The Politics of Exclusion and Paranoia: The Know Nothing Party as a Case Study in Frustration-Aggression Analysis

Elton W. Weintz

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THE POLITICS OF EXCLUSION AND PARANOIA: THE KNOW NOTHING PARTY AS A CASE STUDY IN FRUSTRATION-AGGRESSION ANALYSIS

by

Elton W. Weintz

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2003
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Acknowledgements--Continued

Without his mentorship, I would only be half the scholar that I am today.

Lastly, I thank my family and friends for their support of my academic ventures. Without their encouragement and love, I do not think that I could have survived the task of finishing a second master’s degree while concurrently working toward a doctorate in another discipline. Three down, one to go!

Elton W. Weintz
THE POLITICS OF EXCLUSION AND PARANOIA: THE KNOW NOTHING PARTY AS A CASE STUDY IN FRUSTRATION-AGGRESSION ANALYSIS

Elton W. Weintz, M. A.
Western Michigan University, 2003

Historically, American democracy has been based on a policy of exclusion where the empowered have enjoyed the luxury of deciding which groups would be eligible to participate fully in the great American experiment—a flawed system based upon discriminatory notions of class, racism, sexism, and nativism. Richard Hofstadter’s paranoia interpretation—that irrational beliefs in conspiracies led to civic participation in exclusionary movements—provides some rationale for this exclusionary behavior.

Taking a multidisciplinary approach, this paper applies the social psychological theory of frustration-aggression analysis in conjunction with Hofstadter’s paranoia interpretation in an attempt to further understand exclusionary behavior in American history. In particular, this work analyzes the nativist movement of the antebellum period as well as how the political culture of paranoia sustained the movement’s chief protagonist—the Know Nothing party.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

One of the tragic truths of American democracy is the inherent hypocrisy prevalent in the fundamental idea that "all men are created equal." From the time that those words were initially penned and agreed upon by the Founding Fathers, it was painfully clear that this equality was only meant for the privileged few—the most notable exceptions being women, slaves, and other non-whites. Not even all white males shared in this democratic notion since only property-owning individuals really had access to the ballot and elected office. Historically, American democracy has been based on a policy of exclusion where those few empowered individuals have enjoyed the luxury of deciding which groups would be eligible to participate fully in the great American experiment—a flawed system based upon discriminatory notions of class, racism, sexism, and nativism.

Focus of the Study

For decades, historians and social scientists have attempted to provide some rationale for exclusionary
behavior in American political culture. With an increase in interdisciplinary studies in the understanding of ethnic, race, and gender relations, new approaches to scientific research and historical interpretation can be created through the incorporation of complementary methods. In some cases, quantitative methods can be used to strengthen qualitative or interpretive approaches utilized in the humanities supporting certain propositions or suppositions over others.\(^1\) Additionally, where substantial quantitative data may not exist, scientific theories could still be applied in an interpretive setting to explain why something occurred.\(^2\)

The subject of this research project is the Know Nothing movement of the 1850s. Historical research on the subject of the Know Nothing movement is extraordinarily disjointed. Few monographs exist and, for the most part, the movement has played a supplemental role in the explanation of the rise of the Republican

\(^1\) Prime examples of this approach are W. E. B. DuBois’s study of urban problems in his 1899 work, *The Philadelphia Negro*, or St. Clair Drake’s and Horace Cayton’s work on living conditions in Chicago entitled, *Black Metropolis* (1945). In both cases, empirical research is used to supplement interpretive values.

\(^2\) Karl Marx’s, Georg Simmel’s, and Erich Fromm’s progressive studies of alienation or Robert Merton’s work in structural functionalism, in particular, his study of anomie in *Social Theory and Social Structure* (1968), are two examples of interpretative methods being used to bolster studies where qualitative data is minimal.
Party during the 1850s.\(^3\) Despite being relegated to a secondary role, the movement offers unique insight to the political culture of exclusion during the era as the Know Nothings successfully combined anti-foreign and anti-Catholic sentiment to garner the support of a growing number of Americans who had become disassociated and dissatisfied with an unresponsive political climate. The movement’s ability to foster this exclusionary sentiment came as much from the public’s uncertainty of their economic and social futures and concern over the fate of the Union in the face of the slavery question as it did from a feeling of paranoia that permeated the very fabric of American culture at the time.

The qualitative assessment of exclusionary behavior comes from Richard Hofstadter’s paranoid interpretation of American political culture, introduced in his 1965 work, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays*. In this study, Hofstadter asserted that waves of paranoia resulted from times of economic crisis to produce exclusion in American politics. During the 1850s, with the increase of immigration to the United

\(^3\) Because reasons varied regionally concerning the public’s acceptance of the movement, few works dealing with the Know Nothings on the national level exist. Therefore, for the most part, research on the Know Nothing movement has been relegated to state and regional studies.
States, this paranoia resulted from uncertain economic and industrial prospects producing a climate of hostility toward foreigners, most of whom were Catholics, and from this hostility, attempts to limit their participation in American politics.

The quantitative methods established in the social psychological theory of frustration-aggression analysis will be used in conjunction with Hofstadter's historical interpretation in an attempt to further understand exclusionary behavior in American history. Using aspects of conflict analysis and displaced aggression as presented by Carl Hovland and Robert Sears (1940) and Neal Miller (1948), this work will review how inhibited acts of aggression can provide additional frustration and aggression against objects perceived to be responsible for this inhibition. The decision to use frustration-aggression analysis as a methodological tool in this interpretive study stems from the fact that this particular analysis, although widely accepted by social scientists, still has its detractors and cynics as to the theory's effectiveness. As such, by utilizing the underlying principles of this theory in an interpretive manner, this work also hopes to prove its effectiveness in qualitative research settings.
Outline of the Study

This thesis is divided into five chapters. Serving as background, the second chapter of this work provides a simple historical understanding of the Know Nothing movement during the antebellum period. Relying on both primary and secondary sources, this chapter outlines the political culture of the era. Discussion focuses on increases in immigration, the collapse of the two party system, sectional concerns on the slavery question, and the growing public concerns about a possible Catholic menace. The underlying theme of the chapter deals with public appeal toward the anti-immigration and anti-Catholic movements as well as how grassroots nativist organizations became a national political force in the 1850s.

The historiography of the Know Nothing movement is described in Chapter Three. This chapter examines selected historical and political studies of the movement in order to convey how scholars have interpreted the political, social, and cultural events of the antebellum period as well as the Know Nothing role in it. In particular, Hofstadter's paranoia interpretation is introduced and explained. Emphasis in this chapter is
placed on the paranoia interpretation and its influence on recent historical and political studies.

Frustration-aggression analysis is the focus of the fourth chapter. The social psychological hypothesis of frustration-aggression is detailed and examined as well as the conflict theory developed by Hovland and Sears to support that hypothesis. Further scientific debate of the hypothesis is provided by reviewing the research of Alexander Mintz, Joseph Hepworth, and Stephen West. Additionally, Neal Miller's and Don Fitz's work on aggression displacement is analyzed to defend the Sears and Hovland hypothesis and to expand the scientific dialogue concerning interpersonal relations.

In the concluding chapter, the frustration-aggression model is used in conjunction with Hofstadter's paranoia interpretation to better understand the exclusionary political culture of the antebellum period. The chapter revisits arguments for multidisciplinary approaches in the interpretation of history and analyzes their effectiveness. Additionally, other historical avenues and sociological methods are identified for future interdisciplinary studies.
CHAPTER II

POLITICS OF EXCLUSION AND PARANOIA

As a nation, we began by declaring that "all men are created equal." We now practically read it "all men are created equal, except negroes." When the Know-Nothings get control, it will read "all men are created equal, except negroes, and foreigners, and catholics."

--Abraham Lincoln, 1855

History of the Know Nothing Movement

The early 1840s and 1850s can best be described as a period of economic stagnation--money was scarce, people were in debt, and banks had suspended specie payments. Native workingmen felt anxious as they were continually being brought into competition for jobs with a growing immigrant class that would work for less pay. Unable to find refuge from their anxiety within a political system perceived to have become more corrupt with the increased participation of naturalized immigrants, native-born whites began to turn to nativist organizations in an effort to stem the influence of the immigrant class.

During the first two centuries of the British colonization effort and American independence (1607-1830), no more than one million people immigrated to the thirteen colonies that would eventually become the United States. Most of these immigrants came from Great Britain and the African continent. Rarely, did the annual number of immigrants entering America exceed 20,000.\(^3\) In the decade prior to 1845, just over seven hundred thousand immigrants entered the United States. In the following ten years, nearly three million immigrants came to America (See Table 1). This substantial growth created a strain on already limited economic and residential resources in the urban areas of the northeast as well as contributed to the rise in slums, poverty, moral corruption, and crime in the cities. A growing public resentment by the predominantly Anglo-Saxon, Protestant community toward these new immigrants was a natural byproduct to the increase of the nation’s social ills.\(^4\) As a result, a political radicalism developed in order to limit the effect of these immigrants in American culture and society. This nativism took the form of verbal and,


eventually, physical assaults on the new immigrants.

Since the vast majority of immigrants entering the United States in the 1840s and 1850s came from Ireland and Germany (71.0% and 71.8%, respectively for each decade), this resentment found further inspiration due to the religious convictions of many of the newcomers—Catholicism.\(^5\)

### Table 1

<table>
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<th>Year</th>
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<td>114,371</td>
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<td>1844</td>
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<td>427,833</td>
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<tr>
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<td>707,968</td>
<td></td>
<td>2,944,833</td>
</tr>
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</table>

\(^5\) Select Committee on Immigration and Refugee Policy, *U. S. Immigration Policy and the National Interest: Staff Report*, (Washington, DC: GPO, 1981), 230-231. Between 1841 and 1850, 1.7 million legal immigrants entered the United States. Of those immigrants, 45.6% came from Ireland and 25.4% from Germany. In the following decade, 36.6% arrived from Germany and 35.2% from Ireland. Between 1830 and 1850, the Catholic Church in the United States grew from approximately 600,000 practitioners to 3.5 million.

\(^6\) U. S. Immigration and Naturalization Service.
Anti-Catholicism was not a new phenomenon in antebellum America. The strict hierarchical structure of the Catholic religion along with the doctrine of obedience to the Roman papacy were regarded as outmoded European obscurantism and contrary to American democratic ideals. Native-born Americans argued that with the Church's centralized nature and doctrine of unflagging obedience to priests and bishops, the Catholic Church wielded a disproportionate degree of influence over its followers in local and state politics. The Church's ability to mold the immigrant population into an obedient voting bloc, or political tool of the papacy, was repugnant to the native populace who saw this not only as an attack on the American ideals of liberty, free thinking, and the franchise, but as a form of slavery as well. From this repugnancy, conspiracy ensued--the belief that the Catholic Church wished to subjugate the American people to the Roman papacy by gaining control of the American political system through anti-democratic or corrupt means. As a result, when the American Catholic Church continued to gain new adherents, in large part

from the influx of immigration from Ireland and Germany in the 1840s, anti-Catholic propaganda could be found in the nation’s magazines, newspapers, and books and in the violence perpetrated against Catholics in the nation’s streets. Leading the charge were Protestant clergymen and journalists who attacked Catholicism and its growing influence in local political matters.

Fearful of Catholic influence in local politics and emboldened by the papal conspiracy, native Protestants sought to curtail the power of these newly-arrived immigrants by proposing an extension to the time period outlined in the nation’s naturalization laws. During the antebellum era, immigrants could become naturalized citizens and gain access to the ballot in five years. With the vast wave of immigration in the late-1840s, the early-1850s represented the first time that these new citizens could exercise their right to vote. Hoping to take advantage of its growing political influence, the

---

9 Samuel Morse published *Foreign Conspiracy Against the Liberties of the United States* (1835) calling for the curbing of Catholic immigration and opposition to Catholic schools and officeholders. In 1836, a novel entitled, *Awful Disclosure of the Hotel Dieu Nunnery of Montreal*, reported acts of debauchery, infanticide, murder, and rape purportedly occurring at this particular nunnery. As a result of anti-Catholic sermons, the Ursuline Convent in Charlestown, Massachusetts, was burned to the ground in August 1834. In the summer of 1844, violence broke out between Catholics and Protestants in New York City and Philadelphia. The violence in Philadelphia lasted four days leaving twenty people dead and almost one hundred injured.

10 A Protestant Reformation Society was formed to disseminate anti-Catholic propaganda and newspapers such as *Downfall of Babylon* and *American Protestant Vindicator* preached a crusade against the papacy.
Catholic Church sought to gain ecclesiastical ownership of property, replace the King James Version of the Bible with the Catholic Version for Catholic students attending public schools, and divide school funds so that taxes Catholics paid could be used to support parochial schools.\textsuperscript{11} The calls of a Catholic conspiracy soon gained credence among the native-born population as Protestants and anti-Catholic propagandists insisted that the Catholic Church was attempting to establish an American papacy through the acquisition of land, perpetuating the influence and power of Catholic priests over devotees of the faith, and, since education was perceived as an essential element to class advancement, curtailing the social mobility of many lower and middle-class Americans by diverting funds from public schools to Catholic schools.\textsuperscript{12} As both major political parties sought to garner support from these newly naturalized citizens (the Democratic party, in particular), they attempted to curry favor by adopting parts of the Catholic agenda.\textsuperscript{13} Sensing betrayal and a further corruption of the political


\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 323. For example, in 1842, the New York legislature passed the Maclay Act. This Act replaced the Protestant-run centralized Public School Society with decentralized boards of education and
system, Protestants and anti-Catholics began to form their own political agencies to combat the growing Catholic threat.

Between 1843 and 1847, several nativist political organizations arose from the perceived threat of Catholics and immigrants to the established order. Among these were the religious-nationalistic American Republicans. Utilizing nativist stereotypes for naturalized citizens, the American Republicans played upon xenophobic fears in an attempt to win public acceptance of their major political objectives—only native Americans should hold public office, the King James Version of the Bible should be retained in public schools, and the naturalization process should be extended from five years to twenty-one. Although the group’s success was limited to local politics in New York City, Philadelphia, and Boston, where political and economic control was threatened by Catholics and immigrants, and where American Republicans maintained an unique alliance with state and local Whig party politicians (who were losing the Catholic and immigrant vote to the Democrats), it did establish itself as the voice for thousands of discontented Americans and sought allowed these boards to dispense funds as they saw fit. Although funds could not be used for parochial schools, the Catholic Church did gain control of educational resources in several districts in New York City.14 Curran, 36.
to expand its influence nationally when it became the Native American party.\textsuperscript{15} The party’s national aspirations were short-lived, however, as fearful Whigs sought to dissolve the alliance with the American Republicans in the face of waning national acceptance of nativist propaganda due, in part, to the perceived scarcity of labor as well as the encouragement of immigration by the newer states in the midwest.\textsuperscript{16} Even with the decline of the nativist movement after 1847, its momentum was kept alive by the formation of a number of secret fraternal organizations whose goals were the protection of “American” interests and principles and the symbolic declaration—“America must be ruled by Americans.”\textsuperscript{17}

Among these fraternal organizations was the Order of the Star-Spangled Banner, which, eventually, would don its more familiar \textit{nom de plume}, the Know Nothings or the American party.

Founded in 1849, by Charles Allen as a secret patriotic society, the Order of the Star-Spangled Banner soon gained national prominence through its ultranationalistic propaganda. This New York-based organization appealed to many Americans who feared the evolving American culture and society brought on by

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 40-41.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 43.
industrialization, urbanization, and immigration. Fluctuations in the economy, unpredictable agricultural production, and transportation and communication advancements further disrupted the social and economic security of the time by shifting employment practices and population trends away from rural and small towns and toward the urban centers developing in the northeast and midwest.\textsuperscript{18} Americans looked to the major political parties for a sense of stability, but finding none, turned to grassroots organizations in search of direction. Feeling the sense of public apprehension toward the new social and cultural climate, the Order of the Star-Spangled Banner slowly transformed itself into a political entity and began to offer a viable alternative on the local and state levels to the two-party system by harnessing the public fear and leveling blame for the present predicament squarely on the shoulders of immigrants and Catholics, both of whom, it was believed, sought to destroy the American way of life.\textsuperscript{19}

The ideology of the Know Nothing party appealed to many Americans during the antebellum period. The movement advocated the belief that Protestantism defined American society, that it encouraged individualism and


\textsuperscript{19} Knobel, 118-119.
democratic ideals, and that the autocratic nature of Catholicism was not compatible with those ideals.\textsuperscript{20} The Know Nothings also contended that although few Catholics lived in the United States, their political power was disproportionate to their numbers due, in part, to their unwavering fidelity to Church leaders and the willingness of corrupt political parties and professional politicians to take advantage of this blind obedience for their own personal and organizational gain.\textsuperscript{21} Finally, most northern Know Nothings espoused the need for legal limitations on the extension of slavery and alcohol consumption. Although ambiguous on the former issue at first, the eventual stand taken by the American party after the 1854 elections would signal the end of its influence in antebellum politics.

The rise of the American party on the national level was abetted by the decline of the Whig party during the early-1850s.\textsuperscript{22} A split between the southern pro-slavery and the northern anti-slavery factions over party support of the Compromise of 1850 in the 1852 national elections sounded the death peal for the Whigs. Carrying only four

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 105.
states in the presidential election, the Whigs were on the verge of collapse.\textsuperscript{23} By the end of 1852, the southern wing of the party ceased to exist—many of its members joining the ranks of Union parties, which offered loyalty to the United States and support for the Compromise. In the North, anti-slavery Whigs sought refuge in abolition societies and conservative members of the party eventually fell into the nativist ranks.\textsuperscript{24} With the Democratic passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854, the second American party system soon collapsed as the remaining factions of the Whig coalition abandoned the organization and left third-party organizations such as the Know Nothings and the Republicans to compete with the Democrats in 1856.\textsuperscript{25}

Harnessing its nativist propaganda, the American party sought to provide stability and union in a time of sectional strife. Echoing the need to advance "American" values and interests, the party took aim against immigrants in an effort to unite a disparate people. Bolstered by the growing support and influence of former Whig party members, the Know Nothings attacked the Catholic and foreign-born appointments of the Democratic Pierce administration.\textsuperscript{26} Additionally, the American party

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{23} Bennett, 112.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{25} Anbinder, 100-101.
\textsuperscript{26} Anbinder, 30-31; Bennett, 114; and Knobel, 107.
\end{footnotes}
spoke out against the foreign vote arguing that immigrants were corrupting the American political system by voting in blocs that were easy prey for party machines. By 1854, the American party had established itself in thirty-three states and had close to 1.3 million supporters.27 During the November elections, the American party carried the northern states of Massachusetts, Delaware, and Pennsylvania and sent seventy-five congressmen to Washington, among them was Nathaniel P. Banks who would become Speaker of the House of Representatives. The following year, Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island joined the Know Nothing ranks as well as the border states of Kentucky and Maryland. The Know Nothing movement made substantial gains in Tennessee, New York, and California and its popularity began to make notable showings in southern states such as Virginia, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana.28 With its apparent popularity and growing momentum, this upstart movement appeared ready to fully replace the now-defunct Whig party in the country's two-party system and send its nominee to the White House in 1856.

By 1856, the movement's nativist appeal began to wane in the face of growing sectional strife brought on

27 Bennett, 116, 125.
by the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, visions of "bleeding Kansas," and its members own conflicting interests concerning the slavery issue. In 1856, the Know Nothing candidate, former president Millard Fillmore, captured only the state of Maryland, whose anti-Catholicism dated back to its colonial times when it was established as a religious refuge for Catholics. In the end, it would be the rise of another third party whose regional popularity and anti-slavery stand eventually displaced the Know Nothings on its way to becoming a major political entity -- the Republican party.

Summary

Although the Know Nothings and their national party faded into obscurity after the elections of 1856, the nativist underpinnings of the movement remained deeply rooted in the fabric of American culture. Nativist movements and organizations sprang up to serve as guardians of basic "American" values and culture during the influx of immigration from eastern and southern Europe in the 1880s and 1890s, and again throughout the second and third decades of the twentieth century. Once again, these organizations appealed to an American populace fearful of an evolving American culture and society brought on by unprecedented increases in
industrialization, urbanization, and immigration. And once again, economic fluctuations, unpredictable agricultural production, changes in employment trends and practices as well as labor strife, racial segregation, political corruption, the doctrines of social Darwinism and laissez-faire, mechanization, and technological advances led to an estrangement of the American people from their culture and with it a renewed paranoia toward those outsiders who the nativist propagandists declared responsible for the country's plight. Although the Second World War, like the American Civil War, eventually restrained nativist ideology, nothing could prepare the American population for the paranoia movement of the post-war years, a movement that would combine nativism, nationalism, and anti-Communism to form the crux of American politics and culture for nearly half a century--McCarthyism.
CHAPTER III

HISTORICAL METHOD AND INTERPRETATION

Hofstadter's Paranoia Interpretation

For decades, historians and political scholars have attempted to provide some rationale for exclusionary behavior in American society. Richard Hofstadter's paranoia interpretation espoused in his work, The Paranoid Style in American Politics (1965), is one explanation of this type of behavior. In this work, Hofstadter contended that irrational beliefs in conspiracies to undermine American democracy and values have led to civic participation in movements that were anti-Masonic, nativist, anti-Catholic, and/or anti-Communist in nature, namely the Know Nothings, the American Protective Association, the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s, and McCarthyism.¹ During the antebellum period, one could even add an abolitionist belief in a slaveholder conspiracy, and the populists, for their part, believed that international bankers were taking

over the world's economic markets during the last quarter of the nineteenth century.²

Hofstadter also observed that the strongest waves of paranoia occurred during times of national duress—the sectional strife of the antebellum period, the incredible influx of immigration from 1845-1854, during the 1880s, and once again from 1914-1920, the economic crises of the Gilded Age, and the socialist and communist scares of the 1920s and 1950s.³ Consequently, these bouts of paranoia led directly to the exclusion of groups or the limitation of rights for those who were perceived as the cause of the social, economic, or political turmoil of the time or were being used by the empowered to distract the American public from the true source of their discontent. This "us versus them" mentality produced informal definitions of American citizenry and helped to further divide the country along racial, ethnic, religious, and gender lines. Perhaps one of the most successful groups in

² In his work, The Slave Power Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style (1969), David Brion Davis further defines the Hofstadter hypothesis as "a psychological device for projecting various symbols of evil on an opponent and for building emotional unity through common sense of alarm and peril" (p. 4). Besides his discussion on the slave power conspiracy, it is interesting to note that Davis' work also suggests that many abolitionists believed the Know Nothing movement to be nothing more than a southern conspiracy to divert attention from the slavery issue (p. 14).
³ Hofstadter, 22-23.
promoting this political culture of paranoia was the Know Nothing party of antebellum America.

**Historiography of the Know Nothing Movement**

When scholars examine the political culture of the antebellum period in American history, inevitably they focus on sectional strife and the divisiveness of the slavery issue. Only recently, in the wake of the growing reinterpretation of the collapse of the second party system and the rise of the Republican party, has the Know Nothing movement begun to receive proper scholarly attention. Historiography concerning this movement has been limited to state or local studies and works on nativism. Additional research on the Know Nothings can be found in their connection with the formation and rise of the Republican party during the elections of 1856. The works highlighted in this chapter show the changing interpretations scholars have forwarded over the past seventy years on the impact of the Know Nothing movement in antebellum America.

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Although Ray Allen Billington’s work, *The Protestant Crusade* (1938), offers limited historical interpretation, its narrative account is important in order to understand who the Know Nothings were and what values they professed. Based upon his doctoral thesis, this work is the first scholarly account of the nativist movement that developed during the first half of the nineteenth century. Using contemporary public and private papers, publications and pamphlets of nativist organizations, public records, and church accounts, Billington discusses themes of anti-Catholicism, the war against immigration, and the rise and fall of the Know Nothing movement in the 1850s.

According to Billington, the Know Nothing movement and its appeal to hundreds of thousands of Americans was a result of the confusion in party alignments, the controversy over slavery, and the growing antagonisms Americans felt toward foreigners and Catholics during the first half of the nineteenth century. The movement’s unifying belief, however, was directed more toward anti-Catholicism rather than anti-immigration because of the movement’s varied acceptance and focus in the country’s

different geographical regions. Billington enunciates the perceived threat that the Catholic hierarchy posed toward the established Protestant order and republican values—the belief that the papacy exercised unlimited control over its followers which deprived them of the independent thought and action necessary to participate in a republican government—and why, even after the collapse of the Know Nothing movement, this sentiment never waned during the nineteenth century.⁶

The Know Nothing movement and its party organization were prone to the same material matters that divided other political organizations during this time of sectional animosities. For example, northern Know Nothings opposed territorial expansion, believed that labor should be protected from foreign competition through a high protective tariff, worked toward a homestead bill, and wanted government aid for internal improvements.⁷ Southern Know Nothings were adamantly opposed to these ideas. Therefore, other motivations, such as hatred for the papacy, the preservation of the Union, and nationalism, would be needed to unite Northerners and Southerners to the Know Nothing cause.

⁶ Ibid., 9.
Unfortunately, the sectional strife that existed nationally between the North and South over issues such as the Kansas-Nebraska Act, slavery, and states rights, as well as the movement's inability to enact the doctrines of its anti-Catholic and anti-foreign propagandists would lead the Know Nothing movement to the same fate as other political organizations of the era and the movement's popular appeal would soon dissipate in the face of differing sectional and regional interests that would ultimately tear the country apart.  

As argued in Billington's work, the Know Nothing movement took on various forms in order to court voters in different geographical regions. As stated earlier, Know Nothingism in the North was very different from that in the South. To further illustrate this point, W. Darrell Overdyke's work, *The Know-Nothing Party in the South* (1950), the only true monograph on Know Nothingism in the South, contends that the Know Nothing party was essentially a northern party since all of its political victories occurred there. Additionally, whereas the northern faction of the party held strong anti-Catholic beliefs, in the South, Catholics were allowed to participate in the party and in most of the South,

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7 Ibid., 386-387.
nativism was not truly a concern since most immigration at the time was coming into the northern industrial and urban regions.\textsuperscript{9} According to Overdyke, what appealed to southerners was the party's stance, or lack thereof, on the slavery question prior to 1855.\textsuperscript{10}

Because of its willingness to be ambiguous on many of the nation's pressing issues, the Know Nothing movement, by fostering a sense of national unity and purpose, gained great prominence in the political arena during the 1850s. This singular focus on "Americanism" or national pride is the basis of Carleton Beals' work, \textit{Brass-Knuckle Crusade} (1960). Although narrative rather than interpretive in its nature, Beals' work provides additional insight for the movement's reliance on nativist and anti-Catholic propaganda to secure vast popular appeal. This focus is reiterated through Beals' use of secondary studies on these themes as well as the attention given to nativist and anti-Catholic works and writings of the time.

According to Beals, the Know Nothings played upon the pathological fears and petty animosities held by the

\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., 423.  
\textsuperscript{9} W. Darrell Overdyke, \textit{The Know Nothing Party in the South}, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1950), 218-219. Louisiana's French Creoles, although Catholic, were able to participate in the movement because of their separatist approach to the Roman papacy.
general populace toward foreigners and Catholics and initiated a grassroots campaign to curtail their influence in American culture and society.\(^{11}\)

Additionally, the Know Nothings were aided by the uprooting and uncertainty of the times—industrialization, new class systems, labor organizations, rapid population shifts, the disrepair of urban centers—which contributed to the disintegration of the old party system as well as political and moral standards.\(^{12}\) This confusion and uncertainty would lead to some of the most violent confrontations in American history between the native-born and the foreign-born elements within American society. This violence was a mainstay of the era and the Know Nothings fed off it.

The Know Nothing solution to the growing uncertainty was to unify Americans under a common banner—nationalism. The Know Nothings portrayed the foreign-born and Catholics as threats to the established order of things, that these groups would somehow wrest control of politics, religion, and education away from the empowered natives. Calling upon Americans to uphold their “race” and “pride of birth,” the Know Nothings began a counter-

\(^{10}\) Ibid., vi.
conspiracy against the "Jesuit conspiracy" which led to mob violence and riots throughout the 1850s as native-born Americans attempted to maintain their privileged, superior status over the foreign elements.\textsuperscript{13} Distracted by this call to national arms, Americans embraced this grassroots movement as an escape from the brewing sectional strife over the slavery issue that seemed always on the horizon.

From Beals' narrative, scholars can grasp some semblance of the American political culture during the antebellum period as well as the tinge of paranoia and exclusion that seemed to envelop American society at the time. Beals explains that the jingoistic nature of this movement was like a "nationalistic hypnotism" which seduced much of the country and helped to foster both racial and religious intolerance.\textsuperscript{14} Although this increased intolerance kept the national focus away from the slavery issue for a while, it, too, gave way to the sectional strife of the period, but remained an underlying theme for the decades to come.

The political realignment of the 1850s is the focus of Michael Holt's study, "The Politics of Impatience: The

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 11-12.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 9.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 16.
Origins of Know Nothingism" (1973). In this work, Holt discusses the strength of the anti-Catholic movement, its relationship to the growing popularity of the Know Nothings, and causes for the disintegration of the Whig party in the 1850s. Although Holt acknowledges that the slavery question was a contributing factor to the collapse of the two-party system, he believes that other issues such as the increase in anti-Catholicism, hostility toward politicians, and an impatience with politics as usual led many Americans away from the established parties and into the arms of grassroots movements such as the Know Nothings.¹⁵

Holt paints a dismal picture of the political culture of the 1850s. The corruption and tyranny of party bosses as well as the perceived unresponsiveness of government to the needs of the people created public hostility toward the established parties. Additionally, social, economic, and intellectual forces brought on by the increases in immigration were changing the character of American culture. As such, party loyalty became displaced in the political culture and specific issues concerning immigration, temperance, and anti-Catholicism

took prominence.\textsuperscript{16} When the major parties continually failed to produce satisfactory resolutions to these concerns, impatience set in and the eventual defection to grassroots movements that would address these problems occurred.

Holt argues that the increase of immigrants participating in local and state politics is paramount in understanding the attraction Americans had to the Know Nothings in the 1850s. The immigrant vote in urban centers was significant in the 1850s. Often voting in blocs, immigrants and Catholics could dictate public policy much to the chagrin of Protestants and middle class America. The political party machines recognized this malleable entity and made efforts to capture their votes.\textsuperscript{17} Of the two major parties, the Democrats were more successful in garnering the foreign and Catholic vote and the Whigs, for their part, appealed to nativists, but did very little to curb the growing Catholic influence in local government that would eventually result in movements toward ecclesiastical ownership of church property, the end of Bible reading in public schools, and public tax support of parochial schools. Disenchanted by the willingness of the major

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 314.
parties to court foreigners and Catholics and encouraged by the perceived Catholic threat to American values of social order, political democracy, public education, and social mobility, Americans embraced Know Nothing rhetoric to take action against Catholics and to oust unresponsive politicians, which, in turn, abetted the slow collapse of the two-party system.¹⁸

Holt concludes his study by reiterating the appeal that the Know Nothings had in a time of social and economic upheaval. Preying on the public fear of a papal plot to undermine American democracy, the Know Nothings were able to convince many Americans that Catholics and foreigners were to blame for the radical changes occurring in society. As such, a rise in the acceptance of conspiracy theories provided a sense of stability in an uncertain social, economic, and political environment. Holt reminds us that this anti-Catholic sentiment never truly dissipated in the antebellum period. Even as national attention was diverted to the growing sectional crisis in the late-1850s, the effects of anti-Catholicism still resonated in party politics turning middle and working class voters against the Democratic party and toward the Republican party. Anti-Catholicism and its

¹⁷ Ibid., 323.
papal plot as well as the developing slavocracy conspiracy (inspired by the Kansas-Nebraska Act, "bleeding Kansas," and the Lecompton constitution) enabled the Republicans to solidify their political base in the North and helped to redefine the American two-party system as the party legitimized its existence with Abraham Lincoln’s election to the presidency in 1860.¹⁹

In his work, The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856 (1987), William Gienapp discusses the impact of the Know Nothing movement on the Republican party’s formation and its significance in American political history. Using contemporary publications, letters, and records as well as recent interpretive essays and monographs on the subject, Gienapp offers a compelling study of the Know Nothing movement which places it in a unique historical context as a bridge between the Whig party’s demise and the growth of the Republican party, for being responsible for the disintegration of the second party system, and for creating the ultimate form and direction assumed by the third party system.

In dealing with the Know Nothing movement, Gienapp focuses on the political realignment that took place during the 1850s and the movement’s role within it.

¹⁸ Ibid., 324.
Gienapp contends that the rise of ethnocultural issues during this time period cut across traditional partisan lines and was able to disrupt both the Whig and Democratic coalitions, namely temperance and the anti-Catholic/anti-immigrant movement.\textsuperscript{20} Additionally, although the passage of the Compromise of 1850 seemed to quell sectional differences, the debate over the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854 reshaped party politics as nativism and antislavery-extension came to dominate northern concerns. By skillfully combining nativism, anti-Nebraskaism, and public opposition to the existing political parties into their political platform, the Know Nothings were able to take advantage of the growing anxiety in the North. Under attack by temperance and then nativism, the Whig party collapsed as thousands of nativist Whigs, as well as a number of Democrats and Free Soilers, joined the ranks of the Know Nothing movement.\textsuperscript{21} Although this explains the collapse of the Whig party, Gienapp develops his own interpretation as to the continued rise of the Republicans in the wake of this political realignment.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 331.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
According to Gienapp, after the demise of the Whigs, the Know Nothings were the only political threat to the Democratic party. Continuing to take a nativist approach and holding firm to their antislavery-expansion plank, the Know Nothings were a powerful obstacle for Republican party aspirations for control over northern anti-Democratic forces. Gienapp notes that this battle was not simply a stage between antislavery and nativist forces. He contends that the state elections of 1854 and 1855 proved that these issues together constituted a "stronger party program" than either by themselves.\(^2\) It would only be in 1856 when the Know Nothings dropped their anti-Nebraska position in an attempt to gain further southern support that the Republicans, who were in the process of courting nativist support, would take over the reins of leading anti-Democratic sentiment in the North. The death peal for the Know Nothings, however, would come with the impending sectional crisis which made antislavery-extension, not nativism, the focus of the anti-Democratic opposition in the North.\(^3\)

Gienapp further explains that the historical significance of the Know Nothing movement really had less

\(^2\) Ibid., 445.
\(^3\) Ibid.
to do with their ideas, than with their ability to mobilize hundreds of thousands of previously disenfranchised, apathetic, and weakly identified voters. It was the displacement of the northern voters to the Republican antislavery cause in 1856 that would lead to a new two party system and eventually would align the antislavery sentiments of the North solidly against the South, leaving Democrats and Know Nothings scrambling in the wake of the sectional divide.

In his work, *Nativism and Slavery* (1992), Tyler Anbinder continues Gienapp’s evaluation by making a case that the Know Nothing party carried forward both a nativist and antislavery message. Anbinder’s work focuses primarily on state and local politics since most of the Know Nothing’s influence occurred on these levels and because that influence differed from region to region. Using both contemporary documents and secondary multidisciplinary interpretative studies, Anbinder’s study delves into three themes—the role of the slavery controversy in the rise and fall of the Know Nothings, the depth of anti-Catholic sentiment in the United States, and the role of nativism in the realignment of the party system.

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24 Ibid., 446.
Although he agrees with Holt and Gienapp that disenchantment with both the Whigs and the Democrats created an ideal opportunity for the Know Nothings to garner supporters, Anbinder contends that their growing popularity had more to do with their antislavery reputation rather than their nativist viewpoint especially after the enactment of the Kansas-Nebraska Act. This is supported by the fact that when the Know Nothings reversed their antislavery sentiment in 1855, many northerners flocked to the fledgling Republican party and its antislavery platform. Therefore, Anbinder breaks from Gienapp, Holt, and others, as he argues that slavery, not nativism, destroyed the second party system.

Anbinder also broaches the argument over what impact the Republican party’s adoption of nativism had in attracting voters away from the Know Nothings after 1855. He points out that although the Republicans did preach a nativist stand, few concessions, if any, were made to those Know Nothings who left the American party. By 1856, even the Know Nothings, themselves, were concerned less with nativist propaganda than they were with the idea of being a national party with the goal of

preserving the Union. The Republicans, for their part, simply moderated their radical stand on slavery extension and supported issues such as temperance and tariffs to wean enough northern votes to affect the electoral balance in 1856 and once again in 1860.  

Perhaps one of the most poignant questions asked by Anbinder in his study concerns the strength of nativist sentiment in American society during the 1850s. During this time, Anbinder notes, American bigotry toward the Irish and Catholics was extraordinarily high, so why did permanent nativist organizations fail to establish themselves as political forces, such as the Know Nothings?  

Although historian Eric Foner has made a distinction between “cultural” nativism, which has constant appeal, and “political” nativism, which is conditional in his *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men* (1970), historians tend to see this as too artificial. Anbinder postulates that although many Americans held nativist views, few made them a priority in the voting booth. Anbinder reminds us that nativism competed with sectional, economic, and local issues. Its appeal in the 1850s had much to do with the circumstances of the time—unprecedented levels of immigration, religious disputes

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26 Ibid., 273.
over education and church property—as well as its association with other movements—anti-slavery, temperance, and political reform.\textsuperscript{28}

The theme of nativism is the focus of Dale Knobel’s 1996 study, “America for Americans”. In this work, Knobel traces nativist movements throughout American history. Using both contemporary and secondary source materials and interpretations, he presents a very compelling argument for the appeal of the Know Nothings during the antebellum period as well as explaining the American attraction to nativist thinking.

Like Foner, Knobel distinguishes between political nativism and cultural nativism in his analysis of the brevity of the Know Nothing movement. Knobel, for his part, also contends that there is no simple explanation for this brevity and actually takes offense to many historical interpretations that treat the rise and fall of the Know Nothings as something symmetrical—“what brought the party up must also be what brought it down”—or as a proverbial “flash in the pan.”\textsuperscript{29} These explanations do not explain the mass appeal of the party or the fact that nativism played as much of a part in

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., 277.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.
American politics after the fall of the Know Nothings as before their rise. Although the movement was full of political opportunists, had competing interests, and many nativist leaders and followers eventually found new political homes in the Republican party, Knobel argues that one cannot ignore the presence of a central message that attracted hundreds of thousands of followers to the movement and whose politicization by the Know Nothings in the 1850s helped to realign political ideologies for decades to come.\textsuperscript{30}

To further this argument, Knobel explains that the appeal of nativism and its ideology were interwoven in the issue of individual autonomy. In a time where American republicanism took on new meaning in the face of industrialization, urbanization, and geographical expansion, Americans needed to feel secure in their autonomy, their liberty. In the face of a changing society, many Americans were concerned about possible threats to this autonomy, to the development of their natural talents and their inner potential.\textsuperscript{31} Simply put, "to lose one's autonomy was to become a 'slave'"--which, in accordance to the times, left many Americans

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 99.
extraordinarily fearful and highly impressionable to appeals to protect this individual liberty.\textsuperscript{32} Mirroring the Hofstadter interpretation, this encouraged the use of paranoia tactics, such as conspiracy theories, to convince the American public that "outsiders" were somehow corrupting American republicanism or were to blame for their own station in society instead of universal political, economic, or social forces.

Knobel concludes that American political nativism never really died. Even after the defeat of the American party in 1856, the social movement and its organization never completely disappeared. They remained waiting until the opportunity to rise again was ripe—the American Protective Association, the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s, and McCarthyism. Knobel argues that the Know Nothing movement with its nativist attraction was anything but a flash in the pan. He contends that, what contributed to its rise and fall was not nativism at all, but the movement’s necessity for ideological purity and selective membership as seen in its fraternal and

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 99-100.
beneficiary societies and reform organizations. The ideology was essential for these smaller groups, but on the national stage, plagued with sectional strife, it could not transform into a mass political party.

As can be ascertained from this brief historiographical essay, the Know Nothing movement was much more complicated and influential than once believed. Rather than being a third party nuisance or antebellum fad, the movement had roots deep within the fabric of American consciousness. Although nativism and anti-Catholicism were its underlying foci and made the movement highly popular, its embrace of national issues such as antislavery and temperance would eventually lead to the collapse of the established second party system and help to create a new political alignment. The party's own undoing was a result less of its nativist and anti-Catholic ideology, which would live well beyond Know Nothingism's life span, but of its desire to unify the country in a time of sectional strife by moderating and reversing its stand on the slavery issue. The naïve belief that nativism and anti-Catholicism were somehow stronger than the slavery issue signaled the movement's eventual downfall.

33 Ibid., 153.
Summary

In the study of the Know Nothings, historians and political scholars still have some work ahead of them. Modern monographs and interpretations on the Know Nothings are extraordinarily disjointed considering the movement's impact on the antebellum period. Additional work needs to be done on the southern Know Nothing movement as well as nativist and Know Nothing influence in the midwest and far west during this era. Also, historians can begin to use interdisciplinary methods and theories to advance their understanding and interpretations of this movement's significance. These would be excellent supplements to the paranoia hypothesis advocated by Hofstadter. It will be the interdisciplinary methods and theories surrounding frustration-aggression, conflict, and aggression displacement that will be reviewed in the next chapter.
CHAPTER IV

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORIES OF PREJUDICE

Frustration-Aggression Theory

In 1939, the Institute of Human Relations at Yale University sought to create a hypothesis to explain aggressive acts in terms of prior frustrations that people had endured. It was hoped that this hypothesis would offer an analysis of child training, adolescence, criminology, democracy, fascism, communism as well as race prejudice. Simply entitled, *Frustration and Aggression*, John Dollard, Leonard Doob, Neal Miller, O. H. Mowrer, and Robert R. Sears undertook the daunting task of formulating a comprehensive hypothesis and theory to explain the problems of human relations.

The hypothesis began with the simple premise that aggression was always a consequence of frustration. A very noble effort to disguise common sense with science, but this premise did add something of value to the problem of predicting human behavior when other psychological factors were taken into consideration. In an attempt to gain a better understanding of the specific forms that aggression took, Dollard, et al provided a
more systematic analysis of four groups of factors: the amount of frustration, the effects of punishment, the displacement of aggression, and the catharsis of aggression.¹

In analyzing these four factors, Dollard, et al offered several hypotheses. Three of which are relevant to the study of American race relations. First, they concluded that when the strength of frustration was held constant, there would be a greater anticipation of punishment for an aggressive act and, therefore, aggression was less likely to occur. Second, when the anticipation of punishment was held constant, the strength of the frustration would be greater and an aggressive act was more likely to occur.² Third, and most important, when acts of direct aggression were inhibited, this provided additional frustration against the object perceived to be responsible for this inhibition and increased the possibility of other forms of aggression. It was, therefore, possible for this inhibited aggression to be displaced to different objects and expressed in modified forms.³

Targets of this displaced aggression often included villains who were represented on television or in motion

² Ibid., 38.
³ Ibid., 53.
pictures as well as minority groups such as Jews, foreigners, and African Americans. According to Dollard, et al, these "outgroupers" were blamed for the frustrations that were actually part of human existence. They were made into scapegoats and were socially defined by the "ingroup" by differences in custom or physical characteristics. They were thought of as "perennial frustrators, as traditional enemies and threats to the integrity of in-group life."⁴ Such a representation was required to justify the displacement of aggression to them.

Whereas *Frustration and Aggression* proposed myriad hypotheses, the work fell short of offering any conclusive empirical data to support the analyses of its authors. What the study was able to accomplish, however, was the creation of a stepping stone for further research and evaluation in the various subject matters it concerned itself with. One such research project focused on the idea of displaced frustration and its impact on race and ethnic relations. Although the final report would provide empirical support for the hypothesis forwarded in *Frustration and Aggression*, it would be subjected to strict scrutiny by contemporary peers and be

⁴ Ibid., 90.
considered suspect by late-twentieth-century social scientists.

Hovland’s and Sears’ Conflict Theory

In 1933, Arthur F. Raper presented a graph with two statistics, the number of lynchings in the nine cotton producing states and the per-acre value of cotton, in his book, *The Tragedy of Lynching*. Looking at the years 1901-1930 (omitting 1918-1920 because of the influences of the First World War on both cotton production and the number of lynchings and racial violence), Raper’s work showed an accelerating decrease in lynchings and a slow increase of cotton prices per acre for the period. Using these observations, Raper suggested that “periods of relative prosperity bring reduction in lynching and periods of depression cause an increase.” This thought, seemingly insignificant to Raper’s study, became the basis for the construction of one of the most popular illustrations of frustration-aggression theory—Hovland’s and Sears’ Correlation of Lynchings with Economic Indices.

Published in 1940 under the title, “Minor Studies of Aggression,” psychologists Carl I. Hovland and Robert R. Sears provided empirical evidence that linked social

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aggression to phases in the economic cycle. Their hypothesis stated that acts of aggression would be more numerous during times of economic depression than in times of economic prosperity. To prove this hypothesis, Hovland and Sears used statistics on the number of lynchings per year and correlated them with indices of economic conditions between 1882 and 1930. Since the vast majority of lynching cases occurred in the South, and since cotton was the basic commodity of that region, the value of cotton was used as the index of greatest value in connection with lynchings.

Hovland and Sears computed linear trends for the number of lynchings reported during this time period as well as the number of those lynched who happened to be black. Similar trends were computed for the total value of cotton produced in the fourteen Southern states and for the per-acre value of cotton. Deviations for the two sets were determined from the trend lines. Lastly, the average Ayers index was calculated for each year from the monthly composite indices and several tetrachoric correlations were obtained.⁶

The correlation between total lynchings and the Ayers index of economic activity was -.65. Slightly higher correlations were obtained when the comparison was made between the number of blacks who were lynched and per-acre value of cotton (-.63) and the farm value of cotton (-.72). From these figures, Hovland and Sears inferred that a correlation did exist between economic conditions and the amount of social aggression and proceeded to embark upon the meaning of such a relationship.

Of particular interest to Hovland and Sears was the fact that there did not exist any causal relationship between the source of frustration (economic downturns in the cotton market) and the objects toward which the aggression was expressed (African Americans). It was painstakingly clear that African Americans could not be responsible for the value of cotton or the general level of business activity; so why were they singled out as objects of aggression?

Hovland and Sears explained that although it is common to direct acts of aggression against the agent perceived as the frustrator, "such acts can occur only if the agent is available and if the act will not elicit too much counter-aggression or punishment." Since it was

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7 Ibid., 306.
8 Ibid., 302.
impossible to direct aggression against a condition represented by index numbers, it was necessary to find another object to focus the aggression. Hovland and Sears argued that although merchants, landlords, and wealthy persons could represent the condition symbolically, the retribution or punishment of directing aggression toward these persons of preferred or protected status in society would be relatively high. Following the principle outlined in *Frustration and Aggression*, which stated that the anticipation of being punished inhibits the act of direct aggression and permits the occurrence of displaced aggression, they deduced that the aggression would be directed toward persons of "a less favorable and protected position" and were unable to adequately render retribution.⁹

In the case of lynching victims, Hovland and Sears were quick to point out that the majority of those lynched had actually been arrested for a crime. There already existed a degree of frustration against these persons for violating the public norms. In other words, they were already the targets of a certain degree of direct aggression. Hovland and Sears reconciled this problem by inferring that these persons would suffer more serious aggressions from the group when subsidiary

⁹ Ibid., 308.
frustrations, in this case, low economic indices, were present. The increase in the number of those persons lynched verified their expectation and allowed Hovland and Sears to conclude that

Individuals who arouse direct aggression suffer the additional effects of displaced aggression when the agent responsible for this latter is either not available or would retaliate with a great amount of punishment or counter-aggression.\textsuperscript{10}

Although Hovland's and Sears' findings gained immediate acceptance in the academic community and would serve as empirical support for the frustration-aggression thesis formulated by Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, and Sears, this acceptance was short-lived and the hypothesis would come under a series of attacks beginning in 1946 with Alexander Mintz's, "A Re-examination of Correlations between Lynchings and Economic Indices," and continued to be a topic of contention by social scientists well into the 1990s.

\textbf{Mintz's Re-Examination of Correlations between Lynchings and Economic Indices}

Alexander Mintz published the first critique of Hovland's and Sears' hypothesis in his 1946 article, "A Re-examination of Correlations between Lynchings and Economic Indices." Mintz's primary concern was that the

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid.
method Hovland and Sears used in gaining their correlations was flawed. Mintz first noted that because both cotton value and the frequency of lynching were correlated with time in Hovland’s and Sears’ study, the presence of a correlation between them would be “unsuitable” as evidence about any causal relationship between them since “all variables exhibiting marked time trends tend to be intercorrelated.”¹¹ Second, by computing linear trends and using the deviations of their variables from the trends in their correlations, Mintz believed that Hovland and Sears created a fundamental error where the trends exhibited by the data were not linear and some of their correlations appeared to be artifacts caused by the arbitrary choice of straight lines which were not appropriate to the data.¹² Additionally, Mintz found the tetrachoric approximations to the product-moment correlations used by Hovland and Sears to be misleading. By using this correlation, Hovland and Sears assumed the normal distribution and homoscedasticity of the variables. Mintz argued that they were neither.¹³

In reconstructing Hovland’s and Sears’ study, Mintz found large discrepancies between their findings and his.

¹² Ibid., 154-155
¹³ Ibid., 155.
Using product-moment correlations instead of tetrachoric and by utilizing subdivisions of time intervals for the computation of linear trends for parts of the period rather than the whole period, Mintz confirmed his belief that the trends exhibited by the number of black lynchings and by the total value of cotton were not linear. Mintz also discovered that the product-moment correlation between the farm value of cotton and the number of black lynchings for 1882-1913 was -.25, a substantial difference from Hovland's and Sears' -.72 for the whole period, 1882-1930. Additionally, when Mintz applied the product-moment method to deviations in the total number of lynchings and the Ayers index for the entire period, his correlation was a meager -.34 compared to the tetrachoric correlation of -.65.14

By both re-examining and reconstructing Hovland's and Sears' study, Mintz raised the question as to whether or not a correlation existed between lynchings and economic indices. His figures showed that no such correlation existed between the farm value of cotton and black lynchings and that the correlation between the Ayres index and total lynchings was much weaker than first discovered. Mintz's basic conclusions led to the prospect that the Hovland and Sears study should not be

14 Ibid., 160.
used to validate the frustration-aggression hypothesis nor could it be used as proof for the idea of displaced aggression.

Concern over the social science community's continued acceptance of Hovland's and Sears' study in the face of Mintz's critique was expressed by John Shelton Reed, Gail E. Doss, and Jeanne S. Hurlbert in their 1987 essay, "Too Good to be False: An Essay in the Folklore of Social Science." Their criticism of this acceptance led to the reanalysis of Hovland's and Sears' findings using contemporary time-series techniques.

Hepworth and West: A Time-Series Reanalysis of Hovland and Sears

Joseph T. Hepworth and Stephen G. West undertook the task of reanalyzing the Hovland and Sears study using contemporary time-series techniques in their 1988 essay, "Lynchings and the Economy: A Time-Series Reanalysis of Hovland and Sears (1940)." Their rationale for reanalyzing Hovland and Sears stemmed not only from contemporary criticism of the original study, but because of the belief that recent developments in time-series analysis permitted better statistical analyses of the
temporal data than the techniques available to Hovland and Sears in 1940.\textsuperscript{15}

Hepworth and West first replicated the original Hovland and Sears study. They did this in order to establish that the correct data was used and that the analytic techniques were applied in the same manner. Hepworth and West explained that if the original results were not replicated, “then any discrepant results found using a different analytic technique could be attributed not only to the different technique but also to the lack of original replication.”\textsuperscript{16}

When Hepworth and West attempted to reproduce the three original values, only two of them were consistent with Hovland and Sears. A discrepancy was found in the correlation between the per-acre value of cotton and black lynchings. Whereas Hovland and Sears reported a -.63 correlation, Hepworth and West only obtained a -.50.\textsuperscript{17} Hepworth and West rationalized that the two most plausible explanations for the discrepancy were either a misprint in the acre value of cotton reported by Hovland and Sears or Hovland and Sears made an error in calculating the tetrachoric correlation for this value.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 242.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
Hepworth and West then used product-moment correlations as well as the synchronous cross-correlations produced in the time-series analysis for comparison values against those produced by Hovland and Sears for black and total lynchings (See Table 2). The results seemed to confirm Mintz's conclusion that Hovland and Sears seriously overestimated the relationship that existed between economic indices and lynchings.

Table 2
Correlations Between Lynchings and Economic Indices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Correlation</th>
<th>Ayres Index with Total Lynchings</th>
<th>Acre Value with Black Lynchings</th>
<th>Farm Value with Black Lynchings</th>
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<tr>
<td>Hovland and Sears (Tetrachoric)</td>
<td>-.65</td>
<td>-.63</td>
<td>-.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product-Momemt</td>
<td>-.34</td>
<td>-.14</td>
<td>-.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time-Series</td>
<td>-.42</td>
<td>-.20</td>
<td>-.23</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Hepworth and West, however, took their analysis of the Hovland and Sears study a step further and calculated correlations between white lynchings and economic indices. Contrary to the prediction of the frustration-aggression hypothesis, positive correlations were discovered between white lynchings and the acre value of cotton and the farm value of cotton using the methods of
Hovland and Sears. These correlations, however, became negative and approached levels of statistical significance when time-series models were developed (-.26 and -.25, respectively).\textsuperscript{19}

Although the time-series method failed to support the findings of Hovland and Sears, Hepworth’s and West’s ability to replicate the majority of the original study did verify the basic conclusions drawn in the original work--that frustration can lead to forms of aggression. Additionally, through the new findings that correlated white lynchings with economic conditions, they were able to provide better support for Hovland’s and Sears’ initial premise that under difficult economic or other stressful conditions, aggression can be displaced to group members who are less than likely to have the ability to retaliate.

\textbf{Miller’s Theory of Aggression Displacement}

In 1948, Neal Miller expanded upon the frustration-aggression hypothesis in his essay, “Theory and Experiment to Stimulus-Response Generalization.” In this work, Miller sought to prove that racial persecution was produced by displacement rather than by an instinct of aggression. In his hypothesis, outgroupers could not

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 245-246.
only be the targets of the direct aggression aroused through competition with ingroupers, but could also be scapegoats for suppressed aggression caused internally among ingroupers and displaced to members of the outgroup. This notion of displacement was originally examined by Sigmund Freud in his work on transference where he believed that patients would displace feelings of love or hate to their analyst rather than to the true object or origin of those feelings.

Whereas the work of Hovland and Sears and Hepworth and West dealt with statistical data obtained through historical records, Miller's study on aggression used live subjects--albino rats. In Miller's study, rats were trained to attack one another when a mild shock was administered. After this training, a small doll was introduced into the arena with two rats and the shock was administered again. Once again, the rats attacked one another. The significance of this was that the rats did not attack the doll. When a second rat was not present, however, attacks on the doll commenced. This led Miller to hypothesize that when another rat and the doll were both present, the stronger tendency was to attack the other rat, the object of direct aggression. When the

second rat was not present, aggression would be displaced to the doll.  

In another experiment conducted by Miller and Bergen Richard Bugelski, "Minor Studies in Aggression: The Influence of Frustrations Imposed by the In-Group on Attitudes Expressed Toward Out-Groups" (1948), human subjects were analyzed in a similar way. In this experiment, subjects were angered by frustrations weighed upon them by their own countrymen. The subjects responded by expressing less than favorable attitudes toward foreigners who could not have been responsible for their frustration rather than taking out their frustration on members of their own ingroup.

Fitz’s Re-Examination of Miller’s Conflict Theory of Aggression Displacement

Don Fitz re-examined Miller’s original hypothesis of displaced aggression using human subjects in 1976. In his study, "A Renewed Look at Miller’s Conflict Theory of Aggression Displacement," Fitz attempted to adequately test the conflict theory of aggression displacement by demonstrating that less aggression would occur to targets with decreasing similarity to the original source of frustration and that increased inhibition toward the

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22 Miller, 158.
original source of frustration should illicit the strongest aggression to occur to a displaced target.\textsuperscript{23}

In this experiment, subjects were divided into three groups where their level of arousal was manipulated through interaction with a confederate. In the first group, the controlled group, subjects were given no reason to be annoyed or fearful of the confederate’s behavior. In the second group, subjects were annoyed by the confederate, but given no reason to fear him and in the last group subjects were both annoyed and fearful of the confederate. It was believed that the most intense aggression should come from members of the second group and the least intense from those in the controlled group, that subjects in the second group would be most aggressive to their annoyer and least aggressive toward targets with the least similarity to their annoyer, and that subjects of the third group should be least aggressive toward their annoyer and most aggressive toward targets with the least similarity to their annoyer.\textsuperscript{24}

Fitz’s experiment confirmed the first two beliefs, but the third belief, that subjects of the third group should be least aggressive toward their annoyer and most


\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 729.
aggressive toward targets with the least similarity to their annoyer was not totally confirmed since subjects of this third group seemed to displace their aggression to targets of both similarity and dissimilarity to their frustrator. Another result of Fitz's study was that those members of the control group were significantly more aggressive toward the most displaced target than was previously expected.\textsuperscript{25} Fitz's re-examination, nevertheless, strongly supported Miller's original conflict theory and provided sufficient proof for theories of displaced aggression.

Summary

This chapter has looked at the development of the frustration-aggression theory as well as some of its adherents. It should be noted that although the frustration-aggression hypothesis has its detractors, it has led to a sub-field of study on the causes of frustration and is still one of the classic examples used by social psychologists and sociologists to describe the social phenomenon of scapegoat theory.\textsuperscript{26} Having outlined the premises of conflict analysis and aggression displacement in this chapter, we can now apply these

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 730-731.
hypotheses to Hofstadter's paranoid interpretation in an effort to better understand the prevailing anti-Catholic/anti-foreign sentiment of the antebellum period.
CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

In using frustration-aggression analysis to defend the Hofstadter paranoia interpretation of history, a few cursory observations must be made. Unlike the quantitative data available to Hovland and Sears in their study on lynchings, the quantitative data that exists concerning individual acts of violence directed toward immigrants and Catholics nationwide during the antebellum period is extraordinarily disjointed.\(^1\) As such, utilizing scientific approaches (i.e., product-moment or time-series analysis) to quantitatively support the Hofstadter interpretation on the broad scale established in this paper can not be readily accomplished. Additionally, although the abandonment of the major political parties at this time can provide quantitative data, these numbers would be unreliable since records as

\(^1\) In his 1998 work, *American Mobbing, 1828-1861*, David Grimsted discussed the violence against Catholics and immigrants during the antebellum period. Although no specific numbers of individual acts of violence are recorded (as opposed to the data on lynchings used by Hovland and Sears), Grimsted does point out that the Know Nothings were involved in at least twenty-two political riots during the height of their popularity (1854-56). Of these, three occurred in the North, and the rest in the urban centers of the slave South, accounting for seventy-seven deaths and a "parallel portion" of injuries. See pages 218-245. Examples of individual acts of violence against Catholics and immigrants can be found in most monographs concerning the Know Nothing movement. See Anbinder, Beals, Bennett, Billington, Curran, Knobel, and Overdyke.
to why individuals left certain political parties and joined others do not exist. What we do have in the 1850s is a growing trend of Americans, mostly Anglo-Saxon Protestants, finding refuge in third-party organizations. In the North, these organizations were nativist and/or anti-slavery. In the South, they were nativist and/or anti-secessionist. The appeal, according to several historians, was an impatience or distrust of the current political system to confront the major problems concerning Americans—slavery and sectionalism, industrialization, urbanization, and immigration. Frustration ensued and, coupled with Hofstadter’s paranoia hypothesis, led to aggression against those thought responsible—immigrants and Catholics. The frustration-aggression analysis, therefore, will be used to support that supposition.

Applying the Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis

As explained by Hovland and Sears, it is common to direct acts of aggression against the agent perceived as the frustrator, but “such acts can occur only if the agent is available and if the act will not elicit too much counter-aggression or punishment.”

During the antebellum period, it was impossible for the public to

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direct aggression against economic and social conditions. It was necessary, then, to find another object to focus that aggression. Although employers, merchants, landlords, politicians, and the wealthy could represent the conditions symbolically, the retribution or punishment of directing aggression toward these persons of preferred or protected status in society was relatively high.

Following the principle outlined in *Frustration and Aggression*, which stated that the anticipation of being punished inhibits the act of direct aggression and permits the occurrence of displaced aggression, it follows that the aggression would be directed toward persons of "a less favorable and protected position" and were unable to adequately render retribution.³ In the antebellum period, these "outgroupers" were immigrants and Catholics whose language and cultural barriers set them apart from the rest of American society.⁴

According to Dollard, et al, these "outgroupers" could easily be blamed for the frustrations that were actually part of human existence. They were made into scapegoats and were socially defined by the "ingroup" by differences in custom or physical characteristics. They

³ Ibid., 308.
⁴ Although separate from this study, it should also be noted that blacks and abolitionists were also targets of aggression during this time period.
were thought of as "perennial frustrators, as traditional enemies and threats to the integrity of in-group life."\textsuperscript{5} Such a representation was required to justify the displacement of aggression to them. In the case of Catholics, this degree of frustration had existed in Protestant Europe and later America, since the 1500s, propagated by the paranoid belief of a papal conspiracy. Since Catholics were already targets of a certain degree of aggression, nativists used this paranoia as a tool to displace even further aggression toward this group in times of economic, political, and social uncertainty. The increased acceptance of anti-Catholic sentiment and the continued growth and strength of grassroots organizations such as the Know Nothings, supports that analysis.

Additionally, when it appeared that even the political system seemed to defend and empower these "outgroups" by courting immigrant votes and incorporating the Catholic agenda into public policy, frustration toward the Whigs and Democrats occurred resulting in the aggressive action of abandonment in favor of organizations more responsive to the growing need to displace aggression toward immigrants and Catholics—nativists. Therefore, the collapse of the two-party

\textsuperscript{5} John Dollard, et al., \textit{Frustration and Aggression}, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1939), 90.
system in the 1850s and the rise of the Know Nothing party can be partially attributed to the public need to displace aggression, and the unwillingness of the political parties of that time to adequately respond to that need.

Conclusion

During the 1840s and 1850s, many Americans had become frustrated with the economic, political, and social upheaval brought about by industrialization, urbanization, and immigration. The culture of the United States was evolving and this transformation threatened to leave many Americans trembling in its wake. Fearful of the future, the populace looked to its elected leaders for assistance. Finding the political parties to be unresponsive, Americans resorted to other organizations to meet these perceived threats to American society, organizations that would tell them what they wanted to hear, organizations that would direct responsibility for the country’s problems away from the American economic and political systems and toward some outside threat. At fault was not America—it had not abandoned the agrarian principles of the Founding Fathers—but infiltrators attempting to destroy the country from the inside out.
This was the premise that gave rise to the nativist movement of antebellum America. The paranoia interpretation espoused by Hofstadter is one explanation for the American embrace of nativist propaganda. This acceptance allowed opportunistic organizations like the Know Nothings to divert public attention from the problems of modernization and toward some outside threat. Preying on American paranoia, the Know Nothings were able to mold public frustrations concerning the economy, politics, and social concerns into a movement that redirected that frustration into aggression toward immigrants and Catholics. The acts of violence, the willingness to abridge the rights of new immigrants, and the abandonment of the major political parties as well as the ability of the Know Nothings to create a national discourse based on this frustration-aggression against immigrants and Catholics is testament to the success of that redirection.

The Know Nothing movement was not the first, nor was it the last, to employ paranoia as a tool in creating frustration within the American citizenry. Other organizations followed the nativist example and some even improved upon it. In the 1880s and 1890s, the American Protective League was the agent redirecting the public frustration concerning labor strife, depressed
agricultural conditions, and political corruption toward aggressive acts against the waves of new immigrants entering the country by convincing many, native-born Americans that their foreign cultures and vast numbers would pollute the already volatile American social and economic structure. Similarly, labor unrest after the First World War gave rise to the Red Scare and the Ku Klux Klan. With this rise came increased aggression toward communists, socialists, unions, immigrants and minorities, all of whom supposedly wished to destroy the American institutions of democracy and capitalism. McCarthyism, which gained credence in the wake of the Cold War that followed the Second World War, perfected the use of paranoia against those individuals that the House Un-American Activities Committee considered a threat to American society and culture--basically anyone who did not conform to what the Committee deemed to be American. The communist witch hunt and the growing suspicion that ensued curtailed American civil liberties and made every American a suspect of contributing to the communist conspiracy. Even today, in 2003, we can see how the agents of paranoia are using fear to redirect frustration into propaganda and aggression against “outsiders” that have little to nothing to do with current economic and political crises.
Knowledge and use of the Hofstadter interpretation in conjunction with frustration-aggression analysis can be an effective research tool for understanding and explaining past and present attempts to exclude individuals from participating in American democracy. As can be seen in this brief study, interdisciplinary approaches can provide additional insights to historical, social, and political problems. Although the frustration-aggression analysis was utilized here, other sociological theories concerning power-threat analysis (Herbert Blalock and Seymour Spilerman) or competition (Susan Olzak) could have easily been used in conjunction with Hofstadter's paranoia interpretation and should serve as quantitative methods in future interdisciplinary projects. Additionally, in-depth studies of the Know Nothing movement based upon the frustration-aggression model could be undertaken by reviewing local and county records and using the rudimentary quantitative data available concerning immigration, violence, and voting trends to give further support to the general premise outlined in this thesis.
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