

Anti-Irish Sentiment in the 1850s

The motivations and means of the Know Nothings in the discrimination of Irish-Americans



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Introduction

In the period between 1841 and 1860, approximately 1.1 million Irish emigrated to the United States as a result of the potato famine.¹ Upon the arrival of Irish immigrants in the United States there was a high level of anti-Irish and anti-Catholic sentiment. The existing image of the Irish was that of a lazy, drunk and foolish people; they were considered to be 'paupers'. The anti-immigrant Know Nothing Party (1850-1860) shared this view. The main goals of the party were to curb immigration and naturalization and the measures they took to execute these goals were mainly aimed at foreigners and Catholics. As the majority of Irish immigrants were Catholic, the party was able to use the new immigrants as a scapegoat to blame for economic and social problems in society. In a Know Nothing journal in 1855 their philosophy was described as follows: "The grand work of the American party, is the principle of nationality... we must do something to protect and vindicate it. If we do not it will be destroyed."² This philosophy responded to the increasing xenophobia and nativism in the United States, appealing to many discontented Americans.

Even though the Know-Nothings were not only opposed to the Irish, the focus of this thesis will be solely on their hatred towards the Irish immigrants and Catholics. There was, for example, also hostility towards the group of German immigrants that fled their country due to an economic crisis. Since nativism is so closely connected to anti-Catholicism and as 90% of the Irish immigrants were of the Catholic faith, I decided to concentrate on the Irish.³

On the matter of relevance of the subject, in my view the issue of racism and discrimination of immigrants is still very much alive today, albeit aimed more towards Latin-Americans and Arabic immigrants. Immigration is of course not limited to the United States; also in Europe thousands of boat refugees from Africa arrive daily which leads to heated discussions about which country should shelter them. Researching a certain group and their activism on the subject of immigrants could lead to more understanding about how society responds to social events and how certain circumstances in society can lead to a rise of nativism and hatred towards immigrants.

¹ S. Thernstrom, *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups* (Cambridge, Mass. 1980) 528.

² J. Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism* (New York 1963) 4.

³ K. Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Exodus to North America* (New York 1985) 291.

Regarding the academic discussion on this subject, I have distinguished a couple of different views on the matter of immigrants and race. I will take into consideration the views of Jensen, Jacobson and Higham.

Jensen argues in *No Irish Need Apply: A Myth of Victimization* that it is more of a myth than actual history that the Irish were discriminated against in for example job advertisements. He also claims that after doing extensive research in books and magazine articles, the notion that Irish were often called “simian” or “white negroes” seems to be untrue, as he only found a miniscule amount of such references.⁴ Despite this lack of evidence, there is a general consensus that the Irish were racially discriminated against. This leads to the question whether race plays a factor in this case of discrimination against the Irish.

Jacobson claims in *Whiteness of a Different Color* that the idea of ‘whiteness’ is subject to different factors.⁵ Whether a group or a person is considered to be white is a dynamic process: for example, religion can sometimes be seen as a function of race.⁶ People are not born into a certain race, but they are ‘made’. Thus race is not a fixed category and what defines race does not depend on nature, but on culture, politics and the ever changing conditions in society. The connection between this matter and nativism is easily made, as Jacobson states that “[...]the history of American nativism from the 1840s to the 1920s is largely the history of a fundamental revision of whiteness itself.”⁷ Jacobson asks the question “If whiteness is indeed changeable, under what circumstances does it change?”⁸ If we include the Irish on this matter, the question is under which circumstances the Irish were considered ‘white’ or not.

On the subject of nativism, John Higham states that “nativism usually rises and falls in some relation to other intense kinds of national feeling.”⁹ Thus nativism is subject to circumstances in society, and always involves the fear of disloyalty of foreigners, as it is

⁴ R. Jensen, ‘No Irish Need Apply: a Myth of Victimization’ *Journal of Social History* 36.2 (2002) 405-429, 426.

⁵ M. Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge 1998) 4.

⁶ *Ibidem*, 70.

⁷ *Ibidem*, 68.

⁸ *Ibidem*, 13.

⁹ Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 4.

suspected they will fail in assimilating.¹⁰ The question that arises here is which issues in society gave rise to the nativism of the Know Nothings and why the group of foreigners was considered to be incapable to assimilate.

Now that the academic discussion is examined, I would like to introduce my research question. The research question of my thesis will be: “What were the motivations and means of the Know Nothings concerning the discrimination of Irish-Americans in the 1850’s?” To answer the research question I will divide my thesis in two sub-questions, of which the first one is: “What were the main objectives of the Know Nothings?” This question is aimed at finding out what the objections against the Irish precisely were and how these are derived from conditions in society. Subsequently, the second question is: “How were the Know Nothings’ objections expressed in multimedia sources?” In this chapter I want to investigate how the objections of the Know Nothings were expressed and whether these contain references towards race. Consequently, my hypothesis is that there is an objection amongst the Know Nothings towards the Irish race and I expect there to be implicit references towards racial discrimination of the Irish in the primary sources I will research.

The research method I will use to answer these questions will be aimed at both secondary literature and primary sources. In primary sources such as pamphlets, cartoons and newspapers I will look for expressions of discrimination and negative sentiments against Irish immigrants and Catholics specifically between 1850 and 1860, the years in which the Know Nothing party was active. I have selected the primary sources by the year they were issued and whether they are connected to Know Nothings or nativists. The literature I have selected covers historical reviews such as Miller and Anbinder, literature about ‘whiteness’ and the issue of race such as Jacobson and Roediger and literature about immigration and nativism such as Higham and Gjerde.

Finally, I will explain some of the terminology that will be used in this essay. Xenophobia literally means ‘fear of what is foreign’ and is the irrational fear of foreigners and anything that is unknown. With discrimination I mean the prejudicial treatment of the Irish on the grounds of their nationality. Racism is discrimination based on race, and the belief that one’s own race is superior to others. Nationalism is “an extreme form of

¹⁰ Ibidem, 4.

patriotism marked by a feeling of superiority over other countries.”¹¹ Finally we have nativism, which John Higham describes as “intense opposition to an internal minority on the grounds of its foreign (i.e., ‘un-American’) connections”.¹² Hence the difference between nativism and nationalism is that in my view, nativism is a form of nationalism combined with xenophobia.

¹¹ Oxford Dictionaries, ‘Nationalism’, <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/nationalism>, accessed on May 20th 2015.

¹² Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 4.

Chapter 1 - The Main Objectives of the Know Nothings

The origins of the Know Nothings can be derived back to the Order of the Star Spangled Banner, founded by Charles B. Allen in 1850.¹³ The Order was a secret society whose members were not allowed to disclose any information to outsiders. The initial goal of the members was to “use their votes and personal influence to reduce the political power of both immigrants and the politicians who purportedly pandered to them.”¹⁴ It is a popular assumption that they bear the name Know Nothings because they were to proclaim they ‘knew nothing’ when inquired about the Order or its activities. Contrary to this popular belief however, Anbinder suggests they acquired that name after publications in the *New York Tribune*, somewhere between May 1853 and May 1854.¹⁵ When the Know Nothings entered the political scene in 1856, they renamed themselves the American Party. The party gained many new followers in a relatively short time, consisting of white protestant males above the age of twenty-one.¹⁶ From the beginning in 1850 the party only consisted of forty-three members, but this number grew rapidly in a relatively short time to “[...]more than a million in a little over two years”¹⁷. To illustrate how much influence a party of this considerable size had, I have found that “A million white males represented almost one-eighth of the nation’s potential electorate [in 1852].”¹⁸ This rapid development in the number of members of the party reflects the growing anti-immigrant sentiment amongst citizens and its potential impact in politics.

There are various circumstances in society that can be identified as a cause that drove the members of the party to their hatred towards immigrants, including economic decline and fear of the Catholic religion. The Know Nothings attributed the circumstances they deemed undesirable on the large amount of immigrants, as immigration had skyrocketed in the 1840s and 1850s. In the 1840s about 800.000 Irish settled in America, accounting for 45% of the total immigrant influx and in the 1850s 900.000 Irish immigrants

¹³ T. Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings and the Politics of the 1850's* (New York 1992) 20.

¹⁴ Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 20.

¹⁵ Ibidem, 21.

¹⁶ Ibidem, 23.

¹⁷ R. Daniels, *Guarding the Golden Door: American Immigration Policy and Immigrants Since 1882* (New York 2004) 10.

¹⁸ Ibidem, 10.

arrived, 35% of the total amount of new immigrants.¹⁹ The main reason the Irish emigrated in large numbers is that they were simply forced to move due to the Potato Famine. The famine hit Ireland between 1845 and 1850 and threatened many families with starvation. In order to escape the prospect of death, emigration seemed the only solution. In total roughly 1 million Irish lost their lives as a result of the famine, and 2 million Irish chose to emigrate, causing Ireland to lose a quarter of its inhabitants.²⁰ As most of the Irish were members of the Catholic church and the fear of Catholic conspiracies grew, along with a sentiment of xenophobia, it made them an easy target to the Know Nothings. In this chapter I will discuss the main objectives the Know Nothings had in the antipathy of the Irish population in particular. By linking the historical context to the objections the Know Nothings had, I will try to get a clear explanation of why specifically the Irish were targeted. In order to distinguish different motives of the Know Nothings, I will use a manifest published in *The Know Nothings and American Crusader* on the 15th of July 1854 as a guideline (figure 1). The manifest is a summarization of their foremost principles. In addition, I will use another publication from the same paper that was issued a week later, on the 22nd of July 1854, and consists of a list of things Catholics hate according to the Know Nothings (figure 2).

¹⁹ Thernstrom, *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, 528.

²⁰ D. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London 1999) 139.

1. Repeal of all Naturalization Laws.
 2. None but Native Americans for Office.
 3. A pure American Common School System.
 4. War to the hilt, on Romanism.
 5. Opposition, first and last, to the formation of Military Companies composed of foreigners.
 6. The advocacy of a sound, healthy, and safe Nationality.
 7. Hostility to all Papal Influences, in whatever form, and under whatever name.
 8. American Institutions and American Sentiments.
 9. More stringent and effective Emigration Laws.
 10. The amplest Protection to Protestant Interests.
 11. The doctrines of the revered Washington and his compatriots.
 12. The sending back of all Foreign Paupers landed on our shores.
 13. The formation of Societies to protect all American Interests.
 14. Eternal enmity to all who attempts to carry out the principles of a foreign Church or State.
 15. Our Country, our whole Country, and nothing but our country.
 16. And finally, American Laws and American Legislation, and Death to all Foreign Influences, whether in high places or low!
- The Know-Nothing: and American Crusader -*
15 July 1854.

Figure 1 *The Know Nothings and American Crusader*, (Boston) 15th of July 1854.

- Things Which Roman Catholic Priests and all True Roman Catholics Hate. Providence, July 22, 1854**
1. They HATE our Republic, and are trying to overthrow it.
 2. They HATE the American *Eagle*, and it offends them beyond endurance to see it worn as an ornament by Americans.
 3. They HATE our *Flag*, as it manifest by their grossly insulting it.
 4. They HATE the liberty of conscience.
 5. They HATE the liberty of the Press.
 6. They HATE the liberty of speech.
 7. They HATE our Common School system.
 8. They HATE the Bible, and would blot it out of existence *if they could!*
 9. The *Priests* HATE married life, and yet by *them is fulfilled* the Scripture, to wit: 'more are the children of the desolate, than the children of the married wife.'
 10. They HATE Protestants, and are sworn to exterminate them from our country and the earth.
 11. They HATE the name of WASHINGTON, because he was a *Republican* and Protestant.
 12. They HATE all rulers that do not swear allegiance to the Pope of Rome.
 13. They HATE to be *ruled* by *Americans*, and say 'WE WILL NOT BE RULED BY THEM!'
 14. They HATE to support their own paupers and they are left to be supported by the tax paying Americans.
 15. They HATE, above all, the '*Know-Nothings*,' who are determined to rid this country from their accursed power.
- UNCLE SAM

Figure 2 *Things Which Roman Catholic Priests and all True Roman Catholics Hate* (Providence) July 22nd 1854.

1.1 Different Themes in the Know Nothing Manifest

Several different themes can be distinguished in this list of Know Nothing principles (figure 1). The first theme that can be found is restraining the flow of immigrants. This can be achieved by repealing naturalization laws which impedes immigrants from becoming Americans (1.1), maintaining stricter emigration laws (1.9) and even sending immigrants back to their countries of origin (1.12).

Secondly the theme of opposing all Catholic and Papal influences can be observed. This theme is directed at declaring war to Romanism (1.4) and enmity towards the pope (1.7) in order to protect the Protestant faith (1.10). This includes rejection of those who try to carry out the ideology of a foreign Church or State (1.14.) Finally, the theme of opposition towards all foreign influences in American institutions is being used. This consists of preventing foreigners from fulfilling a public function in the government (1.2), governing schools (1.3) and the military (1.5). In order to achieve this, they call for the formation of societies that protect the interests of Native born Americans (1.13), pure American institutions (1.8) and finally American laws and putting a stop to any foreign influence whatsoever (1.16).

The gist of this platform is making clear that the foremost objective of the Party is the protection of the interests of native born American Protestants, which we call nativism. Higham cites a Know Nothing journal from 1855 in which the Know Nothing philosophy is described as “the principle of nationality... we must do something to protect it and vindicate it. If we do not it will be destroyed.”²¹ Combining the protection of American interests with the opposition of foreign influences results in the nativist attitude on which the party is built. Therefore nativism can be described as the opposition towards foreigners in order to protect nationalist interests.

Following on from the list of Know Nothing principles, I will now elaborate on the three themes that I have distinguished. I will link the ideas the Know Nothings had to economic, social and religious conditions in society in order to clarify what the Know Nothings identified as problems with the Irish immigrants specifically.

²¹ Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 4.

1.2 Economic motives

First of all I will discuss a number of economical motives behind the Know Nothing objectives. Although an economic motive is not directly mentioned in the platform directly (Figure 1), the theme concerning the restriction of the immigrant flow can be derived from the economical setting in the 1850s. The economic situation in the United States in the first half of the 1850s had deteriorated severely in comparison to the decade before. With the arrival of thousands of new immigrants, often farmers or poorly educated members of the working class, there was new competition for the same type of jobs the Americans desperately needed as well. For example in New York, the immigrants constituted over two-thirds of the total workforce, while they made up less than one-half of the population.²² The fact that immigrant women and children were also part of the workforce, unlike native born children and women, contributes to the high labor participation of Irish compared to Americans.²³ In order to gather sufficient income, all members of the family were required to make a contribution.

Not only were jobs lost to the immigrants because they formed a large group of workers, they were also willing to work for a lower salary than American laborers and craftsmen, which resulted in “reduced wages for everyone.”²⁴ As the Irish arrived in such large numbers while lacking skill, their biggest competitors were their own fellow countrymen. The struggle of finding work along with having to compete with other Irishmen led to underbidding American workers in order to get employment.²⁵ In the nativist view, the high Irish employment rate did not only cause a higher unemployment rate amongst native born Americans, but the ‘underbidding’ practice also caused them to receive less income as they did before the arrival of the immigrants. A second reason why immigrants were willing to work for low salaries is, according to Anbinder, that they “had been accustomed to live in poverty” in their homelands and just accepted whatever wage they could take.²⁶ Pre-famine immigrants were of a different nature than the famine migrants in the 1850s. The former immigrants “tended to have enough resources to exercise a limited but real choice about

²² Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 32.

²³ Ibidem, 32.

²⁴ Ibidem, 32.

²⁵ Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*, 148.

²⁶ Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 109.

where to settle and what kind of work to take.”²⁷ The latter immigrants however, were impoverished and uneducated and simply did not have another option then to accept poorly paid jobs, mostly as servants and laborers”.²⁸ Roediger describes the process of less fortunates arriving in the United States over time as “[...] an increasingly poverty-stricken stream of Catholic migrants.”²⁹ The deteriorated state of famine immigrants in the 1850s compared to pre-famine immigrants may have led to more opposition among the Know Nothings against the Irish and can be connected to their call for the restriction of the immigrant flow, the first theme of the Know Nothing manifest.

To put the matter of wages into perspective, G.H Haynes argues that the actual impact of the immigrant workers on the wages and livelihood of natives was not substantial.³⁰ There was a “fear of immigrants as a wage-earner” which was not well grounded “nor were living expenses correspondingly high” in his view.³¹ They simply believed in this “wage-fund theory” and tunnel vision caused them to look at the newcomers with jealousy as they were to share their wage-fund with them.³² As this jealousy and ignorance created a general opinion in which the Irish *were* the main cause of problems, it caused a rise in Know Nothing support. Roediger supports this claim as well as he states that: “many native-born artisans, rightly or wrongly, paired the arrival of the Irish with unfavorable changes in their crafts and wages and participated in both anti-immigrant riots and anti-immigrant political movements.”³³

To the question of why the Know Nothings were more opposed to Irish workers in comparison to other recent immigrants, the answer lies in their large numbers and lack of education. If we draw a comparison with the other large immigrant group, the Germans, it shows that Irish were “far more likely than the Germans to be without skills”³⁴ To illustrate that the Irish were less skilled than their immigrant counterparts, support can be found for this claim: “In New York City in 1855, Germans were about twice as likely to do non-manual

²⁷ Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*, 139.

²⁸ Ibidem, 139

²⁹ Ibidem, 139

³⁰ G. Haynes, ‘The Causes of Know-Nothing Success in Massachusetts’, *The American Historical Review* 3 (1897), 67–82, 75.

³¹ Ibidem, 75.

³² Ibidem, 75.

³³ Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*, 149.

³⁴ Ibidem, 145.

labor as the Irish, and the Irish were nearly five times as likely to be without skills.”³⁵ Since the German immigrants appeared to be more skillful they were also able to get better jobs. The view that the unskilled character of the Irish led to more objections towards them than to other immigrant groups is supported by Kevin Kenny:

“Rhetorically at least, nativists of this type were opposed equally to German, British, Scotch-Irish, and Catholic Irish immigrants, but in practice it was the unskilled status of the latter which caused them greatest concern.”³⁶

Not only were the immigrants to blame for unemployment and lower incomes in the view of native born Americans, there was also reluctance to work together with immigrants, especially since they received the same wages. It was seen as a decline of status and a striking comparison between Irish and Blacks is made in a nativist journal: “Our native-born citizens hate to work by the side of an Irishman [because they feel degraded] and dishonored by the contact... It is the same feeling which makes it impossible for a respectable white man to labor by the side of slaves in the South.”³⁷ This comparison between Irish and black slaves illustrates that Americans thought working by the side of Irish immigrants was considered to be inferior.

The influx of unskilled Irish immigrants in the workforce combined with a decrease in wages and a reluctance to work side by side with the Irish created objections towards the Irish and led to more support for the Know Nothings. As Haynes put it well: “This combined race-antipathy and craft-jealousy contributed in large measure to swell the ranks of Know-Nothingism in the Bay State.”³⁸ The Know Nothings put themselves forward as the ones Americans could rely on in their quest to keep the immigrants at bay, which appealed to American citizens. The following statement was published in the *Know Nothing Almanac* of 1855: “The American mechanics and working men, with their wives and children, require *something* to fall back upon, when they are ousted from their employments by the terrible

³⁵ Ibidem, 145.

³⁶ K. Kenny, Race, Labor, and Nativism: A Response to Dale T. Knobel’ *Radharc* Vol. 2 (November 2001) 27-33, 30.

³⁷ Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 109.

³⁸ Haynes, *The Causes of Know-Nothing Success*, 76.

competition of pauper laborers from the Old World."³⁹ Therefore they considered themselves and their policies to be the solution to the immigrant problem.

³⁹ J. Gjerde, *Major Problems in American Immigration and Ethnic History: Documents and Essays*. (Boston 1998) 148.

1.3 Social Status of the Immigrants and the Issue of Race

Secondly I would like to discuss the social status of the new immigrants, whether their status is connected to views on the matter of race and whiteness and how this is a contributing factor to the anti-immigrant views of the party. The Irish were regarded as being of low status and they were often seen as a group of undesirables and 'paupers'. In a way this caused them to be connected to the general deterioration of society and therefore this caused Know Nothing objections to rise. Anbinder argues that Know Nothings held them directly responsible for this decay in society as they held the belief that "increasing pauperism also resulted from immigration. [...] Earlier immigrants displayed industriousness and frugality, but many recent newcomers were simply "too lazy to work."⁴⁰ The different nature of the famine immigrants opposed to pre-famine immigrants is already discussed in the last paragraph and in general they were "poorer and less skilled"⁴¹. Anbinder even goes as far as saying that they had nothing that worked in their advantage as he calls them "the most impoverished, destitute, unskilled group ever to arrive in the United States. Eighty to 90 percent of them were classified as unskilled laborers."⁴² The enormous wave of uneducated, poor and needy Irish induced resentment towards the new group of immigrants. The poverty of the Irish had its consequences; along with the immigrants came a higher crime rate, prostitution, a number of illnesses and public inebriation. These factors all added to their bad reputation.

Regarding disease, alcoholism and crime, the arrival of the Irish did in fact add to the rising rates. Poor living conditions in the slums along with the poor health of immigrants created a core for illness. Malnutrition in Ireland combined with the long journey overseas often led to diseases but also to physical and mental disabilities.⁴³ Irish immigrants dominated crime statistics and the majority of prison inmates were of Irish origins.⁴⁴ Arrests were usually related to disorderly conduct. The Irish were well known abusers of alcohol, leading to public drunkenness and crime. Mortality rates among the Irish were high as a result of their poor living conditions. They did not have a long life expectancy. Thernstrom

⁴⁰ Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 108.

⁴¹ Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*, 295.

⁴² Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 7.

⁴³ Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles*, 296.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, 320

states that “Americans rarely saw a gray-haired Irishman during the mid-19th century.”, meaning that most of them died before they could reach old age.⁴⁵ Their deaths are related to poor health, alcohol-related diseases and work-related accidents.⁴⁶

As for demographics, the view of the Irish as ‘paupers’ can be supported with evidence. Recent studies discovered that paupers and criminals were sent to the United States on purpose with government funding. According to the figures the British government “financed the emigration of 5000 Irish paupers per year beginning in 1847” as well as Irish landlords, who “sent an additional 50000 destitute tenants to America during the decade ending in 1855.”⁴⁷ The banishment of paupers and criminals from their homelands confirms that they already held a status of undesirables in their countries of origin. In America consequently, they continued to remain unwanted citizens. Their low social status along with their bad reputation, only created more resentment towards these ‘paupers’. Linking the perception of the Irish with a theme, we can see that the reputation of the Irish can be connected to the call for restriction of immigrant flow, as number 12 on the list calls for the return of paupers to the countries in which they were born (figure 1).

The objections against the ‘paupers’ are of a moral and economic nature. The matter of race and the question whether the Know Nothings used racial arguments against the Irish is more complex. A comparison between Irish and blacks has already been drawn (header 1,2 “Economic Motives”), as it was seen to be degrading to work with either of these groups. It is not surprising that these two groups were compared since they had various similarities, as Roediger explains:

“There were good reasons – environmental and historical, not biological - for comparing African-Americans and the Irish. The two groups often lived side by side in the teeming slums of American cities of the 1830s. They both did America’s hard work, especially in domestic service and the transportation industry. Both groups were poor and often vilified. Both had experienced oppression and had been wrenched from a homeland.”⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Thernstrom, *Harvard Encyclopedia*, 532.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, 532

⁴⁷ Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 108.

⁴⁸ Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*, 134.

Knobel states that, from the perspective of Americans, they considered there to be a typical “Irish character” and this character featured more racial typology over time.⁴⁹ The negative traits of the Irish, such as laziness, inebriation and foolishness were linked to physical characteristics and depicted them in a matter that corresponded with their personality and behavior. The physical appearance of the Irish has been described as “low-browed”, “brutish,” and “simian,” with a “small and somewhat upturned nose” and “the black tint of the skin.”⁵⁰

Germans were not under target as much as the Irish were. There is a mention in a Know Nothing pamphlet of the Germans as “driving the ‘white people’ out of the labor market”⁵¹. Yet Anglo-Saxons considered themselves to be of Germanic origin and considered them to be a “freedom-loving, noble race of Germanic peoples,” which forms an explanation as to why Irish were the main target.⁵²

The question is whether the nature of the objections against the Irish had racial tendencies. Roediger claims that the nature of the prejudice against Irish was of a more moral than racial nature: “Nativist folk wisdom held that an Irishman was a ‘nigger’ inside out. But by no means did nativists, who more typically developed a ‘moral’ rather than a ‘racial’ critique of the Irish, corner the market on calling the whiteness of the Irish into question.”⁵³ Thus he claims that despite the more moral nature of the arguments, there was nevertheless still indistinctness on the ethnicity of the Irish as they were still not considered to be fully ‘white’ .

A second claim Roediger makes, is that instead of race, the nature of the objectives was aimed more at religion:

“They instead [of the idea that the Celts were genetically inferior] concentrated on Irish subservience to religious authority and Irish degradation. Some unfavorably

⁴⁹ Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 48.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, 48.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, 47.

⁵² *Ibidem*, 47.

⁵³ Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*, 133.

compared the Irish with free Blacks, not so much as racial types as in terms of their alleged records of fitness to function as republican citizens.”⁵⁴

This feature is an important one; the religion of the Irish was seen as an inseparable characteristic of the Irish and was deemed of more significance than any racial background.

⁵⁴ Ibidem, 144.

1.4 The Catholic Faith

Elaborating on the subject of the character of the Irish, I shall now discuss their religion, as it is such an important theme in Know Nothing ideology. In addition to the list of objectives in figure 1, I will use a second list published in the *Crusader*, called Things Which Roman Catholic Priests and all True Roman Catholics Hate.

First of all it is important to define why exactly there was such opposition towards Catholics. At the core of anti-Catholicism lies that the majority of native Americans were Protestant, and the Irish immigrants were Catholics. The protestant base of society was deeply imbedded and even goes as far as that Know Nothings “believed that Protestantism defined American society.”⁵⁵ Besides Protestantism, republicanism was also an important value to American society and is the form of government the country is built upon. Even before the emergence of the Know Nothings, Catholicism was already seen as a danger. In a source of 1835, Samuel Morse compiled a list of the dangers they formed and in one part he explains why there is such friction between Republicanism and Catholicism:

“It is a fact, that Popery is opposed in its very nature to Democratic Republicanism; and it is, therefore, as a political system, as well as religious, opposed to civil and religious liberty, and consequently to our form of government.”⁵⁶

From this we can conclude that the basic principles of both are incomparable. This is essential as to why there was fear of the Roman Church, since they formed a serious threat to the values American citizens deemed so important, such as liberty and freedom. Catholicism was considered so very different from Protestantism, as Protestantism had “democratic aspects,” unlike Catholicism.⁵⁷ The faiths are organized in a different way. For example, protestant congregations chose their own ministers, there is no all-deciding church father, and protestants were encouraged to read the bible and to interpret the Holy Book in their own way.⁵⁸ On the opposite, Catholicism is a religion in which everything is decided by the Pope, its members are to obey and they are discouraged from interpreting the bible on

⁵⁵ Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 104.

⁵⁶ S. Morse, ‘Imminent Dangers to the Free institutions of the United States through Foreign Immigration and the Present States of the Naturalization Laws’ (1835), in: J. Gjerde, *Major Problems in American Immigration and Ethnic History: Documents and Essays* (Boston 1998) 136-138, 137.

⁵⁷ Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 104.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, 104.

their own.⁵⁹ Therefore the religion is of a more autocratic nature. Higham states that Catholicism looked in this was “dangerously un-American”⁶⁰

Thomas Whitney, member of the Know Nothings, drew a comparison between Catholicism and Republicanism in order to make clear that these are of an entirely dissimilar nature too. He wrote in *A Defence of the American Policy* in 1856 that “one is an *absolute* government, and the other a *popular* government” and also makes a bold statement by saying that “American Republicanism is FREEDOM [and] Romanism is SLAVERY.”⁶¹ We can deduce from these statements that there was a fear of the Pope endangering American values and overthrowing the system.

Considering figure 2, the Know Nothings explain all the things Catholics supposedly hate. This list was published two weeks after the list in figure 1 and is aimed specifically at all Roman Catholics. The enumeration illustrates the rhetoric that was used by the Know Nothings to address people and draw attention to the impending Catholic danger. The author of the text uses a variety of ways to reinforce his words. For example the word ‘HATE’ is repetitively used in every sentence and written in capital letters to stress the meaning of the word. Suggesting the Catholics loathe and despise everything the country stands for is a way to justify the Know-Nothings’ hatred towards them. The author of the text used great American symbols and values to indicate the ‘things’ Catholics hate. For example he used republicanism (2.1), liberty of speech, press and conscience (2.4, 2.5, 2.6), the American Eagle (2.2), the flag (2.3) and George Washington, on the grounds that he was a republican and Protestant (2.11). By putting emphasis on everything American that the Catholics hate, it is as if the author wants to warn the native born Americans for the impending Catholic menace.

As the majority of Irish immigrants were members of the Catholic church, the church and the people cannot be separated from one another. Just as Catholics were regarded to be unable to function in a democratic republic, the same is applicable to the Irish. Irish were considered to be loyal servants of their church. The fear hereby is that this loyalty made that the church could thus influence the Irish a great deal. As Roediger explains: “the Irish were

⁵⁹ Ibidem, 104.

⁶⁰ Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 6.

⁶¹ T. Whitney, ‘A Defence of the American Policy (1856)’, in: J. Gjerde *Major Problems in American Immigration and Ethnic History: Documents and Essays* (Boston 1998) 144-146, 145.

particularly loyal to priests. Modern scholarship has even suggested that religious obedience left the Irish in a state of ‘moral childhood’⁶² This ‘childhood’ insinuates that the Irish lacked the ability to make their own decisions and therefore loyally followed the teachings of the church. Jacobson states that “religion was sometimes seen as a function of race” and in the case of the Irish, their religion was definitely seen as a character trait.⁶³

Considering the large amount of Irish immigrants, the fear existed that this mass was ‘under control’ of the church and would exert their influence in the elections and in institutions. Lyman Beecher expressed this fear as early as 1835 when he wrote that “the clergy of the Catholic denomination could wield in mass the suffrage of their confiding people”⁶⁴

The religious motives of the Know Nothings can be easily linked to the second theme in figure 1, as it enumerates a list of measures that should be taken against the Catholics. Number 1.7 on the list calls for hostility to all Papal influences. Number 1.10 is aimed at protecting Protestantism and corresponds with number 1.14 in which “Eternal enmity to all who attempts to carry out the principles of a foreign Church or State” is declared. These objectives reflect the nativist sentiment of Catholic fear.

⁶² Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*, 138.

⁶³ Jacobson, *Whiteness of a different Color*, 70.

⁶⁴ L. Beecher, ‘A Plea for the West (1835)’, in: J. Gjerde, *Major Problems in American Immigration and Ethnic History: Documents and Essays* (Boston 1998) 134-136, 135.

1.5 Foreign Influence in Institutions

Elaborating on the fear of Catholicism, there was also a fear of foreign influences in institutions, such as the government. As the Catholics were of a large number, fears were being expressed of their potential power. Conspiracy theories on the allegiance of the Irish immigrants were not uncommon, as it was feared they were more loyal to Rome than to America. Higham states that the nativists “considered the immigrants minions of the Roman despot, dispatched here to subvert American institutions.”⁶⁵ It was thought the Pope was continuously supplying a flow of immigrants to indoctrinate and eventually subjugate America. Frederick Saunders, a nativist, expressed this fear in *The Progress and Prospects of America* in 1855 when he wrote that “they seem to be steadily seeking to overthrow our own institutions”⁶⁶ The ‘overthrow’ of institutions was something that could be achieved by the magnitude of the Irish immigrants. The obedient nature of the Irish and the autocratic nature of the Catholic church made it a popular belief amongst nativists that “priests usually determined how Catholics voted” and therefore this gave “a few Catholic leaders the power to decide elections.”⁶⁷

To determine whether there were grounded reasons to believe in the extensive power of the Catholic church, we can take the number of foreign votes into consideration. Beecher already expressed his worry in 1835, even before the famine-immigrants arrived in the United States. He declared that “a tenth part of the suffrage of the nation [...] might decide our elections.”⁶⁸ Roediger confirms the considerable potential of electoral influence as he states that ten years later, in 1845, this number had risen to 1 in 7.⁶⁹ From these sources we can derive that there was a considerable influence foreign voters could exercise. Haynes stresses that when it became clear the Irish vote could become a determining factor, this led to questions about the naturalization laws and whether these were sufficient.⁷⁰ This can be directly linked to the Know Nothings’ call for repealing naturalization laws (Figure 1,1). We can also link the call for a pure school system (1.3) and American institutions (1.8) to another consequence of the anti-Catholic environment; namely the foundation of

⁶⁵ Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 6.

⁶⁶ F. Saunders, “The Progress and Prospects of America (1855)”, in: J. Gjerde, *Major Problems in American Immigration and Ethnic History: Documents and Essays* (Boston 1998) 140-144, 143.

⁶⁷ Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 105.

⁶⁸ Beecher, *A Plea for the West*, 136.

⁶⁹ Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*, 141.

⁷⁰ Haynes, *The Causes of Know-Nothing Success*, 74.

Catholic organizations. Catholics started to found institutions themselves in order to survive in the nativist environment:

“To counter anti-Catholicism, Irish-American bishops, priests, nuns, and brothers, [...] created institutions to enable their people to persevere and survive hostile circumstances. Fearing Protestant and/or secularist proselytism in public education, they established parish schools to preserve the faith of children while at the same time providing them with basic skills to find employment.”⁷¹

They founded schools, hospitals, universities and other establishments, resulting in “an almost self-sufficient Catholic urban ethnic America.”⁷² Which may have contributed to the nativist fear of Catholics and foreigners.

⁷¹ L. McCaffrey, ‘Irish Textures in American Catholicism’ *The Catholic Historical Review* 78 (1992) 1-18, 13.

⁷² McCaffrey, *Irish Textures*, 13.

1.6 Conclusion of Chapter 1

To answer the question of what the objectives of the Know Nothings were, we can say that they wanted to avert all foreign and Catholic influences from society and they called for the repeal of naturalization laws. This philosophy is derived from the objections the party had against foreigners, constituted by the idea that Irish and Catholics could not adapt to American society. Multiple factors played an important role in the nature of these objections. First of all the large number of Irish immigrants that arrived in the United States flooded the cities and took jobs from native born Americans. This led to dissatisfaction amongst citizens as their wages also lowered because of the job competition. A second underlying issue is the bad reputation and low status of the Irish population. They were often of poor health and lived in poverty, which led to alcoholism and criminality. This created a sense of aversion amongst Americans. The final factor, which I would like to argue played the most significant role in the motivations behind the aims of the Know Nothings is that the Irish immigrants were members of the Catholic faith. An intense fear of Catholicism and Papal influences in American institutions existed and the Irish were considered to be pawns of the Catholic Church. To the question whether race is an underlying issue, we can say that the Irish were not considered to be fully 'white', but yet it seems the other factors predominate and that the arguments are more of an economic, moral and religious nature.

Chapter 2 - Know Nothings' objections in multimedia sources

After investigating the objectives of the Know Nothings and how these can be derived from circumstances in society, I will analyze how these objections are expressed in multimedia sources. By looking at primary sources, I want to investigate whether the objections the Know Nothings had can be connected to depictions of the Irish in imagery and documents. In addition, I want to see whether a certain type of symbolism predominates. I expect there to be implicit references towards the race of the Irish that could indicate a connection to racial discrimination. First of all, I will explain a number of cartoons. Secondly we will consider examples of Know Nothing propaganda. Thirdly I will look at several newspapers and finally I will use some excerpts from the Know Nothing Manifest of 1855. All these primary sources are connected to the Know Nothings or nativists. By using different types of sources I will try to create a complete view of how the objections are expressed.

2.1 Cartoons



Figure 3: Know Nothing Cartoon, 1854

The first source I will review is a Know Nothing cartoon published in 1854 (figure 3). It depicts an Irishman and a German stealing a ballot box. A reference is made to the drinking habits of the immigrants, as the Irishman is wearing a barrel of whiskey, while the German wears a keg of beer. In the back other immigrants are fighting. The Know Nothings blamed the immigrants for election-day violence and fraud.⁷³

While a reference is made towards alcoholism and sabotaging the elections, no distinct physical features are depicted that can be related to a racist characterization. The Irishman and the German are portrayed in a cartoonlike way, but neither of them is portrayed in a way that points at the idea them being of a different race. The only distinct stereotypical feature in this cartoon are the freckles on the face of the Irishman. Thus this cartoon resembles the fear of foreign influence in elections and the view of Irish as being alcoholics.

⁷³ Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 128.



Figure 4: Nathaniel Currier, *Taking a "Smile"*, 1854

This image by Nathaniel Currier is called *Taking a "Smile"* (figure 4). Three laughing and drinking Irishmen are depicted. They wear stylish clothing but there is a fixed patch on the jacket of the person on the right and the top hats they wear look disheveled. They have big noses that resemble 'drinker's noses' in my opinion and they look rather silly and leprechaun-like, giving them a comical look. The 'smile' in the title refers to a glass of liquor. In my view there are no implicit references towards the Irish race. Instead, this cartoon resembles the nativists opinion of the Irish being paupers and alcoholics. The artist of this image wanted to portray the Irish as being foolish people.



Figure 5: Thomas Nast, *The Usual Irish Way of Doing Things*, 1871

If we compare figure 3 and 4 with this image by Thomas Nast in *Harper's Weekly* (figure 5), we see an entirely different image of the Irishman. This image was published in 1871, over ten years after the decline of the Know Nothings. The Irishman in this image clearly resembles a monkey, with an ape-like mouth and dark facial hair. A clear portrayal of the simian Irishman which is a racial stereotype. There is a bottle of liquor in his right hand, a torch in his left hand and he is sitting on a barrel of gunpowder. Just like in figure 3 and 4, there are references to the drinking habits of the Irish and their reputation as troublemakers.

In trying to find an explanation in the difference between the imagery from 1854 and 1871, I have found an article by Forker that suggests that over time the depiction of Irish turned into the stereotype image as pictured by Thomas Nast:

“In the 1860s, especially after the rise of the Fenian Movement, the cartoon representation of the Irish grew more grotesque apelike monsters menacing law, order, and British middle-class values. The steady decline of Paddy the Irishman into a grotesque Celtic Frankenstein between 1860 and 1880 was the price exacted from Irishmen for their 'increasing political activity and agrarian protest.’”⁷⁴

The Fenians are an Irish nationalist group in both Ireland and the United States that strived for an independent Ireland. After considering these three cartoons, I would like to argue that the racial identity of the Irish became a more important issue in the years *after* the Know Nothings were active. As Forker explained, the Irish are portrayed more monster and ape-like after the Irish became more politically active and were organized in a nationalist group. The collectivity and the potential strength of the Irish possibly made them more fearsome, which could be why they are portrayed more violent and ape-like.

⁷⁴ M. Forker, 'The Use of the 'Cartoonist's Armoury' in Manipulating Public Opinion: Anti-Irish Imagery in 19th Century British and American Periodicals' *Journal of Irish Studies* 27 (2012) 58-71, 62.

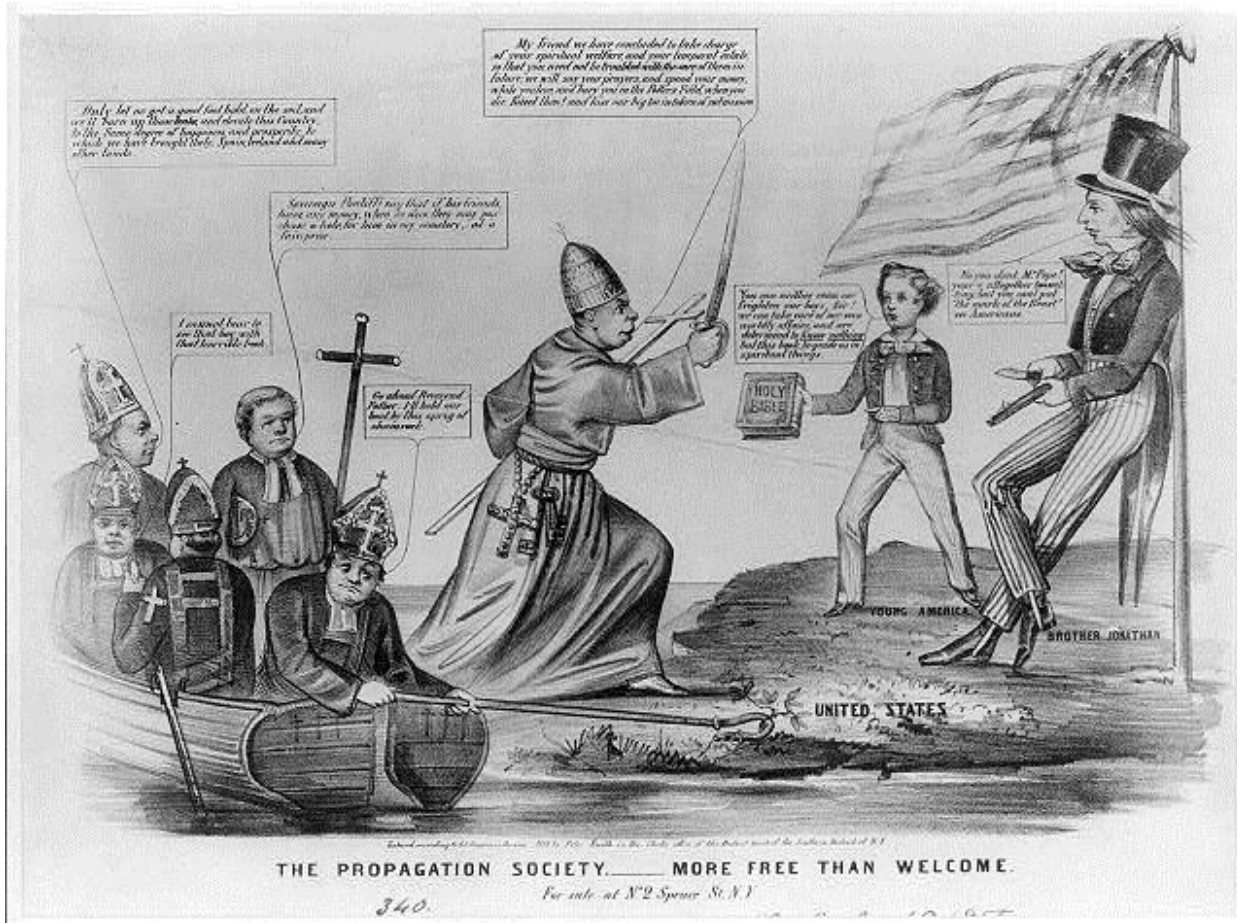


Figure 6: Nathaniel Currier, *The Propagation Society – More Free Than Welcome*, 1855

This image represents the nativist' anti-Catholic attitude (figure 6). Pope Pius IX and five bishops are trying to come ashore in America. The bishop that in the back of the boat tries to pull the boat ashore by claspings his staff around a shamrock. The shamrock is a well-known symbol of Ireland and thus the connection between Catholicism and the Irish is emphasized. The pope holds a cross and a sword and says:

"My friend we have concluded to take charge of your spiritual welfare, and your temporal estate, so that you need not be troubled with the care of them in future; we will say your prayers and spend your money, while you live, and bury you in the Potters Field, when you die. Kneel then! and kiss our big toe in token of submission."

On the right side stand Young America and Brother Jonathan, who is a symbol of New England. Brother Jonathan responds: "No you don't, Mr. Pope! You're altogether too willing; but you can't put 'the mark of the Beast' on Americans." By 'the mark of the Beast' he means the mark of the devil and this indicates that the pope has evil intentions. Young America

holds the Holy Bible and says: "You can neither coax, nor frighten our boys, Sir! we can take care of our own worldly affairs, and are determined to 'Know nothing' but this book, to guide us in spiritual things." The use of 'Know Nothing' in this sentence is both a reference to the Know Nothing party and to the notion that, unlike Catholics, Americans fully rely upon the bible for spiritual guidance. The bishop on the far left says: "I cannot bear to see that boy, with that horrible book," while the second bishop on the far right says: "Only let us get a good foot hold on the soil, and we'll burn up those Books and elevate this Country to the Same degree of happiness and prosperity, to which we have brought Italy, Spain, Ireland and many other lands." They both imply that they do not follow the teachings of the bible and will only try to overrule America, just as they previously did with the three European countries the bishop mentions. This cartoon expresses exactly what the Know Nothings were afraid of. Namely, that the Catholic Church was seeking to dominate America. The bishops in the cartoon are repulsed by the bible and even suggest that they will burn them.

2.2 Propaganda



Figuur 7: *Citizen Know Nothing*, 1855

Figure 7 is a Know Nothing poster that reflects the nativist' ideals. A young, Caucasian man with a fedora is pictured. He is surrounded by American symbols, such as the American flag and an eagle holding the American shield. He is called 'Citizen Know Nothing' and this

reflects what the Know Nothings thought to be the ideal American. This perfect citizen is clearly a native born and not an immigrant.

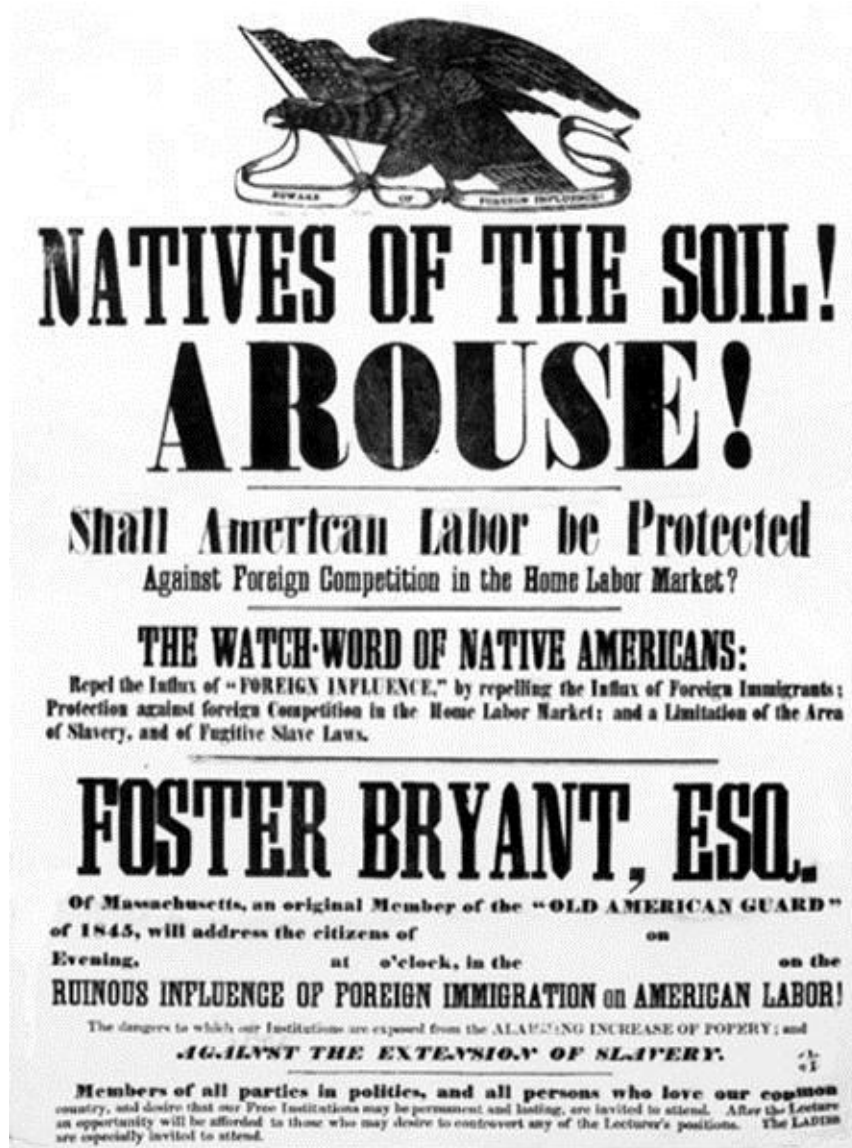


Figure 8 *Natives of the Soil! Arouse!* 1856

Figure 8 is an announcement for a meeting led by nativist Foster Bryant about the “protection of American Labor”. A big eagle with an American flag and the words ‘BEWARE OF FOREIGN INFLUENCE’ is pictured at the top of the announcement. The purpose of the poster is to appeal to worried Americans that are afraid for competition on the labor market. They are trying to tell the people to take action now against the “ruinous influence of foreign immigration”. In this source the economic objections of the nativists against the immigrants come forward.

2.3 Newspapers

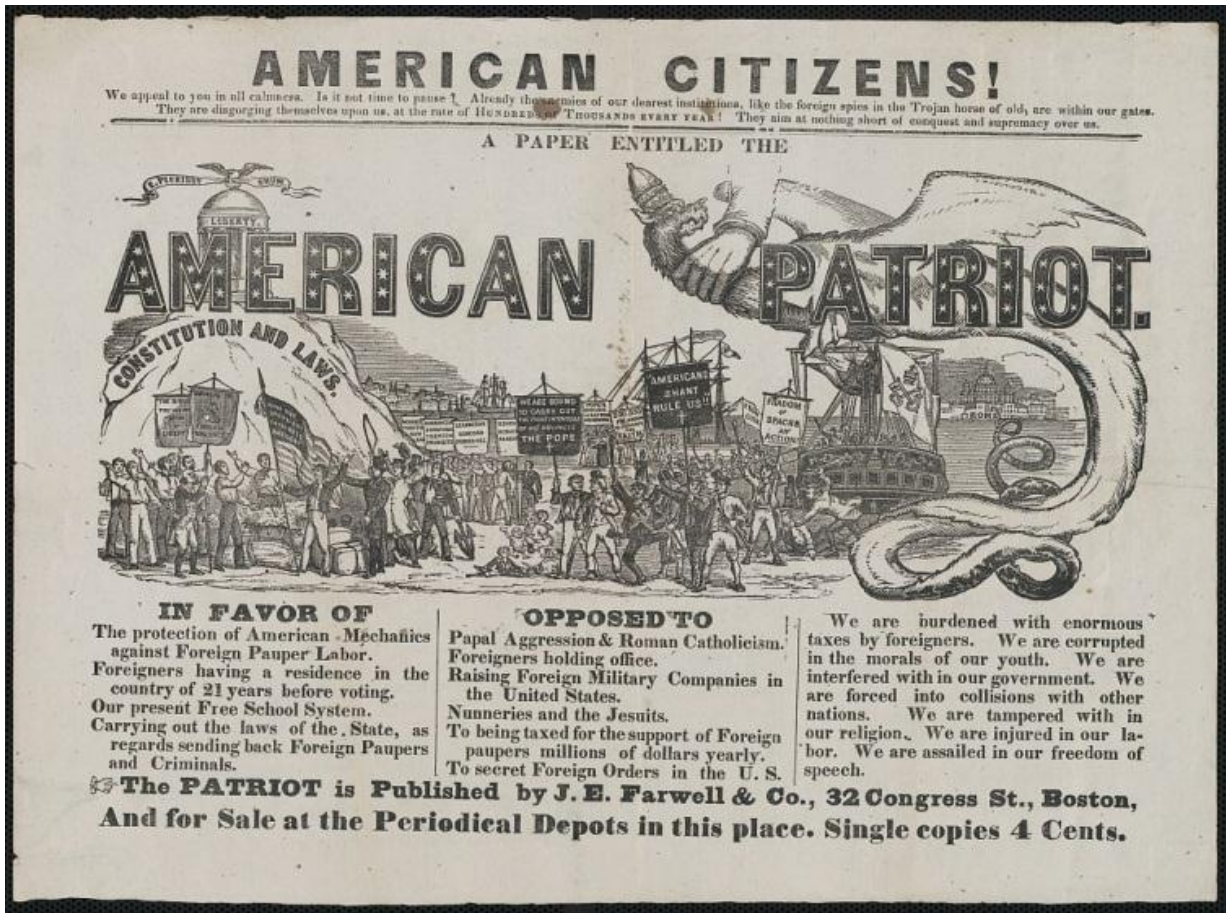


Figure 9 American Patriot, 1852

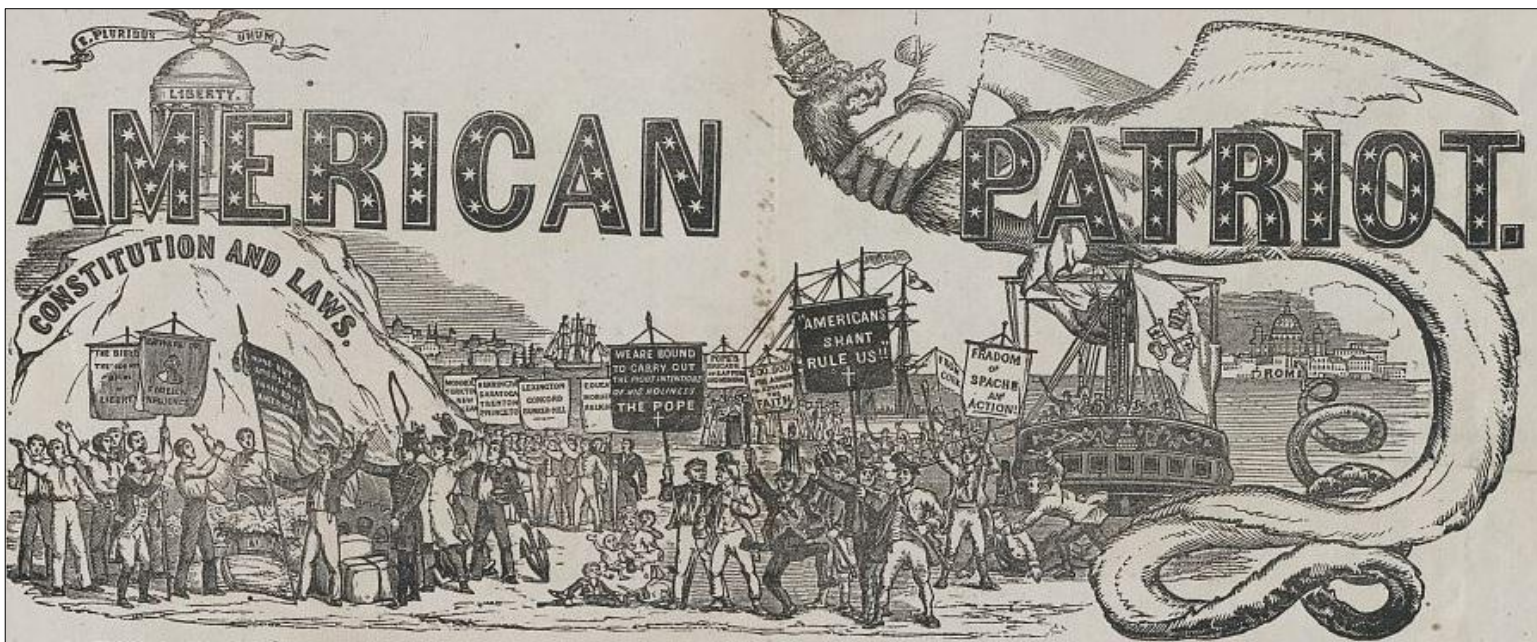


Figure 10 a close-up of American Patriot

In figure 9 and 10 we see the front page of the *American Patriot*, a nativist newspaper that existed for a short while.⁷⁵ The objectives of the paper are equal to those of the Know Nothings (figure 1). For example, the paper is in favor of “the protection of American Mechanics against Foreign Pauper Labor” and opposed to “Papal Aggression & Roman Catholicism” and “Foreigners holding office”. The image on top of the front page is full of symbolism. In the right corner a hand strangles a dragon-like figure that resembles the pope and in the distance we see the Vatican in Rome. On the left we see Americans celebrating the constitution and laws, while on the right a boat just arrived with Irish immigrants. On the boat hangs a flag with the papal symbol and a flag with the text “from Cork”. The group of Irish that just came ashore is holding up provocative banners with the words “Americans shan’t rule us” and “We Are Bound to Carry Out the Pious Intentions of His Holiness the Pope”. They are portrayed as unruly and violent people that have the intention to serve the Catholic church and to follow their own rules. They are not portrayed as apes but rather as disobedient, dangerous and looking for trouble. The criminal nature of the Irish is also portrayed, in the form of a man that clubbing someone to death right in front of the boat.

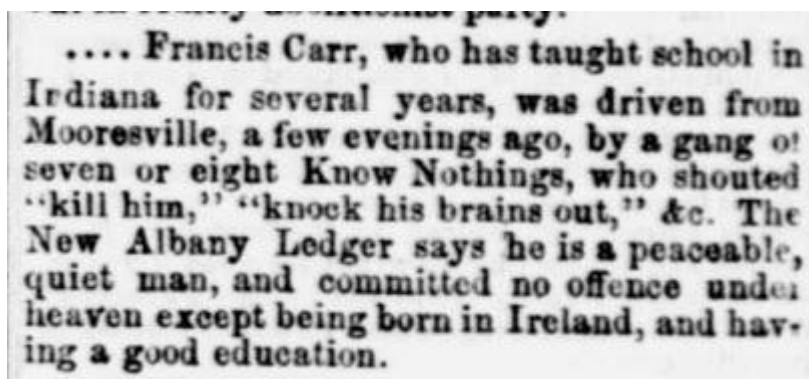


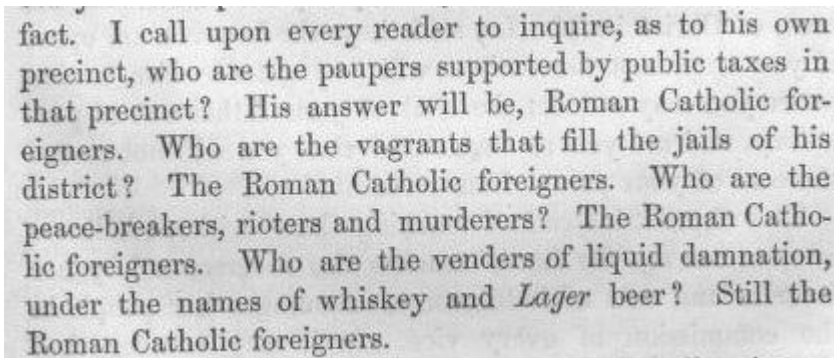
Figure 11 Washington D.C. *Evening Star*, August 17, 1855

In this excerpt from the *Evening Star* (figure 11), I have found an example of the use of violence by Know Nothings against the Irish. It is written that the victim “committed no offence under heaven except being born in Ireland.” Thus the only reason the Know Nothings attacked the man is because he was Irish.

⁷⁵ Library of Congress, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2008661538/>, accessed 05-06-15.

2.4 Know Nothing Platform of 1855

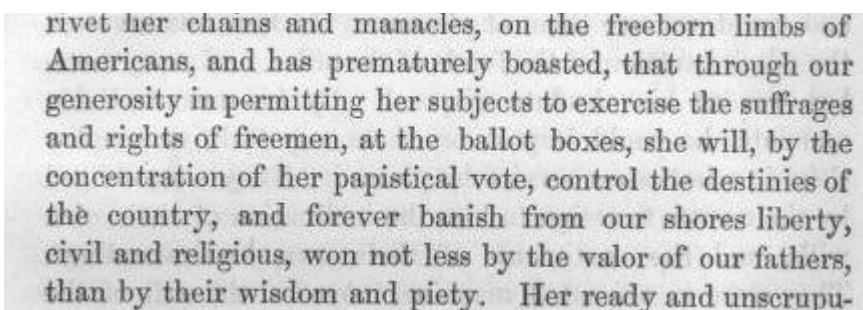
Now I will discuss several excerpts from the *Know Nothing Platform (KNP)* that was published in 1855. The writer of the platform is unknown.



fact. I call upon every reader to inquire, as to his own precinct, who are the paupers supported by public taxes in that precinct? His answer will be, Roman Catholic foreigners. Who are the vagrants that fill the jails of his district? The Roman Catholic foreigners. Who are the peace-breakers, rioters and murderers? The Roman Catholic foreigners. Who are the venders of liquid damnation, under the names of whiskey and Lager beer? Still the Roman Catholic foreigners.

Figure 12 KNP, page 10.

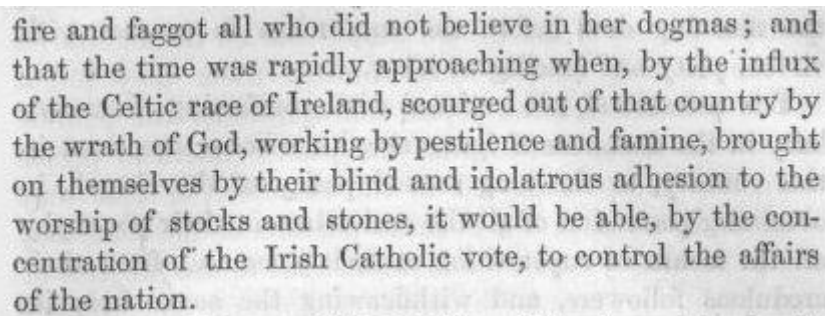
In the passage in figure 12 the writer blames several problems on Catholic foreigners. First of all they are the paupers the tax payer has to provide for. Secondly, they fill the jails and they are criminals. Finally, they are the sellers and users of alcohol.



rivet her chains and manacles, on the freeborn limbs of Americans, and has prematurely boasted, that through our generosity in permitting her subjects to exercise the suffrages and rights of freemen, at the ballot boxes, she will, by the concentration of her papistical vote, control the destinies of the country, and forever banish from our shores liberty, civil and religious, won not less by the valor of our fathers, than by their wisdom and piety. Her ready and unscrupu-

Figure 13 KNP, page 17.

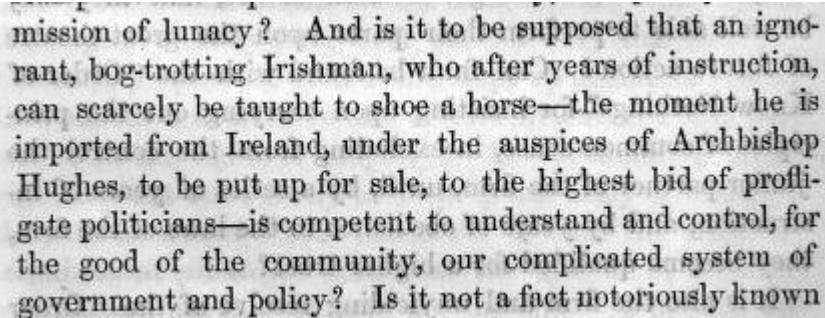
In figure 12 the accusation the writer makes is that the papists will be able to decide the elections, as their subjects are willing to vote whatever they tell them to.



fire and faggot all who did not believe in her dogmas; and that the time was rapidly approaching when, by the influx of the Celtic race of Ireland, scourged out of that country by the wrath of God, working by pestilence and famine, brought on themselves by their blind and idolatrous adhesion to the worship of stocks and stones, it would be able, by the concentration of the Irish Catholic vote, to control the affairs of the nation.

Figure 14 KNP, page 25.

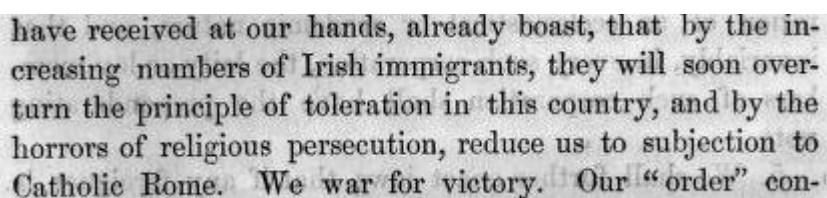
In figure 18 there is a mention of the 'influx of the Celtic race', which is a reference to the Irish. This name for the Irish could indicate that the Know Nothings considered them to be of a different race, namely the Celtic race.



mission of lunacy? And is it to be supposed that an ignorant, bog-trotting Irishman, who after years of instruction, can scarcely be taught to shoe a horse—the moment he is imported from Ireland, under the auspices of Archbishop Hughes, to be put up for sale, to the highest bid of profligate politicians—is competent to understand and control, for the good of the community, our complicated system of government and policy? Is it not a fact notoriously known

Figure 15 KNP, page 39.

In figure 18 there is a suggestion that the Irish are ignorant, dumb and not capable enough to understand how the government works.



have received at our hands, already boast, that by the increasing numbers of Irish immigrants, they will soon overturn the principle of toleration in this country, and by the horrors of religious persecution, reduce us to subjection to Catholic Rome. We war for victory. Our "order" con-

Figuur 16 KNP, page 44.

In figure 19 the fear of the Irish being pawns in the hands of the Catholic Church is expressed once again.

2.5 Conclusion of Chapter 2

I would like to argue that the nature of the argumentation and symbolism that can be found in primary sources is primarily aimed at the portrayal of the Irish as inebriated, silly and violent. In addition, American symbols such as the American flag and the eagle are frequently used. The Irish are portrayed as either dumb and drunk or as violent and disobeying. In the imagery the connection between the Irish and Catholics is also emphasized. The Catholics are portrayed as evil and power hungry. In the accompanying texts and in the Manifest of 1855 it is particularly evident that the nativists want to warn the Americans for the impending danger of foreigners and Catholics. The economic motif is stressed and the objectives of the Know Nothing party are made public. There are implicit references towards the Catholic Church and its affiliation with the Irish, for example in the shape of the shamrock (figure 6) and the Irish boat that sails under a flag with the Papal symbol (figure 10). After drawing a comparison with the cartoon from 1871 (figure 5) I must conclude that a racial and simian depiction of the Irish is not used until two decades later. According to Higham, the concept of race had not yet attained the meaning and fixed character that we use today:

“It is significant that the very concept of race had not yet attained its later fixity and definiteness. Racial nationalism, having arisen out of political and literary speculation, not out of scientific enquiry, displayed a characteristic vagueness. In the sense in which nationalists used the word, “race” often meant little more than nationalist character.⁷⁶

Thus a racial portrayal is not a dominant factor in these primary sources. Above all, the nativist’ nature aimed at the protection of American interests is shown. They also provide a warning. As Higham stated, xenophobia and nativism are subject to social conditions, and arise in times when there is a sense of fear for the power of an unknown group.⁷⁷ The character of the imagery and text in the primary sources is thus overshadowed by the Anti-Catholic, economic and Anti-immigrant aspects, instead of a focus on an Irish race.

⁷⁶ Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 11.

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, 4.

Conclusion

To conclude my thesis I will now answer the main research question, namely: “What were the motivations and means of the Know Nothings concerning the discrimination of Irish-Americans in the 1850’s?” My hypothesis was that I expected there to be objections towards the race of the Irish and I anticipated to find implicit references towards race in the primary sources.

In my view the main motivations behind the hatred towards the Irish were based more on economic, moral and religious conditions, rather than being based on a racial approach. The issue of race was not yet fully exercised in the 1850s. The Know Nothing Party is founded on the fear of the unknown: in this case the fear of a group of immigrants of large size, that practiced an unfavorable religion and that could possibly exert too much influence in American society. The view that the Irish would not be able to settle into a Protestant, Republican society is what lays at the core of the beliefs of the Know Nothings. It is not based on a feeling of the Irish being inferior.

It is suggested by multiple scholars that in time the racial typology got to play a bigger role. This corresponds with the observations I made in chapter 2 after analyzing multimedia sources. The means by which the Know Nothings made their objections clear was to portray the Irishman as a foolish drunkard with Catholic affiliations, along with the use of textual publications in which their prime concerns were communicated and the use of American symbols. No simian typology of the Irish can be distinguished in the primary sources from the 1850s, while such a portrayal *can* be found in the cartoon by Thomas Nast from 1871 (figure 5). The simian depiction of the Irish in later sources and whether race and ‘whiteness’ grew more important over time provide opportunities for further research. My hypothesis proved to be wrong, but if I were to formulate a new hypothesis I would say that the definition of race changed in the decades after the Know Nothing Party and it is my expectation that this will come forward in cartoons.

Looking back on the academic discussion, I would argue that Jensen was partially right in his statement that the Americans did not consider the Irish to be ape-like, at least in the case of the Know Nothings. Regarding Higham and Nativism, I would say that I have

provided a picture as to which conditions led to the wave of nativism in the 1850s. This thesis provides an understanding of how people respond to the fear that immigration induces. This can be useful in comparing waves of immigration and the negative sentiments that occur in society against these immigrants and providing some understanding as to how problems arise.

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