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# Nativism and the Creation of a Republican Majority in the North before the Civil War

William E. Gienapp

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Historians have long recognized that the rise of the sectional Republican party was an essential link in the chain of events that led to the Civil War. The latest in a series of attempts since 1840 to form a northern antislavery party, it was the first such party to garner substantial electoral support, and following its national triumph in 1860 and the inauguration of Abraham Lincoln as the country's first Republican president, war broke out between the North and the South. The history of the early Republican party poses the question not simply why the party formed, but more important, why it succeeded; why by the 1856 presidential election it had become the principal adversary of the Democratic party in the country; and why by the end of the decade it had won the allegiance of a majority of northern voters and was the strongest party in the nation.

As is well known, in the decade before the Civil War the nation's party system realigned. In accounting for the onset of that realignment and the ultimate triumph of the Republican party, historians have traditionally stressed the Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854) and the slavery-extension issue. In recent years, however, a number of scholars, including Michael F. Holt, Joel H. Silbey, Ronald P. Formisano, Paul Kleppner, and Robert Kelley, have challenged that explanation and emphasized instead the centrality of ethnic and religious antagonisms in the antebellum upheaval. "Far from being . . . directly related to slavery and the sectional crisis," Silbey declares in a sympathetic summary, "mass political conflicts in the . . . 1850s were primarily rooted in a complex interaction of social and political perceptions and religious, national, and racial prejudices and divisions, all brought together under the heading of ethnocultural conflict."<sup>1</sup> According to those historians, the Republican party's

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Fitzgibbon Holt, *Forging a Majority: The Formation of the Republican Party in Pittsburgh, 1848-1860* (New Haven, 1969); Michael F. Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (New York, 1978); Michael F. Holt, "The Politics of Impatience: The Origins of Know Nothingism,"

ideology and the reasons men voted for it transcended the slavery issue; nativism was also important in explaining the party's startling growth.

Not all Civil War historians, however, have subscribed to that view. In reaffirming the primacy of the slavery issue in northern politics, Eric Foner and Richard H. Sewell have advanced the most forceful critique of the ethnocultural interpretation of the early Republican party. Foner and Sewell recognize the importance of nativism in the early stage of realignment, and they grant that the Republican party gained the support of many Know Nothings, but they maintain that it did so, in Sewell's words, "without having to embrace a particle of the nativists' platform." Adding weight to their argument is Dale Baum's analysis of Massachusetts voting patterns, the only study available that traces the voting behavior of Know Nothings in a state throughout the decade. Baum downgrades the importance of nativism in the initial Know Nothing coalition, and he goes beyond Foner and Sewell to argue that most Bay State Know Nothings did not join the Republican party, whatever its appeal. He concludes that the Know Nothings "played a very minor role in the transition from a Whig to a Republican majority in Massachusetts."<sup>2</sup>

The antebellum realignment, which began at the state and local levels before 1854, involved more than simply sectional issues. Indeed, the new anti-slavery Republican party made so little headway initially that seasoned political observers predicted it would soon disappear. Instead, the strongest organization opposing the Democratic party in the North and throughout the nation in 1854 and 1855 was the anti-Catholic, anti-immigrant American party. Dubbed the Know Nothings because members were instructed if questioned to say that they knew nothing about it, this secret political society underwent a phenomenal expansion beginning in 1853; in less than two years it had organized in every state and, claiming a national membership of one million voters, seemed destined to replace the rapidly disintegrating Whig party as the major opposition to the Democratic party in the country. The Know Nothing order's strength in the North was first manifested in the 1854 fall elections, when it completely dominated the People's party in Indiana, played a major role in the fusion victories in Maine, Ohio, and Illinois, swamped the once proud Whigs in Pennsylvania and Massachusetts in direct

*Journal of American History*, 60 (Sept. 1973), 309-31; Ronald P. Formisano, *The Birth of Mass Political Parties: Michigan, 1827-1861* (Princeton, 1971); Paul Kleppner, *The Cross of Culture: A Social Analysis of Midwestern Politics, 1850-1900* (New York, 1970); Paul Kleppner, *The Third Electoral System, 1853-1892: Parties, Voters, and Political Cultures* (Chapel Hill, 1979); Robert Kelley, *The Cultural Pattern in American Politics: The First Century* (New York, 1979); Joel H. Silbey, *The Transformation of American Politics, 1840-1860* (Englewood Cliffs, 1967); Joel H. Silbey, "The Surge of Republican Power: Partisan Antipathy, American Social Conflict, and the Coming of the Civil War," in *Essays on American Antebellum Politics, 1840-1860*, ed. Stephen E. Maizlish and John J. Kushma (College Station, 1982), 201-202.

<sup>2</sup> Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (New York, 1970), 226-60; Eric Foner, *Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War* (New York, 1980), 15-53; Richard H. Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom: Antislavery Politics in the United States, 1837-1860* (New York, 1976), 254-365, esp. 265-77, 282, 292, 348-54; Dale Baum, "Know-Nothingism and the Republican Majority in Massachusetts: The Political Realignment of the 1850s," *Journal of American History*, 64 (March 1978), 959-86; Dale Baum, *The Civil War Party System: The Case of Massachusetts, 1848-1876* (Chapel Hill, 1984), 24-54.

and beyond, however, was not entirely attributable to the slavery issue. The antebellum voter's political universe did not orient exclusively toward national affairs; activities at the state and local level, where the bulk of nineteenth-century partisan combat was located, also shaped a party's image and molded its constituency. Even after the raid on Lawrence, Kansas, and the caning of Sen. Charles Sumner in the Senate chamber dramatically intensified sectional feeling, Republicans were unwilling to hazard everything on the slavery extension issue. In seeking to broaden the party's electoral base as well as to reinforce the existing loyalties of party members, Republican spokesmen raised a number of issues other than sectionalism of which anti-Catholicism was the most important.<sup>26</sup>

The basic problem confronting Republicans was to gain the support of the bulk of the Know Nothings without alienating the foreign-born. Any emphasis on antireligionism promised to drive immigrant voters back into the arms of the Democratic party. Anti-Catholicism, on the other hand, entailed little political risk, since party leaders had concluded that the Catholic vote was solidly and hopelessly Democratic. Moreover, hostility to the Catholic church was one principle on which both North Americans and Protestant immigrants could unite; indeed, in many areas Protestant immigrants had cooperated with the Know Nothings when the latter emphasized anti-Catholicism as distinct from antireligionism. When the Know Nothings were openly anti-immigrant, naturalized Protestant voters bitterly opposed them. A Know Nothing organizer in Illinois reported that Swedes strongly sympathized with the order: "They are Lutheran & down on the Pope & where the proper cue is given they are first rate K Ns." Similarly, a Republican congressman emphasized to an Ohio German leader that a union of Protestant and radical Germans and Know Nothings was possible precisely because both groups shared an intense hatred of Catholicism. In the same spirit an Illinois Republican editor, noting that German Protestant immigrants had brought a strong animosity toward Catholicism with them to this country, advocated that anti-Catholic pamphlets be circulated among them in order to "stir up their *prejudices* anew." The result, he predicted, would be that "we shall have every man of them vote the [R]epublican ticket."<sup>27</sup>

In their first national campaign, Republicans exploited animosity toward Catholics, particularly in areas where the Know Nothings were strong, while they were careful not to indulge in indiscriminate attacks on the foreign-born.

<sup>26</sup> Holt also calls attention to the importance of this theme. Holt, *Political Crisis of the 1850s*, 176–80. In arguing that the Republicans rejected nativism, Foner and Sewell fail to draw a sharp enough distinction between anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic feelings. Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 226–60; Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 265–77, 282n, 349–54.

<sup>27</sup> Thompson to Ullmann, Aug. 14, 1855, Ullmann Papers; Timothy C. Day to Friedrich Hassaurek, March 25, 1856, Friedrich Hassaurek Papers (Ohio Historical Society, Columbus); Jacob McDonald to Millard Fillmore, Oct. 15, 1856, Millard Fillmore Papers (State University of New York, Oswego); Stephen L. Hansen, *The Making of the Third Party System: Voters and Parties in Illinois, 1850–1876* (Ann Arbor, 1980), 87. The *Chicago Tribune* affirmed: "Republicanism has nothing to hope from the Catholic vote. There is not a Catholic in Chicago who does not hate it; there is not one who does not set it down as a heresy." What was true in Chicago, it continued, was true almost everywhere. *Chicago Tribune*, Feb. 8, 1856.

neath the canopy of republicanism was of critical significance for the eventual emergence of the Republican party.

In its beginning phase the Know Nothing movement attracted support from a broad spectrum of voters, and its success reflected a number of factors. For some voters it represented a momentary vehicle of protest; for others, especially homeless Whigs, it offered a temporary political refuge. Certainly, opportunistic politicians infiltrated the order's leadership and often diverted the movement to their own ends. Nevertheless, the Know Nothings' astounding electoral strength was not primarily the result of a temporary vacuum caused by the demise of the Whig party or by the effective manipulation of the masses by selfish elites.<sup>5</sup> Instead, popular support for Know Nothingism stemmed in large measure from its extraordinary appeal, which combined opposition to the liquor traffic, hostility to the Kansas-Nebraska Act, and a searing hatred of Catholics and immigrants and of politicians who pandered to them. With a program that blended unvarnished bigotry and a sincere desire for reform, the American party provided an outlet for the welling discontent in the electorate and pulled large numbers of northerners into its crusade.

Eventually the sectional controversy would divide the order, but at the outset American party newspapers and spokesmen throughout the free states took a clear stand against the extension of slavery. In states where the party ran separate candidates in 1854, no clear-cut choice existed on the Nebraska question: Voters could cast Know Nothing ballots and still express opposition to the repeal of the Missouri Compromise. Even harsh Republican critics such as the *New York Tribune* conceded that "beyond a doubt the great body of Know-Nothings in the free States are Anti-Nebraska men." In addition, several Free Soil leaders reported in dismay that many of their former party associates were, as George W. Julian phrased it, "crazy after Know Nothingism."<sup>6</sup> Voting patterns substantiate significant support for the nativist movement among third-party voters, particularly in New England, but it is important to recognize that in voting Know Nothing former Free Soilers did not surrender their

<sup>5</sup> Holt, "Politics of Impatience," 312-19; [Augusta, Me.] *Kennebec Journal*, Dec. 1, 1854; *New York Evening Post*, Nov. 15, Nov. 20, 1854; *New York Times*, Dec. 6, 1854; *Chicago Tribune*, June 29, 1855, Feb. 4, 1856; *New York Herald*, June 27, 1856.

<sup>6</sup> *New York Tribune*, April 19, 1855; George W. Julian to Gerrit Smith, Nov. 16, 1854, Gerrit Smith Papers (Syracuse University, Syracuse, N.Y.); Charles Francis Adams Diary, Nov. 14, 1854, Adams Family Papers (Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston); [Washington, D.C.] *National Era*, Nov. 23, 1854. Reflective of the general tendency to segregate those concerns, historians have unduly minimized anti-Catholic sentiment in the antislavery movement; yet as David M. Potter has pointed out, there were striking parallels between anti-Catholic and antislavery propaganda, and support for the two movements often overlapped. Gilbert Osofsky, "Abolitionists, Irish Immigrants, and the Dilemmas of Romantic Nationalism," *American Historical Review*, 80 (Oct. 1975), 889-912; David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861*, ed. Don E. Fehrenbacher (New York, 1976), 252. The state context was important and patterns varied, but Know Nothingism was strong in many areas where the Free Soilers had previously enjoyed considerable support, such as Worcester County, Massachusetts, the Northern Tier of Pennsylvania, and Ohio's Western Reserve, where even in 1856 the Know Nothings still controlled local nominations. The Free Soil party in New York was always a special case, since its origins were so intimately connected with the rupture of the state Democratic organization in the 1840s; of the party's supporters in 1848, approximately 10 percent voted Know Nothing in 1854 and also in 1855.

TABLE 1  
 Percentage of 1852 Free Soil Voters Casting American Ballots  
 in Subsequent State Elections

	1854	1855	1856	TOWNSHIPS (N)
CONNECTICUT	—	62	18	146
MASSACHUSETTS	57	14	48 <sup>1</sup>	316; 315
NEW YORK	0	0	—	351; 360

SOURCES: Election returns, Massachusetts State Archives; *Connecticut Register*; *Hartford Courant*; *Hartford Times*; *Boston Daily Advertiser*; *Albany Argus*; *Albany Evening Journal*; [Binghamton] *Broome Republican*; *Auburn Daily Advertiser*; *Auburn Journal*; *Jamestown Journal*; *Plattsburgh Republican*; *Poughkeepsie Eagle*; *Buffalo Republic*; *Buffalo Daily Courier*; *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*; *Dansville Herald*; [Geneseo] *Livingston Republican*; *Rochester Democrat*; *Rochester Daily American*; *New York Times*; *New York Tribune*; [Rome] *Roman Daily Sentinel*; *Utica Daily Gazette*; *Middletown Whig Press*; *Newburgh Telegraph*; [Jamaica] *Long Island Democrat*; *Corning Weekly Journal*; *Sag Harbor Corrector*; *Ithaca Chronicle*; [Penn Yan] *Yates County Whig*.

NOTE: Free Soil votes are for president 1852. State elections are Connecticut: 1855 and 1856 governor; Massachusetts: 1854, 1855, and 1856 governor; New York: 1854 governor, 1855 secretary of state.

<sup>1</sup> Vote for Henry J. Gardner (Frémont American).

antislavery principles. (See table 1.)<sup>7</sup> As late as 1856 a Connecticut Republican explained that the slavery-extension issue had been only partially effective in building up the party in that state because "the Americans express themselves with so much decision upon the subject, and come so fully up to our standard

<sup>7</sup> The figures given in this essay are derived by the statistical procedure of ecological regression. See J. Morgan Kousser, "Ecological Regression and the Analysis of Past Politics," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 4 (Autumn 1973), 237–62. Estimates are based on the entire electorate, including nonvoters and those entering the electorate between elections. For the method of calculating the number of eligible voters in various states, see William E. Gienapp, "'Politics Seem to Enter into Everything': Political Culture in the North, 1840–1860," in *Essays on American Antebellum Politics*, ed. Maizlish and Kushma, 67–69. Because ecological regression rests on assumptions not always replicated in reality, these percentages should be viewed as estimates rather than as precise figures. Proportions slightly beyond the upper and lower bounds of 100 and 0 percent have been set at those limits, and the other estimates adjusted accordingly. The main sources for election returns were the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, the *Tribune Almanac* (*Whig Almanac* until 1856), the *Connecticut Register*, the *Maine Register*, state archives, and local and state returns reported in the following newspapers: *Hartford Daily Courant* (1848–1860), *Hartford Daily Times* (1852–1856), [Augusta, Me.] *Kennebec Journal* (1856–1860), *Portland Daily Advertiser* (1856–1860), *Portland Eastern Argus* (1856–1860), *Boston Daily Advertiser* (1848–1860), *Springfield* [Mass.] *Republican* (1857–1859), *Albany Argus* [*Albany Atlas and Argus*] (1848–1860), *Albany Evening Journal* (1848–1860), [Binghamton] *Broome Republican* (1850–1860), *Auburn Daily Advertiser* (1849–1858), *Auburn Journal* (1852–1856), *Fredonia Censor* (1857), *Jamestown Journal* (1848–1860), *Plattsburgh Republican* (1848–1860), *Poughkeepsie Eagle* (1848–1860), *Buffalo Commercial Advertiser* (1848), *Buffalo Daily Courier* (1848–1856), *Buffalo Morning Express* (1850–1858), *Buffalo Republic* (1848–1855), *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (1848–1856), *Dansville Herald* (1852), [Geneseo] *Livingston Republican* (1854–1858), *Rochester Daily American* (1848–1857), *Rochester Democrat* (1848–1852), *Rochester Union and Advertiser* (1852–1858), *New York Times* (1848–1860), *New York Tribune* (1848–1860), [Rome] *Roman Citizen* (1849–1860), *Rome Daily Sentinel* (1855), *Utica Daily Gazette* (1848–1854), *Middletown Whig Press* (1854–1855), *Newburgh News* (1856–1857), *Newburgh Telegraph* (1848–1860), [Jamaica] *Long Island Democrat* (1848–1858), *Corning Weekly Journal* (1852–1858),

that it will be difficult to keep our party friends separated from their organization."<sup>8</sup>

The prominence of so many Free Soilers in the American party organization and the strong voting ties between the two movements cannot be explained away as mere expediency. The classic example often cited is Henry Wilson, the erstwhile Free Soil leader who joined the nativist bandwagon as part of a calculated bid to be elected to the United States Senate. Wilson was a dedicated antislavery man, but he was hardly so free from the taint of nativism as is commonly assumed. As a newly elected senator in 1855, he raised antislavery eyebrows by actively seeking grounds of accommodation with pro-Nebraska southern Know Nothings. Late in that year, after he had gone into the Republican party and no longer needed to cater to nativist sentiment, Wilson privately informed Salmon P. Chase that he was considering introducing a bill to extend the waiting period for naturalization from five to ten years. Contrary to later denials, he also supported Massachusetts's famous Two-Year Amendment.<sup>9</sup>

Like Wilson, rank-and-file Free Soilers generally placed first priority on the slavery issue, but it does not follow that they were indifferent to other concerns. Throughout the North during the decade, Free Soilers invariably supported protemperance candidates and in referenda voted almost unanimously to outlaw the sale of liquor. Moreover, although a majority of former Free Soilers in the Know Nothing coalition soon defected to the Republican party, a significant minority steadfastly adhered to the American party cause until the state organization abandoned its antislavery stance. (See table 1.) In a Connecticut referendum held in the fall of 1855 on a Know Nothing-sponsored constitutional amendment to impose a literacy requirement for voting, those 1852

*Sag Harbor Corrector* (1852-1860), *Ithaca American Citizen* (1856-1857), *Ithaca Chronicle* (1852-1855), [Penn Yan] *Yates County Whig* [later *Yates County Chronicle*] (1848-1858), *Cincinnati Enquirer* (1851), *Cincinnati Gazette* (1856-1860), *Cleveland Plain Dealer* (1856-1860), *Harrisburg Daily Telegraph* (1856), [Harrisburg] *Keystone* (1852-1856), and *Harrisburg Morning Herald* (1855). In addition, Paul Goodman generously made available his data for Maine and Massachusetts, which supplemented my own, and Joel H. Silbey kindly provided several New York returns that I lacked. Estimates for Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, and New York are at the township level, those for the remaining states are at the county level. Except for Ohio, for which incomplete membership figures are available, I have used the votes cast for American party candidates in state elections, and for all states the vote for Millard Fillmore in the 1856 presidential election, to measure Know Nothing strength. I have omitted the votes in 1854 and 1855 for American-backed fusion candidates in state and congressional races, since their support was not confined to Know Nothings. This procedure, while unavoidable, substantially understates the extent of Know Nothing participation in the Republican party in Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Maine, states where the American order was strong but did not run a separate state ticket in those years.

<sup>8</sup> Holt, *Political Crisis of the 1850s*, 170; Stephen E. Maizlish, "The Meaning of Nativism and the Crisis of the Union: The Know-Nothing Movement in the Antebellum North," in *Essays on American Antebellum Politics*, ed. Maizlish and Kushma, 177-82.

<sup>9</sup> Henry Wilson to Chase, Nov. 17, 1855, Salmon P. Chase Papers (Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia). See also Richard H. Abbott, *Cobbler in Congress: The Life of Henry Wilson, 1812-1875* (Lexington, Ky., 1972). Dale Baum argues that many antislavery men who backed the American cause in 1854 did so for lack of a political alternative and had no sympathy with nativism. Baum, "Know-Nothingism and the Republican Majority in Massachusetts," 964-65.

Free Soilers who went to the polls presented an unbroken phalanx in support of the amendment. In a similar referendum in 1857 in Massachusetts, 1852 Free Soilers who turned out favored by a decisive margin a literacy test, and apparently virtually all third-party members who endorsed the amendment had joined the Know Nothings in 1854. For many northerners anti-Catholicism and antislavery, both deeply rooted in evangelical Protestantism, were not mutually exclusive attitudes, nor did they perceive any necessity of choosing politically between the two. As a Cleveland observer commented after a Know Nothing victory in that center of antislavery feeling, adherents to the American party cause "looked upon the questions of Nativism and Catholicism, in the abstract, as not at all conflicting with the cause of African freedom."<sup>10</sup>

Members of the dark lantern society, especially outside the largest cities, were also generally sympathetic to prohibition. In a number of states in 1854 and later, the order supported candidates who endorsed prohibition; in addition, on advisory referendums in Ohio and Pennsylvania, Know Nothings strongly favored banning the sale of alcohol, while in Connecticut independent temperance voters, the most ardent prohibitionists in the state, backed American party candidates by decided margins. The linkage between the two movements arose naturally, since for both Know Nothings and temperance crusaders besotted Irish Catholics functioned as their primary negative-reference group. The *Chicago Tribune*, which merged reports of Irish drunkenness and disorder with nativist arguments, rhetorically asked, "Who does not know that the most depraved, debased, worthless and irredeemable drunkards and sots which curse the community, are Irish Catholics?" Asserting that the Catholic church's influence was "always directly in favor of drunkenness," it specifically endorsed the Maine Law as an anti-Catholic measure.<sup>11</sup>

Overarching those considerations was the growing hostility to immigrants, especially Catholics, that swept across the North in the 1850s. Manuscript evidence of the potency of anti-Catholic feeling in those years is overwhelming, and critics and defenders alike concurred with the assessment of a leading

<sup>10</sup> Neal Dow, *Reminiscences of Neal Dow* (Portland, Me., 1898), 306–307; Ian R. Tyrrell, *Sobering Up: From Temperance to Prohibition in Antebellum America, 1800–1860* (Westport, 1979), 261–64, 305; [Jefferson, Ohio] *Ashtabula Sentinel*, May 24, 1855. The turnout in Connecticut was low, and approximately 60 percent of the 1852 Free Soilers did not vote, but of those who participated, apparently virtually none voted against the amendment (the estimate is negative). The fact that it was a special election and that the amendment was certain to pass handily probably deflated turnout. *Connecticut Register* for 1856. Interpretation of the referendum in Massachusetts is complicated by the low turnout among all parties. Nevertheless, it seems significant that among 1852 Free Soilers (only 13 percent of whom voted) the amendment carried by a 3–1 margin, whereas Free Soil voters in 1854, who constituted a small fraction of the party because of massive defections that year to the Know Nothings, gave no support to the amendment. *Boston Daily Advertiser*, May 2, 1857; *Springfield [Mass.] Republican*, May 4, 1857.

<sup>11</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, March 20, 1854, Feb. 26, 1855. Ian R. Tyrrell argues that nativism and temperance appealed to different social groups. However, voting patterns on temperance referenda establish the strong affinity between the two crusades. In urban areas, some working class nativists were hostile to prohibition, although they generally sympathized with efforts to regulate immigrant saloons and eliminate public drinking among the foreign-born on the Sabbath. Tyrrell, *Sobering Up*, 264–69; Jed Dannenbaum, "Immigrants and Temperance: Ethnocultural Conflict in Cincinnati, 1845–1860," *Ohio History*, 87 (Spring 1978), 125–39.



American party member that "the Protestant feeling is our great element of strength" in the countryside. Referring to the Know Nothing movement, one Democrat wailed that "at the bottom of all this is a deep seated religious question—prejudice if you please, which nothing can withstand," and a Massachusetts Republican wrote after a Know Nothing victory that "the feeling against the subtle working of Cathol[ic]ism & Jesuitism is as old as the days of Cromwell & pervades the whole mass of the people." A New England Republican who accused the order's leaders of opportunism and self-seeking ambition did not doubt on the other hand that the rank and file were both sincere in their beliefs and genuinely alarmed, "& hence their holy horror & unusual zeal against the Roman Catholics." Not all Know Nothings, of course, maintained nativist sentiment with the same intensity, and with only a minority was it an all-consuming passion; nonetheless, for the substantial majority, as their subsequent voting behavior indicated, it was an important aspect of their partisanship. Though he acknowledged that a number of factors contributed to the Know Nothings' success, Rutherford B. Hayes unhesitatingly placed paramount importance on nativist sentiment. "How the people do hate Catholics," he commented after the 1854 election, "and what a happiness it was to thousands to have a chance to show it in what seemed a lawful and patriotic manner."<sup>12</sup>

The congruence of nativist, temperance, and antislavery attitudes, while not perfect, was sufficiently strong to complicate considerably the process of realignment. Had nativism and antislavery in particular not overlapped in the northern electorate, the task confronting Republican organizers would have been immeasurably simplified; as a multicausal movement with diverse sources of support, Know Nothingism presented a major obstacle to the drive to launch the Republican party. Because the power of the Know Nothings and their effective use of the slavery-extension issue helped block the formation of a Republican party in 1854 in key northern states, the first significant steps to organize the party occurred in 1855. The disruption of the American party's national convention in June, when a majority of northern delegates bolted in protest over the platform's endorsement of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, bolstered the Republican movement. Republican leaders sharply differed, however, over the sectional party's proper relationship with the Know Nothings. At stake in the struggle were both conflicting personal rivalries and alternative visions of how to build a formidable Republican organization.

A number of prominent Republican leaders, including Julian, Gamaliel Bailey of the *National Era*, Horace Greeley, and Gideon Welles, harshly denounced nativism and struggled to keep the party free from its taint, but the foremost Republicans who opposed any conciliation toward the Know Nothings were Thurlow Weed and particularly William Henry Seward, the

<sup>12</sup> Kenneth Rayner to Daniel Ullmann, Feb. 17, 1855, Daniel Ullmann Papers (New-York Historical Society, New York); E. A. Penniman to William Bigler, June 8, 1854, William Bigler Papers (Historical Society of Pennsylvania); Edward Winston to Charles Francis Adams, Jan. 25, 1855, Adams Family Papers; Edward Prentis to Francis Gillette, Jan. 5, 1855, copy, Joseph R. Hawley Papers (Library of Congress); Thomas R. Williams, ed., *Diary and Letters of Rutherford Birchard Hayes* (5 vols., Columbus, 1922), I, 470.

leaders of the party in New York. Weed and Seward had already earned the undying enmity of the state's nativists because of their avowed sympathy for Catholics and immigrants since the early 1840s. In addition, their former adversaries in the New York Whig party, the conservative Silver Greys, had entered the American organization to use it to break down their political power. As a result, Weed and Seward were determined to put together a Republican coalition without recognizing their longtime foes. One of Seward's lieutenants later said, concerning the nativists and Silver Greys, "For my part I dont want *any* of them in the Republican party—it was a great blessing to get rid of them." The 1855 Republican platform in New York proclaimed that secret political organizations were "inconsistent with the liberal principles of our free Government." It further declared, "We repudiate and condemn the proscriptive and anti-republican doctrines of the order of Know-Nothings, and all their secret constitutions, oaths, rituals, and organizations." The pragmatic Weed recognized that the Republican party needed significant nativist backing in order to win, but he believed that the sincere antislavery men would leave the society once its proslavery proclivities became apparent without the Republicans' embracing nativism and thus alienating potential foreign-born supporters.<sup>13</sup>

Although many Republican leaders shared their distaste for nativist bigotry, Weed and Seward spoke for a minority in urging that no concessions be made to nativists. The political reality of the Know Nothings' strength, if nothing else, dictated the necessity of seeking a fusion with antislavery supporters of the American organization. Proponents of that policy included a number of past or present members of the secret order seeking new connections. Wilson, David Wilmot, Thaddeus Stevens, Schuyler Colfax, Simon Cameron, Nathaniel P. Banks, and probably John P. Hale and William Pitt Fessenden were onetime Know Nothings who became prominent Republican leaders. Other Republicans, while not members of the society, were sympathetic to its aims. A good example is John C. Frémont, the Republicans' first presidential nominee, who privately endorsed the Know Nothings' most extreme demand, extension of the period for naturalization to twenty-one years.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> S. S. Parsons to Ullmann, Nov. 11, 1854, Ullmann Papers; James R. Thompson to Ullmann, March 24, 1855, *ibid.*; Horace Greeley to Schuyler Colfax, Aug. 24, 1854, Greeley-Colfax Papers (New York Public Library, New York); *Albany Evening Journal*, Nov. 2, 1854; *Auburn Journal*, Nov. 8, 1854, Oct. 24, Oct. 31, 1855; *Buffalo Commercial Advertiser*, Oct. 29, 1855; Thomas J. Curran, "Seward and the Know-Nothings," *New-York Historical Society Quarterly*, 51 (April 1967), 141–59; E. Peshine Smith to Henry C. Carey, June 8, Oct. 30, Nov. 13, 1855, July 25, 1858, Henry C. Carey Papers (Historical Society of Pennsylvania); William Henry Seward, *The Works of William H. Seward*, ed. George E. Baker (5 vols., New York, 1853–1884), IV, 283–85; Aaron H. Cragin to Thurlow Weed, June 15, 1855, William H. Seward Papers (University of Rochester, Rochester, N.Y.); Aaron Delano to William H. Seward, Dec. 6, 1855, *ibid.*; Henry W. Taylor to Weed, June 30, 1855, "Private," Thurlow Weed Papers (Library of Congress); *New York Tribune*, April 19, June 15, Sept. 28, 1855; *New York Times*, Oct. 31, 1855.

<sup>14</sup> Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (8 vols., New Brunswick, 1953–1955), II, 316–17, 320–23; Robert Franklin Durden, *James Shepherd Pike: Republicanism and the American Negro, 1850–1882* (Durham, 1957), 17; James L. Crouthamel, *James Watson Webb* (Middletown, Conn., 1969), 128; Edward Wade to Albert Riddle, Jan. 18, 1855, James Collection (Henry E. Huntington Library, San Marino, Calif.); Theodore Parker to James Oston, Feb. 22, 1855, Theodore Parker Papers (Massachusetts Historical Society); Benjamin F. Wade to William

Chase, the former Free Soil leader in Ohio, was the foremost advocate of a nativist-Republican coalition. Following the 1854 elections, the supremely ambitious Chase saw a chance to organize a majority antislavery party, which had long been his goal, and at the same time to salvage his political career. Beginning in late 1854 and continuing throughout the first half of 1855, he urged the organization of a Republican party that would combine the Free Soilers, Whigs, anti-Nebraska Democrats, Protestant Germans, and those he termed "liberal Americans." Chase realized that without significant nativist backing no opposition party could carry Ohio. Indeed, the American order's continued expansion in the state was such that by the spring of 1855 a majority of the anti-Nebraska voters the previous fall had enrolled in nativist lodges. Although the former Free Soil leader did not want the slavery issue minimized, he was willing to trim on nativism to form a strong Republican party in Ohio. He urged E. S. Hamlin of the *Ohio Columbian*, his closest editorial associate, to cease attacks on the Know Nothings. "It would be better if you admitted that there was some ground for the uprising of the people against papal influence & organized foreignism," Chase directed, "while you might condemn the secret organization & indiscriminate proscription on account of origin or creed."<sup>15</sup>

After some tortuous negotiations, the Ohio Know Nothings agreed to join other anti-Democratic groups in a Republican convention in July. Despite the concerted efforts of non-Know Nothings, nativist influence in the Ohio Republican party at its birth was readily apparent, for a majority of delegates to the convention belonged to the order. Contrary to some historians' claims, the result of the convention did not represent a clear-cut victory for the anti-Know Nothings. If Chase won the gubernatorial nomination, the other eight nominees on the Republican ticket were Know Nothings. If the platform did not contain any nativist planks, it evidenced not a hint of condemnation either, and the pleas of some anti-Know Nothing leaders to put a foreigner on the ticket fell on deaf ears. If Chase could go before the electorate unhindered by a nativist platform, he was also running on a preponderantly Know Nothing ticket, a fact that was not lost on the German voters in the state, many of whom had backed the anti-Nebraska movement the year before but who now generally repudiated Chase and the rest of the Republican state ticket.<sup>16</sup>

Schouler, May 3, 1855, "Confidential," William Schouler Papers, *ibid.*; John C. Frémont Memoirs, manuscript, pp. 192-94, John C. Frémont Papers (University of California, Berkeley).

<sup>15</sup> William E. Gienapp, "Salmon P. Chase, Nativism, and the Formation of the Republican Party in Ohio," *Ohio History*, 93 (Winter-Spring 1984), 5-39; Chase to E. S. Hamlin, Nov. 21, 1854, "Private," Jan. 22, Feb. 9, 1855, Chase Papers (Library of Congress). In a letter published as part of his bid for the Republican gubernatorial nomination, Salmon P. Chase asserted that in the activities of some Catholic priests and foreigners "there has been something justly censurable & calculated to provoke the hostility which has embodied itself in the Know Nothing organization." Chase to John Paul, Dec. 27, 1854, draft, Chase Papers (Historical Society of Pennsylvania).

<sup>16</sup> Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 274; Stephen E. Maizlish, *The Triumph of Sectionalism: The Transformation of Ohio Politics, 1844-1856* (Kent, 1983), 216-17; Eugene H. Roseboom, "Salmon P. Chase and the Know Nothings," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 25 (Dec. 1938), 345; James Ashley to Chase, Oct. 25, 1855, Chase Papers (Library of Congress); Stephen Molitor to Chase, Feb. 25, 1856, *ibid.*; Chase to Edward L. Pierce, Oct. 20, 1855, Edward L. Pierce Papers (Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.); *Toledo Blade*, Oct. 12, 1855.

Republicanism in Ohio, where the party won its first major victory, rested on a substantial nativist foundation.

Know Nothings were also particularly prominent in the formation of the Republican party in two New England states, Massachusetts and Maine. In the Bay State they formed a sizable contingent at the state convention, although some subsequently bolted after the delegates rejected American Gov. Henry J. Gardner's bid for renomination (he subsequently accepted the American nomination). Trying to tread a thin line between the nativist and antinativist factions in the new party, the Massachusetts Republican platform was confined to the slavery question and announced that party members were free to form their own opinion on other matters. Fusion between Republicans and Know Nothings was more harmonious in Maine, where the Republican state convention nominated Gov. Anson P. Morrill, who was either a member of the Know Nothing order or else intimately allied with its leaders, as the party's first standard bearer. In addition, the 1855 Maine Republican platform termed "the debasement of the right of suffrage" by naturalized voters "an alarming evil" and urged either strict enforcement or modification of the existing naturalization laws. Not surprisingly, the American party rejected a move to run a separate state ticket and endorsed Morrill and his fellow Republican nominees.<sup>17</sup>

But it was in Pennsylvania that Know Nothings wielded the most complete control of the Republican party. So pervasive were nativist incursions into the party that the Republican state convention elected as chairman a man who secretly belonged to the order, and he subsequently packed the Republican state central committee with Know Nothings. The committee in turn withdrew the Republican nominee for canal commissioner and endorsed another candidate who, it was later confirmed, was an oath-bound member of the American party. In short, at the conclusion of the 1855 campaign the Republican party in the Keystone State was saddled with a Know Nothing state chairman, state committee, and state ticket.<sup>18</sup> With the Republican party in the state stillborn, nativism was completely dominant in the Pennsylvania opposition.

Taken together, the 1855 elections were a sharp setback for the Republican movement. A number of Republican strategists had believed beforehand that, aided by the recent violence in the Territory, the party could ride to victory on the Kansas issue alone—that the slavery controversy would detach a majority of Know Nothings from their affiliation—but the election results proved otherwise. The Republicans' best showings were in Ohio and Maine, states in which they had made an open alliance with the Know Nothings. In New York, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts, where the Republican party either opposed or ignored nativism, the Know Nothings, by continuing skillfully to exploit

<sup>17</sup> [Augusta, Me.] *Kennebec Journal*, March 2, 1855; *Philadelphia North American*, June 9, 1855; *Springfield [Mass.] Republican*, Sept. 21, 1855; *Boston Daily Bee*, Sept. 21, Oct. 4, 1855; Dow, *Reminiscences of Neal Dow*, 514.

<sup>18</sup> C. Maxwell Myers, "The Rise of the Republican Party in Pennsylvania, 1854-1860" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1941), 62-73.

both the slavery and the nativist issues, bested the Republicans in head-to-head competition. The popular vote in Pennsylvania, where the Know Nothing candidate thoroughly routed the original Republican nominee with 149,745 votes, compared with a meager 7,226 for the latter, documented in stunning fashion the weakness of the Republican movement in that important state.<sup>19</sup>

The 1855 New York election provided the clearest test of the effectiveness of the two parties' appeals, since the New York platform was the only Republican state platform in 1855 explicitly to condemn the Know Nothings and their proscriptive principles. Only an estimated 12 percent of the 1854 Americans defected to the Republican movement in that state. The rate of defection was slightly higher in Massachusetts where the Republicans sidestepped nativism (20 percent), but the unmistakable lesson of the 1855 contests was that combined antislavery and anti-Catholicism remained the most potent force in northern politics. Given the option of voting for the Republican party with its overriding emphasis on the slavery issue, a substantial majority of Know Nothings in those eastern states remained loyal to the American organization with its more broadly based appeal, a development that doomed the Republican cause to defeat. "The people will not confront the issues we present," one despondent Massachusetts Republican shrewdly observed after the election. "They want a Paddy hunt & on a Paddy hunt they will go." Similarly, a conservative New Yorker commented following the Know Nothings' triumph in his state: "Our antipathy to the Pope and to Paddy is a pretty deep-seated feeling."<sup>20</sup>

In the wake of Republican defeats elsewhere, Chase's razor-thin victory in Ohio, which is attributable to his strong support from American voters, took on added significance. Over 40 percent of the 1854 Know Nothings voted for Chase, a rate of support seven times greater than that received by an independent American-Whig candidate.<sup>21</sup> It was, as Wilson commented, the only bright spot for Republicans in an otherwise dismal autumn political sky. In a move of great significance for the future of the Republican party, Chase immediately launched a coordinated drive to organize a national party on what Seward scorned as "the Ohio plan, half Republican and half Know Nothing."

<sup>19</sup> Edward Kent to William Pitt Fessenden, May 21, 1855, William Pitt Fessenden Papers (Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio); Joshua R. Giddings to Abraham Lincoln, Sept. 18, 1855, "Private," Herndon-Weik Collection (Library of Congress); Samuel Bowles to Henry L. Dawes, Oct. 10, 1855, Henry L. Dawes Papers (Library of Congress); Wilson to Chase, Dec. 17, 1855, Chase Papers (Historical Society of Pennsylvania).

<sup>20</sup> Pierce to Chase, Oct. 9, 1855, Chase Papers (Library of Congress); George Templeton Strong, *The Diary of George Templeton Strong*, ed. Allan Nevins and Milton Halsey Thomas (4 vols., New York, 1952), II, 241.

<sup>21</sup> Since the Know Nothings never ran a separate state ticket in Ohio, the regression estimates given in the text are based on the order's reported membership by counties in October 1854. Counties not yet organized by the Know Nothings, which therefore lacked American lodges at that date, and counties that did not report membership, have been excluded from the analysis (not all the included counties, however, were nativist strongholds). Also excluded are members who joined after that date. Know Nothing membership in Ohio more than doubled between then and the summer of 1855. [Columbus] *Ohio Statesman*, March 18, 1855; [Columbus] *Ohio Columbian*, June 13, 1855; *Toledo Blade*, June 8, 1855.

His efforts culminated in the official call for the Republicans' first national convention, which assembled in Pittsburgh in February 1856. In drumming up support for the movement, the new governor's basic argument was that a coalition such as had been formed in Ohio—which meant significant Know Nothing participation and recognition—could carry the presidential election in the fall.<sup>22</sup>

The Connecticut state election in April 1856, the most important spring election in the North prior to the Republicans' national nominating convention in June, reinforced the meaning of the 1855 fall contests. For the first time, the Republican party directly challenged the heretofore dominant Know Nothings in the state. The Republican state platform focused exclusively on the slavery controversy, but in a calculated rebuke to the Know Nothings, the Republican convention rejected a nativist candidate and nominated Welles, a severe critic of Know Nothingism, to head the state ticket. The American platform and campaign, in contrast, continued to emphasize both nativism and antislavery. For Republicans, who had earlier pronounced the American party a dying force in the state's politics, the election results were a rude shock. The American incumbent polled almost four times as many votes as Welles, who finished a distant third with a mere 10 percent of the vote. Equally disconcerting, the Republicans failed to make significant inroads in the Know Nothings' base of support. Approximately two-thirds of previous Know Nothing voters remained loyal to their party, and of those who defected, three times as many went over to the Democrats as transferred their support to Welles.<sup>23</sup> In failing to win substantial nativist accessions, the Republican party in Connecticut, as throughout much of the North, remained a hopeless minority with only six months to go until the presidential election.

As they looked ahead to the 1856 national contest, Republican strategists realized that a more concerted effort to win over American party voters was needed. Fusion at the state level between Republicans and Know Nothings increased in 1856, but the most important attempt to secure the cooperation of the Know Nothings took place at the national level. The American party's national convention suffered its second schism in as many years, as once again a majority of northern delegates left in protest over the national platform. The North Americans, as the bolters called themselves, scheduled a nominating convention to meet in New York City shortly before the Republicans were to

<sup>22</sup> Chase to Kinsley S. Bingham, Oct. 19, 1855, copy, Chase Papers (Historical Society of Pennsylvania); Wilson to Chase, Nov. 17, 1855, Jan. 15, 1856, *ibid.*; Seward to Weed, Dec. 31, 1855, Jan. 6, 1856, Weed Papers (Library of Congress). See also Robert F. Horowitz, "James M. Ashley and the Presidential Election of 1856," *Ohio History*, 83 (Winter 1974), 4–16. It is important to note that Chase's strategy for building the Republican party was considerably at odds with the portraits of that strategy advanced by Richard Sewell and Eric Foner. Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 265–77; Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 226–60.

<sup>23</sup> Gideon Welles received 6,740 votes, compared with 26,108 for William Minor, the American party candidate. Regression estimates indicate that 66 percent of the 1855 American voters supported the party in 1856 and that only 8 percent voted Republican, compared with 25 percent who supported the Democratic ticket. For the Republican convention and campaign, see *Hartford Evening Press*, March 1, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 18, April 1, 4, 5, 10, 1856, and Robert D. Parmet, "The Know-Nothings in Connecticut," (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1966), 181–87.

gather in Philadelphia. In an intricate set of maneuvers as leaders shuffled back and forth between the two conventions, the North Americans nominated Frémont after the Republicans had named him to head their ticket. For vice president, the nativist delegates selected former Pennsylvania Gov. William Johnston, a Know Nothing. A group of Republican power brokers, headed by Weed, who was more amenable to making concessions at the national level than he was in his bailiwick of New York, agreed that the Republicans would accept the North Americans' vice presidential choice to symbolize the union of the two groups, but a floor fight at the Republican convention prevented agreement and left the matter unresolved. Negotiations continued until, late in the campaign, Johnston agreed to withdraw, a development that caused hard feelings among many North Americans. After Frémont's defeat, Weed concluded that "the first, and as I still think fatal, error, was in not taking a Vice President in whose nomination the North Americans would have concur[r]ed cordially."<sup>24</sup>

Republicans also sought to win over Know Nothings by securing the endorsements of notable American party leaders. Although the drawn-out struggle over the vice presidential nomination strained relations between the two groups, a number of prominent nativists, headed by James W. Barker, the order's former national president, embraced the Republican cause in 1856. George Law, who had been defeated by Millard Fillmore for the American party nomination, Ephraim Marsh, who had presided at the party's national nominating convention in February, and Chauncey Shaffer, an important New York Know Nothing leader, all wrote public letters endorsing Frémont that the Republicans issued as campaign documents. Marsh, Shaffer, and French Evans, the author of the 1856 American platform, were active on the stump during the campaign and, along with earlier Know Nothing converts to Republicanism such as Wilson, Banks, and Anson Burlingame, were in heaviest demand for Republican meetings.<sup>25</sup> For voters sensitive to the matter, the Republican party's recognition of onetime Know Nothings provided unmistakable evidence, as did Frémont's nomination by both conventions, of the growing fellowship between the two movements.

Republican rhetoric in 1856 also played a crucial role in bringing nativists into the Republican camp. To be sure, party pronouncements emphasized various aspects of the slavery issue, particularly the threat posed by the Slave Power to northern rights and republican government, and without question the sectional controversy wielded great influence on northern voters, including many Know Nothings. The Republicans' electoral strength in 1856

<sup>24</sup> Edwin D. Morgan to Russell Sage, June 28, 1856, copy, Morgan Papers (New York State Library, Albany); Weed to Simon Cameron, Nov. 12, 1856, Simon Cameron Papers (Library of Congress); Fred Harvey Harrington, "Frémont and the North Americans," *American Historical Review*, 44 (July 1939), 842-48; William B. Hesseltine and Rex G. Fisher, eds., *Trimmmers, Trucklers & Temporizers: Notes of Murat Halstead from the Political Conventions of 1856* (Madison, 1961). For the debate at the Republican convention over nativism, see *New York Herald*, June 19, 1856.

<sup>25</sup> Ephraim Marsh, *Reasons for Going for Fremont* (n.p., [1856]); Geo. Law & Chauncey Shaffer's *Reasons for Repudiating Fillmore and Donelson* (New York, 1856).

and beyond, however, was not entirely attributable to the slavery issue. The antebellum voter's political universe did not orient exclusively toward national affairs; activities at the state and local level, where the bulk of nineteenth-century partisan combat was located, also shaped a party's image and molded its constituency. Even after the raid on Lawrence, Kansas, and the caning of Sen. Charles Sumner in the Senate chamber dramatically intensified sectional feeling, Republicans were unwilling to hazard everything on the slavery extension issue. In seeking to broaden the party's electoral base as well as to reinforce the existing loyalties of party members, Republican spokesmen raised a number of issues other than sectionalism of which anti-Catholicism was the most important.<sup>26</sup>

The basic problem confronting Republicans was to gain the support of the bulk of the Know Nothings without alienating the foreign-born. Any emphasis on anteforeignism promised to drive immigrant voters back into the arms of the Democratic party. Anti-Catholicism, on the other hand, entailed little political risk, since party leaders had concluded that the Catholic vote was solidly and hopelessly Democratic. Moreover, hostility to the Catholic church was one principle on which both North Americans and Protestant immigrants could unite; indeed, in many areas Protestant immigrants had cooperated with the Know Nothings when the latter emphasized anti-Catholicism as distinct from anteforeignism. When the Know Nothings were openly anti-immigrant, naturalized Protestant voters bitterly opposed them. A Know Nothing organizer in Illinois reported that Swedes strongly sympathized with the order: "They are Lutheran & down on the Pope & where the proper cue is given they are first rate K Ns." Similarly, a Republican congressman emphasized to an Ohio German leader that a union of Protestant and radical Germans and Know Nothings was possible precisely because both groups shared an intense hatred of Catholicism. In the same spirit an Illinois Republican editor, noting that German Protestant immigrants had brought a strong animosity toward Catholicism with them to this country, advocated that anti-Catholic pamphlets be circulated among them in order to "stir up their *prejudices* anew." The result, he predicted, would be that "we shall have every man of them vote the [R]epublican ticket."<sup>27</sup>

In their first national campaign, Republicans exploited animosity toward Catholics, particularly in areas where the Know Nothings were strong, while they were careful not to indulge in indiscriminate attacks on the foreign-born.

<sup>26</sup> Holt also calls attention to the importance of this theme. Holt, *Political Crisis of the 1850s*, 176–80. In arguing that the Republicans rejected nativism, Foner and Sewell fail to draw a sharp enough distinction between anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic feelings. Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 226–60; Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom*, 265–77, 282n, 349–54.

<sup>27</sup> Thompson to Ullmann, Aug. 14, 1855, Ullmann Papers; Timothy C. Day to Friedrich Hassaurek, March 25, 1856, Friedrich Hassaurek Papers (Ohio Historical Society, Columbus); Jacob McDonald to Millard Fillmore, Oct. 15, 1856, Millard Fillmore Papers (State University of New York, Oswego); Stephen L. Hansen, *The Making of the Third Party System: Voters and Parties in Illinois, 1850–1876* (Ann Arbor, 1980), 87. The *Chicago Tribune* affirmed: "Republicanism has nothing to hope from the Catholic vote. There is not a Catholic in Chicago who does not hate it; there is not one who does not set it down as a heresy." What was true in Chicago, it continued, was true almost everywhere. *Chicago Tribune*, Feb. 8, 1856.



The *Chicago Tribune*, for example, called on to join the Republican party those who wanted to "repress the political tendencies of a false but arrogant Church, without ostracizing the foreigner whose political and religious sympathies are as true and ardent as his own." In addition, Republican journals directed attention to the Catholic press's endorsement of James Buchanan, to the alleged political activities on his behalf by Catholic priests, and to the overwhelming preference of Catholic voters for the Democratic ticket in order to link the Democratic party with the Catholic church and thereby to prevent Know Nothings and Protestant immigrants from voting Democratic. After the election the *New York Courier and Enquirer*, in one of many such comments in the Republican press, angrily attributed Frémont's defeat to "Irish bog-trotters, with necks yet raw with a foreign priestly yoke."<sup>28</sup>

No immigrant group came in for greater abuse among Republicans than Irish Catholics. The *Cleveland Leader* denounced them as "sots and bums" who lived in "rotten nests of filth" and voted the Democratic ticket. In other editorials it referred to the Irish as "dupes of Popery" and "cattle" who blindly supported the Democratic party. For vituperative denunciations against the Church of Rome, few Know Nothing papers could match the *Cleveland Leader*, which even endorsed disfranchising Catholics. Still, if less strident, other Republican presses joined in those aspersions. The *Buffalo Morning Express* said of Irish Catholics in that city: "They pour out on election day in herds and droves, no creature thinking for himself, or acting for himself, but like sheep following their leader, away they go pell mell together, just as their leader may direct." They would "vote for a horse or an ox" if it were on the Democratic ticket. At the same time, Republican journals often went out of their way to praise Protestant immigrants and to distinguish Germans in particular from Irish Catholics.<sup>29</sup> These and similar comments make it difficult to accept the argument that the Republicans made no concessions to nativist sentiment before the Civil War.

Republican state and local platforms catered to nativists as well. The most significant example was the 1856 Union party platform in Pennsylvania, which condemned the interference of "foreign influence of every kind" in the nation's government, denounced the "pandering of any party to foreign influence," and pledged to defend the common school system, which Catholic bishops had attacked, from any attempt to pervert it to sectarian uses. The Indiana Republican platform in 1856 demanded abolition of alien suffrage, which allowed immigrants to vote in the state before they became citizens. The Republican convention in Iowa, rejecting German-sponsored resolutions that repudiated Know Nothingism and that endorsed the present system of naturalization, adopted instead a policy of silence on those matters. The party's 1856

<sup>28</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, Feb. 5, 1856; Holt, *Forging a Majority*, 208-209; [Augusta, Me.] *Kennebec Journal*, Nov. 14, 1856; *New York Courier and Enquirer*, quoted in *Rochester Daily Union*, Nov. 8, 1856. A flood of anti-Catholic rhetoric appeared in Republican papers after the election. See the extensive selections in *ibid.*, Nov. 8, Nov. 12, 1856.

<sup>29</sup> Thomas W. Kremm, "Cleveland and the First Lincoln Election: The Ethnic Response to Nativism," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 8 (Summer 1977), 83, 85; *Buffalo Morning Express*, Nov. 13, Nov. 19, 1856.

national platform managed to balance an appeal to Americans and the foreign-born in a single clause by promising to protect "liberty of conscience" and the "equality of rights among citizens." Liberty of conscience was a time-honored nativist phrase that referred to the right of individuals to interpret Scriptures for themselves and as such carried distinct anti-Catholic connotations.<sup>30</sup>

Historians who argue that by 1856, after several years of great intensity, ethnic and religious tensions ceased to have political relevance, misconstrue the reality of antebellum northern politics. The great emphasis that leading Fillmore adherents gave to the false accusation that Frémont was a Catholic, which they invoked in an effort to shore up their deteriorating support in the face of the Republican onslaught, provided ample evidence of the continuing salience of ethnocultural issues. From the beginning of the 1856 campaign, Republicans were on the defensive with regard to their candidate's religious affiliation, and there seemed no limit to American party leaders' imagination in concocting evidence of Frémont's alleged Catholicism. One American journalist defended the great effort expended in circulating the charge with the confident prediction that "the great majority" of Protestant voters would consider the question of Frémont's Catholicism "of more importance than the false issue of 'Free Kansas.'"<sup>31</sup>

Republican strategists saw, as Weed admitted, that "the Catholic story is doing much damage." Schuyler Colfax reported that of the "hundreds of letters" he received from the Northwest, "scarcely any omits a reference to the fact that the Catholic story injures us materially, both in keeping men in the Fillmore ranks who ought to be with us, & in cooling many of our own friends who fear from Col. F's silence & the cloud of rumors on the subject in the K. N. papers, that there may be some truth in it." Party managers tried to handle the issue in a number of ways, but to the end large numbers of northern voters believed that the Republican standard bearer was a Catholic. With justification the *New York Mirror* maintained that Frémont's supposed Catholicism was the most damaging charge leveled against him.<sup>32</sup>

The difficulties Republicans encountered in the controversy over Frémont's religion provide forceful evidence that anti-Catholicism remained an important element in northern politics in 1856, and that the Sumner and Kansas incidents, if they muted the intensity of ethnocultural concerns, did not eradicate them from the political system. Fear and hatred of Catholics continued to motivate many voters, and as a number of observers commented in

<sup>30</sup> Holt, *Political Crisis of the 1850s*, 178-79.

<sup>31</sup> [Greene, N.Y.] *Chenango American*, Aug. 28, 1856; N. Sargent to Fillmore, Oct. 12, 1856, Fillmore Papers; *New York Express*, June 21, July 9, 12, 19, 23, 25, 27, 29, Aug. 1, 4, 5, 7, 11, Sept. 6, 9, 12, 26, 29, Oct. 1, 9, 11, 13, 14, 16, 18, 24, 27, 28, 1856; *Col. Fremont's Religious History* (n.p., [1856]); *Fremont's Romanism Established* (n.p., [1856]); *Col. Fremont's Religion* (n.p., [1856]); *Fremont a Protestant!* (n.p., [1856]). Elements of John C. Frémont's life, most notably his French heritage and the fact that he and Jessie Benton had been married by a Catholic priest, greatly strengthened the suspicions concerning his religious affiliation.

<sup>32</sup> Weed to Morgan, Aug. 9, [1856], Morgan Papers; Colfax to John Bigelow, Aug. 29, 1856, John Bigelow Papers (New York Public Library); Horatio Nelson Weed Diary, Nov. 4, 1856 (Yale University, New Haven, Conn.); *New York Mirror*, quoted in *Washington Evening Star*, Nov. 3, 1856.

TABLE 2  
 Percentage of Those Casting American Ballots in State Elections  
 Voting Republican in the 1856 Presidential Election

	1854	1855	1856 (STATE)	CASES (N)
CONNECTICUT	—	73	89	146 <sup>a</sup>
MASSACHUSETTS	72	72	86 <sup>1</sup>	323; 322; 322 <sup>a</sup>
NEW YORK	41	14	—	351; 360 <sup>a</sup>
OHIO	48 <sup>2</sup>	17 <sup>3</sup>	14	49; 88; 88 <sup>b</sup>
PENNSYLVANIA	12	70 <sup>4</sup>	—	63 <sup>b</sup>

SOURCES: Election returns, Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research; Massachusetts State Archives; *Tribune Almanac*; *Connecticut Register*; *Hartford Courant*; *Hartford Times*; *Boston Daily Advertiser*; *Albany Argus*; [Binghamton] *Broome Republican*; *Auburn Daily Advertiser*; *Auburn Journal*; *Jamestown Journal*; *Plattsburgh Republican*; *Poughkeepsie Eagle*; *Buffalo Republic*; *Buffalo Daily Courier*; *Buffalo Morning Express*; *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*; [Geneseo] *Livingston Republican*; *Rochester Daily American*; *Rochester Daily Union*; *New York Times*; *New York Tribune*; [Rome] *Roman Daily Sentinel*; [Rome] *Roman Citizen*; *Utica Daily Gazette*; *Middletown Whig Press*; *Newburgh Telegraph*; [Jamaica] *Long Island Democrat*; *Corning Weekly Journal*; *Sag Harbor Corrector*; *Ithaca American Citizen*; *Ithaca Chronicle*; [Penn Yan] *Yates County Whig*; [Penn Yan] *Yates County Chronicle*; *Cleveland Plain Dealer*; *Cincinnati Gazette*; *Harrisburg Daily Telegraph*; [Harrisburg] *Keystone*; *Harrisburg Morning Herald*.

NOTE: State elections are Connecticut: 1855 and 1856 governor; Massachusetts: 1854, 1855, and 1856 governor; New York: 1854 governor, 1855 secretary of state; Ohio: 1855 governor, 1856 supreme court justice; Pennsylvania: 1854 supreme court justice, 1855 canal commissioner.

<sup>1</sup> Vote for Henry J. Gardner (*Frémont American*).

<sup>2</sup> Membership, October 1854.

<sup>3</sup> Vote for Allan Trimble (*Independent American-Whig*).

<sup>4</sup> Vote for Thomas Nicholson (*Fusion American*).

<sup>a</sup> Townships and wards.

<sup>b</sup> Counties.

1856, a widespread belief that a presidential candidate was tainted with Catholicism was politically fatal (and would be for over a century thereafter).<sup>33</sup>

Despite achievement of only an imperfect fusion with the Know Nothings, the Republican party's showing in the 1856 election was little short of astounding and indicated how much the party had accomplished in less than two years. In the North Frémont outdistanced both Buchanan and Fillmore to win a plurality of the votes cast. He carried every free state except Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Indiana, Illinois, and California. Furthermore, among the northern states Fillmore finished second only in California. One reason for Frémont's strong showing was the substantial support he received from men who voted Know Nothing in 1854 or 1855. (See table 2.) The exact proportion varied from state to state, but the general pattern was clear. Among first-time Know Nothings, Frémont gained the most support in Connecticut and Massachusetts and the least in Pennsylvania. Even in New York, approximately two-

<sup>33</sup> One of William H. Seward's supporters commented concerning Frémont's political vulnerability: "The very idea of his being a Catholic will be the death of him forever, as a Presidential candidate." Harrison Smith to Seward, Oct. 27, 1856, Seward Papers.

fifths of the 1854 Know Nothings voted for Frémont. Republican overtures to the Know Nothings, as well as anger over the American party's proslavery national platform, presumably precipitated that large exodus.

While Fillmore probably won the votes of a majority of die-hard nativists (who because of their single-minded commitment were a minority in the Know Nothing movement during its ascendancy), his showing was not an accurate index of the strength of nativism in the northern electorate. Not only did Fillmore himself stress the Union issue in his campaign, but in view of Frémont's acceptance of the North American nomination on a partly nativist platform, his endorsement by a majority of Know Nothing leaders in the free states, and the Republicans' catering to anti-Catholic feeling, the 1856 presidential race did not present northern voters with a clear choice between nativism and antislavery. As long as Republicans recognized leading Americans and were an anti-Catholic party, as compared with the Democrats, former Know Nothings did not have to vote for Fillmore or other American candidates to express their nativist principles.<sup>34</sup>

The 1856 presidential election was the decisive turning point in the Republican party's struggle with the Know Nothings. The results established the Republicans as the major opponent of the Democratic party in the country and left the once powerful American party shattered beyond recovery. Defeating the Know Nothings as the successor to the Whigs was the single most important victory the Republican party would ever win in its long history. Once they had achieved that objective in November 1856, Republicans needed only to aggregate the other anti-Democratic voters under their banner to become the majority party in the North, and most of those voters now saw that the Republican movement represented the best chance of defeating the Democrats.

Analysis of the 1856 returns convinced Republican leaders that Frémont lost because too many Know Nothings voted for Fillmore. To be sure, not all of Fillmore's votes were cast by hardcore nativists—many conservative Whigs who placed a higher priority on the Union issue also backed the former president. Nevertheless, a large if indeterminate proportion of his northern support came from committed nativists, who, because of their intense and unrelenting hatred of the Irish Democracy, were an especially promising source of additional Republican recruits. As earlier, Republican politicians were wary of alienating Protestant immigrants, many of whom had backed Frémont in 1856, but at the same time they recognized that they had to capture the majority of the Fillmore supporters. The Republicans' continuing exploitation of anti-Catholicism was crucial in that regard. After the 1856 election one of Chase's correspondents stressed the importance of using anti-Catholicism to win over the Fillmore Americans. "The element most to be dreaded is the American vote. . . . If we make judicious nominations, and emphatically show no disposition to court the Catholic vote, and, if practicable, open our batteries

<sup>34</sup> Frank H. Severance, ed., *Millard Fillmore Papers, Publications of the Buffalo Historical Society* (2 vols., Buffalo, 1907), II, 3-33; *New York Herald*, June 17, July 1, 1856; Holt, *Political Crisis of the 1850s*, 274-76.

against the political tendencies of that institution, we can command the largest portion of this vote."<sup>35</sup>

Thus anti-Catholicism remained an important part of the Republican appeal after 1856. During the senatorial contest between Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas in 1858, the Republican state organ, the *Illinois State Journal*, in an editorial titled "The Two Despotisms—Catholicism and Slavery—Their Union and Identity," charged that the Catholic church was in league with the proslavery Democratic party to destroy the principles of free government. It pointed out that only "an infinitesimal fraction of Roman Catholic voters" were not Democrats and argued that "to all practical purposes" Catholic churches were Democratic "nurseries." The Democratic party and the Catholic church must be battled together, it continued in an obvious bid for nativist support, "because their forces are so intermingled that their separation is impossible." Only by voting Republican could one rebuke both. After the election John Wentworth's *Chicago Democrat*, which had denounced Catholic support for Douglas during the campaign, alleged that the senator's victory was "as much a triumph over Protestantism, as it is over free labor." The same year the Republican organ in Pittsburgh printed a list of the Democratic nominees with the names of the Catholics italicized and explicitly asked Protestants how they could vote for such a ticket. Nor were such emotions absent from the 1860 presidential campaign. Indeed, a number of Republican journals, calling attention to the fact that Douglas's wife and children were Catholics, charged that Douglas was a secret convert to Catholicism and the candidate of Catholic bishops. Sensitive to its potential damage, Democratic editors hastened to deny the assertion, which only served to keep the issue alive. Dangling the specter of a Jesuit in the White House before the eyes of its Protestant readers, the *Chicago Tribune* bluntly proclaimed that "Catholicism and Republicanism are as plainly incompatible as oil and water."<sup>36</sup>

Even in New York many Republicans advocated that the party adopt an anti-Catholic as well as an antislavery stance. Despite the claims of some historians that Weed persisted in refusing "to make concessions to Know-Nothing feeling," once the decade-long rift in the state's Democratic party ended in 1856, the New York boss recognized the necessity of including some nativist planks in the party's platform to attract the Fillmore Americans. In 1857 Weed engineered the nomination of Almon C. Clapp, the editor of the *Buffalo Morning Express*, who had been outspoken in his attacks on Catholics

<sup>35</sup> *New York Times*, Nov. 6, 1856; [Augusta, Me.] *Kennebec Journal*, Nov. 7, 1856; *Albany Evening Journal*, Nov. 8, 1856; *Ohio State Journal*, Nov. 10, 1856; Weed to Cameron, Nov. 12, 1856, Cameron Papers; Ralph Metcalf to Stilman S. Davis, Nov. 16, 1856 (New Hampshire Historical Society, Concord); Edward Rankin to Richard Yates, Dec. 4, 1856, Richard Yates Papers (Illinois State Historical Library, Springfield); Grace Julian Clarke, *George W. Julian* (Indianapolis, 1923), 180–81; Richard M. Corwine to Chase, Dec. 8, 1856, Chase Papers (Historical Society of Pennsylvania). Conservatives, even those who placed a premium on the issue of the Union, were not always indifferent to nativism, however. See Mark E. Neely, Jr., "Richard W. Thompson: The Persistent Know Nothing," *Indiana Magazine of History*, 72 (June 1976), 95–122.

<sup>36</sup> Holt, *Forging a Majority*, 244n; *Illinois State Journal*, Aug. 30, 1858; *Chicago Democrat*, June 5, Dec. 4, 1858; Robert W. Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas* (New York, 1973), 785; *Chicago Tribune*, July 17, Aug. 10, Sept. 18, Oct. 19, 1860.

while simultaneously repudiating any proscription of Protestant immigrants, to head the party's state ticket. The Republican *Corning Journal* praised the candidate's long-standing support for a voter registry law and his denunciation of the political power of Catholicism, which it termed "collateral issues [that] are inseparable from the Republican creed." It went on to criticize the "folly" of adopting an exclusively antislavery platform and called instead for a broad statement of principles that repudiated Know Nothingism yet would "maintain at all hazards the necessity of preserving the country from the domination of the corrupt alliance of Democracy, Political Papacy and Slavery." The same year the Republican *Jamestown Journal* advocated that the party "unite all the Anti-Slavery, Anti-Popery and Anti-Whiskey electors of the State into an endearing opposition to the Democratic Party."<sup>37</sup>

Between 1857 and 1860, Republicans also sought to secure Know Nothing support by advocating and in some instances by enacting nativist legislation. Foner has argued that by 1856 the party moved to drop all ethnic issues, and at least on the matter of temperance that was generally the case. Republican leaders recognized that the antiliquor issue was too limited in its popular appeal to build a majority coalition, although party spokesmen often continued to link intemperance with the Democratic party and with Catholics. On occasion Republican legislation was explicitly directed against Catholicism. In 1857 the Republican-controlled legislature in Ohio passed a church-property law, modeled after a number of such laws passed earlier in other states by Know Nothing legislatures, that had as its specific target the Catholic hierarchy. Of the ninety-three Republicans in the legislature who voted on the question, ninety-two were recorded in favor of the law. Republican power in northern legislatures also blocked any possibility of state aid to parochial schools, which had been a key demand of the Catholic bishops earlier in the decade. More common was Republican support for voter-registration laws, which were intended to check the political power of urban immigrant groups. In the wake of Frémont's defeat, which many party leaders blamed on naturalized voters, a number of Republican politicians endorsed various proposals to restrict foreign-born voting. The 1858 Republican platform in New York included two traditional Know Nothing proposals, a registry law and an extension of the time between naturalization and voting, and the subsequent Republican-controlled legislature approved a registry law. In 1859 and again in 1861 Michigan Republicans also passed stringent voter-registration laws, as did Ohio Republicans in 1857. Although an effort to pass a registry bill in Illinois failed in 1859, Republican legislators voted unanimously in favor of such a law.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 254; *Corning Journal*, Oct. 29, 1857; *Jamestown Journal*, Nov. 13, 1857; *Buffalo Morning Express*, Nov. 13, Nov. 20, 1855, Nov. 13, Nov. 19, 1856, Oct. 27, Nov. 6, Nov. 7, Nov. 9, Nov. 10, 1857. Silbey provides a careful analysis of the connections between the New York Republican party and Know Nothingism. Joel H. Silbey, "'The Undisguised Connection': Know Nothings into Republicans: New York as a Test Case," in Joel H. Silbey, *The Partisan Imperative: The Dynamics of American Politics before the Civil War* (New York, 1985), 127-65.

<sup>38</sup> Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 241-42; Thomas W. Kremm, "The Old Order Trembles: The Formation of the Republican Party in Ohio," *Cincinnati Historical Society*

The most famous example of Republican endorsement of nativist legislation was the so-called Two-Year Amendment in Massachusetts, which the voters ratified in 1859 after a long struggle. The intimate association between the amendment and Bay State Republicanism was too pronounced to be disregarded. On several occasions Banks, the state's first Republican governor, called for an amendment to establish a waiting period before naturalized citizens could vote or hold office, and the Republican-controlled legislatures in 1857 and 1858 approved an amendment to institute a two-year waiting period. Moreover, in 1857 the state's voters had ratified an amendment imposing an English literacy requirement for voting (designed to reduce the political power of immigrants) that obviated to some extent the need for the Two-Year Amendment. It is true that Republican leaders and papers in the state divided on the issue, as did the rank and file, but outside the Commonwealth friends and critics alike identified the amendment with the Republican party, and with good reason.<sup>39</sup>

The Republican party's image as an anti-Catholic party, an image it continued to foster after 1856, derived not only from the party's propaganda but also from the men it nominated and from the kinds of men who voted for it. On the state and especially on the local level, where as Holt notes the party ran far more candidates than it did nationally, Republicans continued to nominate former Know Nothings for countless offices and in other ways recognized their services to the party. A good example is the choice of James O. Putnam, a former Know Nothing legislator and the author of the state's anti-Catholic church-property law, to head the Republican electoral ticket in New York in 1860. When campaigning for Lincoln, Putnam made no apologies for his earlier actions, and his selection was of enormous symbolic significance. Just as many Republicans associated the Democratic party with Catholicism because Catholics overwhelmingly voted Democratic, so many voters identified the Republican party with anti-Catholicism because most anti-Catholic zealots

*Bulletin*, 36 (Fall 1978), 197-206; Formisano, *Birth of Mass Political Parties*, 285-88; *Illinois State Journal*, Nov. 8, 1860; Silbey, "'Undisguised Connection,'" 141-56; James M. Bunce to Morgan, Nov. 6, 1856, Morgan Papers; Young Men's Fremont & Dayton Central Union, New York City, Nov. 6, 1856, circular, Thomas H. Dudley Papers (Henry E. Huntington Library); James Harlan to William Penn Clarke, Dec. 1, 1856, William Penn Clarke Papers (Iowa State Department of History and Archives, Des Moines); Ashley to Chase, Nov. 27, 1856, Chase Papers (Library of Congress); *Cincinnati Commercial*, Nov. 18, 1856.

<sup>39</sup> Baum, "Know-Nothingism and the Republican Majority in Massachusetts," 973-76; Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 250-53, 257. Both Foner and Baum seek to minimize Republican responsibility for the amendment, but they ignore important evidence and make too much of the low turnout in the special election. Baum, "Know-Nothingism and the Republican Majority in Massachusetts," 273-76; Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 250-53. As was the case of referenda throughout the decade, turnout was low in the 1857 literacy amendment referendum, but those 1856 Republican voters who cast ballots decisively backed the amendment (15 percent in favor to 2 percent opposed). Bowles to Nathaniel P. Banks, Jr., May 2, [1859], Nathaniel P. Banks, Jr., Papers (Illinois State Historical Library); William Cullen Bryant to Banks, April 25, 1859, "Confidential," *ibid.*; Carl Schurz to Banks, May 8, 1859, *ibid.*; Basler, ed., *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, III, 380; Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 251-53, 257; William G. Bean, "Party Transformation in Massachusetts with Special Reference to the Antecedents of Republicanism from 1848-1860" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1922), 368-73; Reinhard H. Luthin, *The First Lincoln Campaign* (Cambridge, Mass., 1944), 108-109, 153-56.

were Republicans. During the 1856 election the official paper of the Archdiocese of Cincinnati vigorously defended Catholic support for the Democratic party on grounds that "the men who threatened our churches, . . . whose papers are filled with calumnies the most atrocious, are now all . . . Fremonters, and remarkable for the savage animosity which they manifest on all occasions against Roman Catholics." In like manner nativist support for the Republican party often reflected negative-reference voting. In a classic invocation of that idea, the *Illinois State Journal* insisted that "Irish Democracy and Irish Catholicism are one and the same thing." Throughout the 1850s and well beyond, the Republican party projected an anti-Catholic image, a fact readily perceived by both nativist and Catholic voters alike. Indeed, the presence of Catholics normally increased Republican support among both Yankee and German Protestant voters.<sup>40</sup> Certainly, many Republicans were indifferent to the party's anti-Catholicism, and it never was the focus of the party's ideology, but for many others it was a very important element in their loyalty to the party.

Nor were former Know Nothings the only party members sensitive to that aspect of the Republican appeal. Many Republicans who sympathized with nativism refrained from joining a Know Nothing lodge for a variety of reasons, including the society's unrepugnant secrecy, its countenance of violence, its interference with individual judgment, and the fear that it would be converted into a proslavery national organization. Party regulars such as Benjamin F. Wade, James Shepherd Pike, and Theodore Parker endorsed nativist tenets yet never affiliated with the Know Nothings. The *Worcester Spy*, the *Buffalo Morning Express*, and the *Chicago Tribune*, Republican journals that were highly critical of the American order, also printed harsh strictures against Catholics. Even party members who were generally unsympathetic to nativism often held viewpoints far removed from the modern ideal of cultural pluralism. Long a champion of equal rights for the foreign-born, Horace Greeley nevertheless characterized immigrants as "deplorably clannish, misguided, and prone to violence" and urged enactment of a "rigid" registry law. Joshua R. Giddings's organ, the *Ashtabula Sentinel*, which fought against any alliance with the Know Nothings, strongly criticized Germans for their clannishness and called upon them to assimilate fully by abandoning their social organizations, disbanding their ethnic associations, and giving up their language.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Holt, *Political Crisis of the 1850s*, 180; Kleppner, *Third Electoral System*, 73, 157, 215, 365; [Cincinnati] *Catholic Telegraph*, Aug. 9, 1856; *Illinois State Journal*, Aug. 30, 1858; *Newburgh Telegraph*, Oct. 25, 1860; Luthin, *First Lincoln Campaign*, 211–12. Holt calculates that in Pittsburgh between 1858 and 1860, of 37 Republican candidates whose previous partisanship was known, 13 were former Know Nothings. Moreover, Americans secured some of the most important and visible positions in the party organization. Holt, *Forging a Majority*, 287. Paul Kleppner notes that during the remainder of the nineteenth century, "in most locales throughout the North *Republican* had a standing aura of opposition to Romanism and *Democracy* an image as the Catholic party [that] guaranteed its partisanization." Kleppner, *Third Electoral System*, 231.

<sup>41</sup> Richard Carwardine, "The Know-Nothing Party, the Protestant Evangelical Community and American National Identity," in *Religion and National Identity: Papers Read at the Nineteenth Summer Meeting and the Twentieth Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, ed.



Republicans' adoption of anti-Catholicism was more than simply a campaign strategy. Republicans and Know Nothings shared fundamental values and attitudes that facilitated a union of the two groups. In particular, each party's ideology emphasized an existing threat to republican government. Nativist spokesmen insisted repeatedly that the order's purpose was to check the Catholic church's political power, which threatened republican government, and in no way was to interfere with the right of freedom of worship. Opposition to the political pretensions of the Catholic church could be easily incorporated into the Republican party's discussion of the threat to northern liberties and republican society. One of Seward's correspondents stressed that the central plank of the Republican platform ought to be "Opposition to Despotism—whether the seat of its power be in the papal chair of Rome or on a Cotton Plantation of the South." Solid Catholic support for the Democratic party, which was (Republicans charged) the ally of the Slave Power, the church's refusal to condemn slavery, and southern and Catholic denunciations of northern institutions such as free schools enabled Republicans to link the Slave Power and the Catholic church. Party spokesmen depicted a dual threat to republicanism—the Slave Power and the Papal Power—and though they gave greater emphasis to the former and considered it the more serious danger, they by no means ignored the latter.<sup>42</sup>

Further strengthening the connection between the fear of the Slave Power and animosity toward the Catholic church was the growing affinity of evangelical Protestants for the Republican cause. Northern Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists evidenced a common hatred of Catholicism, a strong opposition to drink, and an intense dislike for slavery. Their presence in the Republican party helped to give it puritanical overtones, and Democrats labored hard throughout the decade to portray Republicans as a group of moral busybodies who sought to regulate other people's private lives. A New England paper emphasized the interrelationship of these issues for many voters when, in a variation of the phrase that would reverberate throughout postwar politics, it charged that the Democratic party was the champion of "Rum, Romanism and Slavery."<sup>43</sup>

By 1860 the Republicans were on the threshold of becoming the majority party in the North. In earlier state contests they had made alliances with the Know Nothings, had endorsed various pieces of nativist legislation, and in the process had won over many voters who had backed Fillmore in 1856. (See table 3.) Still, it was essential that the Republicans not only retain the loyalty of the former Know Nothings but win additional accessions as well. Attracting sup-

Stuart Mews (Oxford, Eng., 1982), 449–63; Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 227–32; Jeter Isely, *Horace Greeley and the Republican Party, 1853–1861* (Princeton, 1947), 83; Greeley to A. E. Bovey, Nov. 17, 1856, typescript, Horace Greeley Papers (Library of Congress); [Jefferson, Ohio] *Ashtabula Sentinel*, July 19, 1855.

<sup>42</sup> Justin D. Fulton to Seward, May 26, 1856, Seward Papers; *Ohio State Journal*, Nov. 14, 1856; William G. Bean, "Puritan Versus Celt, 1850–1860," *New England Quarterly*, 7 (March 1934), 86; *Chicago Tribune*, Feb. 8, Feb. 13, 1856; Thomas T. McAvoy, *A History of the Catholic Church in the United States* (Notre Dame, 1969), 157–61, 183–84.

<sup>43</sup> Silbey, "Surge of Republican Power," 209–29; *Hartford Courant*, March 31, 1856.

TABLE 3  
 Percentage of Fillmore Americans Voting Republican 1857–1859:  
 Five Key Northern States

	1857	1858	1859	CASES (N)
ILLINOIS	—	73	—	99 <sup>b</sup>
INDIANA	—	49	—	91 <sup>b</sup>
NEW YORK	5	11	28	360 <sup>a</sup> ; 360 <sup>a</sup> ; 60 <sup>b</sup>
OHIO	1	61	39	88 <sup>b</sup>
PENNSYLVANIA (all Fillmore voters)	64	81	67	63 <sup>b</sup>
PENNSYLVANIA (Fillmore Union voters)	72	74	67	63 <sup>b</sup>
PENNSYLVANIA (Fillmore Straight voters)	18	82	52	63 <sup>b</sup>

SOURCES: Election returns, Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research; *Tribune Almanac*; *Albany Argus*; *Albany Evening Journal*; [Binghamton] *Broome Republican*; *Auburn Daily Advertiser*; *Fredonia Censor*; *Jamestown Journal*; *Plattsburgh Republican*; *Poughkeepsie Eagle*; *Buffalo Daily Courier*; *Buffalo Morning Express*; *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*; [Geneseo] *Livingston Republican*; *Rochester Daily Union*; *New York Times*; *New York Tribune*; [Rome] *Roman Citizen*; *Newburgh Telegraph*; [Jamaica] *Long Island Democrat*; *Corning Weekly Journal*; *Sag Harbor Corrector*; *Ithaca American Citizen*; [Penn Yan] *Yates County Whig*; [Penn Yan] *Yates County Chronicle*; *Harrisburg Daily Telegraph*; [Harrisburg] *Keystone*.

NOTE: State elections are Illinois: 1858 treasurer; Indiana: 1858 secretary of state; New York: 1857 and 1859 secretary of state, 1858 governor; Ohio: 1857 and 1859 governor, 1858 supreme court justice; Pennsylvania: 1857 governor, 1858 supreme court justice, 1859 surveyor.

<sup>a</sup> Townships and wards.

<sup>b</sup> Counties.

port from nativists remained a major concern for party managers when mapping strategy for the 1860 contest. Of the most populous northern states, only Ohio seemed safe. Illinois and Indiana were still under Democratic control, while in New York, as the 1859 state election clearly demonstrated, the remaining remnant of the American organization held the balance of power between the two major parties. Equally critical was Pennsylvania, where nativist influence was stronger in the anti-Democratic ranks than in any other state and where the People's party, representing a coalition of Republicans and Americans, had only recently managed to carry the state.

The importance of the nativist element both inside and outside the Republican ranks played a major role in Lincoln's unexpected triumph at the 1860 Chicago convention. Historians traditionally attribute the rejection of Seward, the party's most prominent leader and the frontrunner for the nomination, to his radical antislavery reputation. Also critical, however, was the nativists' burning hatred of the New York leader, which the passing years had done nothing to extinguish. Nativist Republicans at Chicago asserted on the convention floor and in private caucuses that Seward would never receive sufficient backing from former Know Nothings and Fillmore supporters to carry the

TABLE 4  
 Percentage of Those Casting American Ballots in State Elections  
 Voting Republican in the 1860 Presidential Election

	1854	1855	1856 (STATE)	CASES (N)
CONNECTICUT	—	72	80	146 <sup>a</sup>
MASSACHUSETTS	62	62	74 <sup>1</sup>	322; 321; 321 <sup>a</sup>
NEW YORK	64	47	—	351; 360 <sup>a</sup>
OHIO	51 <sup>2</sup>	47 <sup>3</sup>	57	49; 88; 88 <sup>b</sup>
PENNSYLVANIA	77	99 <sup>4</sup>	—	63 <sup>b</sup>

SOURCES: Election returns, Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research; Massachusetts State Archives; *Tribune Almanac*; *Connecticut Register*; *Hartford Courant*; *Hartford Times*; *Boston Daily Advertiser*; *Albany Argus*; [Binghamton] *Broome Republican*; *Auburn Daily Advertiser*; *Auburn Journal*; *Jamestown Journal*; *Plattsburgh Republican*; *Poughkeepsie Eagle*; *Buffalo Republic*; *Buffalo Daily Courier*; *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*; [Geneseo] *Livingston Republican*; *Rochester Daily American*; *New York Times*; *New York Tribune*; [Rome] *Roman Daily Sentinel*; *Utica Daily Gazette*; *Middletown Whig Press*; [Jamaica] *Long Island Democrat*; *Corning Weekly Journal*; *Sag Harbor Corrector*; *Ithaca Chronicle*; [Penn Yan] *Yates County Whig*; *Cleveland Plain Dealer*; *Cincinnati Gazette*; *Harrisburg Daily Telegraph*; [Harrisburg] *Keystone*; *Harrisburg Morning Herald*.

NOTE: State elections are Connecticut: 1855 and 1856 governor; Massachusetts: 1854, 1855, and 1856 governor; New York: 1854 governor, 1855 secretary of state; Ohio: 1854 board of public works, 1855 governor, 1856 supreme court justice; Pennsylvania: 1854 governor, 1855 canal commissioner.

<sup>1</sup> Vote for Henry J. Gardner (Frémont American) and George W. Gordon (Fillmore American) combined.

<sup>2</sup> Membership, October 1854.

<sup>3</sup> Vote for Allan Trimble (Independent American-Whig).

<sup>4</sup> Vote for Thomas Nicholson (Fusion American).

<sup>a</sup> Townships and wards.

<sup>b</sup> Counties.

doubtful northern states. The chairman of the New Jersey delegation admonished a western Seward supporter beforehand that "it is conceded by all judicious and well advised men that Mr. Seward's Nomination will revive the divisions of 1856 in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, and will be fatal to us in those states." An Ohio delegate, who understood the basic forces at work in the convention's deliberations, later attributed Seward's defeat to the combined efforts of the Indiana, Illinois, and Pennsylvania delegations, "declaring in Ind that they would lose their Governor & in Ill that they would in some districts hardly be able to run an electoral ticket at all, & in Pa declaring the state never could be carried for Seward Swearing to his Catholicizing proclivities &c." In their quest for victory the delegates turned to Lincoln, who despite his repugnance for nativist doctrines had never publicly criticized the Know Nothings and who thus was acceptable to nativists.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>44</sup> William E. Baringer, *Lincoln's Rise to Power* (Boston, 1937), 195; R. Hosea to Chase, May 18, 1860, Chase Papers (Library of Congress); *Chicago Press and Tribune*, May 16, 1860. In their reminiscences Alexander K. McClure, the Republican state chairman in Pennsylvania, and James G. Blaine, his counterpart in Maine, agreed that nativist hostility to Seward had been crucial to his

In winning the presidency Lincoln captured a majority of the popular vote in the free states in a four-way race. As was true with Frémont four years earlier, Lincoln received substantial support from those who had voted Know Nothing in 1854 or 1855. (See table 4.) Most of those initial Know Nothings who had supported Frémont continued to adhere to the Republican party after 1856, and they were joined by new nativist converts. In New York, for example, where only 41 percent of the 1854 Know Nothings had voted for Frémont, Lincoln won 64 percent of their votes. Even more dramatic was the shift in Pennsylvania, where Lincoln won fully three-fourths of the 1854 American voters, compared with only 12 percent for Frémont. Of the states sampled, the only

TABLE 5  
Percentage of 1856 Fillmore Voters Casting Republican and Constitutional Union Ballots in the 1860 Presidential Election

	REPUBLICAN	CONSTITUTIONAL UNION	CASES (N)
CONNECTICUT	29	28	146 <sup>a</sup>
ILLINOIS	74	3	99 <sup>b</sup>
INDIANA	40	22	91 <sup>b</sup>
IOWA	63	19	64 <sup>b</sup>
MAINE	0	48	377 <sup>a</sup>
MASSACHUSETTS	22	53	321 <sup>a</sup>
NEW YORK	50	50 <sup>1</sup>	360 <sup>a</sup>
OHIO	47	31	88 <sup>b</sup>
PENNSYLVANIA	83	7	63 <sup>b</sup>

SOURCES: Election returns, Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research; *Tribune Almanac* [for 1857 and 1861]; *Connecticut Register* [for 1857 and 1861]; *Maine Register* [for 1857]; *Hartford Courant*; *Hartford Times*; [Augusta, Me.] *Kennebec Journal*; *Portland Daily Advertiser*; *Portland Eastern Argus*; *Albany Argus*; [Binghamton] *Broome Republican*; *Auburn Daily Advertiser*; *Jamestown Journal*; *Plattsburgh Republican*; *Poughkeepsie Eagle*; *Buffalo Daily Courier*; *Buffalo Morning Express*; *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*; [Geneseo] *Livingston Republican*; *Rochester Daily Union*; *New York Times*; *New York Tribune*; [Rome] *Roman Citizen*; *Newburgh Telegraph*; [Jamaica] *Long Island Democrat*; *Corning Weekly Journal*; *Sag Harbor Corrector*; *Ithaca American Citizen*; [Penn Yan] *Yates County Chronicle*; *Harrisburg Daily Telegraph*; [Harrisburg] *Keystone*.

<sup>1</sup> Vote for Fusion electoral ticket.

<sup>a</sup> Townships and wards.

<sup>b</sup> Counties.

rejection at Chicago. A. K. McClure, *Old Time Notes of Pennsylvania; a Connected and Chronological Record of the Commercial, Industrial and Educational Advancement of Pennsylvania, and the Inner History of all Political Movements since the adoption of the Constitution of 1838* (2 vols., Philadelphia, 1905), I, 399; James G. Blaine, *Twenty Years of Congress* (2 vols., Norwich, 1884-1886), I, 165-66. The triumph of an American-Democratic coalition in the Rhode Island state election in April reinforced the fears of party managers that Seward's nomination would drive off nativists whose support was mandatory for a national victory. James L. Huston, "The Threat of Radicalism: Seward's Candidacy and the Rhode Island Gubernatorial Election of 1860," *Rhode Island History*, 41 (Aug. 1982), 87-99. Cognizant of the Know Nothings' power in Illinois, Abraham Lincoln confined his criticism to private exchanges. See, for example, Basler, ed., *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, II, 316-17, 323.

ones in which Lincoln won fewer votes from initial Know Nothings than did his predecessor were Connecticut and Massachusetts, and the decline in the former was negligible. Presumably, many of those Know Nothings, who were antislavery as well as nativist, left the party in reaction to the proslavery national platforms of 1855 and 1856. But even among those who remained loyal to Fillmore in 1856, the Republicans made substantial inroads during the next four years. Lincoln won over 40 percent of the Fillmore vote in Indiana and Ohio, 50 percent in New York, over 60 percent in Iowa, over 70 percent in Illinois, and over 80 percent in Pennsylvania. (See table 5.) Historians traditionally view the Constitutional Union party as the successor of the American party, but in fact only in Maine and Massachusetts did John Bell, the Constitutional Union party's presidential nominee, win a greater share of the 1856 Fillmore voters than did Lincoln. Conversions among 1856 Know Nothings were essential to Lincoln's election: They accounted for his margin of victory in Illinois and also in New York, where the opposition had united and without whose electoral votes he would have been defeated. In addition, votes from Fillmore Americans enabled Lincoln to win clear majorities in Indiana and Pennsylvania over the divided opposition.

The timing and process by which American party members transferred their partisan allegiance varied from state to state. Of the five most significant northern states, only in Pennsylvania did a substantial segment of Fillmore Americans enter the Republican ranks in 1857. (See table 3.) The vast majority of those converts, however, came from Fillmore Union voters, who had cooperated with the Republicans the year before. A significantly smaller proportion of the so-called Fillmore Straight men, who had been unwavering in their support of Fillmore, defected to the Republican cause in 1857.<sup>45</sup> It was in 1858 that the first significant break occurred among the diehard Fillmore Americans. Only in New York was the rate of conversion relatively low in 1858, and even there it was double that of 1857. In the other states, half or more of the Fillmore supporters cast Republican or People's ballots. In New York the desertion from the lingering American organization began a year later, when the party finally abandoned its separate existence and after the Republicans had passed a state registry law. The Republicans' long courtship of the nativists, the Lecompton Constitution controversy of 1858, and the disappearance of separate American party tickets all contributed to the Republican party's political momentum, so that by 1860, despite Bell's candidacy, a majority of Fillmore voters gravitated to Lincoln's standard.

There still remains the evidence marshaled by Baum that few Know Nothings joined the Republican party in Massachusetts. Baum's argument rests on a highly selective comparison of elections, however. Inexplicably, he

<sup>45</sup> The 1856 presidential election in Pennsylvania was complicated by the presence of two separate Fillmore electoral tickets. The so-called Fillmore Straight ticket represented the uncompromising Americans; these electors were pledged to support only Fillmore. The Fillmore Union ticket, on the other hand, represented those Americans who desired to maintain their separate identity, yet agreed with the Frémont forces to support a common electoral ticket (minus one elector) in a joint effort to carry the state. *Pittsburgh Daily Gazette*, Oct. 20, Oct. 21, 1856; John F. Coleman, *The Disruption of the Pennsylvania Democracy, 1848-1860* (Harrisburg, 1975), 97-98.

fails to analyze the sources of Frémont's vote in 1856, even though Frémont was the first Republican candidate to carry the state and developments that year were far more crucial than those of subsequent years in determining the fate of the Republican party in the state. Regression estimates for the 1856 presidential contest dispel any doubt that Massachusetts Know Nothings overwhelmingly voted Republican. In fact, such analysis indicates that over 70 percent of the 1854 Know Nothings voted for Frémont and that a similar proportion of the 1855 Know Nothings (already weakened by defections to Republicanism) cast Republican ballots. The same pattern prevailed in 1860; in addition, Lincoln won about one-fourth of the 1856 Fillmore Americans. Though the extent of defections among Fillmore voters was lower in Massachusetts than in most other northern states, that state's rate of defection to Frémont among 1854 and 1855 Know Nothings was rivaled only by Connecticut's. Know Nothing converts were absolutely essential to the formation of the Republican majority in Massachusetts.<sup>46</sup>

Baum also ignores the significance of the 1856 gubernatorial election in Massachusetts and misinterprets elections later in the decade. In 1856 the Republican state convention made no nomination for governor in exchange for the North Americans' agreement to support a common Frémont electoral ticket. That decision, in effect, conceded reelection of the American incumbent, Henry J. Gardner, who more than any other man epitomized the nativist movement in the state. Certainly, no man was more intensely hated by the anti-Know Nothing Republicans. Although Baum insists that the Republican party in Massachusetts was strictly an antislavery party untainted by nativism, the radical antislavery faction in the party was not strong enough to prevent the indirect endorsement of Gardner, and a protest ticket it ran polled less than 4 percent of the vote. Some additional Frémont voters abstained on the governor's race, but the overwhelming majority (83 percent) supported Gardner. Despite Frémont's overpowering victory in the state, Republican leaders were not deceived about the realities of Massachusetts politics. Recognizing that some concessions to nativist sentiment were imperative for victory, the Republicans in 1857 nominated Banks to run against Gardner. Far from presenting the voters with a clear choice between nativism and anti-slavery, Banks's nomination was irrefutable evidence of the continuing strength of nativism in the Republican ranks. The former congressman had been one of the most prominent Know Nothing leaders in the state; following his expedient conversion to Republicanism, he did not confine his platform to

<sup>46</sup> Baum, "Know-Nothingism and the Republican Majority in Massachusetts," 967-72, 978-79, 986. Baum also minimizes the American influence in the Republican coalition by calculating the percentage of Lincoln's vote in 1860 cast by 1855 Know Nothings. *Ibid.*, 979. A more relevant comparison is with American support in 1854, since the Republican vote in 1855 included a large proportion of former Know Nothings. Men who had voted American in 1854 accounted for an estimated 54 percent of Frémont's total vote in 1856, and only slightly less, 48 percent, of Lincoln's tally four years later. The latter figure is subject to greater uncertainty because of the large population increase between the two elections and because the available data do not make possible corrections for migration into and out of the state or for the death of voters between elections. These figures, coupled with additional conversions among 1855 and 1856 Americans, leave little doubt that a majority of Lincoln's supporters were one-time Know Nothings.

the slavery issue and continued to speak out for nativist reforms. Once again, disgruntled antislavery radicals entered a protest candidate, who received a token 213 votes. An extraordinarily gifted political operator, Banks refused to discard nativism after he became governor, despite heavy pressure from some Republicans, and was closely identified with the Two-Year Amendment. He exploited both antislavery and nativism to win three terms as the state's chief executive, much to the chagrin of frustrated radicals, before he voluntarily retired in 1860. In short, in its electoral base, its leadership, and its public policy, the Republican party of Massachusetts displayed unmistakable evidence of the continuing influence of nativism.<sup>47</sup>

To account for the Republican party's success and the Know Nothings' corresponding eclipse, historians have emphasized a number of factors: the Republicans' extraordinarily skillful leadership, the crescendo of sectionalism, the Know Nothings' squandering of many of their advantages, and the American party's sorry performance in office. Also crucial was the Republican party's blatant solicitation of nativist support. By helping to win over those former adversaries, the Republicans' adoption of various strands of nativist thought and their recognition of former Know Nothings in the distribution of party honors were significant factors in the creation and maintenance of a Republican majority in the North.

Still, one must be careful not to minimize the importance of sectional tensions in bringing Know Nothings into the Republican party. Observers inside and outside the order reported extensive defections among rank-and-file American party members during the summer of 1856 following the alleged "sack of Lawrence" and the assault on Sumner. The vast majority of Northerners who joined the Know Nothing lodges in 1854 and 1855 were anti-slavery extension as well as nativist in sentiment, and they voted for the American party because it represented both principles. At the party's 1855 and 1856 national conventions, northern Know Nothing leaders bluntly warned that a proslavery platform would destroy the order's strength in the North. American Gov. William Minor of Connecticut explained that had the northern delegates endorsed the 1855 platform, "the American party would have been blown to atoms in every Northern state."<sup>48</sup> As those leaders predicted, when

<sup>47</sup> *Boston Daily Advertiser*, June 20, Sept. 9, Oct. 16, 1857; Pierce to Charles H. Ray, Jan. 4, 1861, Charles H. Ray Papers (Huntington Library); Fred Harvey Harrington, *Fighting Politician: Major General N. P. Banks* (Philadelphia, 1948), 42-47; John R. Mulkern, "The Know-Nothing Party in Massachusetts" (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1963), 271-96. For a detailed account of Massachusetts politics in this decade, see Bean, "Party Transformation in Massachusetts." Henry J. Gardner was stronger among recent converts to Republicanism than among its initial supporters, although a majority (53 percent) of the 1855 Republicans voted for the governor on the Frémont American ticket. Their behavior is hardly consistent with Baum's view that the 1855 Republican vote represented the hardcore antislavery element of the party. Rather, these figures suggest that even at the party's founding, only a minority of Massachusetts Republicans were unwilling to brook any concessions to nativism, and subsequent Know Nothing accessions further reduced their strength in the Republican party. Baum, "Know-Nothingism and the Republican Majority in Massachusetts," 966-68.

<sup>48</sup> William T. Minor to Ullmann, July 17, 1855, Ullmann Papers. For similar assessments, see J. D. Colver to Ullmann, July 21, 1855, *ibid.*; Cragin to Weed, June 15, 1855, Seward Papers;

the party dropped its anti-slavery extension position in 1856, thousands of members deserted it for the Republicans precisely because the Republican appeal emphasized both sectionalism and nativism. The Republican party's success in 1856 and later demonstrated, as the 1854 elections had as well, that the strongest political party in the North was one that combined opposition to the Slave Power with anti-Catholicism.

Contemporary observers recognized the role of Know Nothingism in the Republican party's eventual rise to power. The Know Nothing movement, one Ohio Republican commented, "was simply a stepping-stone" for disaffected Whigs and Democrats on their way to becoming Republicans. Julian added his voice to that testimony. Far from a defender of the secret society, he nevertheless called it "a sort of 'underground railroad'" by which Whigs and Democrats "generally made their exodus from their former political masters" into the Republican ranks.<sup>49</sup> Julian's imagery was particularly apt and no doubt came naturally to a radical antislavery man. Greeted with great fanfare, the Know Nothing train got off to a fast start, only to suffer a series of derailments that ultimately left it wrecked beyond repair. In the course of those developments, the large majority of the passengers on that railroad disembarked, some sooner, some later, at the station known as "The Republican Party."

N. Darling to Weed, June 20, 1855, Thurlow Weed Papers (University of Rochester); Henry J. Gardner's remarks, quoted in *New York Tribune*, June 12, 1855.

<sup>49</sup> Roeliff Brinkerhoff, *Recollections of a Lifetime* (Cincinnati, 1900), 91-92; George W. Julian, "The Death-Struggle of the Republican Party," *North American Review*, 126 (March-April 1878), 265.