Historians disagree over the immediate cause of the Civil War, but most of them concur that a major factor precipitating the conflict was the political realignment of the 1850's. The established view of Northern politics in the 1850's holds that the Kansas-Nebraska Act introduced in Congress by Illinois Senator Stephen A. Douglas in 1854 destroyed old alignments and gave rise to the Republican Party which suddenly struck down the seemingly unchallengeable Democracy. The Kansas-Nebraska Act, only one of a series of outrages designed to extend the domain of slavery, finally united Northern consciences and committed them to stopping the expansion of slavery and containing it in the South. Former Whigs, shattered after their defeat in the 1852 presidential election, joined dissident Democrats and Free Soilers in the search for new organizations capable of wresting control from the Democrats. Some discovered it in Know Nothingism, but this was only a temporary and abnormal half-way house to Republicanism. This interpretation, although not without merit, fails to analyze adequately the traumatic political reorganization of the 1850's.¹

In asking why voters deserted the Whig Party at the state level, instead of why the national Whig organization disappeared or why the Republican coalition emerged, it becomes apparent that the slavery extension issue alone did not account for the realignment of the 1850's. Even though the slavery issue divided Northern and Southern Whigs, it did not necessarily drive Northern Whig voters from the party. During the 1840's Congressmen in both parties split along North-South lines over the Wilmot Proviso, but overall, this decade is regarded as "a high point of national party unity." Despite the increased sectional pressures brought about by the Proviso issue, voters in both sections continued to support their parties' candidates and remained committed to a stable two-party system. In fact, as late as 1848 Whigs and Democrats were able to run different presidential campaigns in both sections of the country, opposing slavery extension in the North, and supporting it in the South. When Douglas introduced the Nebraska Bill in 1854, conceivably the Whigs could have followed the same strategy to revive the party which had been declining rapidly since 1852. Because most Northern Whigs opposed slavery extension, anti-Nebraska sentiment should have strengthened, rather than weakened
them. However, it did not and they suffered massive defections to new political organizations in 1854 and 1855, and by 1856 the Republican Party dominated Northern politics.2

Thus, a complete description of the political realignment of the 1850’s must explain why both old parties, especially the Whig Party, could not exploit the slavery extension issue in the 1850’s as they had in the 1840’s. In addition, such a discussion must analyze why voters abandoned their former parties and joined new ones. Had the slavery issue alone accounted for voter shifts, the explanation would be simple. However, such was not the case and other factors that helped to destroy the old political order must be discussed. The purpose of this essay is to evaluate these factors with particular reference to Ohio, since many historians credit it with being the pivotal state in the struggle between nativism and antislavery men for control of the Midwestern “fusion” movement in 1855.3

Crucial to the demise of Ohio Whiggery was a state-wide hostility to the political system as it existed in the 1850’s. In the early 1850’s party discipline was disintegrating among both Whigs and Democrats. In 1851 and 1852 a “Citizens” or “People’s” ticket replaced the Whig organization in Cleveland, while in 1853 four parties ran candidates in the Cincinnati municipal election. Many rank and file voters lost faith in their organizations because they believed government to be unresponsive, corrupt, and boss-controlled. According to Charles Reemelin, a leading Cincinnati Democrat who later joined the Republican Party, as early as 1851 voters in his area were dissatisfied with “spoils hunting and office distributing” parties, more interested in “personal gain” than what “ought to be done.” The Whigs apparently were in only slightly better shape. In February, 1852, Joseph M. Root of Sandusky reported to Congressman Joshua Reed Giddings that, although the Democratically controlled Ohio General Assembly was “an aggregation of imbecility and presumption,” state Whigs were in no condition “to take advantage” of the situation. The Ohio Whig Party, declared Root, did not know whether its organization was “dead or alive” and any influence possessed by the party was “in the hands of sordid hunkers who would be a reproach to any party.”4

Anti-party sentiment continued to gain strength in Ohio as editors and others joined in the chorus of discontent. In August of 1853, James A. Briggs, a leading Cleveland Whig and correspondent for the Columbus Ohio State Journal, reported that in Cuyahoga County “the political cauldron” had started to boil and “party ties” were loosening. “Party,” decried Briggs, was a “despot” and the time had arrived for men to abandon party considerations and “fuse together” on behalf of the people to promote “their own interests.” Writing in early 1853, the editors of the Cincinnati Daily Unionist, an independent labor paper, echoed the views of Briggs, charging that “party is the great State evil of the times, because the interests of the country are sacrificed to the schemes of cliques and partisan objects.” “The settled idea of politicians,” continued
The Fifty-Second General Assembly enacted several anti-Catholic bills which indicated the strong influence of the nativists in Ohio politics.
the editors, was to “provide offices for their use” and to treat elections as “a kind of lottery in which prizes are determined.”

Although anti-party feeling existed since the advent of the two party system, it has been more widespread and influential at some times than at others. Such was the case in Ohio during the 1850’s, and this hostility to established parties and their leaders did much to prevent the Whigs from exploiting the antislavery extension sentiment. Because the people were angry with old officeholders and party leaders, they refused to turn to them and sought to express their hopes and fears through new organizations. The emerging Republican coalition in Ohio recognized this and cogently used the labels “Fusion” movement, “People’s Ticket,” “Independent,” “American,” “Republican,” and “People’s Republican” ticket in 1854 and 1855. Hoping to capitalize on the nascent anti-party feeling and unite all opponents of the old order, they used these names to demonstrate the many facets character of the movement. The ticket was “Fusion” because it hoped to fuse together all opponents of the Democracy; it was “Independent” because it was nominated without “the aid of demagogues and traitors” and would be elected by “an Independent majority,” and was “Republican” because it embodied “the principles and sentiments . . . [of] men struggling for freedom and righteous government.”

In addition to the anti-party character of the new coalition, the terms Fusion and Republican also attested to the anti-Southern and antislavery extension sentiment of its supporters. Thirdly, and perhaps most significant, the names also pointed out the strong anti-Catholic bias of many Ohioans who joined the movement. In 1854 and 1855 nativism with its strong anti-Catholic stance, rather than antislavery extension feeling, swept many voters into the “Fusion” ranks. Unlike the eastern states where Know Nothingism generally operated as a separate political party, in Ohio nativists combined with antislavery extension voters in a partnership to unseat the Democracy. The Know Nothing movement, through its secret lodges, was a powerful force in politics, and as noted by Salmon P. Chase, “contributed materially” to the “Fusion” successes of 1854 and 1855. According to him, should the American order be alienated from the coalition, there would be “imminent danger of defeat.”

Coalition organs, including the Canton Ohio Repository and the Portage County Democrat, aware of the strong anti-Catholic views of many supporters, went so far as to couple a “Republican Platform of Principles” with the official state platform of 1855. The “Principles,” although expressing antislavery extension sentiment, also bitterly assailed the Roman Catholic hierarchy by opposing “adherence to any foreign power, either political or politico-ecclesiastic” and vowing to support no man for office who did not favor resisting “the aggressions of POPERY and SLAVERY” by “all lawful and constitutional means.”

Students of Ohio history, although aware of the part played by Know Nothing voters in early Republican victories, have overlooked important nativist
inspired measures adopted by the Fifty-Second General Assembly of Ohio and have instead concentrated solely upon the "personal liberty laws" it enacted to circumvent the federal Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 and the Dred Scott decision. The overtly anti-Catholic bills enacted into law by the first "Fusion" controlled legislature clearly indicated the debt paid to nativists for their support. Rather than being "swallowed up" by the antislavery spirit of Free Soilers in the Republican Party and abandoning their former beliefs, Know Nothings helped to formulate initial Republican state policies. Thus, a full account of the political realignment of the 1850's must explain not only why the Whigs were unable to exploit the slavery issue and passed from the political scene; it must also explain how nativistic concepts were enacted into law and why nativism was extraordinarily popular in the Buckeye State. 9

The first of two anti-Roman Catholic bills passed by the General Assembly and signed into law by Governor Salmon P. Chase, "An Act in relation to Conveyances and Devices of Property for religious purposes," established uniform rules for the acquisition, control, and sale of property set aside for religious use. Although not named in the statute, the Roman Catholic hierarchy, observed William C. Howells, the strongly anti-proscription editor of the Republican Ashtabula Sentinel, was the target. The law, "a favorite" enactment of Republicans in Ohio who "dread[ed]" and feared "Catholic influences," undermined the hierarchical control of church officials by giving members all authority over buildings, cemeteries, and other properties belonging to individual congregations. Thus, Ohio joined such sister states as Massachusetts, Michigan, Indiana, Pennsylvania, Arkansas, and New Jersey that passed bills to curtail the power of the Roman Catholic Church over ecclesiastical property. In fact, the Ohio law was worded almost exactly the same as the one passed by the Know Nothing-dominated Massachusetts General Court in 1855. 10

Ohio's church property bill became law on April 14, 1857, two days before the first state "personal liberty law" and three days prior to the remainder of the antislavery measures. The second act designed to cement the "Fusion" coalition by repaying nativists for their support, "An Act to preserve the purity of elections," passed on April 15, 1857, was intended to diminish illegal immigrant voting, a frequent Know Nothing complaint. Accusations that ethnics, especially Irish Catholic ones, had been casting illegal ballots for Democratic candidates began in the 1840's and reached a crescendo during the nativist movement of the middle 1850's. According to sworn testimony given before the Ohio House of Representatives in 1854, the ballot boxes in some areas of the Buckeye State, "the paladium of our liberties was about to be prostituted, and popular elections . . . brought into disgrace and contempt" because of illegal voting by Irish Catholics. The Democratic Party, claimed its critics, hired and transported to the polls hundreds of immigrants, mostly Irish Catholics, and paid them to vote. Moreover, Democrats were accused of adding fictitious names to poll books and of permitting illegal voters to cast as many as

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The Ohio Republican Party platforms and the Ohio Democratic Party platforms from 1855 to 1881 illustrate the differences and contrasts between the two parties. In addition the Ohio Republican Party platforms reflect its desire to attract and “fuse” opponents of the old order and to capitalize on the anti-party, anti-Southern, and antislavery sentiments.
THE OHIO PLATFORMS
OF THE
REPUBLICAN and DEMOCRATIC PARTIES
FROM
1855 TO 1881 INCLUSIVE.

Union Republican, July 13, 1855.

1. Resolved, That the people, who constitute the supreme power in the United States, should guard with jealous care the rights of the several States, as independent governments. No encroachment upon their legislative or judicial prerogatives should be permitted from any quarter.

2. Resolved, That the people of the State of Ohio, mindful of the blessings conferred upon them by the Ordinance of Freedom, whose anniversary our convention this day commemorates, have established for their political guidance, the following cardinal rules:
   I. We will resist the spread of slavery under whatever shape or color it may be attempted.
   II. To this end we will labor assiduously to render inoperative and void that portion of the Kansas and Nebraska bill which abolishes freedom in the territory withdrawn from the influence of slavery by the Missouri Compromise of 1820; and we will oppose, by every lawful and constitutional means, the existence of slavery in any National Territory, and the further increase of slave territory or slave States in this Republican Confederacy.

3. Resolved, That the recent acts of violence and civil war in Kansas, incited by the late acting Vice President of the United States, and tacitly encouraged by the Executive, demand the emphatic condemnation of every citizen.

4. Resolved, That a proper retrenchment in all public expenditures, a thoroughly economical administration of our State government, a just and equal basis of taxation and single districts for the election of members of the Legislature, are reforms called for by a wise State policy and justly demanded by the people.

5. Resolved, That a State Central Committee, consisting of five be appointed by this Convention, and that said committee, in addition to its usual duties, be authorized to correspond with committees of other States for the purpose of agreeing upon a time and place for holding a National Convention of the Republican party, for the nomination of President and Vice President.

JUDGE SPALDING,
Chairman Com. Res.
Democratic, Jan. 8, 1855.

Resolved, That the 8th of January is an anniversary which the Democracy of Ohio are proud to honor, not only for the illustrious military achievements of Andrew Jackson and his companions in arms forty years since, but because the events and results of that day will always be associated in the minds of the American people with the courage, patriotism and purity which characterized the civil career of the Hero of New Orleans.

Resolved, That we earnestly recommend to the Democratic press of the State to re-publish, as the best tribute to the memory of the departed chieftain and sage, the Farewell Address of Andrew Jackson, delivered to his countrymen on the 3d of March, 1837, a legacy as worthy of reverence, a creed of Democratic truth as sound and invaluable as the Inaugural Address of Thomas Jefferson, in 1801.

Resolved, That the names and examples of Jefferson and Jackson are a tower of strength, whenever temporary reverses occur to the Democratic party; and as in 1798 and 1824, our motto for future conflict and victory shall be, Forward, forgetting those things which are behind, and pressing forward unto those which are before.

Resolved, That it is the duty of every Ohio Democrat to determine, and by this declaration of sentiment we propose to proclaim, those immediate and urgent issues of State and National policy upon which the Democracy are fully agreed, but which can only be secured to the people by union, concession, and harmony—everything for the cause: nothing for men.

Resolved, That we demand from the Democratic majority in Congress:

1. A revision of the tariff of 1846, with a double purpose of reducing the amount of revenue and excluding the principle of bounties to special interests.

2. Cooperation, by efficient measures, in the restoration to the States of the constitutional currency, gold and silver.

3. Hostility to a general system of internal improvements, in accordance with the principles expressed in the recent veto message of the Executive; but a just and impartial application within the limits contemplated by the Constitution for lake and river improvements, as well as for the harbors of the Atlantic and Pacific coasts.

4. Uncompromising hostility to any attempt of the European powers to establish colonies on, or to extend their political systems over, any part of this continent or the islands adjacent thereto.

5. The acquisition and annexation to our Union of Cuba and the Sandwich Islands at the earliest moment consistent with our national honor, and the securing of a passage across the Isthmus for our commerce in peace and our armies in war.

6. The speedy passage of a law placing the national domain in limited quantities within the reach of actual settlers at a price not exceeding the necessary expenses of acquisition and survey.

7. Economy in public expenditures; the investment of the public revenue for the redemption of the national debt; and a rigid enforcement of the Independent Treasury act.

Resolved, That the Democracy of Ohio are attached to the Union of the States, and to the Constitution, in which are expressed the principles and the compromises upon the faith of which the Union was originally established, and by a strict adherence to which alone that Union can be preserved, and they denounce as dangerous to the peace and liberties of the country all attempts to organize political parties with reference to geographical or sectional distinction.

Resolved, That this Convention, in behalf of the Democracy of Ohio, hereby affirm the platform of resolutions adopted by the National Democratic Convention, which assembled at Baltimore in
June, 1852, as a clear and distinct declaration of our political principles.

Resolved, That the people of Ohio now, as they have always done, look upon slavery as an evil, and unfavorable to the development of the spirit and practical benefits of free institutions; and that entertaining these sentiments, they will at all times feel it to be their duty to use all power clearly given by the terms of the national compact to prevent its increase, to mitigate, and finally to eradicate the evil; but be it further

Resolved, That the Democracy of Ohio do at the same time fully recognize the doctrine held by the fathers of the Republic, and still maintained by the Democratic party in all the States, that to each State belongs the right to adopt and modify its own municipal laws, to regulate its own internal officers, to hold and maintain an equal and independent sovereignty with each and every State, and that upon these rights the National Legislature can neither legislate nor encroach.

Resolved, In the language of the Continental Congress, adopted forty days after the Declaration of Independence, that "it is a wise policy to extend the protection of our laws to all who shall settle among us, of whatever nation or religion they may be, and to admit them to a participation of the benefits of civil and religious freedom," that we therefore proclaim the language of Jefferson as our party creed, to wit: Equal and exact justice to all men, of whatever State or persuasion, religious or political;" and we hereby reiterate the declarations of the successive Democratic National Conventions from 1836 to 1852, namely: "That the liberal principles embodied by Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence, and sanctioned by the Constitution, which makes ours the land of liberty and the asylum of the oppressed of every nation, have ever been cardinal principles in the Democratic faith, and every attempt to abridge the privilege of becoming citizens and the owners of soil among us, ought to be, resisted with the same spirit which swept the alien and sedition laws from our statute books."

Resolved, That we will labor for the election of a Democratic majority in the General Assembly of Ohio, pledged to the following measures:

1. A law withholding the remedies of our State courts from such banks or bankers as refuse to pay their taxes according to the Constitution and laws of Ohio, and forbidding the State Treasurer or County Treasurers from receiving the notes of such banks or bankers in payment of their taxes.

2. An exercise by the General Assembly of the power granted by the constitution to restrict the taxation by the authorities of cities and incorporated villages, as well as of County Commissioners, thereby preventing the abuse of such power.

Resolved, That we recognize in the Democratic administration, State and National, fearful, consistent and patriotic auxiliaries in the above and kindred measures of Democratic policy, and therefore worthy of the confidence and support of every Democrat.

Resolved, That we present to the Democracy of Ohio the above nominations as a ticket fully deserving a triumphant election in October; and to their success and to the ascendency of Democratic principles involved in their election, we pledging ourselves, and those whom we represent, in the coming campaign of 1855.

Resolved, That the union of the Democratic newspapers at the Capital—the Statesman and Democrat—meets with our hearty concurrence, as conducive to the harmony and integrity of the party; and that its course since united meets with the cordial approval, and deserves the cordial support of the Democracy of Ohio,
1. Resolved, That the Constitutional Government of the United States was formed by our fathers to "promote the general welfare and secure the blessings of liberty" to themselves and their posterity.

2. Resolved, That the people of Ohio are determined to uphold the National Government so that the "blessings of liberty" may be perpetuated.

3. Resolved, That the Constitution of the United States guarantees to Senators and Representatives in Congress "freedom of speech;" that any violation of this sacred guaranty should receive the emphatic denunciation of every American citizen.

4. Resolved, That the recent outrage on the floor of the U. S. Senate upon the Hon. Charles Sumner, a staunch and noble defender of the principles of freedom, by Preston S. Brooks, a Representative from South Carolina, is an act of atrocity which we unqualifiedly condemn.

5. Resolved, That Kansas is entitled to Freedom from Slavery as her birthright, and that Congress ought to recognize her free Constitution, and admit her into the Confederacy as a free State without delay.

6. Resolved, That we can only expect to stay the hand of the ruffian and extinguish the torch of the incendiary in the border land by making a radical change in the administrators of the General Government, and to this great end we will direct our whole energies in the coming contest.

7. Resolved, That Congress has power under the Constitution to prohibit slavery in the territories and that such power ought to be exercised in all territory now belonging to, or hereafter to be acquired by the United States.

8. Resolved, That we commend the foregoing principles to the cordial support of all good citizens, whether of native or foreign birth, and hereby declare that the great and only issue to be determined by the ensuing Presidential contest is, whether "Freedom be National and Slavery Sectional, or Slavery be National and Freedom Sectional."

Democratic, Jan. 8, 1856.

The Committee on Resolutions, with entire unanimity on the engrossing questions of the day, present the creed of the Democracy of Ohio as follows:

1. Resolved, That slavery (being the creation of positive law, cannot exist without it,) is a domestic institution, and that Congress has neither the power to legislate it into any territory or State, nor to exclude it therefrom, but to leave the people thereof perfectly free to form and regulate their domestic institutions in their way, subject only to the Constitution of the United States.

2. Resolved, That the right of the people of each particular State and Territory to establish their own Constitution or form of government; to choose and regulate their own domestic institutions of every kind and to legislate for themselves, is a fundamental principle of all free government; and that it is the self same right to secure which our ancestors waged the war of the Revolution; a right lying at the very foundation of all our free institutions, recognized in the Declaration of Independence and established by the Constitution of the United States; and we hereby indorse and reaffirm this now disputed principle,
3. **Resolved**, That the introduction of moral and religious questions into political controversies and issues of the day, is a wide departure from the ancient principles and sound policy of the country; at war with the true interests of the people, corrupting alike to morals, religion, and politics, and of a most pernicious and dangerous tendency.

4. **Resolved**, That the Democracy has no secrecy and requires no oaths, that while it publicly avows as a fundamental principle freedom of conscience without distinction of religious faith, the political equality of all whom the law recognizes as American citizens, without reference to the accident of birth, it relies for success upon open discussion and the intelligence of the people. We therefore denounce the Know-Nothing organization so called, as intolerant in its warfare upon the freedom of religious belief and the sacred rights of conscience; unjustly exclusive in its requirements of birth and blood; corrupting and demoralizing in its oath and concealment, and antirepublican and dangerous in its secret combination, and its secret political action.

5. **Resolved**, That the Democracy of Ohio, relying upon the intelligence and patriotism of the people, declare and publish these as the principles for which they will do battle; and inscribing them upon their banner, thus boldly and defiantly meet the issues presented now by the combined hosts of the enemies of Democracy and of the Union and of the Constitution pledging themselves that the banner shall remain unfurled as long as there is a Constitution and Union and Democratic principles to support and defend.

6. **Resolved**, That we rejoice in the firm, noble and patriotic stand of the Democratic members of the Congress of the United States, in the matter of electing a Speaker of the House of Representatives, and trust that they will maintain that stand to the last.

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**Union Republican August 12, 1857.**

**RESOLUTIONS.**

Invoking earnestly, the favor of God and relying confidently upon the intelligence, the patriotism and discriminating justice of the people, we, the delegates of the Republican party in State Convention assembled, submit to the enlightened and candid judgment of the Freemen or Ohio the following declaration of Republican principles and measures:

1. We adhere to the platform adopted by the Republican Convention held at Philadelphia in July 1776, and reaffirmed in June 1856, and solemnly consecrate our political and moral powers to support its doctrines.

2. We maintain the Union of the States, and the Rights of the States and the Liberties of the people.

3. We submit cheerfully to the legitimate and constitutional exercise of the powers of the Federal Government; but we protest against the arrest and vexatious prosecution under writs of Federal Commissioners, of our Judges, Sheriffs, Justices of the Peace and private citizens, for acts required by State law, as oppressive, tyrannical and unwarrantable.

4. We insist that the lawful process by the State courts for the maintenance of right and the prosecution and punishment of crime committed within the limits of Ohio and against her sovereignty, shall be executed without let or hindrance by federal officials.

5. We deny the right of the Federal authorities, under the color of a Fugitive Slave act, or any other act, to suspend the writ of *habeas corpus*, or defeat its due execution and operation in this State.
6. We condemn the doctrines of the majority of the Federal Supreme Court, in the Dred Scott case, as anti-constitutional, anti-republican, anti-democratic, incompatible with State rights, and destructive of personal security.

7. We regard Slavery as a great evil and wrong, ever aggressive, constantly mischievous, and prospectively fatal to both Union and Liberty; and we therefore earnestly oppose its extension or encouragement by the Federal Government.

8. We concur with a vast majority of the people of the free States and with a respectable portion of the people of the slave States, in reprobation of the action of the Federal Government, under the control of the slave power, in breaking down the barriers against slavery extension provided by the wisdom of our fathers, and in forcing Slavery into Free Territory under the fraudulent pretences of the Nebraska-Kansas Bill, in disregard of settled national policy and plain constitutional provisions.

9. We adhere cordially to the doctrine of popular sovereignty as taught in the Declaration of Independence; but condemn as a gross perversion of that doctrine the modern pretension that one portion of a community may rightfully enslave another.

10. We hold to the old fashioned notions of our Fathers "a fair day's wages for a fair day's work," and repudiate with scorn the sentiment that "Slavery is the natural and normal condition of the laboring man," and will resist as anti-republican and unjust, every attempt by whomsoever made, to degrade the free labor of freemen here and elsewhere, and proclaim it as one of the leading objects of the Republican party to prevent the further spread of slavery, and to secure to the free white labor of the country its just reward and its full social and political rights.

11. We condemn without qualification the embezzlement of the public moneys recently discovered, and we demand the prompt and rigorous enforcement of the laws in the punishment of every person implicated in the same.

12. We are in favor of the free grant of the public lands by the General Government, in limited quantities to actual settlers.

13. We approve the acts of the last General Assembly, providing for the better security of the State Treasury; rectifying abuses, reducing State taxation and expenditure, and limiting the amount of local taxation by county and municipal authorities, and we demand such further legislation as will most surely and effectually protect the money of the people from embezzlement and misapplication, and most perfectly secure economy and efficiency in every department of the State administration.

14. The administration of Salmon P. Chase as the Chief Executive of the State Government, has been honest, able and dignified, commanding the admiration and confidence of our own people and the respect of the people of our sister States.

WILLIAM DENNISON, JR.,
Chairman of Com. Resol.
four or more ballots in a given election.\textsuperscript{11}

Under provisions of the 1857 "purity of elections" law, any person who "wilfully" voted in any township or ward in which he had not resided for at least twenty days previous to an election could be imprisoned for a maximum of six months. Furthermore, any resident of Ohio who voted in "any county" other than his own, upon conviction, would be imprisoned for from one to three years at "hard labor" in the state penitentiary. Finally, the "purity" statute tightened voting procedures and regulations by modifying existing rules for the conduct of elections. After the law went into effect, election officials were required to scrutinize more carefully the naturalization papers of all immigrants and deny the suffrage to those who could not clearly demonstrate that they were naturalized citizens and met all residency requirements.\textsuperscript{12}

During the 1855 canvass the "Fusion" coalition formally adopted the name Republican and scored impressive victories at the polls. When the Fifty-Second General Assembly convened in the winter of 1855-1856, Republicans outnumbered Democrats twenty-nine to six in the state Senate and seventy-eight to thirty-four in the Ohio House of Representatives. In addition, the incipient coalition captured all nine state-wide offices, including the governorship. Although himself not a nativist, Governor Chase had headed a ticket containing eight avowed Know Nothings. Moreover, even though many extreme nativists had supported the unsuccessful gubernatorial bid of Allen Trimble on the American Party ticket in 1855, Know Nothing votes had been crucial to Republican successes at the polls. Therefore, Know Nothings were in a position to demand that the Republican Party use its control of state government to repay them for their support by enacting laws designed to correct abuses they believed to exist in Ohio.\textsuperscript{13}

An analysis of the roll call votes in both houses of the state legislature for passage of these two overtly anti-Roman Catholic measures confirms the relative strength of Know Nothingism in the emerging Republican coalition. "An Act in relation to Conveyances and Devices of Property for religious purposes" passed the House sixty-seven to twenty-five and the Senate twenty-five to six. In the lower chamber Republicans cast all sixty-seven votes for passage, while Democrats accounted for all but one negative response. Moreover, in the Senate Republicans supplied all twenty-five votes for passage and Democrats cast all six negative votes.\textsuperscript{14}

"An Act to preserve the purity of elections" likewise sailed through both chambers of the General Assembly, being approved seventy-three to twenty-seven in the House and twenty-five to four in the Senate. In the House Republicans accounted for all seventy-three votes for passage, while Democrats cast all but two of the twenty-seven negative ones. In the Senate twenty-four of twenty-five votes for approval were cast by Republicans, while all four negative votes emanated from Democratic members. Thus, both statutes were enacted into law on the basis of party affiliation and the Know Nothings who
joined Whigs, Free Soilers, and dissident Democrats in a “Fusion” movement to oust the Democracy received something for their loyalty—legislation to correct abuses they believed to exist in Ohio society. Anti-slavery extension sentiment ultimately dominated the state Republican Party, but Know Nothingism achieved some successes before being “swallowed up.”

The anti-Catholic statutes enacted by the General Assembly were a logical outgrowth of the nature of the “Fusion” coalition and were prompted by the climate of opinion in the state. During the 1850’s Know Nothingism, as political nativism was popularly called, thrived in several states, varying in intensity from area to area. The movement arrived in Ohio as early as 1853 and the secret order grew rapidly. In October, 1854, it possessed approximately 50,000 members and claimed upwards of 120,000 adherents in February, 1855. Although Know Nothing lodges declined rapidly after June, 1855, at that time they probably had close to 130,000 followers. In spite of the fact that Know Nothings in some states briefly replaced the Whig Party and wrested control of state government from the Democrats, in Ohio they never became a viable separate political entity. Since Ohio nativists opposed the extension of slavery, disliked Democrats because of their alleged Catholic proclivities, and obtained legislative concessions from the emerging Republican Party, they fused with the incipient Republican organization after a short period of semi-independent action.

Know Nothingism, although ostensibly anti-foreign, actually rested on an anti-Catholic base. During the course of the nineteenth century, increased Catholic immigration to America, especially from Ireland and Germany, greatly expanded the American Roman Catholic Church. This was particularly true in Cincinnati and Cleveland where German and Irish Catholics made up a substantial minority of the population. The Know Nothing movement of the 1850’s was a direct result of the increased immigration and the accompanying growth of the American Catholic population.

In most instances nativists attacked an institution they did not comprehend. Since they misunderstood the workings of the hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church, they perceived it to be an undemocratic engine of oppression that stifled individualism and left its adherents unfit to function in a free society such as the United States. Because “Roman Catholicism is diametrically opposed to American Republicanism,” charged the editor of the Steubenville True American, it was “dangerous to civil as well as religious liberty.” Catholics, educated to believe in “the ‘Supremacy of the Pope’ . . . whose bulletins constitute a ‘higher law’ before which even the ‘majesty of the people’ must bend” were “unfit” to exercise political rights. Because the Roman Catholic Church claimed “temporal as well as spiritual power over all its subjects” and demanded “allegiance to the Pope,” claimed the editor of the Meigs County Telegraph, its members could never become “true American[s]” whose “paramount” loyalty was to the Constitution of the United States. Those “governed
by a head in a foreign land, holding no sympathy with our institutions . . . where Papal power prevails" and "no genuine liberty, either civil or religious" exists, exclaimed Lewis D. Campbell, must not "control the American Ballot Box!" The fears and complaints lodged by the editors of the True American and the Telegraph, as well as those of Campbell, were not isolated incidents, but only a few examples of a wide-spread attitude existing in Ohio during the 1850's. Many Ohioans were convinced that a Papal plot to subvert liberty and control American government existed and that those who depended on the Pope for spiritual leadership also looked to him for secular guidance. 18

Political reformers, especially on the local level, saw a direct relationship between Catholicism and political chicanery. Most believed that Catholics voted en masse for Democratic candidates. Joe Medill, Scotch-Irish, anti-Catholic editor of the Cleveland Leader and himself probably a Know Nothing, claimed that Roman Catholics constituted the "backbone" of the Democracy. These "dupes of Popery," argued Medill, blindly obeyed the dictates of Democratic leaders and were unfit to cast ballots in "a free Protestant country" such as the United States. Because Papal followers practiced "proscription in politics," the anti-Democratic coalition had not the least inclination to "solicit the vote of a single Roman Catholic." In 1855, stories in several newspapers, including the Canton Ohio Repository, the Bellefontaine Republican, and the Cincinnati Daily Gazette, contended that Archbishop John Purcell of the Diocese of Cincinnati openly boasted that he had long controlled the votes of 6,200 Roman Catholics in Hamilton County. Thus, in criticizing Democratically controlled governments as unresponsive and plagued by corruption and incompetence, reformers singled out Catholics as special targets. 19

In addition to the opponents of political corruption and inefficiency, anti-slavery extension voters resented the alleged Catholic preference for the Democratic Party. "An administration and Congress, elected and controlled by unAmerican influences, and which has achieved only the contempt of the American people," charged Thomas Spooner, President of the Ohio Council of the American Party, were responsible for the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act. The "unAmerican influences" according to Spooner were basically Catholic voters who "gave their hearty and undivided support" to those who perpetrated the repeal of the Missouri Compromise—support which sounded "death to liberty." To rectify the situation, Spooner invited ethnics, including German Forty-Eighters and Calvinists, who supported the great American principle of liberty, to join native-born Americans in a collective effort to rid the United States of "Romanism." 20

A series of blunders committed by the Church itself, also added to the growing anti-Catholic feeling. These blunders led many Americans to believe that a Papal conspiracy existed against American liberties and democratic institutions. In 1852, John Hughes, Archbishop of New York and the recognized head of the American Catholic Church, launched a propaganda campaign to
Although he was not a nativist, Salmon P. Chase headed a ticket containing eight avowed Know Nothings in his election to the governor's office in 1855.

Salmon P. Chase

Friederich Hassaurek, editor of two German language newspapers in Cincinnati, wrote an inflammatory editorial warning of the Papal envoy Bedini's visit to the city. On Christmas night, 1853, Hassaurek led a German Freeman's Society march to Bedini's residence and later was arrested for inciting a riot.

Friederich Hassaurek
secure public financial assistance for Roman Catholic schools. Simultaneously he also began an effort to end Protestant Bible reading in the nation’s common school systems, a campaign Ohio Know Nothings labeled “an open war” against “the profoundest teacher of wisdom to all men” designed to “strike down the genius of religious liberty.”

Although nativists reacted immediately and vigorously to Hughes’ twin efforts, they became even angrier when Gaeteno Bedini, a Papal envoy, arrived in the United States in June, 1853. The legate, officially in America to straighten out matters relating to Catholic Church property in Buffalo, Baltimore, and Philadelphia, received an extremely hostile reception after his arrival. Bedini, a vigorous opponent of Italian unification, toured several American cities and met with President Franklin Pierce and various members of Congress. Critics of the Roman Catholic Church viewed his visit as part of a larger plot to subvert American liberties and extend Papal power. Bedini ran into a series of difficulties almost everywhere he went, being jostled by mobs in Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, and elsewhere.

Although rarely accorded more than passing notice, the Bedini riot in Cincinnati sheds much light on the nature of Ohio nativism and the anti-Catholic bias in the emerging Republican coalition. Instigated by Friederich Hassaurek, the editor of two German language newspapers in the city, the riot occurred on December 25, 1853. Hassaurek and other German Forty-Eighters hated the Roman Catholic Church and believed Bedini to be the incarnation of the reactionary forces dominant in Europe. On the eve of the riot, the Hochwachter, one of Hassaurek’s organs, carried an inflammatory editorial warning of the legate’s forthcoming visit. The article called Bedini a butcher and overtly suggested that German nonCatholics revenge the unsuccessful revolutions of 1848 by attacking the Nuncio. On Christmas night, 1853, between 800 and 1,000 members of the German Freemen’s Society led by Hassaurek marched to the residence where Bedini was staying. They carried several anti-clerical signs with inscriptions such as “NO PAPACY” and “DOWN WITH BEDINI.” The Cincinnati police, anticipating some type of incident, sent a contingent of Irish Catholic members of the force to prevent trouble. Whether the police or the Germans fired first is uncertain, but in the ensuing battle eighteen persons were wounded. Police arrested over sixty of the rioters after the battle and the following day arrested Hassaurek for inciting the riot. Charges and counter charges were leveled as both sides accused the other of precipitating the violence. Eventually all prosecutions were dropped, but the hatred between German Freemen and Catholics remained.

From its inception as a “Fusion” movement in 1854, the Ohio Republican Party consistently sought and claimed the support of German Forty-Eighters and other nonCatholic ethnics. To acquire these votes, Republican leaders and editors attacked both Catholic priests and laity for alleged politico-religious activities, while simultaneously praising nonCatholic immigrants who
In newspaper cartoons critics accused the Ohio Democratic Party of transporting hundreds of immigrants, mostly Irish-Catholics to the polls and paying them to vote. The "Purity of Election Laws" passed by the Ohio legislature in 1857 was intended to diminish this illegal immigrant voting.
voted for Republican candidates. According to the "Fusion" press, in 1854 "Liberal Germans," i.e. Protestants and freethinkers, all over the United States opposed the slave Democracy, feared "Jesuitism," and "gave manly assurance of the fidelity of their countrymen to the great cause of Free Labor and Freedom." They were humane, principled, and Anti-Nebraska, and their "central idea" of "Anti-Despotism" made them proponents of free soil, free labor, and free men. Thus, Republicans consciously courted German-American voters at the expense of Irish Catholics they believed to be irreconcilably Democratic.24

As pointed out to Friederich Hassaurek by Timothy Day in 1856, because both Know Nothings and Forty-Eighters hated Roman Catholics, they were natural political allies. According to the Cincinnati Congressman and former Democrat, Know Nothings "hate Jesuitism because of their Protestantism, and love freedom because it is Protestant." For their part, Forty-Eighters "hate[d]" Jesuitism because it was "the enemy of liberalism." Thus, the views of both nativists and German Freemen were similar and could easily be "assimilated." The incipient coalition of Whigs, Free Soilers, and dissident Democrats openly wooed and welcomed foreign-born voters who viewed Roman Catholics with suspicion and hatred. It was no accident that Hassaurek was frequently sought as a campaign speaker in the 1860 presidential canvass and stumped Ohio and other states for Abraham Lincoln.25

That the "Fusionists" actively courted Protestant and freethinking ethnics was immediately recognized by the state Democratic press, and it did all it could to alienate this element from the emerging anti-Democratic coalition. The "Fusion" movement, bemoaned J. W. Gray of the Cleveland Plain Dealer, impudently called upon "nonCatholic immigrants ... to join hands with the proscription party [to] repeal all naturalization laws, and thereby prohibit themselves from the right to vote and hold office." The opponents of the Democracy, reported Gray, used "every deceptive intrigue" to get into "the good graces of the Anti-Catholic foreigners." Ethnic voters, stated Gray, must not be deluded by such tactics. They must support the Democratic Party and the cause of "universal toleration."26

Two additional factors—Catholic criticism of a new Ohio school law and Sabbatarianism—intensified anti-Catholic agitation. Passed on March 14, 1853, the school statute simplified the school code and levied a uniform tax of two mills to be distributed among the several counties of the state in proportion to the number of school age children. The law also provided for the establishment of school libraries to be funded by a special tax. Although considered to be a major piece of reform legislation by the Ohio General Assembly, the measure provoked sharp criticism from Ohio's leading Roman Catholic newspaper, the Cincinnati Catholic Telegraph and Advocate, as well as from leading clerics such as John Purcell who assailed the law because it used taxes paid by Catholics to finance secular learning.27
Although an amorphous and confused issue, Sabbatarianism added to the increasing animosity toward Catholics. In contrast to the Protestant American belief that Sunday was a day of rest and quiet religious pursuits, ethnics “stoutly defended their right to observe the Sabbath in European manner.” For them, Sunday was a time for “dances, parades, theatricals, picnics, visits to beer gardens, . . . sharpshootings, bowling,” and other recreational activities. In Ohio, Irish and German immigrants were singled out for allegedly profaning the Sabbath. For example, a letter signed “Protestant” appearing in the Bucyrus Journal in June, 1854, lambasted German-Americans living in Cincinnati and elsewhere for turning the Sabbath into “a gala day for operas and concerts, and public parade.” The writer went on to add that “the anti-republican and infidel strides of a corrupt foreign population” made resistance to their activities a “necessity.” Moreover, he complained, if Americans failed to take heed, “corrupt politicians” would use “Roman Catholic votes . . . to sustain them in power.”

These and other tensions present in Ohio had tremendous significance for the emerging Republican Party. The nascent anti-party feelings prevented Whigs from channeling the renewed antislavery extension sentiment in their direction and permitted the Republicans to exploit it. Anti-Catholic bias enabled the anti-Democratic coalition to profit not only from the fears expressed by native Americans, but also to benefit from the divisions in Europe where Irish and German Catholics were bitterly hated by Protestants and freethinkers. Because these religious animosities spilled over into America, Republicans used anti-Catholic rhetoric to gain the allegiance of German Forty-Eighters and other ethnics who hated Roman Catholics. Thus, the antislavery extension Republicans were able to develop a strong base of support by broadening their appeal and principles to attract both Know Nothings and non-Catholic immigrants, as well as voters dissatisfied with the unresponsive old parties.

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(4) Cleveland Plain Dealer, April 8, 1851, April 5, 1852; Cincinnati Enquirer, April 8-10, 1853; Charles Reemelin, *Life of Charles Reemelin . . .* (Cincinnati, 1892), 87, 101; Joseph M. Root to Joshua Reed Giddings, February 23, 1852, Joshua Reed Giddings Papers, Ohio Historical Society (OHS). See also the Ashtabula Sentinel, March 3, 1853.

(5) James A. Briggs, Correspondence to the Columbus Ohio State Journal, August 3, 1853, Scrapbook I (1830-1887), James A. Briggs Papers, Western Reserve Historical Society (WRHS); Cincinnati Daily Unionist, February 7, 1854.

(6) Norwalk Reflector, n. d., as quoted in the Canton Ohio Repository, August 16, 1854; Portage County Democrat (Ravenna), July 13, 1855. See also John G. Palfrey to Joshua Reed Giddings, December 2, 1854, Joshua Reed Giddings Papers, OHS; Marietta Republican, December 8, 1854; *Weekly Scioto Gazette* (Chillicothe), April 14, 1854, May 22, 1855; Somerset Post, September 13, October 25, 1854; and the Wooster Republican, March 16, 1854.

(7) Salmon P. Chase to Hon. Kingsley Bingham (Governor of Michigan), October 19, 1855, Salmon P. Chase Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP); Salmon P. Chase to Oran Follett, February 14, 1855, “Selections from the Follett Papers,” V, Quarterly Publication of the Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio (Cincinnati, 1918), XIII, 63-66; Eugene H. Roseboom, “Salmon P. Chase and the Know Nothings,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XXV (December, 1938), 335. See also, Crandall, *Early History of the Republican Party*, 15-40; Canton Ohio Repository, October 10, 1855; Lancaster Ohio Eagle, October 11, 1855; Urbana Citizen and Gazette, October 19, 1855; Columbus Ohio Columbian, October 3, 17, 24, 1855; Portage County Democrat, October 29, 1855; and Thomas Spooner's final election appeal to members of the Ohio American Party in the Cincinnati Gazette, October 1, 1855.

(8) Canton Ohio Repository, September 5, 12, 19, 26, October 3, 10, 1855; Portage County Democrat, May 9, 16, 23, 30, June 6, 13, 30, 27, July 4, 11, 18, 25, August 1, 15, 22, 29, September 5, 12, 19, 26, October 3, 10, 1855.


(10) I am extremely indebted to Ronald P. Formisano for calling my attention to the necessity of more closely scrutinizing legislative sessions to investigate the impact of Know Nothingism on initial Republican policies. With the exception of his excellent study of Michigan politics, historians dealing with state level
developments have ignored the legislative enactments spawned by nativistic fears and antipathies. Formisano, *The Birth of Mass Political Parties*, especially 252-253, 256-257, 262-265, 268, and 271-272. Ohio, *Laws* (1857), LI, 110-112; Massachusetts, *Acts and Resolves* (1855), 722-724; Ashtabula Sentinel, April 16, 1857. The church property statute was repealed by the Democrats when they regained control of the General Assembly in 1857. Ohio, *Laws* (1858), LV, 8. The law was undoubtedly a reaction to the demands made by Archbishop John Hughes of New York and other leading Catholic clerics in the 1850’s that Roman Catholic Church property in the United States be owned by the clergy rather than the laity. In contrast to conditions in France and Italy, church property in America and its transfer was regulated by civil law and Hughes and other clerics demanded this be changed. Robert D. Cross, *The Emergence of Liberal Catholicism in America* (Cambridge, 1958), 76-77. See also the comments in the Canton *Ohio Repository*, October 25, July 26, 1854, and April 22, 1857.

(11) Ohio, “Report of the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections Relative to the Contested Election Case of Perry County,” in *Appendix to the Journal of the House of Representatives of the State of Ohio* (1854), 55-62, 107, 112, 114, 121, 258-261. See also the speech of state Senator David Heaton in favor of the measure on April 11, 1857 in the Columbus *Ohio State Journal*, April 14, 1857; Salmon P. Chase to Friederich Hassaurek, April 7, 1857, Friederich Hassaurek Papers, OHS; and the Canton *Ohio Repository*, October 22, 29, 1856.


(13) Columbus *Ohio State Journal*, November 17, 1855; Joseph P. Smith (Comp.), *History of the Republican Party in Ohio* . . . . (2 vols., Chicago, 1898), I, 40-41; Salmon P. Chase to Hon. Kingsley Bingham, October 19, 1855, Salmon P. Chase Papers, HSP.


(16) Humphrey J. Desmond, *The Know-Nothing Party* (Washington, D.C., 1904), 53; Roseboom, *The Civil War Era*, 1850-1873, 299; Thomas Spooner, *Report of the President of State Council of Ohio* [American Party], June 5, 1855 (Cincinnati, 1855), 6-10; “Speech of the Hon. Lewis D. Campbell of Ohio, at the American Mass Meeting held in Washington, D.C., February 25, 1856” (pamphlet); J. P. Jones to Allen Trimble, n. d.; Allen Trimble to J. P. Jones, September 24, 1855; David Chambers to Allen Trimble, September 26, 1855, Allen Trimble Papers, WRHS; Richard Mott to Joshua Reed Giddings, June 2, 1855, Joshua Reed Giddings Papers, OHS; Timothy Day to Friederich Hassaurek, March 10, 1856, Friederich Hassaurek Papers, OHS; Cleveland Express, January 23, 1855; Steubenville *True American*, August 13, 1856; Salmon P. Chase to Hon. Kingsley Bingham, October 19, 1855, Salmon P. Chase Papers, HSP.


(18) Steubenville *True American*, January 4, 1855; Meigs County *Telegraph* (Pomeroy), July 24, August 21, 1855; “Speech of the Hon. Lewis D. Campbell.” See also, Canton *Ohio Repository*, October 4, 1854, October 3, 24, 1855; Lebanon
Western Star, October 5, 1855; Lancaster Gazette, September 20, 27, October 4, 1855; Gallipolis Journal, September 27, 1855; Ashtabula Sentinel, November 29, 1855; Hamilton Intelligencer, May 4, 1854; Hardin County Republican (Kenton), May 25, 1855; Spooner, Report of the President of State Council of Ohio, 3-4, 8-12; Cleveland American Liberal, December 20, 1854; Cincinnati Daily Gazette, March 12, 16, 22, 26, April 26, May 3, 1853; Bucyrus Journal, June 1, 1854; Coshocton Republican, April 24, 1851; Cleveland Express, January 23, 1855; and John Gressner to Elisha Whittlesey, July 24, 1855, Elisha Whittlesey Papers, WRHS.

(19) Cleveland Leader, May 1, June 6, October 8, 1855; Canton Ohio Repository, October 3, 1855; Cincinnati Daily Gazette, September 19-20, 1855; Bellefontaine Republican, October 5, 1855. Other newspapers carrying the same accusation against Purcell included the Meigs County Telegraph, October 2, 1855; the Portage County Democrat, September 26, 1855; and the Marietta Independent American, September 28, 1855.

(20) Spooner, Report of the President of State Council of Ohio, 7-12.


(24) Cleveland Leader, March 24, May 9, June 20, 1854.

(25) Timothy Day to Friederich Hassaurek, March 25, 1856, Friederich Hassaurek Papers, OHS.

(26) Cleveland Plain Dealer, October 6, 1854, January 16, July 2, 1855.

(27) Roseboom, The Civil War Era, 1850-1873, 288; Billington, The Protestant Crusade, 382; Cincinnati, Catholic Telegraph and Advocate, January-April, 1853, September 2, 1854, September 22, 1855; Ashtabula Sentinel, March 24, 1853. In the spring of 1853 opponents of the Catholic Church “seized on the school question” and nominated an “Anti-Catholic” ticket for city offices that nearly toppled the Democracy. In the race for the mayor’s office, a four man contest, the “Anti-Catholic” candidate polled 5,187 votes (34%), only 856 votes less than the Democratic victor (5,943/39%). Cincinnati Enquirer, April 8-10, 1853; Cincinnati Daily Gazette, March 12, 16, 22, 26, 28, April 2, 1853.

(28) Carl Wittke, Refugees of Revolution: The German Forty-Eighters in America (Philadelphia, 1952), 139-141; Bucyrus Journal, June 1, 1854. See also, the Cincinnati Daily Gazette, May 4, 1853.