the saloon keepers, the bar-room frequenters, the lower class of Roman Catholics, has taken in his message calls forth the approbation of all Protestant Christian men and women, and the praise of all who would see the Sabbath of the Lord sanctified by respectful outward observance.”¹³³ Southern society, therefore, expected citizens to conform to Protestant Christian traditions.

Anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic sentiments clearly existed in southern culture. Indeed, William Russell Smith, Know Nothing Representative from Tuscaloosa, Alabama, maintained in his memoir that the American Party held lasting importance. He contended that the foreign-born population controlled the balance of power in elections in

¹³¹ *The Mobile Daily Advertiser*, December 8, 1854, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library.

¹³² *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, December 21, 1851, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library.

¹³³ *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, December 21, 1851, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library.

the 1850s and that the ballot box was at the mercy of the whim of foreign masses. As a result, the Whig and Democratic Parties shamelessly competed for the foreign vote, which degraded American politics and introduced corruption into the political process. Describing the defeated American Party candidate for governor, George Shortridge, as a martyr to the “great cause of native Americanism,” Smith maintained that the defeat of the American Party surrendered the ballot box to foreign elements.¹³⁴ While a statistical analysis of southern society does not reveal a sufficient cause for southern angst regarding immigrants and Catholics, conservative values in the nineteenth-century South sought to place limits on which white men could become full political participants. Thus, when the American Party began its political activities in Alabama and South Carolina, it did not need to invent nativist ideology. It already existed within southern culture.

American Party Political Ideology in Alabama and South Carolina

When the Know Nothing Party attempted to wrest power away from the Democrats in Alabama and South Carolina, they utilized popular patriarchal and nativist values found within nineteenth-century southern culture. Moreover, elements of secrecy used by Know Nothing lodges forced the American Party to defend its manly stature within a patriarchal society.¹³⁵ Though some southern Know Nothings advocated anti-Catholic public policies, the majority preferred to combat the “Papists” outside of politics. Due to the greater emphasis on states’ rights, southern Know Nothings found it

¹³⁴ William Russell Smith, *Reminiscences of a Long Life; Historical, Political, Personal, and Literary, Volume I* (Charleston: BiblioBazaar, LLC., 2008), 254-256.

¹³⁵ Anbinder, xii; and Overdyke, v. The primary scholarship on the southern branch of the Know Nothing Party discounts its use of nativism as merely an attempted distraction from sectional tensions. This disregard results, in part, because southern Know Nothing political policies differed from their northern counterparts.

more difficult to justify legal proscription of Roman Catholics. Their states' rights emphasis altered their anti-immigration policies as well. The American Party in Alabama and South Carolina blamed increased immigration for increasing fanaticism or abolitionism. This outlook contrasts with northern Know Nothings, who linked immigrants to pro-slavery ideology.¹³⁶ Though northern and southern Know Nothings came to different conclusions regarding the dangerous influence of foreigners, both sections legitimately employed nativist ideology to explain contemporary political conflicts and propose solutions.

The American Party in Alabama and South Carolina argued that their political ideology best upheld patriarchal values, in which the male head of household reigned supreme.¹³⁷ William Russell Smith proclaimed, "We wish to teach American wives that their husbands are their only confessors; American children that their fathers and mothers are their only confessors."¹³⁸ American Party principles allowed men to exert their authority more effectively and, according to southern nativists, promised to improve women's behavior as well. The *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, the American Party newspaper in Mobile, Alabama, maintained that discouraging immigration forced native-born women to perform domestic labor. Without immigrant, unskilled labor, "when a man marries, he will marry a wife, one that can cook his dinner, wash his shirt, and mend his clothes, and not an overgrown baby to sit in the parlor, spend money without thinking

¹³⁶ Anbinder, 44-47.

¹³⁷ Scott, 17.

¹³⁸ William Russell Smith, "The American Party, and Its Mission," Speech Delivered in the House of Representatives, January 15, 1855 (Washington D.C.: American Organ Office, 1855), Alabama Pamphlets Collection, 1821-1961, ADAH.

that it must be earned, and play lady till husbands are bankrupt.”¹³⁹ The southern Know Nothing Party intended to create a more conservative, patriarchal society. Moreover, southern Know Nothings insisted that only their party exerted bold, manly efforts against abolitionists.

The newly formed Know Nothing Party defended itself for attempting to supplant the South’s elder, well-established Democratic political organization. Disregarding elderly wisdom was normally considered an affront to patriarchal values.¹⁴⁰ Therefore, advocates of the American Party portrayed their organization as a young, masculine party that boldly confronted its opponents. Often referred to as “Sam,” advocates claimed that the party “is a decidedly good looking fellow. He has a frank, bluff, and intelligent countenance, strongly indicating a sound head and honest heart. His appearance is exceedingly attractive, and wherever he goes he wins . . . the affections of the people.”¹⁴¹ This depiction allowed southern Know Nothings to attribute masculine virtues of boldness and strength to the party. Toasting the new party, a journalist from Mobile proclaimed, “Long life and good health to the victorious sons of ‘Sam’ in Mobile – the gallant two thousand shadows that can neither be wheedled nor frightened from the manly support of their principles.”¹⁴² Though their party was young, Know Nothings claimed to exhibit power and strength, which contributed to a respectable beginning for the new party.¹⁴³ Such depictions also allowed the American Party to paint southern Democrats as too old and incapable of meeting contemporary political threats.

¹³⁹ *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, August 18, 1854, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library.

¹⁴⁰ Heyrman, 79-16, 135-155; and Wyatt-Brown, 101.

¹⁴¹ *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, March 29, 1855, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library.

¹⁴² *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, May 8, 1855, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library.

¹⁴³ *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, July 6, 1855, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library.

The American Party in the South boldly claimed to confront forces of fanatical abolitionism and depicted southern Democrats as “old fogies.”¹⁴⁴ Even Democrats expressed concern over their application of the seniority system within the party. Democrat William F. Samford of Alabama urged, “Let us kill off old fogyism and the old combinations – and elevate principle and merit to controlling positions.”¹⁴⁵ Know Nothings especially emphasized the shortcomings of the seniority system. Although respect for elderly wisdom proved valuable in southern culture, Know Nothings argued that their opponents’ wisdom proved unfruitful and insufficient to check corruption and abolitionism. Percy Walker, who belonged to the Democratic Party before becoming the American Party Representative for Mobile, argued that the Know Nothing movement was an outpouring of the people’s hearts and minds against corruption found in the old and effete parties. The Democratic Party, according to Walker, lacked wholesome, manly vigor and became overly decadent.¹⁴⁶ These masculine values, shared with the national American Party, allowed Know Nothings to behave as responsible parents in political society.

Portraying themselves as bold and manly, despite the party’s youth, national Know Nothings claimed that these virtues allowed them to become responsible parents towards their political children, especially Catholics and immigrants. In Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Frederick Rinehart Anspach, a member of the Know Nothing Party, maintained that “you may call that parental solicitude which a father displays by

¹⁴⁴ *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, March 29, 1855, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library.

¹⁴⁵ Private letter from William F. Samford to M. P. Blue, August 14, 1854, Johnson Jones Hooper Papers, 1853-1860, ADAH.

¹⁴⁶ *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, August 5, 1855, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library.

restraining a refractory child, *hostility* to the offspring, but those who understand the relations which the parties sustain to each other, will regard it an act of the highest consideration for the youth's welfare; our government sustains a parental relation towards its legitimate and adopted children."¹⁴⁷ Southern members of the American Party, therefore, compared favorably to national appeals to proper patriarchal values. Not only did the party boldly confront its adversaries, it properly exerted parental authority, which the South greatly valued, towards its adopted citizens. Anna Ella Carroll of Maryland, a staunch supporter of the American Party, linked the success of Know Nothing principles to a woman's duty to her country. She argued that "woman has a high political mission to fulfill in America, but it is only as a moral agent – her aim is to develop the child for God and his country. She implants these in the soul; and whilst the morals of the country depend upon her, she may be said to guard the integrity of her country."¹⁴⁸ Carroll, therefore, embraced the conservative vision of society espoused by the Know Nothing Party. According to Carroll, women must safeguard the country's soul, which required support of American Party principles because they were founded on God's eternal truth.¹⁴⁹ She described Sam as a "dear modest fellow, he is so honest . . . He is sure to say what he means, and just what he means."¹⁵⁰ Carroll linked the American Party's ability to communicate plainly with the perceived inherent dishonesty of foreigners. Discounting

¹⁴⁷ Frederick Rinehart Anspach, *Sons of the Sires: A History of the Rise, Progress, and Destiny of the American Party, and Its Probable Influence on the Next Presidential election. To Which is Added a Review of the Letter of the Honorable Henry A. Wise, Against the Know-Nothings* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo, & Co., 1855), 118-119, Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas, Emphasis Original.

¹⁴⁸ Anna Ella Carroll, *The Great American Battle, or, The Contest Between Christianity and Political Romanism* (New York and Auburn: Miller, Orton, and Mulligan, 1856), 18, South Caroliniana Library, USC.

¹⁴⁹ Carroll, 25, South Caroliniana Library.

¹⁵⁰ Carroll, 92, South Caroliniana Library.

the foreigner's and Catholic's ability to be truly honest, she encouraged native-born men to defend manfully the truth put forth by the Know Nothings.¹⁵¹ By portraying themselves as the best defenders of traditional society, the national American Party attempted to sanctify patriarchal virtues by linking nativist ideology with the words of the American Founding Fathers.

Anspach described the Know Nothing organization as “a youth of rare capacities and of glorious promise; so attractive, that his personal charms daily captivate thousands and tens of thousands hearts . . . If I were to draw a portrait of this youth and analyze the properties of his character, I might commence by saying that he is very much in appearance like the pictures of the manly Washington.”¹⁵² Appealing to the Founding Fathers became an important rallying point to justify Know Nothing proscriptive policies, both North and South. Samuel F. Rice, Know Nothing advocate from Alabama, quoted George Washington as saying, “*I do most devoutly wish that we had not a single foreigner among us, except the Marquis de LaFayette, who acts upon very different principles from those which govern the rest.*”¹⁵³ Know Nothings also quoted Thomas Jefferson as saying, “I hope that we may find some means in the future of shielding ourselves from foreign influence; political, commercial, or in whatever form it may be attempted. I scarcely withhold myself from joining in the wish of Silas Deane that there were an ocean of fire between this and the Old World.”¹⁵⁴ Associating masculine virtues

¹⁵¹ Carroll, 102, South Caroliniana Library.

¹⁵² Anspach, 14, Kansas State University.

¹⁵³ Samuel F. Rice, “Americanism and Southern Rights,” An Address Delivered Before a Mass Meeting of the American Party of Talladega County, September 6, 1855 (Montgomery: Barrett and Wimbish's Book and Job Office, 1855), Curry Collection, Emphasis Original.

¹⁵⁴ *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, August 19, 1854, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library.

with the words of the Founding Fathers allowed Know Nothings to justify further their policies. These appeals proved important for defending elements of secrecy associated with the American Party, which significantly threatened Know Nothing success in the South.

Geologist Oscar Lieber contended that secrecy contributed to the American Party's political success in Alabama by referring to the election of the mayor in Tuscaloosa. Though the incumbent believed that he ran unopposed, he somehow lost the election to the unknown Know Nothing candidate. Indeed, according to Lieber, secret signs had a "peculiar fascination for the vulgar mind" that he also observed among other organizations, such as the Odd Fellows, Free Masons, and Sons of Temperance.¹⁵⁵ Southern Know Nothings attempted to translate this fascination into political capital and votes.

Addressing accusations that secret organizations undercut politicians' masculinity, Know Nothing advocates emphasized their manly boldness, the tactical advantages of secrecy, and the Constitutional right of assembly.¹⁵⁶ William Russell Smith argued that secrecy proved a prudent and effective weapon against the party's Catholic enemies. Smith argued that the Jesuits, "the fearful and disguised enemy – an enemy whose name is *legion* – with which the American party is at war," utilized secrecy as a weapon.¹⁵⁷ As a result, secrecy became necessary for the American Party. Smith maintained, "There is an old saying, and never more appropriately used than now, '*when*

¹⁵⁵ Letter from Oscar Lieber to Francis Lieber, March 13, 1855, Lieber Papers.

¹⁵⁶ *Edgefield Advertiser*, August 22, 1855, Edgefield, SC, "Chronicling America."

¹⁵⁷ Smith, "The American Party and Its Mission," Alabama Pamphlets Collection, Emphasis Original. "Legion" refers to an alternative biblical name for demons controlled by Satan. Smith equated the Catholic Church with Satan in this statement.

you fight the devil, you have the right to fight him with fire.”¹⁵⁸ Though more reluctant to use secrecy than Smith, Samuel Rice conceded that secrecy provided necessary protection for the new party during its early years.¹⁵⁹ Furthermore, Know Nothings contended that society accepted the secret charity performed by the Free Masons and Odd Fellows. Even the Founding Fathers crafted the Constitution in secrecy.¹⁶⁰ Percy Walker contended that the United States Constitution, authorizing the secret ballot, recognized secrecy as a legal right.¹⁶¹ Ultimately, however, secrecy proved a detriment to southern Know Nothings because of strong patriarchal values embedded in southern culture. Therefore, southern delegates convinced the 1855 national party convention in Philadelphia to drop much of its secrecy, admit membership in lodges, openly avow their principles, and publicly announce the location of meetings.¹⁶² This attachment to conservative cultural and political values, however, affected more than the element of secrecy in the southern American Party. These values exerted a profound influence on Know Nothing political policies concerning Catholics and immigrants, which gave the regional branch of the party its own unique vision of national politics.

Section VIII of the 1855 national American Party Platform promised to halt the dangerous influence of the Roman Catholic Church and criticized Catholicism for attempting to ban the Bible from public schools.¹⁶³ While animosity towards Catholics existed in Alabama and South Carolina, a much more virulent strain of anti-Catholicism

¹⁵⁸ Smith, “The American Party and Its Mission,” Alabama Pamphlets Collection, Emphasis Original.

¹⁵⁹ Rice, “Americanism and Southern Rights,” Curry Collection.

¹⁶⁰ *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, April 22, 1855, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library.

¹⁶¹ *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, August 5, 1855, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library.

¹⁶² Anbinder, 170.

¹⁶³ Anbinder, 170.

existed outside the South.¹⁶⁴ Northerners asserted, “It is impious to assert that Popery and Christianity are the same Religions . . . Catholicism and Christianity are as totally distinct as light and darkness . . . a Catholic and a Christian are not the same being.”¹⁶⁵ Not only did northern nativists oppose the Catholic Church on religious grounds, they also felt threatened on political grounds. Anspach asserted that the Know Nothing Party emerged in response to Jesuit assaults on Protestantism. Through their attempts to ban the Bible in public schools, Catholics sought to sow dissension among American citizens. This discord, according to northern nativists, became a key feature of Jesuit strategy to gain absolute power in America.¹⁶⁶ Anspach claimed, “The most far-seeing and judicious minds, had often expressed it as their conviction that foreign despots were co-operating with the Jesuits to subvert, if possible, our government.”¹⁶⁷ Clerical authority, therefore, inherently opposed American civil institutions and waged war against religious freedom.¹⁶⁸ In agreement, Anna Ella Carroll compared the Pope to the oppressive Roman Emperor Nero in the first-century A.D. The despotism of the Catholic Church created weakness and division and undermined national character. She argued, “This is the Romish Jesuitical Hierarchy, that got into America, because of her religious toleration . . . Thus they [the Jesuits] came to America to take liberty by the hand and make it a corpse . . . their design, by education is to crush the soul, and leave the mind a mere machine.”¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁴ Anbinder, 24-30, 104-106.

¹⁶⁵ Junius Minimus Natu, *A Blow at the Root of Puseyism and Episcopalianism: Being an Answer to an Anonymous Book Published by a Priest of the Catholic Church*, ca. 1850, 6-7, Curry Collection.

¹⁶⁶ Anspach, 25-28, Kansas State University. Both northern and southern Know Nothings typically used Catholic and Jesuit interchangeably.

¹⁶⁷ Anspach, 35, Kansas State University.

¹⁶⁸ Natu, 8, Curry Collection.

¹⁶⁹ Carroll, 72-73, South Caroliniana Library.

This anti-Catholic sentiment compelled northern Know Nothings to obey the wishes of their constituents and enact strong legislation to proscribe Catholics from public life.

Anti-Catholic ideology emboldened northern Know Nothings to attack Catholic institutions more directly than the southern American Party. The Massachusetts legislature, controlled by the American Party, mandated that public school students read the King James Bible every day.¹⁷⁰ Know Nothing members of the Massachusetts state legislature went so far as to invade the privacy of the Sisters of Charity, behaving “indecorously and disrespectfully” towards the nuns while inspecting their convent.¹⁷¹ Furthermore, in the hope of limiting funding to Catholic parochial schools, Know Nothings prohibited the use of state money on sectarian schools.¹⁷² Southern Know Nothings, on the other hand, demonstrated a reluctance to proscribe Catholics legally from public institutions.

Like their northern counterparts, some members of the southern American Party demanded legal proscription of Catholics from political life. An editorial written to support the Know Nothing Party in Choctaw County, Alabama, contended,

in our midst there are not wanting those who assert the *divine right* of kings, and that the mitre and crosier, the ensigns of ecclesiastical dominion, should be revered, and who address the head of the Catholic Church as *Dominus Deus Noster Papa – Our Lord God the Pope* – and maintain his infallibility. Are not our liberties endangered? Have they not been assailed? Then let us be up and doing – let us defend them.¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ Anbinder, 170. The King James Bible was the predominant bible translation used by Protestants during the nineteenth-century.

¹⁷¹ *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, April 11, 1855, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library; For further discussion of this incident, see Anbinder, 137.

¹⁷² Anbinder, 136.

¹⁷³ *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, February 3, 1855, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library, Emphasis Original.

William Russell Smith took up this call to action but limited his proposals to party rules instead of legislative policies. He argued, “The sooner our children are taught that the Jesuits and priests have been raised from their cradle to seduce us, the better for us . . . To correct these evils we invoke public opinion and proclaim that we intend to practice party *proscription*. We ask no law, *but give us a pure ballot box*.”¹⁷⁴ To check Catholic despotism, Smith wanted the American Party to refrain from voting for Catholics and appointing Catholics to political office. He noted that all mid-nineteenth century political parties practiced rules of party proscription and did not mean that Know Nothings intended to violate the First Amendment right to freedom of religion.¹⁷⁵

Jeremiah Clemens, Know Nothing advocate from Alabama, asserted that Catholics still displayed hatred, intolerance, and bigotry towards Protestants. Furthermore, Catholics continued to make strides toward gaining power and influence in America, which posed a significant threat to liberty. Clemens argued, “When he [a Catholic] believes that every Protestant is on the highway to hell – when he believes that it is charity to torture, and piety to murder those whom he looks upon as enemies to his God, it would be absurd to expect mercy or look for toleration.”¹⁷⁶ In agreement with Smith, Clemens argued that the best way to check the advancements of Catholics centered on refusing to vote for them instead of actively legislating against them. Clemens maintained that the Constitution does not compel anyone to vote for a Catholic any more than it would compel a southerner to vote for an abolitionist.¹⁷⁷ These proposals

¹⁷⁴ Smith, “The American Party, and Its Mission,” Alabama Pamphlets Collection, Emphasis Original.

¹⁷⁵ Smith, “The American Party, and Its Mission,” Alabama Pamphlets Collection.

¹⁷⁶ Clemens, “Letter from Honorable Jeremiah Clemens,” Clemens Letters.

¹⁷⁷ Clemens, “Letter from Honorable Jeremiah Clemens,” Clemens Letters.

stopped far short of the policies being enacted in the North. An explicit concern for states' rights and strict construction of the Constitution prevented southern politicians from adopting a stronger legislative stance against Catholics.

Unlike the North, the South felt directly threatened by increasing centralization of federal power.¹⁷⁸ No southern politician during the nineteenth-century could hold office without demanding strict construction of the Constitution. Know Nothings in Alabama and South Carolina, therefore, refused to promote state or national policies of religious legal proscription. Though the American Party convention in Alabama approved of the national Philadelphia Platform, it also denounced Section VIII as unnecessary and unconstitutional. The party refused to maintain an unconstitutional Union and demanded a distinction between good and bad Catholics.¹⁷⁹ The Know Nothing Convention in South Carolina also voted to removed religious tests of the party. Know Nothings who assembled in Charleston decreed that all native-born citizens were eligible for membership, provided that Catholics renounce "all foreign and ecclesiastical jurisdiction and influence."¹⁸⁰ While noting the incompatibility of Catholicism and republican values, Know Nothings also maintained that the Constitution did not allow them to proscribe Catholics legally from political office.

The policies enacted by Alabama and South Carolina Know Nothings regarding Catholics do not demonstrate a complete difference of opinion from their northern counterparts. The policies concerning Catholics enacted by southern Know Nothings still

¹⁷⁸ Elizabeth R. Varon, *Disunion! The Coming of the American Civil War, 1789-1859* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 9-14, 273.

¹⁷⁹ *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, August 17, 1855, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library.

¹⁸⁰ *The Lancaster Ledger*, August 29, 1855, Lancasterville, SC, "Chronicling America," Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

expressed a strong anti-Catholic bias. The South Carolina Know Nothings, while stating their opposition to Section VIII of the national platform, also claimed that they would not vote for Catholics who relied on Papal authority for ecclesiastical governance.¹⁸¹ Since Roman Catholicism utilizes an episcopal or hierarchical form of church governance, with the Pope at the top of the hierarchy, this statement eliminated all Catholics in good standing with the Church as viable candidates for political office. Furthermore, anti-Catholic statements encouraged isolated acts of violence directed towards Catholics in the South. In May 1855, for example, a Jesuit Priest from Spring Hill College in Mobile was assaulted near the Dog River Factory. The four perpetrators severely beat the cleric and threatened him with death if he continued to celebrate Mass at the factory. Though the Know Nothing newspaper in Mobile eventually condemned the attack, its initial reports on the event falsely and without cause blamed four Catholic Irishmen. Furthermore, the paper initially attributed the motive for the attack to the priest's abuse of his sacred office.¹⁸² Though the paper ultimately retracted its initial story and condemned the attack, the episode reveals that Know Nothing ideology in the South did not unequivocally condemn cultural violence against Catholics. Instead of prioritizing their political policies towards legally proscribing Catholics, however, Alabama and South Carolina Know Nothings focused on the perceived links between increasing immigration and the growing strength of abolitionism.

During the first half of the 1850s, immigration to the United States and the South increased dramatically. In 1850, 315,000 immigrants relocated to America, and their

¹⁸¹ *The Lancaster Ledger*, August 29, 1855, Lancasterville, SC, "Chronicling America."

¹⁸² *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, May 16, 1855, May 17, 1855, and May 18, 1855, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library.

numbers exceeded 400,000 in 1851.¹⁸³ Immigration did not begin to decrease until 1855 and 1856.¹⁸⁴ Furthermore, the Irish population in the South increased by over fifty-five percent between 1850 and 1860.¹⁸⁵ Simultaneously, agitation over the slavery question also increased during the 1850s. First, the Compromise of 1850 admitted California as a free state but included a strong Fugitive Slave Law that was extremely unpopular in the North. Second, the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 repealed the Missouri Compromise and established the principle of “popular sovereignty” in the new western territories.¹⁸⁶ These incidents increased the anxiety felt by white southerners concerning the fate of their economic and political institutions.¹⁸⁷ Know Nothing politicians in Alabama and South Carolina believed that increased immigration corrupted existing political parties, which led to increasing abolition fanaticism in the North.¹⁸⁸ Clemens asserted that existing political parties bought most of the foreign-born voters for a shilling, corrupting the ballot box and undermining liberty.¹⁸⁹ By extending the rights of citizenship to aliens and suffrage to foreign-born citizens, he charged, Democrats and Whigs corrupted American politics and paved the way for abolitionists to gain power in the North.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸³ *Mobile Daily Register*, May 17, 1851, Mobile, AL, USA.

¹⁸⁴ *Mobile Daily Register*, June 12, 1856, Mobile, AL, USA.

¹⁸⁵ Gleeson, 27.

¹⁸⁶ For a discussion concerning the effect of these two political incidents, see: Michael Holt, *The Fate of Their Country: Politicians, Slavery Extension, and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2004); James M. McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire: The Civil War and Reconstruction* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2001); and Varon, *Disunion!*, 213-217, 236.

¹⁸⁷ For further discussion of growing anxiety concerning the fate of America because of the slavery question, see William W. Freehling, *The Road to Disunion: Secessionist Triumph, 1854-1861* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Michael F. Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1983); David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis: 1848-1861* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2011); Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Causes of the Civil War* (Greenwich: Touchstone, 1992); and Varon, *Disunion!*, 31-213.

¹⁸⁸ Rice, “Americanism and Southern Rights,” Curry Collection.

¹⁸⁹ Clemens, “Letter from Honorable Jeremiah Clemens,” Clemens Letters.

¹⁹⁰ Smith, “The American Party, and Its Mission,” Alabama Pamphlets Collection.

As the American Party began to gain power, both nationally and in the South, its supporters hoped that corrupt politicians would lose influence. Residents of Mobile argued that the corruption of political office prepared the public mind to accept the American Party. Know Nothing success doomed the existence of professional politicians. Southern Know Nothings maintained, “We think we see one ray of promise, at least, in the future, and that is, the doom of professed politicians.”¹⁹¹ The American Party, therefore, proposed to purify American politics. This assertion was not, however, simply anti-party sentiment. A clear connection between perceived foreign influence and corruption existed.¹⁹² This corruption occurred in all existing political parties, but especially the Democratic Party, which reflects the predominant Whig composition of the southern American Party.¹⁹³

In the South, Know Nothing advocates believed that allowing foreign-born citizens to vote simply led to mobocracy. David Gavin contended that, “the American Party is now abused by the dirty politicians and democratic or mob-o-crat-ic party of this parish and district, but the time will come if the people ever learn their interest, that [the American Party] . . . are the true advocates of free government, and the true opponents of bribery, and corruption in elections.”¹⁹⁴ He believed that politicians degraded themselves and compromised their principles to win an election by appealing to foreign-born voters. This state of the ballot box, in which aliens and Catholics ruled the country through corrupt means, inevitably led to dire consequences.¹⁹⁵ Agreeing with Gavin, William

¹⁹¹ *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, June 13, 1854, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library.

¹⁹² Clemens, “Letter from Honorable Jeremiah Clemens,” Clemens Letters.

¹⁹³ *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, October 17, 1854, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library.

¹⁹⁴ Gavin, November 9, 1855, *Gavin Diary*, 6, McCain Library and Archives.

¹⁹⁵ Gavin, November 9, 1855, *Gavin Diary*, 6, McCain Library and Archives.

Russell Smith argued that the clerks of courts improperly conferred citizenship on immigrants, which allowed for “spurious” votes.¹⁹⁶ Smith maintained that foreigners lacked a proper appreciation for American government and that oppression in their native countries nourished treasonable inclinations.¹⁹⁷

The American Party felt confident that it could succeed where the Democrats had failed. The Democratic Party failed to quell the abolitionist threat, according to Know Nothings in Alabama and South Carolina, because they allowed foreign influence to corrupt the party’s adherence to the Constitution. Not only did corrupt party politics displace superior native talents, it also allowed abolition fanaticism to thrive in American politics. Southern Know Nothings claimed that immigrants arrived in America from European nations sympathetic to the abolitionist cause. Since most immigrants settled in the North, they increased the northern population, giving them firm control over the House of Representatives.¹⁹⁸ Samuel Rice argued that foreign influence and abolitionism grew under both the Whig and Democratic Parties. He maintained that

foreign influence is the enemy of negro slavery, and the friend of its abolition in the United States; and that foreign influence and foreign immigration keep the abolition party of the North in heart; aid it with large annual supplies of men from abolition nations of Europe; cheer it with the prospect of ultimate success; and thus preserve it from political annihilation, and drive it on in its mad career.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁶ Smith, “The American Party, and Its Mission,” Alabama Pamphlets Collection.

¹⁹⁷ Smith, “The American Party, and Its Mission,” Alabama Pamphlets Collection.

¹⁹⁸ *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, August 2, 1855, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library; and for more information on Know Nothing perception of the link between immigrants and abolitionism, see Clemens, “Letter from Honorable Jeremiah Clemens,” Clemens Letters.

¹⁹⁹ Rice, “Americanism and Southern Rights,” Curry Collection.

Whether European immigrants actually arrived naturally disposed towards abolitionists remains irrelevant. The important point centers on the fact that southern Know Nothings perceived that Europe sent their abolitionists to America to subvert slavery.

Know Nothing assertions that foreigners sympathized with abolitionism challenged Democratic accusations that the American Party supported anti-slavery ideology. Such an association threatened to undermine Know Nothing efforts in the South. Know Nothings in Alabama complained about these accusations, arguing that Democrats

[cling] to your loving embraces every fresh importation from foreign shores; crowd out native industry and moral worth, and supplant it with pauper labor and convict vice if you will; substitute . . . foreign idiom for that of your native land; let 'Rule Britannia' be your national anthem. Do all this if you wish; but don't sink poor native Americans to the level of ABOLITIONISTS.²⁰⁰

The charge of abolitionism gravely threatened southern Know Nothings because the American Party in the North did link foreign immigration to pro-slavery ideology.²⁰¹ Southern Know Nothings, however, accumulated enough evidence to throw into doubt the party's ties to abolitionism.

The American Party in the South often cited northern abolitionist newspapers, such as the *New York Tribune*, as evidence that northern Know Nothings demonstrated pro-slavery attitudes. The *Tribune* asserted that the Know Nothing Party threatened to eliminate anti-slavery agitation and viewed slavery as the "creed of the worst slaveholder."²⁰² Southern members acknowledged that some abolitionists perceived

²⁰⁰ *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, March 30, 1855, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library, Emphasis Original.

²⁰¹ Anbinder, 99-101.

²⁰² *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, November 28, 1854, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library; and *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, May 18, 1855, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library.

themselves as members of the American Party but claimed that the party as a whole was pro-slavery. Again, southern Know Nothings noted the *New York Tribune*'s contention that, "the American Party, so far as I know anything of the views of its members, are opposed to making the slavery question a matter of discussion at all."²⁰³ Advocates of the American Party attributed its success in the South to the national party's stance on slavery. According to the *Louisville Journal*, a Know Nothing newspaper from Kentucky, "undoubtedly there are abolitionists among them, and undoubtedly, in some few localities, the abolitionists predominate among them; but take the whole of the Know Nothing Party of the North together, and it is sounder in heart, sounder in principle and sounder in action upon the great slavery issues than any other party in that section."²⁰⁴ Moreover, Know Nothings maintained that prominent abolitionist leaders, such as William Seward, Joshua Giddings, and Horace Greeley, vigorously opposed the American Party.²⁰⁵ Members of the American Party in the South, therefore, plausibly claimed that the national party directly opposed abolitionism.

The American Party in Alabama and South Carolina maintained that to defeat abolitionism it had to curtail foreign immigration. Samuel Rice argued that the South could not defend slavery without subduing foreign influence. He demanded a modification of existing naturalization laws "because, *in the present circumstances and conditions of our country*, we believe that a very large majority of the foreigners . . . will be the enemies of the institution of slavery."²⁰⁶ Even southerners who failed to endorse

²⁰³ *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, January 11, 1855, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library, Emphasis Original.

²⁰⁴ *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, May 16, 1855, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library.

²⁰⁵ Rice, "Americanism and Southern Rights," Curry Collection.

²⁰⁶ Rice, "Americanism and Southern Rights," Curry Collection, Emphasis Original.

the American Party enthusiastically believed a relationship existed between immigration and abolitionism. Joseph A. Woodward, an independent politician from South Carolina, admitted that Catholics and immigrants proved responsible for increasing conflict over the slavery question. Foreign-born voters, according to Woodward, demanded reconstruction of southern economic institutions.²⁰⁷ Allowing native virtue and intelligence to govern the country, according to southern Know Nothings, significantly weakened northern fanaticism that took advantage of the foreign vote.²⁰⁸

The American Party in Alabama and South Carolina argued that excluding foreigners from full participation in American government offered the only sure way to protect liberty and republican values. Samuel Rice contended that “the same principle which would justify the exclusion of foreign criminals and paupers, would justify the exclusion of all other foreigners who are deemed by us to be dangerous to our institutions and liberties.”²⁰⁹ Southern Know Nothings demanded that state legislatures proscribe foreigners from voting and that the federal government discourage immigration by modifying existing naturalization laws to make it more difficult to become a citizen. At a mass meeting of the American Party in Mobile, southern Know Nothings readily adopted the Philadelphia national platform and the Alabama state convention platform. Both platforms emphasized that “the principle shall be sustained that ‘Americans shall rule America.’”²¹⁰ The American Party argued that their principles did not seek to interfere

²⁰⁷ Joseph A. Woodward, “The Relations of the North and South Considered in Connection with the Principles of the American Party,” An Address Delivered at Talladega, September 6, 1855, Before the American Party of Talladega County (Montgomery: Barrett and Wimbish’s Book and Job Office, 1855), Curry Collection.

²⁰⁸ Walker, “Letter to Constituents,” Alabama Pamphlets Collection.

²⁰⁹ Rice, “Americanism and Southern Rights,” Curry Collection.

²¹⁰ *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, July 6, 1855, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library.

with the rights of naturalized citizens but that the existing process of naturalization proved too easy for the nation's welfare.²¹¹ William Russell Smith urged states to bar non-citizens from voting and the federal government to discourage immigration by refusing passports to paupers, the sick, and criminals.²¹² Section V of the national platform demanded a radical revision of existing naturalization laws and a call for state legislatures to ban non-naturalized foreigners from voting. Section VI urged the federal government to refrain from granting land and suffrage to unnaturalized foreigners in the western territories.²¹³ Both Alabama and South Carolina adopted Sections V and VI of the 1855 national American Party platform.²¹⁴ Percy Walker clarified the demand for a radical revision of the naturalization laws by demanding a twenty-one-year naturalization period.²¹⁵ In order to reconcile these demands with states' rights ideology, southern Know Nothings pointed to the Constitution.

Jeremiah Clemens argued that the United States Constitution already sanctioned the proscription of foreigners. In Article I, Sections 2 and 3, the Constitution required a citizen to reside in the country for seven years to be eligible for election to the House of Representatives and nine years for the Senate.²¹⁶ In addition, Article II, Section 1 required the president and vice-president to be native-born citizens. Know Nothing

²¹¹ *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, August 1, 1855, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library.

²¹² Smith, "The American Party, and Its Mission," American Pamphlets Collection.

²¹³ *The Lancaster Ledger*, July 4, 1855, Lancasterville, SC, "Chronicling America;" *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, August 17, 1855, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library; and *The Lancaster Ledger*, August 29, 1855, Lancasterville, SC, "Chronicling America."

²¹⁴ *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, July 6, 1855, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library; and *The Lancaster Ledger*, August 29, 1855, Lancasterville, SC, "Chronicling America."

²¹⁵ *Mobile Daily Register*, April 16, 1856, Mobile, AL, USA.

²¹⁶ U.S. Constitution, Article I, § 2 and 3.

principles, according to Clemens, merely derived from the Constitution.²¹⁷ Samuel Rice agreed, arguing that the Constitution does not confer the right of a foreigner to become a citizen. Instead, the Constitution gave Congress the power to establish a uniform rule of naturalization under Article I, Section 8, Clause 4.²¹⁸ This power, however, did not obligate Congress, according to Rice, to establish a naturalization process at all. Rather, Congress had the responsibility to protect the Constitution from internal foreign subversion as much as from external foreign military invasion.²¹⁹ Though southern Know Nothings came to a drastically different conclusion regarding the type of threat immigrants posed to American values, both sections agreed that immigrants threatened liberty and should be excluded from full participation in American politics. Indeed, the southern vision of the inherent danger of immigration dominated the national platform in 1855.

In most cases, northern and southern Know Nothings agreed on Sections V and VI of the national platform. Their disagreement centered on immigration's ties to slavery. Ultimately, the southern vision triumphed, and the 1855 Philadelphia national convention adopted Section XII, which states:

²¹⁷ U.S. Const., art. II, § 1; and Clemens, "Letter from Honorable Jeremiah Clemens," Clemens Letters.

²¹⁸ U.S. Const., art. I, § 8, cl. 4.

²¹⁹ Rice, "Americanism and Southern Rights," Curry Collection.

the National Council has deemed it the best guarantee of common justice, and of future peace to abide by and maintain the existing laws upon the subject of slavery, as a final and conclusive settlement of that subject . . . Congress possesses no power . . . to legislate upon the subject of slavery . . . where it does or may exist, or to exclude any State from admission into the Union because its constitution does or does not recognise the institution of slavery as a part of its social system . . . Congress ought not to legislate upon the subject of slavery within the Territories of the United States, and that any interference by Congress with slavery as it exists in the District of Columbia, would be a violation of the spirit and intention of the compact by which the State of Maryland ceded the District to the United States.²²⁰

The national platform demanded that the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 remain the final word on slavery. Southern delegates managed to impose their vision of the relationship between foreign influence and abolitionism onto the national American Party.²²¹ Even opponents of the American Party in the South admitted that “if any measure could conciliate the South, it looks reasonable that the promises of the Know Nothing party would.”²²² Section XII demonstrated an exceptionally pro-southern policy, and northern abolitionist delegates, led by Henry Wilson, refused to cooperate further on platform development and promised to repudiate it.²²³ Southern nativism, therefore, played an important role in crafting the American Party’s national policies in 1855. Nativism, for southerners, did not function as an empty distraction designed to downplay sectional tensions. Rather, it became a serious issue with significant ramifications for the slavery question on the national political scene. Furthermore, while northern and southern Know Nothings disagreed on the type of threat posed by foreign immigrants, anti-immigrant rhetoric fostered violence in both sections.

²²⁰ *The Lancaster Ledger*, July 4, 1855, Lancasterville, SC, “Chronicling America.”

²²¹ For further discussion on the crafting of Section XII and the influence of southern delegates, see Anbinder, 166-172.

²²² *The Lancaster Ledger*, July 18, 1855, Lancasterville, SC, “Chronicling America.”

²²³ Anbinder, 166-172.

Similar to Know Nothing rhetoric directed towards Catholics, anti-immigrant animosity led to isolated instances of violence in the South, usually on election days. Fighting erupted between French, Irish, and native citizens in Mobile during an election for Justice of the Peace.²²⁴ Not all violence, however, occurred during the high spirits of an election. Though Know Nothing advocates urged all parties to avoid violence, the *Mobile Daily Advertiser* also argued that “the history of the last few months shows, that while a class of foreigners have been more unwise and insulting in their conduct, there is much less disposition than formerly, on the part of Americans, to bear with what they deem outrages and insults – hence conflicts have arisen, and hence blood has been sacrificed at the altar of passion.”²²⁵ This “altar of passion” led to even more violence. A mob attacked four foreigners in the vicinity of the Government Street Market in Mobile and then committed similar acts of violence against three other foreigners on the wharves at the end of Dauphin Street.²²⁶ Nativism in the South, therefore, became a powerful issue with political and cultural consequences.

The American Party in Alabama and South Carolina did not employ nativist rhetoric during campaigns as an empty, meaningless political issue. Instead, southern Know Nothings utilized cultural elements of nativism that appealed to the conservative nature of their constituents. Though southern nativist policies differed from those above the Mason-Dixon Line, nativist sentiments motivated the political agendas both North

²²⁴ *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, September 5, 1854, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library; and *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, August 8, 1855, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library. During the 1855 gubernatorial election in Alabama, multiple fights broke out on election day. In one of the fights, an Irishman wounded a native-born citizen with a knife, and was forced to hide under the city docks to avoid retaliation.

²²⁵ *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, April 24, 1855, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library.

²²⁶ *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, April 25, 1855, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library.

and South. Nativist cultural values proved attractive to southern constituents and seriously threatened Democratic hegemony in the South.

CHAPTER III - "A SHREWD YANKEE TRICK:" DEMOCRATIC OPPOSITION TO
DIXIE KNOW NOTHINGS

"I have said that the President, the immigrant, and the Catholic had much to do with the slavery issue." – Preston S. Brooks²²⁷

On October 1, 1853, John A. Wagener contacted Governor John Lawrence Manning on behalf of the German settlement in Pickens District, South Carolina. Wagener urged the governor to provide the German community greater access to land and better roads for the community. This request reflected the larger debate in the South concerning the role of state governments in effecting internal improvements. It also involved the controversy over foreign-born immigrants. Wagener admitted that government-funded improvements for the German community would inspire great opposition. Also aware that Manning's constituents opposed the advancement of foreign-born immigrants, Wagener argued that, "the one does not like his fellow being, because he speaks a strange tongue; another hates his neighbor on account of wearing an outlandish dress; a third scorns the stranger in the savage spirit which kept the dog in the haybarn to exclude the starving cow."²²⁸ Countering nativist sentiment faced by his fellow German-Americans, Wagener argued that German-born residents constituted good Americans and good southerners. He maintained that the benefits of immigration proved invaluable, not only to South Carolina but to the South.²²⁹

²²⁷ *Edgefield Advertiser*, August 15, 1855, Edgefield, South Carolina, "Chronicling America," Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

²²⁸ John A. Wagener, October 1, 1853, "To His Excellency John Lawrence Manning, Governor of the State of South Carolina," John A. Wagener Collection, 1816-1876, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina (USC), Columbia, SC.

²²⁹ Wagener, "To His Excellency," Wagener Collection.

The Democratic Party, the primary opposition to southern Know Nothings, adopted similar arguments in favor of immigrants in their fight against Dixie Know Nothings during the 1850s. The southern Democratic Party encountered a significant challenge from Know Nothings in Alabama and South Carolina. To counter the increasing power and influence of the American Party, Democrats relied on a complex combination of democratic, nativist, and patriarchal cultural values held by southern society. Though seemingly divergent, democratic and nativist values proved complementary in the nineteenth-century South.²³⁰ In the course of political debates and elections, Know Nothings forced mainstream Democrats to move closer to the extreme states' rights ideology of the Fire Eaters. To solidify their control over southern political power, Democrats radicalized their stance on states' rights and became unwilling to compromise on the slavery question. This shift in ideology further sectionalized the Democratic Party, which contributed to secession and the outbreak of the Civil War.

Democratic Nativism

From 1854 to 1856, the Democratic Party in Alabama and South Carolina faced a realistic prospect of losing political power to the American Party. Know Nothing electoral success, combined with shared ideological values with Fire Eaters, left mainstream Democrats vulnerable to defeat. In order to counter the increasing Know Nothing threat, Democrats appealed to egalitarian and nativist sentiments that existed

²³⁰ A modern, twenty-first century understanding of egalitarianism cannot be used to define this cultural value. In the context of the nineteenth-century, the expansion of political rights applied only to white males. Though white, educated women made some gains regarding their participation in public life during the 1850s, southern Democrats meant to include only a broader range of white men in the political process. Political leaders still expected women to play a complementary, but inferior role to men, and they never considered including African Americans in the political process.

within southern culture. Democratic counterarguments directed at southern Know Nothings exposed both the contradictory and compatible nature of democratic values in southern culture. While criticizing Know Nothing policies on religious and immigrant proscription, Democrats simultaneously demonstrated sympathy for anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant cultural sentiments. Thus, while opposing the American Party's call to limit the political power of Catholics and immigrants, Democrats concurrently demonstrated sympathy for nativist values.

After Alabama and South Carolina supported Democrat Franklin Pierce for President in 1852, the American Party began to pose an unexpected, but serious, threat to Democratic hegemony. In 1854, voters in Mobile elected Know Nothings to the posts of Commissioner of Revenue, Auditor of Public Acts, and County Assessor.²³¹ The American Party in South Carolina also made gains in 1854. In October, Know Nothings achieved a "fair representation" in the state legislature.²³² During that same month, the *Lancaster Ledger*, an independent newspaper in Lancasterville, South Carolina, claimed that the Know Nothings numbered in the thousands in Charleston and predicted that the party would win the next presidential election.²³³

The American Party's next electoral success in South Carolina came in April 1855 when they elected Mayor E.J. Arthur and six aldermen to the city council of

²³¹ *Mobile Daily Register*, November 9, 1852, Mobile, Alabama, University of South Alabama Library (USA), Mobile, AL; and *Mobile Daily Register*, August 8, 1854, Mobile, AL, USA.

²³² *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, October 17, 1854, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library: Local History and Genealogy, Mobile, AL.

²³³ *The Lancaster Ledger*, March 14, 1855, Lancasterville, SC, "Chronicling America," Library of Congress, Washington D.C. The editors of this newspaper defined their political position as, "Neutral in Politics."

Columbia.²³⁴ A month later, Mobile Know Nothings consolidated their gains by electing Judge Hitchcock Probate Judge in Mobile County by over one-thousand votes. The *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, a local newspaper supporting the American Party, claimed that the election proved that politicians could no longer neglect native-born citizens to elevate aliens.²³⁵ Later that month, the American Party elected Simon Goldsby Probate Judge in Tallapoosa, Alabama.²³⁶ These electoral victories, combined with news of national Know Nothing political wins, made southern Democrats recognize the serious challenge posed by the new political party.

In Alabama and South Carolina, Know Nothing victories in 1854 and 1855 grew in importance as the American Party experienced success across the country. Southern Know Nothings felt encouraged by nation-wide electoral success of the new party. The *Mobile Daily Advertiser* claimed that the American Party controlled municipal elections North and South and that their power appeared to grow rapidly throughout the nation. Southern Know Nothings used American Party electoral victories in seven interior counties in Pennsylvania to argue that the party could succeed outside of major urban areas.²³⁷ In addition, Know Nothings won municipal elections in Washington D.C. and Philadelphia. The election of John T. Towers as mayor of Washington D.C. proved especially impressive to members of the American Party, who maintained that Towers

²³⁴ *The Lancaster Ledger*, April 11, 1855, Lancasterville, SC, "Chronicling America." The Aldermen were: T.W. Radcliffe, Richard Anderson, Eli Killian, W.S. Wood, R. Hammilton, and William Glaze.

²³⁵ *Mobile Daily Register*, May 9, 1855, Mobile, AL, USA.

²³⁶ *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, May 15, 1855, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library.

²³⁷ *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, March 4, 1855, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library. The towns and counties were: Bellefonte in Centre County; Tremont in Schuylkill County; Johnstown in Cambria County; Williamsport in Lycoming County; Hollidaysburg in Altoona County; Blair County; and Clinton County.

won despite the opposition of the Pierce Administration.²³⁸ Four months later, the American Party challenged the Pierce Administration further by winning elections in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana. Southern Know Nothings proclaimed that “the battle has been fought, and amid the smoke now lifting from the field of contest, we see the eagle of victory perched up on the standard of the reviled Know Nothings, while their arrogant accusers are so badly beaten they scarcely know themselves.”²³⁹ Both the American and Democratic Parties in Alabama and South Carolina took notice of these results and began to prepare themselves for upcoming election battles held for more prestigious political positions.

In 1855, the Know Nothings experienced additional victories in South Carolina and Alabama. In Charleston, the American Party elected John E. Carew sheriff. Though not a member of the Know Nothing Party, Carew ran on a platform based on American Party principles.²⁴⁰ Democrats in Alabama, however, did manage to slow the momentum of the American Party. Though Know Nothings elected Percy Walker from Mobile and William Russell Smith from Tuscaloosa to the House of Representatives, they did not win a majority in the state legislature nor the gubernatorial election.²⁴¹ This setback could be interpreted as evidence of the American Party’s inevitable demise in the South, but this argument fails to account for two factors. First, the American Party only existed as a political organization in Alabama for one year, which placed it at a disadvantage

²³⁸ *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, June 13, 1855, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library.

²³⁹ *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, October 17, 1854, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library.

²⁴⁰ *Edgefield Advertiser*, July 18, 1855, Edgefield, SC, “Chronicling America.”

²⁴¹ *Mobile Daily Register*, August 14, 1855, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library: Local History and Genealogy, Mobile, Alabama. For more discussion concerning the defeat of George Shortridge, see Jeff Frederick, “Unintended Consequences: The Rise and Fall of the Know Nothing Party in Alabama,” *Alabama Review* Vol. 55, (January 2002): 3-31.

compared to the well-established Democratic Party. Know Nothing success in gaining seats in the federal government and seriously challenging the Democrats in the gubernatorial election proves remarkable based on the party's youth. Second, the Know Nothing Party did not disappear nor immediately lose influence in Alabama. Indeed, it gained strength in some locations. On December 3, 1855, the American Party swept municipal election in Mobile. Know Nothing candidates won the mayor's office, seven councilmen positions, and seven aldermen posts in the city government.²⁴² These Know Nothing victories in the South genuinely concerned the Democratic Party.

In addition to its electoral success, Know Nothing ideology appealed to Fire Eaters, presenting an opportunity for a new political alliance.²⁴³ This political alliance held the potential to alter fundamentally the political landscape in the South by depriving the Democratic Party of its political power. Even mainstream Democrats sympathized with Know Nothing suspicions of America's foreign-born population. While reflecting on the War of 1812, Clement C. Clay, Jr., Democratic Senator from Alabama, portrayed foreigners as "strangers to the nature of our government, servile minions of tyranny, born and bred to lick the hand that struck and kiss the chains that gotten them."²⁴⁴ Foreigners, he argued, did not understand American institutions and liberty. Responding to the threat of foreign influence, prominent and respectable Democrats, such as Percy Walker, left

²⁴² *Mobile Daily Register*, December 4, 1855, Mobile, AL, USA.

²⁴³ Tyler Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings & the Politics of the 1850s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); and William Darrell Overdyke, *The Know-Nothing Party in the South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1950). Historical scholarship traditionally discounts the appeal of the American Party in the southern states. Upon closer inspection, however, Democratic hegemony and Know Nothing failure in the South does not prove inevitable. For further discussion on how the Know Nothing Party forced the Democrats in Alabama to consolidate their political strength, see Frederick, "Unintended Consequences, 4 and 31.

²⁴⁴ C. C. Clay, Jr., Private Notebook, C. C. Clay Papers, 1811-1925 (Bulk 1821-1915), Rubenstein Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

the ruling party to join the nascent American Party. The attractiveness of Know Nothing nativism to white southerners, in short, appealed to mainstream Democrats and Fire Eaters alike.

Southern Fire Eaters displayed sympathy for Know Nothing suspicions of America's Catholic, foreign-born population. A states' rights newspaper in Edgefield, South Carolina, noted the dangerous tendency of Catholic bishops to assert temporal authority. Temporal authority, such as property ownership and political power, threatened to undermine American republican values. This spirit of Catholic despotism changed the voluntary principle of Christianity into compulsory support of the Catholic clergy. Thus, ambitious bishops "threatened to absorb the property of the people, and perhaps to establish a new Popedom in our midst."²⁴⁵ Suspicious of the Catholic Church, Fire Eaters especially agreed with Know Nothing nativist ideology concerning the foreign-born population in America.

Preston S. Brooks, Fire Eater Representative from Edgefield, South Carolina, acknowledged nativism as a natural sentiment in the South. No American, according to Brooks, desired foreign-born citizens to represent the country abroad. In addition, he wanted all states to withhold the right to vote from immigrants for a minimum of ten years.²⁴⁶ L. W. Spratt, another Fire Eater from South Carolina, argued that the country's lenient immigration policies demonstrated the federal government's open bias in favor of

²⁴⁵ *Edgefield Advertiser*, June 30, 1852, Edgefield, SC, "Chronicling America;" and *Edgefield Advertiser*, June 30, 1852, Edgefield, SC, "Chronicling America." Fear of Catholic political power even prompted some Fire Eaters to consider weakening their states' rights ideology to curb growing Catholic influence in society. The *Edgefield Advertiser* sanctioned a call for federal or state government intervention to legally prevent Catholic clergymen's attempts to increase their spiritual and temporal authority.

²⁴⁶ *Edgefield Advertiser*, August 15, 1855, Edgefield, SC, "Chronicling America."

the North. While the federal government banned the southern supply of labor via the international slave trade, it simultaneously supplied the North with cheap immigrant labor from Europe. By sanctioning the northern supply of labor, the federal government implicitly agreed with abolitionists regarding the evils of slavery.²⁴⁷ Spratt argued that pauper labor from Europe could not replace the efficiency of slave labor in the South. As a result, most immigrants settled in the North and created an excess population in northern states. This excess population allowed the North to expand West more rapidly than the South. This westward expansion and excess population in the North increased the power of abolitionists.²⁴⁸ Likewise, Lawrence Massillon Keitt, Democratic member of the House of Representatives from Orangeburg, South Carolina, also located the impetus for Know Nothing policies in the northern labor system. Slavery, Keitt explained, did not threaten the South with pauperism because southerners took good care of their slaves. Moreover, he argued against extending the naturalization period because it would fail to solve northern labor problems. Modifying naturalization laws only served to increase social tensions in the North by creating a disfranchised caste. This practical, social slavery promised to convulse the North in chaos, which only assured harm to southern institutions and liberty. The only solution required the federal government to ban foreign immigration altogether.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁷ L.W. Spratt, "A Series of Articles on the Value of the Union to the South, Lately Published in the Charleston Standard" (Charleston: James Williams and Gitsinger, 1855), J. L. M. Curry Pamphlet Collection 1730-1902, Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH), Montgomery, AL.

²⁴⁸ Spratt, "Articles on the Value of the Union," Curry Collection.

²⁴⁹ Lawrence Massillon Keitt, "American Politics," Speech of Honorable Lawrence Massillon Keitt of South Carolina, Delivered in the House of Representatives, January 3, 1855 (Washington D.C.: Office of the Congressional Globe, 1855), South Caroliniana Library, USC.

Similar outlooks concerning the place of immigrants and Catholics in southern society posed a significant problem to mainstream Democrats. Differences with Fire Eaters during the early 1850s threatened to divide the Democratic Party, and Know Nothing ideology offered compelling incentives to cause concern about losing Fire Eater support. During the early 1850s, Fire Eaters called for immediate secession and disunion. Utilizing southern patriarchal values, they equated compromise with submission, and demanded that southern men act boldly and manfully to combat the repressive federal government. Furthermore, they argued, secession should not be based on southern unity, and that “every day that passes schools us to submission, and a year or two more will make us slaves.”²⁵⁰ William F. Colcock of South Carolina claimed that the federal government destroyed southern rights, property, and safety. Thus, true southern men must seek security under a different government.²⁵¹ Fire Eaters in Alabama argued that the Constitution did not protect slavery. Northern anti-slavery politicians violated constitutional principles, and the federal government no longer benefitted the South. Thus, according to Fire Eaters, no middle ground existed between disgraceful submission and disunion.²⁵²

Unlike Fire Eaters, mainstream Democrats proved reluctant to call for immediate secession and still found value in federal protection of slavery. Many adhered to the 1851 Georgia Platform, which called for the South to remain in the Union unless the federal Congress directly attacked slavery. The South should secede only if Congress abolished slavery in the District of Columbia, attempted to abolish slavery where it already existed,

²⁵⁰ *Edgefield Advertiser*, March 13, 1851, Edgefield, SC, “Chronicling America.”

²⁵¹ *Edgefield Advertiser*, July 10, 1851, Edgefield, SC, “Chronicling America.”

²⁵² *Mobile Daily Register*, March 21, 1851, Mobile, AL, USA.

suppressed the internal slave trade, refused to admit slaveholding territories as states, or repealed the Fugitive Slave Law.²⁵³ The *Mobile Daily Register*, the local Democratic newspaper, condemned Fire Eaters for pushing secession, which only promised to destroy the South. Fire Eaters, in short, threatened to harm the South.²⁵⁴

The divide between mainstream Democrats and Fire Eaters became clear during the 1852 presidential election. Mainstream Democrats demonstrated concern that Southern Rights candidates, such as Samuel F. Rice, could split the Democratic vote in the South.²⁵⁵ As a result, southern Democrats exerted considerable efforts to ensure Fire Eater support for Franklin Pierce. Prominent Democrats in Mobile called a mass meeting to persuade their constituents that Pierce, a New Englander, held proper views regarding southern rights and slavery. Percy Walker, at this time still a Democrat, argued that Pierce demonstrated consistent opposition to abolitionists and proved his genuine friendship to the South. Thus, the Southern Rights Party could support Pierce and remain consistent with their own principles.²⁵⁶ Philip Phillips, Democratic Representative from Mobile, also defended the consistency of states' rights and voting for the Democratic nominee for president. Speaking to Fire Eaters, Phillips contended that Pierce posed no threat to states' rights, and held correct views on naturalization, annexation, and internal improvements, which hints at the early importance of nativist issues in southern politics.²⁵⁷ Though Democratic efforts to maintain Fire Eater support allowed Pierce to triumph over the Whig candidate, General Winfield Scott, their efforts reveal that

²⁵³ *Edgefield Advertiser*, August 22, 1855, Edgefield, SC, "Chronicling America."

²⁵⁴ *Mobile Daily Register*, March 21, 1851, Mobile, AL, USA.

²⁵⁵ *Mobile Daily Register*, July 28, 1851, Mobile, AL, USA.

²⁵⁶ *Mobile Daily Register*, October 11, 1852, Mobile, AL, USA.

²⁵⁷ *Mobile Daily Register*, October 11, 1852, Mobile, AL, USA.

mainstream Democrats could not take Fire Eater support for granted. This ambivalent relationship became more pronounced as the Know Nothing Party emerged onto the political scene in the South.

The American Party in the South failed to form a new alliance with Fire Eaters because mainstream Democrats successfully linked political opposition to southern cultural, religious, and political values. These democratic values both competed against and complemented exclusionary tendencies within southern society. Democrats, under the leadership of President Andrew Jackson, long endorsed popular politics and mass white voting. Furthermore, Democrats generally championed the cause of individual advancement through hard work. These attitudes made Democrats natural adversaries of the American Party and natural allies of immigrants.²⁵⁸ Moreover, southern Democrats successfully utilized American religious traditions to combat Know Nothing policies.

Fusion between Protestant Christianity and patriotism created benevolent impulses in addition to exclusionary habits within American society.²⁵⁹ A strong Protestant identity held by southerners created suspicious attitudes towards Catholics, but there existed a strong tradition of political religious tolerance. Southerners strongly supported the First Amendment right to freedom of religion. While city ordinances mandated the observation of the Sabbath, they also protected all religions from harassment. The cities of Wetumpka and Mobile in Alabama mandated a fifty dollar fine

²⁵⁸ William J. Cooper, Jr. and Thomas E. Terrill, eds., *The American South: A History*, 4th Edition (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.: 2009), 166-167.

²⁵⁹ Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997). For further discussion on how American Christianity created egalitarian impulses in society, see Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989).

for disturbing any church or worship service, and Charleston similarly imposed a twenty dollar fine for the disturbance of any worship in that city.²⁶⁰ Although suspicious of Catholic, foreign influence, southerners also supported inclusive cultural values.

Protestant Christians proved willing to collaborate with Catholics on benevolent causes. One expression of southern egalitarian instincts centered on education. While nativist incidents in the North focused on the threats Roman Catholicism posed to public education, southern states, such as Alabama, emphasized the benefits of a religiously diverse education system.²⁶¹ The Alabama Baptist State Convention and Bible Society attempted to sway public opinion to support public schooling by noting the transcendent quality of education. Unsanctified knowledge, according to the Baptist State Convention, furnished an instrument for the forces of evil, which threatened American liberty. Baptists also argued that all Christians should unite on the issue of education, despite their clear animosity towards Catholics resulting from doctrinal disputes. Religion, according to the Baptists, became defective when doctrinal differences imposed obstacles to the advancement of education.²⁶²

These statements carried weight in southern society. In 1850 and 1851, the city of Mobile allocated public funds to Roman Catholic Free Schools. In 1850, the Board of

²⁶⁰ "Charter and Ordinances of the City of Wetumpka, Alabama," Lewis E. Parsons Papers, 1831-1891, ADAH; C.E. Bolles, ed., *A Digest of the Various Acts of the Legislature Incorporating the City of Mobile* (Mobile: Thompson and Harris, 1849), 469, Mobile Municipal Archives, Mobile, AL; and Charleston City Council, *Digest of the Ordinances of the City Council of Charleston, From the Year 1783 to July 1818* (Charleston: Archibald E. Miller, Printer, 1818), 232, South Carolina Department of Archives and History (SCDAH), Columbia, SC.

²⁶¹ Anbinder, 113-114.

²⁶² "Minutes of the Twenty-Eighth Anniversary of the Alabama Baptist State Convention and of the Alabama Baptist Bible Society, 1851," Alabama Religious Organizations Publications, 1819-1995, ADAH; and "Minutes of the Thirty-Fifth Anniversary of the Alabama Baptist State Convention and of the Alabama Baptist Bible Society, 1857," Alabama Religious Publications.

Aldermen appropriated twelve dollars and fifty cents each month to the Bethel Methodist and Catholic Free Schools.²⁶³ In 1851, responding to a petition from Reverend J. A. Massey of Trinity Parish, the city dedicated twenty dollars each month to the Trinity Parish, Catholic, and Bethel Free Schools. The Board of Aldermen argued that it was “essential that these schools should be fostered and cherished by the city.”²⁶⁴ This public support of diverse education organizations, however, went beyond obtaining government funding for education. Residents in Alabama and South Carolina demonstrated a willingness to work across denominational and gender lines to provide benevolent services to their communities.

Mobile residents actively supported non-Protestant efforts to improve American and southern society. In an editorial penned by a southern woman, the Catholic Female Orphans and Free Day School for Girls received public applause for their institutions. She noted that the elementary students dressed neatly and simply and carried an air of modesty and cheerfulness, which impressed observers. She claimed that the orphan students increased the priceless value of this Catholic institution.²⁶⁵ The *Mobile Daily Register* declared the Catholic Orphan Asylum the most commendable benevolent institution in the city. The asylum and associated school bestowed moral and intellectual benefits on helpless children, which produced good American citizens dedicated to republican values.²⁶⁶ Not only did cultural values produce acts of charity that cut across

²⁶³ *Mobile Daily Register*, January 26, 1850, Mobile, AL, USA.

²⁶⁴ *Interesting Transcriptions from the City Documents of the City of Mobile for 1845-1867*, Prepared from Original Data by the Municipal and Court Records Project of the Works Progress Administration, (Mobile: 1939), Mobile Municipal Archives.

²⁶⁵ *Mobile Daily Register*, January 24, 1850, Mobile, AL, USA.

²⁶⁶ *Mobile Daily Register*, December 31, 1852, Mobile, AL, USA.

denominational lines, they also provided a public space for women to participate in public life.

Women often spearheaded public benevolent efforts. Indeed, patriarchal values dictated that women were especially suited for such tasks.²⁶⁷ Reporting on the Catholic Orphan Asylum Festival, the local fundraising event for this organization, the *Mobile Daily Register* maintained that the festival displayed qualities of beauty, taste, and refinement. The newspaper credited the women who organized the festival with waving the hand of beauty and taste over benevolent efforts in the city.²⁶⁸ The benevolent efforts overseen by women, according to patriarchal ideology, were designed to temper the harsh living conditions of the world. Another example of women's benevolent efforts designed to elevate society centered on the efforts of the Ladies' Fuel Society in Charleston. This charitable organization mobilized women to assist the poor in procuring wood as fuel during the winter. After acquiring fuel, women sold it to the poor at half-price or gave it away to those living in extreme poverty.²⁶⁹ Southern women's greatest success, however, came from their efforts on behalf of the temperance movement.

Women wielded considerable public influence on the temperance movements in Alabama and South Carolina. The president of the Charleston Total Abstinence Society, James Tupper, noted that 1,112 women signed the total abstinence pledge in Charleston. In addition, 27,000 women belonged to the national organization, The Daughters of

²⁶⁷ For further discussion on the contradictory nature of nineteenth-century patriarchal values, see Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18 (1966): 151-174.

²⁶⁸ *Mobile Daily Register*, December 12, 1852, Mobile, AL, USA.

²⁶⁹ *Rules of the Ladies' Fuel Society* (Charleston: A.E. Miller, 1858), South Carolina Historical Society, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC.

Temperance.²⁷⁰ According to temperance movement leaders, women furnished crucial support for eliminating demon liquor. Moreover, they encouraged women to refrain from serving alcohol at Christmas and New Year's parties. Indeed, avoiding intemperance over the holidays lay entirely in the hands of women.²⁷¹ Speaking before the Greensboro, Alabama, Sons of Temperance Division, Reverend Christopher D. Oliver argued that female encouragement provided necessary support for the success of temperance advocates. He went so far as to claim that purveyors of alcohol did not respect women or practice Christianity.²⁷² Some women took up this call to action. Mary Vaughan delivered an address on behalf of the Ladies of Tuscaloosa to encourage members of the temperance movement to maintain consistent Christian conduct in their fight against demon liquor.²⁷³ Women in Selma, Alabama, formed the Society of Matrons and Maidens of Temperance to exert greater influence on the advancement of temperance ideology.²⁷⁴ In short, alcohol created bad citizens and southerners, and women sought to reform society through their virtuous influence both in private and public spheres.

Democrats incorporated strong egalitarian tendencies within Alabama and South Carolina culture to develop a competing political ideology. Democrats argued that "human nature is substantially the same under all climates. A common inheritance of joy and grief, of good and evil, is shared between those of the most apparently opposite

²⁷⁰ James Tupper, "Introductory Address on the Principles and Progress of the Temperance Reformation," Delivered Before the Charleston Total Abstinence Society, March 31, 1851, College of Charleston Special Collections, College of Charleston.

²⁷¹ *Mobile Daily Register*, December 27, 1850, Mobile, AL, USA.

²⁷² Reverend Christopher D. Oliver, "An Address Delivered Before the Greensboro Division of the Sons of Temperance, on its First Anniversary Occasion," August 13, 1849 (Greensboro: Alabama Beacon Office, 1849), Alabama Pamphlets Collection, 1821-1961, ADAH.

²⁷³ *Crystal Fount*, August 2, 1851, Tuscaloosa, AL, ADAH.

²⁷⁴ *Crystal Fount*, January 30, 1852, Tuscaloosa, AL, ADAH.

character.”²⁷⁵ Despising a person because of the accident of birth or religious creed violated the bond of Christian brotherhood. As a result, Democrats invited all white southern men, including Catholics, immigrants, and even Know Nothings to join the Party.²⁷⁶ In addition to advancing Democratic political interests by increasing the party’s membership, this inclusiveness also reflected southern egalitarian culture. Indeed, Mobile Democrats took great pleasure in pointing out that not even Know Nothings proved immune to this inclusive cultural tradition. They noted that Jeremiah Clemens, a prominent supporter of Alabama’s American Party, sent his daughter to a Catholic school in Washington D.C.²⁷⁷ Know Nothings’ proscriptive political policies against Catholics and immigrants contradicted southern and American cultural values and violated conservative political values as well.

Southern Democrats insisted that Know Nothing policies of religious proscription violated the conservative nature of the Constitution. Philip Phillips, member of the House of Representatives from Mobile, argued that “there is nothing clearer than that in the formation of the constitution it was intended emphatically to exclude all connection with any religious faith whatsoever.”²⁷⁸ He maintained that total separation existed between church and state. Incorporating the Christianity of any denomination required subjecting an individual’s conscience to Congressional judgment, which inevitably led to the demise of republican government.²⁷⁹ James Orr, another Congressman from Anderson, South

²⁷⁵ *Mobile Daily Register*, October 6, 1855, Mobile, AL, USA.

²⁷⁶ *Mobile Daily Register*, September 13, 1855, Mobile, AL, USA.

²⁷⁷ *Mobile Daily Register*, September 16, 1855, Mobile, AL, USA.

²⁷⁸ Philip Phillips, “Letter of Honorable Philip Phillips, of Mobile, Alabama, on the Religious Proscription of Catholics,” July 4, 1855, (Washington D.C.: 1855), Curry Collection.

²⁷⁹ Phillips, “Letter of Honorable Philip Phillips,” July 4, 1855, Curry Collection.

Carolina, argued that the American Revolution secured civil and religious liberty for all Americans. Thus, Know Nothing policies violated the intent of the Founding Fathers.²⁸⁰ According to Colonel John Erwin of South Carolina, this violation of religious liberty represented nothing less than an assault “with insidious, but malignant hatred [of] our most patriotic and useful men – the most valued principles of our institutions and our beloved and cherished traditions – filling society with discord, hatred, and strife.”²⁸¹ Not only did religious proscription violate cherished values of liberty espoused by the Founding Fathers, it also introduced religious sectarianism into American society.²⁸² American democratic values not only condemned religious proscription, they also rejected proscription of immigrants as well.

Democrats drew on American history to combat Know Nothing efforts to proscribe immigrants from public life. Fire Eater William Lowndes Yancey of Alabama invoked a common argument against the American Party by noting that foreigners from France and Poland helped the American colonies gain their independence. Know Nothings, he claimed, invoked the “pride of past with a bad grace.”²⁸³ In a public meeting in Charleston, states’ rights advocates assembled in the Hibernian Hall to denounce the American Party. While they admitted that reforming the country’s naturalization laws provided a proper subject of legislation, they condemned the American Party’s call for

²⁸⁰ *The Edgefield Advertiser*, August 3, 1854, Edgefield, SC, “Chronicling America.”

²⁸¹ *Mobile Daily Register*, September 13, 1855, Mobile, AL, USA.

²⁸² *Mobile Daily Register*, September 13, 1855, Mobile, AL, USA.

²⁸³ William Lowndes Yancey, Speech, Undated, William Lowndes Yancey Papers, 1834-1941, ADAH.

indiscriminate exclusion of foreigners from citizenship. They maintained that genuine American values demanded the country open the doors of liberty to foreigners.²⁸⁴

Despite attacking nativist policies, Democrats incorporated cultural nativist values to undermine the American Party in the South. Yancey opposed legal religious proscription despite believing that the Catholic Church undermined the spirituality of the Bible. He argued that the American Party allowed Catholics to break through barriers of respectability by eliciting sympathy and respect for the persecuted sect. Thus, persecution unintentionally strengthened the Catholic Church.²⁸⁵ In agreement, the *Edgefield Advertiser* argued that repression demonstrates the genuineness of the persecuted sect. Thus, Know Nothing proscriptive policies diverted future Christian converts to the Catholic Church instead of Protestant denominations.²⁸⁶ Senator Andrew P. Butler from Columbia, South Carolina, articulated the common view of Democrats regarding religious proscription by acknowledging that most southerners did not admire the Catholic Church and distrusted the church's claims to temporal authority. These attitudes, however, did not justify ostracizing Catholics from political life in America.²⁸⁷

Democrats proved remarkably willing to prevent immigrants from entering the country, despite their claims that proscription violated democratic values. Lawrence Keitt objected to Know Nothing immigration policies because they proved insufficient. He argued that extending the residence period for citizenship did not prevent social chaos resulting from immigration. The only remedy, according to Keitt, required banning

²⁸⁴ *Edgefield Advertiser*, August 22, 1855, Edgefield, SC, "Chronicling America."

²⁸⁵ Yancey, Speech, Undated, Yancey Papers.

²⁸⁶ *Edgefield Advertiser*, May 23, 1855, Edgefield, SC, "Chronicling America."

²⁸⁷ *Edgefield Advertiser*, June 6, 1855, Edgefield, SC, "Chronicling America."

immigration entirely, which the South understood and appreciated.²⁸⁸ An anti-Know Nothing meeting in Edgefield, South Carolina, admitted that a few American Party principles suited the South. Namely, the group argued, Americans, both North, and South, wanted to suppress foreign influence.²⁸⁹ An editorial written in opposition to the American Party admitted that “we believe firmly, in the doctrine that ‘the sons of the soil should rule the soil.’”²⁹⁰ Thus, even fierce opponents of Know Nothing proscriptive policies demonstrated genuine sentiments of disdain towards the foreign-born population.

Though Democrats saw little political value in nativism, their opposition reveals deep cultural roots of nativism in the South. Moreover, southern Democrats feared the effect of Know Nothing policies on southern liberties and institutions. Preston S. Brooks argued, “The Know Nothings, with professions of devotion to their section on their lips, are circuitously but deliberately undermining the foundations of the temple of our liberty, which, in its fall, must bury them and all of us in its ruins.”²⁹¹ As a result of these threats, mainstream Democrats in the South altered their relationship with Fire Eaters. The American Party’s success in utilizing nativist sentiments in the South pushed mainstream Democrats into a closer relationship with Fire Eaters, which transformed the dynamics of the Democratic Party in the South.

A Trojan Horse

Know Nothing policies concerning immigrants and Catholics threatened the alliance between mainstream Democrats and extreme states’ rights advocates. According

²⁸⁸ Keitt, “American Politics,” South Caroliniana Library.

²⁸⁹ *Edgefield Advertiser*, March 7, 1855, Edgefield, SC, “Chronicling America.”

²⁹⁰ *Edgefield Advertiser*, August 22, 1855, Edgefield, SC, “Chronicling America.”

²⁹¹ *Edgefield Advertiser*, August 29, 1855, Edgefield, SC, “Chronicling America.”

to Fire Eaters, the federal government's ban on the slave trade unconstitutionally deprived the South of its labor supply. Furthermore, the federal government displayed clear bias in favor of northern states by sanctioning northern immigrant labor.²⁹² This resentment provided an opportunity for the southern American Party to attract Fire Eaters to their cause. No longer able to take Fire Eaters' support for granted, mainstream Democrats were forced to embrace Fire Eater ideology to solidify their hold on political power. Southern Democrats argued that the American Party threatened both patriarchal and states' rights values. Furthermore, Democrats took a stronger position regarding slavery to prove that only they could defend southern political and economic institutions.

Like the American Party in Alabama and South Carolina, southern Democrats appealed to southern patriarchal institutions to demonstrate the value of their political ideology. Lawrence Keitt maintained that the American Party's "love of power, the ambition to be masters without the patriarchal relation, without the unselfish antagonism of races, have much to do with this recent organization at the north."²⁹³ Know Nothing politicians threatened the southern social order by undermining traditional patriarchal social structures, which simultaneously threatened slavery since the institution relied heavily on white male authority.²⁹⁴ Thus, southern Democrats understood their opposition

²⁹² Spratt, "Articles on the Value of the Union," Curry Collection.

²⁹³ Keitt, "American Politics," South Caroliniana Library.

²⁹⁴ For further discussion on southern patriarchal institutions and their relationship to race, gender, and politics, see Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995); Elizabeth R. Varon, *We Mean to be Counted: White Women and Politics in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); and Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

to Know Nothings, not simply in political terms, but as defending cherished patriarchal values of southern culture.

Many Democrats claimed that Know Nothingism was an affront to their masculinity. According to Keitt, true American men were “frank, manly, and magnanimous,” and Know Nothing practices of secrecy threatened southern manhood.²⁹⁵ Keitt insisted, “God forbid that the manhood of the American character should sicken and disappear under the poison of trickery and insincerity,” and that “elements of manly character [were] not nursed in secret.”²⁹⁶ At a public meeting in Charleston, opponents of the Know Nothing Party argued that secrecy risked undercutting politicians’ masculinity. Secrecy promoted insincerity and duplicity while stifling bold, open, and manly conduct.²⁹⁷ Democrats began to alter their political ideology to become bolder and manlier for their constituents. Southern Democrats demanded that audacious and independent men shrink from the “midnight conspiracies” of Know Nothingism.²⁹⁸ Thus, southern Democrats effectively framed their own efforts as manly, while calling into question the masculinity of members of the American Party.

Democrats emphasized the danger that Know Nothing policies posed to patriarchal institutions. According to southern Democrats, proposed Know Nothing reforms to naturalization and suffrage laws threatened to undermine the masculinity of southern, white men. Preston Brooks claimed that giving the federal government control of the franchise threatened to end liberty in the South by allowing an abolitionist majority

²⁹⁵ Keitt, “American Politics,” South Caroliniana Library.

²⁹⁶ Keitt, “American Politics,” South Caroliniana Library.

²⁹⁷ *Edgefield Advertiser*, August 22, 1855, Edgefield, SC, “Chronicling America.”

²⁹⁸ *Mobile Daily Register*, June 11, 1855, Mobile, AL, Mobile Public Library.

to grant citizenship to slaves and free African Americans.²⁹⁹ Granting Congress the power to enfranchise foreigners would also permit the federal government to enfranchise women and children or disfranchise white men. Such an action, according to southern Democrats, threatened to reduce white men to the level of slaves and women.³⁰⁰ Thus, Know Nothing calls for congressional regulation of voting rights for foreigners, under Article 1, Section 8, Clause 4 of the Constitution, threatened to emasculate white southern men.³⁰¹ Undercutting the political authority of state governments challenged not only patriarchal institutions but cherished political values as well. Mainstream Democrats argued that southern Know Nothings' attempts to reform naturalization and suffrage laws threatened to consolidate the nation, which promised to place the South at the mercy of northern abolitionists.³⁰² Democrats argued that Know Nothing calls to consolidate the nation threatened southern institutions, especially slavery.³⁰³ This argument ultimately won the allegiance of strong states' rights advocates, though Fire Eaters and Know Nothings both held suspicious attitudes towards northern immigrants.

The Democratic Party agreed with Know Nothings that the issue of immigration proved relevant to the slavery question. Preston Brooks argued, "The President, the

²⁹⁹ *Edgefield Advertiser*, August 15, 1855, Edgefield, SC, "Chronicling America."

³⁰⁰ *Mobile Daily Register*, February 22, 1856, Mobile, AL, USA.

³⁰¹ U.S. Constitution, Article I, § 8, Clause 4.

³⁰² When southerners referred to the dangers of consolidation, they meant to warn Americans against the dangers of a strong, centralized federal government. Specifically, southerners feared that a strong federal government might heed abolitionist calls to interfere with slavery in the South. Thus, southerners continued to claim that the United States consisted of a confederation of sovereign states. For further discussion on the creation of nationalism, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

³⁰³ For further discussion on southern anxiety concerning slavery, see Lacy K. Ford, Jr., *Origins of Southern Radicalism: The South Carolina Upcountry, 1800-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); and Elizabeth R. Varon, *Disunion! The Coming of the American Civil War, 1789-1859* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

immigrant, and the Catholic had much to do with the slavery issue.”³⁰⁴ Unlike the American Party in Alabama and South Carolina, however, Democrats understood Know Nothing proscriptive policies as a threat to slavery. Indeed, southerners like Brooks came to view the southern American Party as a northern Trojan Horse designed to undermine slavery.³⁰⁵ Southern Democrats argued, “We cannot repress the conviction, that the founding of the Know-Nothing order is a shrewd Yankee trick, cunningly devised to produce discord and confusion at the South.”³⁰⁶ The most explicit threat to the South centered on the national American Party’s connections with prominent abolitionists in the North.³⁰⁷ William Lowndes Yancey pointed out that prominent abolitionists, such as Henry Gardner of Massachusetts, counted themselves as members of the Know Nothing Party.³⁰⁸ Representative Lawrence Keitt claimed that the Know Nothing Party commonly allied itself with Free Soilers and abolitionists in the North.³⁰⁹ Democrats in Alabama also argued that northern Know Nothings proved untrustworthy because they gave way to abolitionist fanaticism too easily.³¹⁰ Connections between abolitionism and northern Know Nothings certainly existed, but southern Know Nothings provided enough evidence to cast into doubt the strength of these links.³¹¹ Southern Democrats more effectively attacked Know Nothing policies as an abolitionist plot to consolidate the country, which provided a subtler, more promising means to attack slavery in the South.

³⁰⁴ *Edgefield Advertiser*, August 15, 1855, Edgefield, SC, “Chronicling America.”

³⁰⁵ *Edgefield Advertiser*, August 29, 1855, Edgefield, SC, “Chronicling America.”; and *Mobile Daily Register*, February 16, 1856, Mobile, AL, USA.

³⁰⁶ *Edgefield Advertiser*, June 1, 1855, Edgefield, SC, “Chronicling America.”

³⁰⁷ For a discussion on the link between abolitionism and the northern Know Nothing Party, see Anbinder, 43-48.

³⁰⁸ Yancey, Speech, Undated, Yancey Papers.

³⁰⁹ Keitt, “American Politics,” South Caroliniana Library.

³¹⁰ *Mobile Daily Register*, September 8, 1855, Mobile, AL, USA.

³¹¹ Anbinder, 106.

The American Party's call for revising federal naturalization laws and state suffrage laws frightened southern Democrats. Democrats, such as Philip Phillips, believed that the Know Nothings' desire for modified naturalization laws included giving Congress the right to regulate suffrage for foreign-born citizens.³¹² Countering that position, Phillips argued that the Constitution regulated only the qualifications of government functionaries, not the constituency. Since the Constitution gave no explicit right to regulate suffrage to Congress, then only the states could determine voting qualifications. Indeed, no state power was more sacred than the right to regulate suffrage.³¹³ Keitt supported Phillips by arguing that the right to regulate suffrage proved essential for maintaining state sovereignty. Any attempt by Congress to control suffrage undermined state institutions, which resulted in consolidating the independent states. Consolidation, according to Keitt, allowed states to interfere with the domestic affairs of other states. Thus, the American Party threatened to begin the "funeral procession of the republic."³¹⁴ Likewise, Preston S. Brooks maintained that Know Nothing promises to purify the ballot box implied that Congress could regulate suffrage. Such power only promised to destroy liberty by allowing an abolition majority to dictate terms of citizenship and suffrage to the South.³¹⁵ Democrats in Mobile argued, "*Congress cannot by naturalizing or refusing to naturalize the alien population of a state restrict against its will the elective franchise within it.*"³¹⁶ The states, according to southern Democrats, even

³¹² U.S. Const., Article I, § 8, cl. 4.

³¹³ Philip Phillips, "Naturalization and Citizenship" (Washington D.C.: A. O. P. Nicholson, 1854), Curry Collection.

³¹⁴ Keitt, "American Politics," South Caroliniana Library.

³¹⁵ *Edgefield Advertiser*, August 15, 1855, Edgefield, SC, "Chronicling America."

³¹⁶ *Mobile Daily Register*, February 22, 1856, Mobile, AL, USA, Emphasis Original.

held the right to grant suffrage to non-citizens, and the federal Congress could not interfere on any level.³¹⁷ Those in support of a limited federal government moved mainstream Democrats towards a more radical states' right ideology, which allowed southern Democrats to maintain the support of Fire Eaters. This support led to an increasing unwillingness to compromise on the slavery question.

Democratic radicalization concerning suffrage influenced their political stance concerning slavery. Arguing that Congress lacked authority to interfere with voting requirements in individual states, mainstream Democrats could no longer reject Fire Eater claims that the federal government could not intervene with slavery in the territories. Before the political contest against the Know Nothings, mainstream Democrats were willing to permit the federal government to regulate slavery by providing federal safeguards to protect the institution. To gain these protections, southern Democrats compromised by allowing the federal government to restrict slavery's expansion into some of the western territories.³¹⁸ To confront the political challenge of the Know Nothing Party successfully, however, southern Democrats shifted their ideology to match that of the Fire Eaters. Southern Democrats began to demand full implementation of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which repealed the Missouri Compromise.³¹⁹ Southern Democrats also insisted that Congress could not prevent slavery's expansion into any of the western territories.³²⁰ Lawrence Keitt exemplified this boldness by arguing that "the South should

³¹⁷ *Mobile Daily Register*, February 22, 1856, Mobile, AL, USA.

³¹⁸ For a discussion of compromises on the slavery question, see Michael Holt, *The Fate of Their Country: Politicians, Slavery Extension, and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2004); James M. McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire: The Civil War and Reconstruction* (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2001); and Varon, 31-52.

³¹⁹ *Mobile Daily Register*, September 13, 1855, Mobile, AL, USA.

³²⁰ Henry W. Hilliard, "Letter on the Political Issues of the Day" (Montgomery: Confederation Book and Job Office, 1858), Curry Collection; Keitt, "American Politics," South Caroliniana Library;

establish in the platform, the principle that the right of a southern man to his slave is equal, in length and breadth, to the right of a northern man to his horse.”³²¹ This closer alliance with Fire Eaters did not allow for any compromise on the slavery issue. Now, southern Democrats began to argue that any federal intrusion on the slavery question proved unconstitutional and threatened southern liberty.³²² Democrats finally offered a clearer, bolder defense against northern abolitionism than the American Party, which justified Democratic demands for southern political unity.

An effective demand raised by southern Democrats in response to the American Party centered on its call for southern unity in the face of unprecedented abolitionist hostility. Democrats insisted that the South should unite instead of supporting the Union at all costs. Indeed, Know Nothing support of the Union as the “paramount political good” became an idolatrous infatuation for southern Democrats.³²³ Such an outlook threatened the foundation of state sovereignty.³²⁴ Southern Democrats became so vehement in their calls for unity at the expense of Union that Know Nothings accused Democrats of looking for an excuse for disunion. Jeremiah Clemens bitterly lamented that “the Democracy . . . dragged the slavery question from the obscure pulpits of a few crazy fanatics, and thrust it upon the national theater to disturb the peace and embitter the social relations of the different members of the Confederacy.”³²⁵ Politicians such as

Edgefield Advertiser, August 15, 1855, Edgefield, SC, “Chronicling America;” and *Mobile Daily Register*, September 13, 1855, Mobile, AL, USA.

³²¹ Keitt, “American Politics,” South Caroliniana Library.

³²² *Edgefield Advertiser*, August 15, 1855, Edgefield, SC, “Chronicling America;” *Mobile Daily Register*, September 13, 1855, Mobile, AL, USA; and *Mobile Daily Register*, December 16, 1855, Mobile, AL, USA.

³²³ *The Lancaster Ledger*, July 4, 1855, Lancasterville, SC, “Chronicling America.”

³²⁴ *Edgefield Advertiser*, August 22, 1855, Edgefield, SC, “Chronicling America.”

³²⁵ Jeremiah Clemens, Speech, August 6, 1860, Johnson Jones Hooper Papers, 1853-1860,

ADAH.

Clemens, however, failed to convince the majority of white southerners that Democrats mistakenly placed their trust in Fire Eater ideology. Instead, the Democratic Party defeated its Know Nothing rivals by adopting a radical states' rights message, which fundamentally weakened southern attachments to the Union.

By the end of the 1850s, southern Democrats consolidated their alliance with Fire Eaters, insisting the South avoid compromise on the slavery issue no matter the consequences. The Union was no longer paramount for southern Democrats. Indeed, mainstream Democrats began to reflect sentiments espoused by Fire Eaters, such as William Yancey, who argued that the South should not value the Union at all costs. The Union held value only if the rights of states held equal sanctity with the rights of the federal government. Unlike the Know Nothing Party, whose leaders took the third-degree oath to maintain the Union at all costs, Yancey believed that unqualified support of the Union left the South begging for its rights from the hands of the abolitionist majority in Congress.³²⁶ In his 1857 inaugural address, Governor Andrew B. Moore of Alabama agreed with Yancey. Conceding that dissolution of the Union posed great dangers to the South, he argued that the preservation of the Union was not “the paramount political good.”³²⁷ In 1859, he insisted that southerners should refuse to compromise on their principles, insisting on all constitutional rights. The South lost much but gained nothing through compromise.³²⁸ Instead of emphasizing the importance and value of the Union,

³²⁶ Yancey, Speech, Undated, Yancey Papers.

³²⁷ Andrew B. Moore, “Inaugural Address to the General Assembly of Alabama,” December 1, 1857 (Montgomery: N. B. Cloud, 1857), Curry Collection.

³²⁸ Andrew B. Moore, “The Inaugural Address of the Governor to the General Assembly of the State of Alabama,” Delivered December 1, 1859 (Montgomery: Advertiser Office, 1859), Curry Collection.

southern Democrats began to emphasize southern unity instead.³²⁹ Developments regarding the national Know Nothing Platform in 1856 only strengthened their arguments.

In 1856, the national American Party Platform abandoned Section XII. In its place, the party called for the “maintenance and enforcement of all laws constitutionally enacted until said laws shall be repealed, or shall be declared null and void by competent judicial authority.”³³⁰ This new position undermined southern Know Nothing claims that the national party opposed abolition fanaticism because it permitted future restrictions on slavery. Percy Walker bemoaned this development noting that, “the *object* of the council of June 1855, was to *put down* agitation upon the subject of slavery; the *effect* of the action of the council of 1856 was to renew that agitation, by making the laws relative to slavery the subject of investigation.”³³¹ By placing the legitimacy of slavery in doubt, the national American Party gave further credence to Democratic assertions that abolitionists controlled the Know Nothings. Even worse for southern Know Nothings, the American Party nominee for President, Millard Fillmore, supported the Missouri Compromise. Fillmore contended, “This repeal seems to have been a Pandora’s box, out of which issued all the evils which now afflict the country.”³³² Democratic arguments that northern members of the Know Nothing Party would prove faithless to the South appeared prescient. Developments within the national American Party fatally weakened southern

³²⁹ For further discussion of growing unwillingness to compromise on slavery in the South, see Varon, 177, 213-217, 273-335.

³³⁰ Anbinder, 207.

³³¹ Percy Walker, “Speech on the Presidential Election, the Attitude of Parties, the Duty of Southern Men,” Delivered in the House of Representatives, August 6, 1856, Alabama Pamphlets Collection, Emphasis Original.

³³² Walker, “Speech on the Presidential Election,” Alabama Pamphlets Collection.

Know Nothings in the 1856 Presidential election. Ultimately, Fillmore won only the state of Maryland, showing that national American Party efforts crucially weakened Know Nothing efforts in the South.³³³

In May 1856, before the presidential election, the *Louisville Journal* assured its readers of the inevitable Know Nothing victory in Alabama. The *Mobile Daily Register* retorted, “The *Louisville Journal* is a ninny. It may bamboozle its blind worshippers in Kentucky with such stuff as this, but people hereabouts know it is all moonshine.”³³⁴ Southern Democrats proved more perceptive than the American Party. Know Nothings in South Carolina quickly began to lose power and influence. In 1855, Democratic leaders formally charged the Know Nothing Party of attempting to destroy the independence, safety, and welfare of slave states and claimed that Know Nothing ideology opposed southern rights and principles. Given the strength and respectability of Democrats in South Carolina, these accusations crippled the Know Nothings. The American Party in that state failed to obtain electoral success after these denunciations.³³⁵ Though the American Party in Alabama managed to stave off ultimate defeat until 1857, the Philadelphia Platform of 1856 and the nomination of Millard Fillmore for President ensured their eventual defeat. In August 1857, Democrats regained control of Mobile’s municipal government in an overwhelming electoral victory. The *Mobile Daily Register* touted the victory as a triumph of Democratic principles and equal constitutional rights for the South.³³⁶ Though the American Party still existed after this defeat, Know Nothing

³³³ Anbinder, 243.

³³⁴ *Mobile Daily Register*, May 17, 1856, Mobile, AL, USA.

³³⁵ *Edgefield Advertiser*, August 22, 1855, Edgefield, SC, “Chronicling America.”

³³⁶ *Mobile Daily Register*, August 4, 1857, Mobile, AL, USA.

political influence effectively ended in Alabama in 1857, which further solidified overwhelming Democratic control of the state.

The American Party forced the Democratic Party to radicalize its political ideology. Incorporating both egalitarian and nativist cultural traditions, southern Democrats during the 1850s reveal the competing democratic and nativist tendencies in southern society. Moreover, to prevent Fire Eaters from supporting the Know Nothing Party, Democrats altered their ideology regarding states' rights and their willingness to compromise on the slavery issue. In their fight against the American Party, southern Democrats contributed to the increasing sectionalization of the country. Thus, the struggle between Democrats and Know Nothings in Alabama and South Carolina contributed to the dissolution of the Union and the outbreak of the Civil War

CHAPTER IV – CONCLUSION

“The question we wish to present, and one which deserves due consideration, is will foreigners or natives control the election?” – The Lancaster Ledger³³⁷

On July 28, 1851, the *Mobile Daily Register*, the local Democratic newspaper, listed Samuel F. Rice as a candidate for Congress in the Seventh Congressional District in Alabama.³³⁸ Instead of running as a Whig or Democrat, however, Rice ran as a Southern Rights candidate. As a member of the Southern Rights Party, Rice demanded that Alabama immediately secede from the Union.³³⁹ He believed that the North frequently violated the United States Constitution and that an abolitionist spirit dominated northern voters. As a result, the federal government no longer benefited the South, and southerners could not hope to protect their property from the federal government. Secession, he therefore insisted, should occur as soon as possible.³⁴⁰ Though Rice did not win a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives, he was elected to the Alabama Supreme Court in January 1855.³⁴¹ Later that year, in September, Rice agreed to lend his support to a new political party, the American Party.

Samuel F. Rice provides a case study for the American Party in the South. Like many Know Nothings in Alabama and South Carolina, he desired an alternative to existing political parties because he was convinced that Whigs and Democrats allowed or

³³⁷ *The Lancaster Ledger*, July 26, 1854, Lancasterville, South Carolina, “Chronicling America,” Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

³³⁸ *Mobile Daily Register*, July 28, 1851, Mobile, Alabama, University of South Alabama Library (USA), Mobile, AL.

³³⁹ Samuel F. Rice, “Americanism and Southern Rights,” An Address Delivered Before a Mass Meeting of the American Party of Talladega County, September 6, 1855 (Montgomery: Barrett and Wimbish’s Book and Job Office, 1855), J. L. M. Curry Pamphlet Collection, 1730-1902, Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH), Montgomery, AL.

³⁴⁰ *Mobile Daily Register*, March 21, 1851, Mobile, AL, USA.

³⁴¹ “Alabama Supreme Court Chief Justices: Samuel F. Rice,” ADAH, Last Modified May 7, 2010, <http://www.archives.alabama.gov/judicial/srice.html>, Accessed January 30, 2017.

even encouraged abolitionism to grow in the United States.³⁴² By 1855, Rice maintained that the American Party's focus on the dangers of foreign influence provided a more effective solution to political problems encountered by the nation. By curbing foreign influence, the South could successfully destroy fanaticism and remain in the Union. In taking this position, Rice demonstrated the importance of nativism to the success of the American Party in Alabama and South Carolina.

Contrary to existing scholarship, nativist ideology truly existed in southern culture.³⁴³ Know Nothings in Alabama and South Carolina proved capable of transforming this cultural value into a powerful political issue. Southern culture fostered nativist values, which were exacerbated by social and immigration patterns during the 1840s and 1850s. In taking advantage of cultural nativist sentiment, Know Nothings took part in broader conservative trends within the South. These conservative social and cultural tendencies sought to impose political limitations on women, slaves, immigrants, and Catholics.

Political nativism in the South demonstrated different priorities than did northern Know Nothing policies. Southerners emphasized anti-immigrant ideology more than anti-Catholic prejudice when crafting public policy. While anti-Catholic bias certainly existed in the South, it remained more viable culturally than politically. Moreover, states' rights ideology profoundly shaped Know Nothing political policies in Alabama and South Carolina. Both the American and Democratic Parties had to reconcile their public policies

³⁴² Rice, "Americanism and Southern Rights," Curry Collection.

³⁴³ Tyler Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings and the Politics of the 1850s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); and William Darrell Overdyke, *The Know-Nothing Party in the South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1950).

with a strict constructionist interpretation of the Constitution to appeal to their constituents.

From 1854 to 1856, the American Party in Alabama and South Carolina began to experience significant political success. Indeed, southerners argued, “the question we wish to present, and one which deserves due consideration, is will foreigners or natives control the election?”³⁴⁴ A realistic possibility existed for a new political alliance between Know Nothings and Fire Eaters based on nativist ideology. This possibility threatened Democratic hegemony in the South, and Democrats faced the prospect of losing political power in the South. Similar to the Know Nothing Party, Democrats drew upon popular trends within southern culture to formulate their ideology. Drawing upon nineteenth-century notions of egalitarianism, patriarchy, and even nativism, southern Democrats attempted to paint their party as more faithful to conservative political and cultural values. Moreover, to solidify their claim as the most conservative party available, southern Democrats further radicalized their ideology concerning states’ rights and slavery. The Democratic Party in Alabama and South Carolina became increasingly unwilling to compromise on the slavery question due to their political battles with southern nativists. This growing sectionalization of the Democratic Party contributed to secession and the outbreak of the Civil War.

The thought and actions of Samuel F. Rice reveals the possibility of a rearrangement of the political landscape in the South in the 1850s. Sympathetic to Fire Eater ideology, Rice nevertheless supported the American Party. While arguing that southerners could not eliminate abolitionism without curbing foreign influence, Rice

³⁴⁴ *The Lancaster Ledger*, July 26, 1854, Lancasterville, SC, “Chronicling America.”

provides a window into an alternative political path for the South during the 1850s.³⁴⁵ His political outlook proves that nativism was a viable cultural and political issue in the South. Though immigration ultimately proved unable to displace slavery as the predominant political issue in the South, Know Nothings found a powerful political voice centered on nativist ideology.

³⁴⁵ Rice, "Americanism and Southern Rights," Curry Collection.

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