ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Catholics Incorporated: Class, Power, and the Politics of Assimilation in Nineteenth Century America

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This project takes as its subject the integration of Catholicism into nineteenth-century American society, politics, and culture. Adopting a cross-regional approach, the dissertation argues that by midcentury the Church was far better integrated into the American South than the North, and had forged a powerful alliance with the Southern planter elite and the Southern-dominated Democratic Party. In the aftermath of the Civil War, the Church increasingly forged an alliance with the growing Irish-American middle-class, whose influence within Democratic politics proved critical to the advancement of Catholic interests. During the Gilded Age the Church itself proved an arena of ideological conflict, as working-class radicals and Irish-American elites sought to define the Church’s relationship to power and poverty. In the 1890s, however, many working-class radicals returned to the Church and embraced Catholic conservatism. At 1900 the Irish-dominated institutional Church defined itself as a bulwark of conservatism, moral order, and “American” values against the threat of secular radicals and liberals.
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My father, Stephen J. McGrath, did not live to see this project to its completion. But his deep love of history, Irish America, and the Catholic Church suffuse these pages. I dedicate this project to him.
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Introduction: The New York City Draft Riots and the Ambiguities of Americanism

In the early summer of 1863, at the height of the American Civil War, Orestes A. Brownson publicly accused his fellow American Catholics of mass disloyalty, if not outright treason, against the government of the United States. An esteemed Yankee writer and philosopher who had converted to Catholicism in 1845, the New England-born Brownson had clashed with his fellow Catholics for nearly two decades over the traditions of the Church and their relation to American culture. A predominantly foreign-born community composed almost entirely of Irish and German migrants, American Catholics had proved, in Brownson’s view, to be an ignorant peasant folk accustomed to Old World absolutism and pagan superstition—a "foreign" people with "no clear understanding of their religion." But if American Catholics had long proved unschooled in theological orthodoxy and deficient in liturgical practice, under the pressures of rebellion and civil war they had shown themselves to be something far more sinister. They were “people on the side of slavery and disloyalty”—defenders and allies of the slaveholding South. “Go where we will in the loyal States,” Brownson wrote in June of that year, "and we find nearly every Catholic we meet a Southern sympathizer, an intense hater of the abolitionist, and more ready to see the Union divided, or reconstructed, under Jeff Davis … than to see it restored by the extinction of slavery.”

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1 For an overview of Brownson’s life and conversion to Catholicism, see Arthur M. Schlesinger, Orestes A. Brownson: A Pilgrim’s Progress (Boston: Little, Browns, and Co., 1939); Theodore Maynard, Orestes Brownson: Yankee, Radical, Catholic (New York: Macmillan, 1943).
3 Orestes Brownson, “Are Catholics Proslavery and Disloyal,” Brownson’s Quarterly Review 4 (Summer 1863), 378, 369-370. Brownson in the 1840s had been a persistent critic of abolitionism, but by the time of the Civil War he had come to support the antislavery cause; his complicated relationship with slavery has
Entitled “Are Catholics Proslavery and Disloyal?” and published in the summer issue of Brownson’s New York-based Quarterly Review, the essay condemned the American Catholic clergy, the Catholic press, and the vast majority of the Catholic laity for publicly defending the institution of slavery and sympathizing with the Confederate cause. For more than a decade, Brownson charged, the clergy and the Catholic press had persistently denounced abolition as the plot of New England fanatics; defended chattel slavery as an institution consistent with, if not favorable to, the traditions of Catholic civilization; and everywhere marshaled their political and social influence in support of the Confederacy. Disunion and civil war, moreover, had done little to quell Catholic sympathy for the Southern Slave Power. Editorials in the Catholic press proclaiming that slavery was “no sin” had only grown more vigorous since the secession of the Confederate states in 1861. For a community long suspected of monarchical tendencies and anti-republican sentiments, a Catholic alliance “with the cause of slavery and rebellion,” Brownson cautioned, would only strengthen the anti-Catholic prejudices of Anglo-American Protestants and further compromise the Church’s already tenuous position in the United States.  

Only July 13th, just weeks after the publication of Brownson’s controversial article, New York City witnessed an “armed insurrection” against Union authorities. In March of that year Congress had passed the Conscription Act, enabling the federal

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government to institute a Union-wide conscription of “able bodied male citizens” into the federal army. As expected, the Conscription Act drew the ire of Northern Democrats, who decried federal conscription as yet another example of Republican “despotism” on behalf of a “grand Abolition crusade” against the South. In particular, Democrats condemned Union authorities for including in the Act a provision stipulating that draftees could avoid military service by paying a $300 fee or “furnishing a substitute.” This “rich man’s exemption” aroused mass discontent among Northern white wage-laborers, who denounced the Republican administration for conscripting the urban poor while allowing “rich men [to] pay three hundred dollars in order to stay at home.” In New York City, Democratic politicians had promised they would seek constitutional challenges to federal conscription, but legal resistance proved moot, and on July 11 federal draft officials began the roll call of the names and addresses of those drafted into the Union Army. By Monday armed mobs had begun to form outside draft stations, and vocal protest quickly escalated into widespread violence and destruction of property.

The rioters burned draft stations, exchanged gunfire with local police, hoisted Confederate flags, and chanted the name of Jefferson Davis.


7 [John Mullaly], The Washington Despotism Dissected in Articles from the Metropolitan Record (New York: Office of the Metropolitan Record, 1863).

8 Stoddard, The Volcano Under the City, 301.


As Iver Bernstein has argued, the so-called Draft Riots may have commenced “as a demonstration against the draft,” but the carnage quickly “expanded into a sweeping assault against the local institutions and personnel of Abraham Lincoln’s Republican Party, as well as a grotesque and bloody race riot.”

Denouncing the antislavery agenda of the Union war campaign as the plot of abolitionist “fanatics,” rioters pillaged the residences of prominent Republicans and abolitionists, besieged the offices of pro-Union newspapers, and brutally murdered African American freemen on the city streets. Engaging in open warfare with police and local militia, the rioters also despoiled Protestant churches and missions, set ablaze African American homes and institutions, and assaulted suspected Republicans without provocation. Only the eventual arrival of Union battalions from the South brought the carnage to an end.

In the aftermath of the riots, much of the Republican press would agree that the riots had been carried out by proslavery “rebel sympathizers.” But while the question of whether the “miscreant mob” had in fact acted at the behest of Confederate officials in Richmond remained unanswered, few eyewitnesses seemed to have any doubts about the ethnic and religious character of the mob. “By all it was known as a riot instigated and carried on by the Irish Catholics,” an eyewitness recalled. “There were none of the promoters of that riot belonging to any other nationality than the Irish, nor embracing any other religion.”

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15 *Banquet Given by the Members of the Union League Club of 1863 and 1864*...(New York: George F. Nesbitt and Co., 1886); Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots*, 157. On the common perception of
when the Irish-born Archbishop of New York, John Hughes, gave a public address to
“the Men of New York, who are now in many of the papers called Rioters” from the
balcony of his 36th Street residence. “[C]lad in purple robes, and decked with the insignia
of his position,” the Archbishop called on the crowd of several thousand “not to give up
[their] principles or convictions” but at least to abstain from violence and “retire quietly”
to their homes.16 Hughes’s speech helped bring the riots to a close, but by making the
address Hughes seemed to acknowledge his role as de facto leader of the riotous “celtic
horde.”17

In the aftermath of the Draft Riots, Brownson remained bitter and defiant,
convinced that the horrific violence had done irreparable harm to the status to the One
True Faith. The episode, however, had nonetheless validated Brownson’s misgivings
about the political and cultural orientation of the American church. A Yankee convert to
the faith, Brownson had long hoped to strip Catholicism of its Old World trappings and
assimilate the Catholic laity into the “true American civilization” of the Yankee North, a
culture that prized political liberty, individual freedom, material progress, and the
promise of self-advancement through labor and self-discipline.18 Brownson’s effort,
however, had proved futile. “The great body of our Catholics, no doubt, wish to
Americanize, and to conform to the civilization of the country,” Brownson wrote in 1862,
“but they have hitherto Americanized, so far as they have Americanized at all, in a

immigrant Catholics as disloyal, see Susannah J. Ural, The Harp and the Eagle: Irish-American Volunteers
17 Alban Man has argued persuasively that Catholic leadership in New York City did have a hand in
provoking the riots, though the general racism of the Irish-American community was more to blame. See
Alban P. Man, “The Church and the New York Draft Riots of 1863,” The Catholic Historical Society of
Southern rather than Northern sense.”19 In particular, Brownson pointed to the pro-
Southern influence of the old-line Catholics of Maryland, whose wealth, status, and
education allowed them to shape the cultural attitudes and political sympathies of
Catholics nationally. The absorption of immigrant Catholics into the clannish world of
Democratic machine politics, moreover, had estranged them from the Whiggish and
individualist values of the Yankee middle-class, edging them closer to the culture and
politics of their Southern Democratic allies. The advent of the sectional crisis had only
sharpened Catholics’ sense that, culturally and politically, they had to choose between
divergent pathways of American civilization—Southern absolutism, sustained by a
slaveholding oligarchy, or the Yankee virtues of freedom, individualism, and competitive
capitalism.

In the aftermath of Reconstruction, Catholic scholars would strive to suppress the
legacy of the Draft Riots by emphasizing Catholic chivalry and military valor during the
war. Brownson’s charge that the Church had rejected the fundamental values of
“American civilization,” however, would echo through the annals of American Catholic
history, inspiring various attempts by Catholic intellectuals to “Americanize” the Church.

In the Gilded Age, Catholic thinkers like Isaac Hecker, a Brownson acolyte, would seek
to convert the Anglo-American middle-class by fusing Catholic principles with American
values of reason, individual liberty, and moral progress.20 By the 1890s such

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19 Orestes Brownson, “Catholic Schools and Education,” Brownson’s Quarterly Review 3 (January 1862): 80. “The type of Americanism they aim to adopt,” Brownson said of Catholics, “is in Maryland, not Massachusetts; Baltimore, not Boston; and nothing can exceed the hostility of the Maryland type, which, properly speaking, is the Virginia type, to the Boston, or New England type.”
20 Brownson had prodded Hecker to emphasize in his writings the harmony between Catholic orthodoxies and American values of reason, liberty, and individualism. Hecker described this as speaking “a la American.” See Isaac T. Hecker to Orestes A. Brownson, March 27, 1855 and Isaac T. Hecker to Orestes A. Brownson, April 15, 1855, in Joseph F. Gower and Richard M. Leliaert, ed., The Brownson-Hecker Correspondence (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), 177-178. Hecker is often interpreted
“Americanist” views had taken hold among leading Catholic churchmen like Archbishop John Ireland of Minnesota, who beseeched his fellow Catholics to embrace the American spirit of individualism, moral progress, and economic prosperity. Fearful that such tendencies posed a threat to ecclesiastical rule and moral order, Pope Leo XIII in 1899 officially denounced “Americanism” as a heresy, condemning outright the idea that “the Church should shape her teachings more in accord with the spirit of the age and relax some of her ancient severity and make some concessions to new opinions.” Only in the 1960s, when the Second Vatican Council ratified the Church’s support for liberal democracy, ecumenism, and democratic capitalism, did the spirit of “Americanism” finally triumph in the U.S. Church, enabling American Catholics to integrate the liberal, individualist, and progressive values of their culture with the moral and political doctrines of their Church.

The perceived tension between a liberalist, individualist America and a reactionary, hierarchical Catholicism has moreover shaped the writing of Catholic history itself, particularly over the last 50 years. As Philip Gleason has suggested, a generation of middle-class Catholic liberals, inspired by the progressive “spirit” of the Second Vatican Council, radically reshaped Catholic historiography in line with their own “Americanist”

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22 Pope Leo XIII, Testem Benevolentiae in Ellis, ed., Documents of American Catholic History, 554; on the subsequent “chilling effect” of this proclamation, see also Patrick Alitt, Catholic Converts: British and American Intellectuals Turn to Rome (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 116.
impulses in the last three decades of the twentieth century. Often trained in secular institutions and eager to harmonize Catholicism with liberal values of personal dignity, religious tolerance, individual freedom and secular progress, historians like Jay Dolan, David J. O’Brien, Margaret Mary Reher, and Robert Emmett Curran produced scholarship that celebrated “proto-Americanists” like Hecker and Brownson while lamenting the institutional Church’s repudiation of the American liberal tradition. Works like Dolan’s *In Search of American Catholicism: A History of Religion and Culture in Tension* (2002) cast the dominant strand of “immigrant Catholicism” in the U.S. Church as essentially reactionary and authoritarian, redeemed only by the liberal “reformation” of the Church in the 1960s. Echoing Gleason’s remarks, theologian Michael Baxter has accused such academics of subordinating Catholicism to the values of secular liberalism and democratic capitalism, giving rise to an “Americanist” fusion of Catholicism and liberalism that breaks from the authentic traditions of the Church.

The “Americanist” paradigm, which equates the “Americanization” of Catholicism with the embrace of bourgeois liberal values, has even shaped the scholarship of Catholic historians with more complex attitudes toward the liberal...

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John T. McGreevy, for instance, has described Catholic social thought as a necessary counterweight to the disintegrative and ultra-individualistic tendencies of American liberalism. In *Catholicism and American Freedom* (2003), McGreevy argues that in the nineteenth century a radically traditionalist strain emerged within global Catholicism (known as “ultramontanism”) that linked devotion to the supreme authority of the Holy See with rejection of the liberal individualism of the ascendant middle class. Buttressed by the major institutions of the *ancien regime*, especially the Catholic nobility, this “Catholic revival” embraced a neo-medievalist conception of moral order that exalted deference to tradition and authority, emphasized the social nature of personhood, and sanctified hierarchy and inequality as prerequisites of a just and harmonious social order. The assimilation of immigrant Catholics into American

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28 McGreevy has been particularly influential in demonstrating the significance of the broader “Catholic revival” of the nineteenth century to American Catholicism, and thus pushing U.S. Catholic historians to adopt a transnational approach; see McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom*, 1-42. Subsequent works of scholarship that have adopted this transnational approach, and emphasized in particular the development of ultramontane Catholicism, include Peter D’Agostino, *Rome in America: Transnational Catholic Ideology from the Risorgimento to Fascism* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Michael Pasquier, *Fathers on the Frontier: French Missionaries and the Roman Catholic Priesthood in the United States* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2011); Gerald McKevitt, *Brokers of Culture: Italian Jesuits in the American West, 1848-1919* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2010).

society, in McGreevy’s account, thus entailed a prolonged ideological struggle between American “liberal individualism” and the corporatist ideals of ultramontane Catholicism. As an account of how Catholic social values can contribute to moral debates within a liberal-democratic culture, *Catholicism and America* is compelling, exhaustive, and rich in insight. But like the Catholic liberal scholars before him, McGreevy equates American cultural and civic identity with the liberal tradition, foreclosing alternative conceptions of American identity and thus the myriad and complex ways Catholics sought to adjust to American life.  

Brownson’s notion of two distinct pathways toward Americanization—one Northern, one Southern—crystallizes the limitations of this “Americanist” paradigm within Catholic historiography. Like many of the Catholic liberals of the twentieth-century, Brownson believed that the values of individual freedom, moral progress, and competitive capitalism were the “true” ideals of American civilization, but he also recognized the existence of alternative conceptions of American identity, none more pressing than that of slave-based white republic of the South. Indeed, by 1860 Brownson’s political values were those of the antislavery Republican Party, a purely sectional institution that embodied the liberal, individualist, and competitive values of the Northern capitalist order. 

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31 “Indeed, it is these two orders of civilization,” Brownson wrote, “that meet in mortal combat in the civil war which now threatens the integrity of the American nation.” Brownson, “Catholic Schools and Education,” 80.  
values of the Northern capitalist order would come to dominate the nation as a whole, such that “Yankee” cultural nationalism, once contested by Southerners and urban immigrants, would ultimately become indistinguishable from American nationhood itself. But in Brownson’s era, the “Yankee” liberal ideology of the Republican Party remained just one of many expressions of “American civilization.”

In other words, Brownson’s notion of dueling expressions of American identity affirms that the overarching “Americanist” paradigm was, in its origins, an expression of the individualist ideals of the Northern middle class. Early “Americanists” like Brownson and John Ireland were stalwart Republicans who wanted to cultivate among Catholic immigrants the individualist, liberal, and competitive values of the Anglo-American middle-class. For the Catholic liberals of the twentieth century, the values of this liberal tradition, now undergirded by the “managed” economy of the New Deal, had emerged as the universal expression of American middle-class ideals. To regard Catholics who departed from such values as living “in tension” with American culture, however, is to impose a presentist conception of American identity onto the complex cultural geography of the nineteenth century.

This dissertation envisions Catholic assimilation into nineteenth-century America as a staggered and unsteady process, varying across lines of region, class and ethnicity.34


33 “The true American civilization,” Brownson wrote in 1862, “…is best represented by the Puritans and their descendants.” Orestes Brownson, “Catholic Schools and Education,” 79.

34 In this respect this dissertation builds on the recent efforts of Catholic historians to demonstrate the myriad and complex ways that Catholics adapted to life in the U.S. Maura Jane Farrelly, in particular, has through her study of Maryland Catholicism demonstrated that some Catholics had “Americanized” long before the advent of the immigrant Church. These studies, however, have been regional in focus. My dissertation, by contrast, attempts to apply these insights to a broader, cross-regional narrative of nineteenth-century Catholic assimilation, one that links the rise and fall of Southern Catholicism with the urban Catholicism of the North. See Michael Pasquier, Fathers on the Frontier: French Missionaries and
In this respect the project rejects the Americanist narrative of Catholic assimilation, which posits “Americanization” as a gradual but linear embrace of the American liberal tradition that reached its apogee with the Catholic-liberal rapprochement of Vatican II.\(^3\) Rather I argue that Catholics adapted to American society in complex and myriad ways, and not necessarily by embracing by liberal values of the Anglo-American middle-classes. As Brownson himself recognized, Anglo and French Catholics by 1860 had achieved considerable power and status in the slaveholding South, endearing themselves and their faith to the slaveholder elite. Meanwhile, in the working-class environs of New York, Brooklyn, and San Francisco, Irish-Catholics had proved a dominant force in Democratic machine politics, controlling elections and reaping the benefits of municipal power. And in the aftermath of the Civil War, many Catholics would embrace a radical working-class culture that fused Irish-nationalism with the artisanal republicanism of the labor movement. None of these groups had embraced the Yankee liberal values that Brownson equated with “true American civilization” but they were nonetheless adapting to, while also shaping, the unique conditions of nineteenth-century American life.

My narrative concludes around 1900, by which time Catholics had achieved considerable social and political influence in urban America. The pro-labor posture of Pope Leo XIII helped to assuage many of the lingering class tensions within urban

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\(^3\) Overall, this project borrows Eric Foner’s insight that cultural assimilation is rarely unidirectional. In his essay on Irish nationalism in the Gilded Age, Foner argues that past studies of Irish nationalism have envisioned Irish assimilation into America as a gradual embrace of middle-class culture. In Foner’s view, however, many Irish had in fact assimilated into a radical working-class “oppositional” culture that defined itself against bourgeois values. My project attempts to apply this insight to the assimilation of American Catholicism. Eric Foner, “Class, Ethnicity, and Radicalism in the Gilded Age: The Land League and Irish America,” in Foner, Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War. Foner was responding, in particular, to Thomas Brown, Irish American Nationalism, 1870-1890 (J.B. Lippincott Company, 1966).
Catholicism, giving rise to a powerful cross-class Catholic culture that exerted profound influence over American society. Adamantly patriotic, this Catholic culture identified Catholicism as a necessary counterweight to the liberal and individualist tendencies of Protestantism, and in the twentieth century Catholics’ pronounced conservatism and antisocialism would edge the Church toward the very center of American political culture. The pathway to power and respectability, however, was neither linear nor inevitable, and within the Catholic community itself there were often deeply divergent conceptions of justice, patriotism, and moral order.

Chapter One lays out the complex social geography of antebellum Catholicism. In the first half of the nineteenth century, I argue, the Catholic Church was better assimilated, culturally and institutionally, in the South than the North, having forged a particularly strong relationship with the Southern upper class. At midcentury the American Church remained a Southern-dominated institution, even as immigration shifted its demographic base to the urban north. Chapter Two explores the cultural implications of the Church’s uneven integration into American life, using the experiences of converts, in particular, to examine how popular attitudes toward Catholicism varied across region. In the North, Catholics and Protestants alike viewed Catholicism as a foreign counterculture, deeply at odds with prevailing Yankee orthodoxies of freedom and individualism. In the South, by contrast, Catholics and Protestants viewed the Church as congenial to the hierarchical values of a slave society. The chapter then examines how contrasting attitudes toward Catholicism in the North and South shaped international diplomacy during the American Civil War.
Chapter Three shifts the story to the urban North. While most narratives of immigrant Catholicism commence with the Irish-famine generation of the 1840s, chapter 3 takes as its subject an older generation of native-born Irish-American elites. Though coming of age with few ties to organized Catholicism, this generation of Irish-American lawyers, politicians, and urban powerbrokers leveraged their influence within Democratic machine politics to advance the temporal interests of the Church, even as they embraced a secular and cosmopolitan identity at odds with the pious conservatism of the clergy. Though never fully assimilated into the immigrant community, this generation of Irish-Americans nonetheless adapted the Church to the hardscrabble world of ethnic working-class politics and the Democratic political machine, forging an alliance between Catholics and urban Democrats that would persist for a century.

Chapter Four examines the rise of a deeply sectarian Irish-Catholic subculture at midcentury, taking as its subject the career of Archbishop John Hughes of New York. While previous studies of “the immigrant Church” have depicted the sectarianism of immigrant Catholics as an outgrowth of a broader European “Catholic revival,” this chapter argues that Hughes’ religious populism was an adaptation to the hypersectarian religious marketplace of the antebellum U.S., as well as an attempt to strengthen the political influence of the Church within working-class circles. Though Hughes and his fellow clergy would embrace many of the reactionary values of “ultramontane Catholicism,” these tendencies flowed less from any identification with European religious practices than a desire to mobilize working-class support for the

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Church and to stamp out the secular and ultra-republican political traditions that persisted in Irish culture.

Chapter Five explores the Church’s attitudes toward the American capitalist order, focusing in particular on the development of an Irish-Catholic bourgeoisie in the second half of the nineteenth century. Though Catholic leaders denounced “Yankees” and “Protestants” as selfish and materialistic, they nonetheless preached a social gospel of self-uplift and personal advancement that comported with the broader values of the capitalist order. To guard against Protestant and secular influences, however, Catholic leaders yoked this ethic of self-improvement with a rabid Irish sectarianism that, while estranging Irish-Catholics from Protestant society, also alienated non-Irish Catholics. Many working-class Irish-Catholics, moreover, resisted the bourgeois inflections of the Catholic ethic of self-improvement, fusing Irish-Catholic sectarianism with working-class values out of step with clerical orthodoxy.
Chapter One:
The Social Geography of Antebellum Catholicism

In 1885 Charles Chiniquy, a Canadian-born ex-priest, published an 800-page expose of the Catholic Church entitled *Fifty Years in the Church of Rome*. Among other charges of Catholic corruption and duplicity, the memoir claimed that the Catholic Church had long “ruled and degraded” the American South, and had even manipulated the slaveholding elite into seceding from the Union. Reminding his readers that Spanish and French Catholics had first colonized the South, Chiniquy charged that the Old South had remained a residually Catholic society in the nineteenth century, dominated by Roman Catholic values and institutions. Catholic priests and nuns, he claimed, had educated all “the leading families” of the South, and the leaders of the Confederacy had been “under the influence of the Jesuits” by virtue of their marriage to Catholic women or their close friendship with Catholics.¹

Chiniquy’s claim that the Catholic Church had close ties to the Old South would not necessarily have shocked nineteenth-century readers. During the Civil War era the Catholic Church did have a strong institutional presence in the Upper South and the lower Mississippi Valley. Many upper class Protestants had attended Catholic academies and boarding schools. Much of the Catholic clergy had trained in Southern seminaries. And many of the most influential voices in Catholic literature, arts, and politics spoke with a Southern accent. Though immigration from Ireland and Germany gradually shifted the

demographic base of the Church to the urban North, culturally and institutionally the Church remained a Southern institution into the Civil War era.²

The perception of Catholicism as a Southern phenomenon even took root in American popular culture and fiction. Of course, the stereotype of the “Paddy”—the ill-tempered, violent Irish hooligan—was the dominant image of Catholicism in nineteenth-century America.³ But in the antebellum era there was a rival depiction of the Catholic as an Old World aristocrat, often of French or Spanish extraction, whose genteel refinement far exceeded that of the typical Yankee.⁴ In particular, this motif of the Catholic aristocrat typically focused on the old-line Catholic planters of southern Maryland or Louisiana. John Kennedy’s Rob of the Bowl (1838), for example, depicted a stately colonial Maryland, populated by genteel Anglo Catholic planters and cosmopolitan Jesuit priests.⁵ Catholic novelists like Joshua Huntington embraced this trope of the Catholic Cavalier, conjuring the elite Catholic planters of Maryland or Louisiana in their novels as counter-images to the nativist stereotypes of Irish Catholics as drunks and paupers.⁶ Though the motif of the Catholic Cavalier would fade as the Catholic ethnics of the North assumed control of the American Church, even as late as 1878 a Catholic novelist like Father

² For a traditional narrative of gradual immigrant assimilation into urban America, see John Tracy Ellis, American Catholicism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969); Thomas T. McAvoy, A History of the Catholic Church in the United States (South Bend: Notre Dame Press, 1969).
⁴ Of course, like the Paddy stereotype, this caricature lent itself to both positive and negative uses: the Old World aristocrat could easily shade into the devious, libertine clergymen of convent-abduction literature.
Bernard O’Reilly could reprise the image of the Catholic Cavalier in recounting the American Civil War from the perspective of a genteel Catholic planter, the half-Irish, half-Spanish Francis D’Arcy of South Carolina in the novel Two Brides.⁷

Of course, such renderings reflected, in part, nineteenth-century Americans’ fascination with Old World decadence and courtly manners as a counterpoint to the emerging Anglo-Protestant bourgeois civilization of self-disciplined achievement, material progress, and industrial growth. Depicted as the spiritual marrow of a declining European ancien régime, Roman Catholicism could function, particularly among the slaveholding elite, as a symbolic foil to the cultural inflections of New England Protestantism. In this respect the trope of the Catholic Cavalier was a novelistic flourish—a symbolic device that, drawing on the cultural connotations of the Old World aristocracy, helped demarcate the emerging cultural fault lines between a free-labor Yankee North and slaveholding Cavalier South. But the trope gained potency in antebellum literature, at least in part, because it reflected the fact that the U.S. Catholic Church’s deepest cultural and institutional roots were in the slaveholding South.

For Yankee Catholics like Orestes Brownson, of course, the Southern influence on Catholicism was a source of grave concern. Brownson, in particular, despised the old-line Maryland Anglo Catholics, whose wealth and education allowed them to shape the cultural attitudes and political sympathies of Catholics throughout the Union. These “Baltimore Catholics,” Brownson claimed, had taught working-class Catholics to regard the “chivalrous” South as the guardian of Catholic interests in America. As a result, in the contest between the “two orders of civilization” in America, Catholics had chosen Southern despotism over Northern freedom.

The role of the Southern elite in shaping Catholic attitudes may have been self-evident to Brownson and his contemporaries, but in the aftermath of the Civil War Catholic historians would see little use in documenting their legacy. As the demographic and institutional base of the Church shifted northward, historians like the New York-born John Gilmary Shea would all but suppress the memory of the Catholic Cavaliers, emphasizing instead the dutiful service of working-class Catholics to the Union war effort. Until the Second Vatican Council, Catholic historiography would assume the form of the immigrant assimilation narrative: of upwardly mobile Catholics loyal to God and country steadily gaining acceptance in urban America. Catholics’ prior assimilation into the American South would be all but forgotten, reprised only in anti-Catholic tracts like *Fifty Years in the Church of Rome*.

Only recently have historians begun to recover the traditions of Southern Catholicism. These studies, however, have been predominantly regional in focus, offering little insight into the influence of the Southern Catholic elite on the American church as a whole. What needs to be explained is how the staggered development of the U.S. Catholic Church in the antebellum period—a strong institutional presence below the Mason-Dixon line, compared to virtual absence in New England—would shape broader

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Catholic attitudes toward slavery, industrialization, and the war between North and South.

The Social Origins of American Catholicism

The anti-Catholic animus of English post-Reformation Protestantism stunted the development of Catholicism in much of colonial British North America. Even before the consolidation of the Protestant monarchy in England’s 1688 Glorious Revolution, English colonial settlers displayed a rabid aversion to Pope as a threat both to true Christian piety and the Protestant crown. The Puritan settlers of Massachusetts, for example, passed a law in 1647 barring any Jesuit from entering the colony under the penalty of death. The ascent of the Protestant royals William and Mary to the throne in 1688, coupled with subsequent wars against Catholic France and Spain, stoked anti-Catholic prejudice in the British colonies, and Parliament’s interest in tightening formal control over the empire led to a spate of anti-Catholic legislation in the colonies. By the early eighteenth century virtually every colony of British North America would formalize legislation barring Catholics from holding political office, practicing their religion in public, or establishing Catholic churches or schools.11 Some colonies, in line with Massachusetts, would ban the Catholic priesthood outright. New York, the future stronghold of American Catholicism, passed a law in 1700 declaring any Catholic clergyman in the colony a “disturber of the public peace” and “an enemy to the true Christian religion,” subject to “perpetual imprisonment” if apprehended.12 Such anti-Catholic decrees throttled Catholic migration to the colonies and precluded the establishment of a Roman Catholic hierarchy in British North America. Unsurprisingly,

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12 Shea, A History of the Catholic Church Within the Confines of the United States, vol.1, 357.
by the time of the American Revolution, Catholics would constitute only a little more than 1 percent of the total population of the thirteen colonies.

The small number of Catholics that did persist in colonial British North America were generally the descendants of the Catholic settlers of Maryland, an English colony established by the Catholic convert Cecil Calvert, Lord of Baltimore, in 1634. Though Catholics were no doubt persecuted under the English penal laws, there remained a small number of wealthy Catholic families, like the Calverts, who were of noble blood and possessed strong political ties to the crown. (Cecil’s father, George, had been a Member of Parliament and close adviser to Charles I.) The colony of Maryland, granted to the Calverts as a favor from the King, essentially served as an overseas haven for the English Catholic aristocracy both to practice their religion in peace and to maintain their genteel status outside the purview of the English penal laws. Although the colonial charter did not explicitly grant religious freedom to Catholics, it made no mention of an established church or religious test oaths, leaving Catholics free to hold property or political office. As a result, Calvert recruited heavily among his fellow Catholic nobles for the initial settlement of Maryland, offering, according to his privileges as colonial proprietor, generous tracts of land on the fertile Chesapeake shore “with all such royalties and privileges as usually belong to Manors in England.” An established Catholic elite, surrounded by Protestant servants, supported by tobacco-growing plantations, and ministered by European-educated Jesuit priests, would by 1649 secure formal recognition of religious freedom in Maryland.13

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Calvert’s dream of a “seignurial Catholicism writ large,” however, was not to last
in Maryland. Though political power would remain in Catholic hands for a half century,
the colony’s need for labor led to an influx of Protestant indentured servants, many of
whom came to resent their Catholic masters. Conflict between the Catholic upper class
and Protestant settlers boiled over into sectarian violence in 1652, when a revolt led by
envoys from Oliver Cromwell’s English Commonwealth temporarily overthrew the
Catholic ruling class. Though eventually suppressed, the uprising highlighted the
underlying social tensions between a Catholic upper class and a growing Protestant
majority. Tensions would persist until the Glorious Revolution of 1688, after which
Maryland would become a royal colony, subject to the dominion of the Anglican Church.
Though Catholics could retain their landholdings under the new Protestant establishment,
they were barred from political office and forced to pay tithes to the Church of England.

The Catholics of Maryland would remain a religiously persecuted minority until
1776, when the state legislature, inspired by the rising tide of revolution against the
British crown, at last revoked discriminatory laws against Catholics. Though stripped of
political power for much of the colonial era, the Catholic gentry of Maryland nonetheless
retained much of their landed wealth and social prestige well into the nineteenth-century.
Barred from establishing Catholic colleges within the colonies, the Maryland Catholic
elite would send their sons to Jesuit colleges in France and Spain, such as the prestigious
St. Omer’s in Flanders, which since the Reformation had served to educate the Catholic
aristocracy of England. Heirs of large tobacco plantations in southern Maryland and
beneficiaries of a cosmopolitan European education, Anglo Catholics like Charles Carroll

*Patriots*: Robert Emmett Curran, *Papist Devils: Catholics in British America, 1574-1783* (Washington,
of Carrollton, one of the wealthiest Americans in the colonies and a signatory of the Declaration of Independence, would provide leadership among the small Catholic minority while helping to dampen anti-Catholic prejudice among Protestants. Inheriting from his father nearly 40,000 acres of land and 285 slaves, Charles Carroll would serve as a member of the Continental Congress, a close friend and confidante of George Washington, and a U.S. Senator. Even Henry Adams, a New Englander long suspicious of Roman Catholics, praised Carroll as a “zealous supporter of the rights of America” in light of his service during the revolutionary era.\(^\text{14}\)

Charles, however, was perhaps not even the best known Carroll of his generation. Charles’s cousin, the Rev. John Carroll, also born in Maryland, would serve as the nation’s first Catholic bishop from 1789 to 1815. The descendant of a wealthy Anglo-Irish family of planters, John was born in Maryland in 1735 but spent much of his youth at Catholic universities in Europe.\(^\text{15}\) Received into the Jesuit order in 1761, Carroll taught theology and philosophy at Jesuits schools in France and Belgium until 1773, when the papal dissolution of the Jesuit Order forced him to flee to England, where he served as a tutor to the Catholic upper class. The following year he returned to his native Maryland, where he was immediately swept up in the revolutionary uprising against the British crown. Acclaimed for his European education and manners, he served as a diplomatic envoy to Montreal during the revolutionary war, earning the respect of leading American statesman like Benjamin Franklin. After the war, his predilection for a social order based


on deference and hierarchy (no doubt amplified by his years among the European aristocracy) led him to strongly sympathize with the ascendant Federalists. Respected both by his American peers and by the Vatican, Carroll in 1789 was elected the first bishop of the newly organized U.S. Church, taking his episcopal seat in the city of Baltimore. The choice of Baltimore was unsurprising: of the 35,000 Catholics living in the U.S. in 1785, more than 25,000 resided in Maryland. For the next half-century Baltimore would remain the cultural and intellectual nerve center of the U.S. Catholic Church.\footnote{16 Thomas W. Spalding, \emph{The Premier See: A History of the Archdiocese of Baltimore} (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994).}

As the territorial borders of the U.S. nation-state expanded, however, so too did the demographic base of the U.S. Church.\footnote{17 For a detailed overview, see Woods, \emph{A History of the Catholic Church in the American South}, 72-140.} In particular, the French and Spanish Creoles of the lower Mississippi Valley and Gulf Coast, gradually naturalized into the American republic following the Louisiana Purchase (1803), would come to exert their own influence on American Catholicism. While anti-Catholic penal laws throttled Catholic migration to British North America, in the French and Spanish colonies of the New World the Catholic Church had in fact benefited from a state-supported religious monopoly. Indeed, many of territories incorporated into the United States in the early nineteenth century—including Florida, the lower Mississippi Valley, the Gulf Coast, and, later, Texas—had for centuries been colonial outposts of Catholic monarchs eager to employ the clergy as emissaries of the crown.\footnote{18 \textit{A Catholic History of Alabama and the Floridas} (New York: P.J. Kennedy and Sons, 1908), 25-213; J.J. O’Connell, \emph{Catholicity in the Carolinas and Georgia: Leaves of its History} (New York: D.J. Sadlier and Co., 1879).} As late as 1763 France and Spain still controlled the vast majority of the North American continent; only the geopolitical
shockwaves unleashed by the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars would finally dislodge the Catholic nations from their colonial footholds in North America. The fall of the Spanish and French empires, however, did not lead to the mass exodus of Spanish and French Catholics from North America, but rather their subjection to new governing authorities—in particular, the United States. The admissions of Louisiana (1812), Mississippi (1817), Missouri (1821), Florida (1845) and Texas (1845) into the Union, in other words, signified the absorption of tens of thousands of French- and Spanish-speaking Catholics into a Anglo-Protestant nation and, moreover, an Anglo-dominated U.S. Church.

The French and Spanish Catholics of Louisiana would be particularly important to the development of American Catholicism. Originally settled by the French in the early eighteenth century, Louisiana was, after the Treaty of Paris in 1763, ruled by a wave of successive regimes, including the British, Spanish, and, after 1803, the United States. Spain controlled the eastern half of Louisiana, including the port city of New Orleans, from 1763 until 1802, which helped reaffirm the colony’s Catholic heritage, despite persistent tensions between French “creoles”— Francophone colonists descended from Europeans but born in New France—and the Spanish colonial authorities. While the colony’s population in 1750 hovered around 7,000, the British acquisition of French Canada in 1763 compelled more than 20,000 French Catholics from Newfoundland to resettle in Louisiana. At the time of its admission to the Union in 1812, Louisiana was home to 60,000 Catholics.

19 These migrants would later be known as the Arcadians, the forerunners of the modern-day Cajuns of Louisiana.
And yet despite more than a century of colonial rule by Catholic nations, Louisiana was hardly a beacon of Catholic piety, at least according to local church authorities. French and Spanish authorities had rarely placed the recruitment of clergy or the development of church institutions as high priorities in colonial Louisiana. In 1785, for example, the entire colony of Louisiana had only nineteen parish priests, and the clergy constantly complained about the loose morals, anticlerical biases, and Voltairian ideals of the Creole population. The local bishop’s report on the religious state of the colony in 1795 lamented that the French Creoles rarely attended mass or received the sacraments, flouted the church’s teaching on sexual morals, and filled their homes with “books written against religion and the state.” The Creoles of Louisiana, however, did not necessarily see a contradiction between their “laissez-faire attitude toward religion” and their cultural identity as French Catholics. French Creoles in Louisiana, one historian has noted, were generally “indifferent to the moral demands of Catholicism” but nonetheless “turned to the church at key moments in their lives—birth, marriage, and death.”

Catholicism, in other words, was in Louisiana more a cultural inheritance than a philosophical or ethical system—a civic religion affirming culture and history, not personal morality or belief. But as the civic religion of the French nation and people, Catholicism in French Louisiana had none of the negative social connotations that it had in the English-speaking world, where centuries of legal discrimination had stripped Catholics of property, status, and political power. Indeed, the enduring alliance of altar


and throne in early modern France had fortified the Church’s social and political
privileges and ensured a religious monopoly (at least in law, if not in practice) over all
segments of French society. Thus Protestant America would have to confront, in the form
of the Louisiana planters, a Catholic ruling class unencumbered by centuries of religious
persecution.

The emergence of New Orleans as a crucial port city in the cotton-based economy
of the American South, in particular, would bring the Louisiana Creoles to national
prominence. Linking the cotton-plantations of the lower Mississippi Valley to the
commercial shipping routes of the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic Ocean, the port of New
Orleans was a crucial nexus in the rapidly expanding Atlantic cotton trade that linked
Southern slave labor, Northern capital, and British textile manufacturing.²³ Enriched by
their key role in the expanding cotton empire but mindful of their cultural distinctiveness,
the French Creoles would cultivate an image of New Orleans as the bastion of Old World
decadence built on New World fortunes, embodied in stately plantation manors adorned
with “handsome furniture, cut glass, porcelain” and “delicate bric-a-brac of all kinds.”
Such displays of old world grandeur and refinement did not go unnoticed by Anglo-
American observers. Indeed, the Creole ethic of “fine living and generous spending, of
lordly pleasure and haughty indifference to the cost” would closely shape the mythology
of the Southern planter and compel American Protestants to rethink their cultural
assumptions about Rome. For instance, the Rev. Theodore Clapp, a New England-born
Presbyterian minister who founded a New Orleans mission in the 1820s, admitted that the

grace, elegance, and cordiality of Creole society demonstrated that “exalted and ennobling influences” persisted within Catholicism.24

Contrary to popular wisdom, American Catholicism, in other words, did not come from humble origins, nor did it initially take hold in the urban northeast. Two affluent, well-established social groups, the Louisiana French Creoles and the Maryland Anglo Catholics, laid the social foundations for the American Church in old-line Catholic settlements around the Chesapeake harbor and along the Louisiana Gulf Coast. From these colonial outposts the U.S. Church would expand outwards into the far reaches of the American South, guided by a wealthy and respected native-born Catholic elite.

In particular, American Catholics would, between 1780 ad 1830, establish thriving settlements in the lower Mississippi Valley and along the western borderlands of the Upper South. In the 1780s, following the expulsion of the British, settlers from Catholic Maryland would flood the borderlands of eastern Kentucky, driven westward by population expansion as well as the diminishing returns of the Chesapeake tobacco crop.25 Successive waves of Catholic settlers from Maryland would, over the next few decades, establish Kentucky as a stronghold of American Catholicism; according to one contemporary estimate, the city of Bardstown, Kentucky was in 1821 home to nearly three times the number of Catholics (30,000) as the city of Boston.26 Home to a large native-born French Creole population served by French émigré priests, the city of St. Louis, meanwhile, would emerge as a center of Catholic institutional life, laying claim to

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the first American Catholic seminary (at Berrens) and Catholic college (Saint Louis University) outside of Maryland. By 1830 the cities of Baltimore, New Orleans, St. Louis, and Bardstown possessed nearly twice as many total Catholics as did New York, Philadelphia, and Boston.

Such demographic and institutional growth, moreover, met with little organized resistance from the nation’s Protestant majority. While in the 1840s and 1850s immigrant Catholics would suffer harassment and even violence at the hands of Protestant mobs in Philadelphia and New York, in the early antebellum era the Anglo and French Catholics of Maryland, Louisiana, Kentucky, and Missouri experienced limited persecution for their religious beliefs. Such tolerance, no doubt, stemmed largely from the social position of Catholics in the young republic—their wealth, status, and deep roots in North America. Indeed, unlike their Irish and German successors, the Anglo and French Catholics had longstanding ancestral ties to their communities, and prominent Catholic families, such as the Carrolls, had lent to the Catholic Church an air of social prestige and cultural refinement. Moreover, because the Catholic population never exceeded more than two percent of the national population between 1790 and 1830, Catholics hardly constituted a political or cultural threat to the dominant Protestant majority. American Catholics, in short, were socially respectable but numerically insignificant—a religious minority confined to a few regions of the Upper South and lower Mississippi Valley.

The broader geopolitical landscape of the early national era, both in the U.S. and Europe, also facilitated the growth and expansion of the American Church. The American Revolution, in particular, had helped to dampen anti-Catholic prejudice by reversing the
traditional roles of Catholic tyrants and Protestant liberators. For centuries Anglo-Protestants, including the British colonists of North America, had denounced the Pope of Rome as a threat to political liberty. But during the 1770s and 1780s the American colonists had fought to free themselves from the ostensible tyranny of a Protestant king, and had received crucial financial and military support from the Catholic monarchs of France and Spain. French Catholics like Marquis de Lafayette emerged from the war as national heroes, and the strong support of the Catholics for the revolutionary cause won praise from the likes of George Washington. The anti-British animus of the revolutionary era thus afforded the possibility of Catholic inclusion in the founding myths of the American nation. To be both papist and patriot, as one historian has suggested, was no contradiction in the revolutionary era.

The social upheavals of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars also helped create a political climate beneficial to Catholic-Protestant relations in the early Republic. The revolutionary violence of the French Jacobins, which horrified most Americans, took the Catholic Church as one of its principal targets. Claiming to emancipate the French people from the tyranny of the priestly class, insurgents executed Catholic leaders, dissolved monasteries and religious orders, induced clerical marriages, and transformed Catholic churches into “temples of reason.” As Napoleon’s armies traversed central and western Europe, they overthrew Catholic princes and installed liberal-republican regimes. The anti-Catholic thrust of the violence crested in 1799, when Napoleon imprisoned Pope Pius VII, who had refused to crown Napoleon emperor. Pius

would die in exile in France in 1803; the Holy See would sit vacant for six months, with some Catholics speculating that the Papacy had come to an end. In the U.S. such anticlerical violence had the effect of rendering Catholics sympathetic figures. An imprisoned Pope, in short, posed little threat to American liberties.

Catholic emigration during the Napoleonic Wars, moreover, had the ultimate effect of reinforcing popular conceptions of American Catholicism as a genteel, aristocratic religion practiced by the Old World elite. The Irish and German Catholics who migrated to the U.S. between 1830 and 1860, no doubt, generally fled economic turmoil. As a result, Catholicism came to be associated with grinding poverty and folk superstition. Between 1790 and 1830, by comparison, Catholic immigrants to the U.S. were often drawn from leading families of the Old World, who fled Europe to escape the religious and political upheavals of the Napoleonic era. Several of the early bishops of the early U.S. Church, for example, were distinguished French clergymen horrified by the rabid anticlericalism of the 1790s. Educated at the leading Catholic universities of Europe, and often from noble families, these émigrés impressed Anglo Americans with their refined manners, enormous erudition, and aristocratic charms. In addition, the Haitian revolution of 1794, an uprising of the slave population against its French creole masters, resulted in the influx of Catholic planters to Baltimore and Louisiana, where

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they melded into the Francophone Catholic elite. Political unrest in Europe and the West Indies thus infused the Catholic upper class in America with new blood.

And yet the cessation of the Napoleonic wars, coupled with the restoration of the European ancien régime at the Treaty of Vienna in 1815, would bring about a new era in the U.S. Catholic Church. Plummeting agricultural prices in Europe, occasioned by rising agricultural competition in peacetime, would bring waves of cheap foreign labor, often Catholic in origin, onto American shores. Between 1815 and 1860, Ireland and Germany alone would send more than two million emigrants to the United States, more than half of whom were Catholic. Meanwhile, the restored power of the Catholic princes on the Continent, buttressed by the military and diplomatic prowess of Catholic Austria, stoked Anglo Protestant fears of a resurgent Catholic absolutism. Spearheaded by an evangelical ministry forcefully opposed to popery, American Protestants at midcentury would denounce the influx of Irish Catholics as a papal plot to destroy American liberties.

The old-line Anglo and French Catholics of the South, however, would remain relatively immune to the resurgent Protestant crusade of the 1840s and 1850s. The wealth, social status, ethnicity, and longstanding community ties of the old-line Catholics certainly shielded them from the more vitriolic displays of anti-Catholicism in the antebellum period. But precisely because of their genteel origins and longstanding roots in the South, the Anglo and French Catholics also had a deep investment in the defining institution of southern life: chattel slavery.

30 Walter Charlton Hartridge, “The Refugees from the Island of St. Domingo in Maryland,” Maryland Historical Magazine 38 (June 1943): 103-123.
Toleration of slavery was indeed the litmus test of civic acceptance in the Old South, and both the Catholic laity and the Catholic Church in North America had a long history of supporting the “peculiar institution.”\(^{32}\) The Anglo Catholics of Maryland had, since the mid-seventeenth century, wrought their fortunes from tobacco plantations cultivated by slaves. Charles Carroll, the esteemed Catholic revolutionary hero, had been the largest slaveholder in the state of Maryland at the time of the revolution. As late as 1838, the Jesuits of Maryland owned more than 250 slaves working across six tobacco plantations.\(^{33}\) The French Catholics of Louisiana had similar historical ties to slave labor; in the eighteenth the Catholic Church had been the “largest slaveholder in French Louisiana,” and the prominence of the French Creoles of the Old South rested on the thriving cotton trade of the Mississippi.\(^{34}\) Virtually every Catholic religious order operating in the antebellum United States, from the Ursulines in Louisiana to the Sisters of Loretto in Kentucky, had relied on the profits of slave labor to defray institutional debts, and leading Catholic colleges like Georgetown, Mt. St. Mary’s (in Emmitsburg, Maryland), and Saint Louis University owned slaves into the 1850s.\(^{35}\)

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\(^{34}\) Davis Heisser, *Patrick N. Lynch, 1817-1883: Third Catholic Bishop of Charleston* (Charleston: The University of South Carolina Press, 2015).

Southern Catholics, moreover, vigorously opposed abolitionism. While acknowledging that the Church in general “favored human liberty” and had often exhorted slaveholders “to manumit their slaves,” Southern prelates like Bishop John England of Charleston, South Carolina denied that slavery violated the moral teachings of the Church. Drawing on scripture, canon law, and the writings of the Church Fathers, England argued in an 1840 treatise that Jesus Christ himself, though living among slaveholders, had never condemned slavery; that apostles such as St. Paul, rather than arguing for the liberation of slaves, had in fact implored slaves to “obey your masters”; and that the most influential theologian of the Middle Ages, Saint Thomas Aquinas, had acknowledged slavery as “perfectly compatible with the natural law.”

“There is no danger, no possibility on our own principles, that Catholic theology should ever be tinctured with the fanaticism of abolition,” England concluded. “Catholics may and do differ in regard to slavery, and other points of human policy, when considered as ethical or political questions. But our theology is fixed … [and] must be the same now as it was for the first eight or nine centuries of Christianity.” For the next two decades U.S. Catholics cited England’s treatise as proof that American slavery was compatible with Catholic social teaching.

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36 [William George Mead], ed., Letters of the Late Bishop England to the Hon. John Forsyth on the Subject of Domestic Slavery... (Baltimore: John Murphy, 1844), 74, 23. Francis Patrick Kenrick, later the Archbishop of Baltimore, echoed England’s view of slavery in his treatise on Christian morals, which was an influential text among nineteenth-century U.S. clergymen. See Franciscus Patricius Kenrick, Theologia Moralis (Mechliniae: H. Dessain, 1841); Joseph Delfman Brokhage, Francis Patrick Kenrick’s Opinion on Slavery (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1955).

37 Ibid., v.

38 William George Read, “Introductory Notice,” in [William George Mead], ed., Letters of the Late Bishop England to the Hon. John Forsyth on the Subject of Domestic Slavery... (Baltimore: John Murphy, 1844).
Southern Catholics proclaimed their Church’s tolerance of slavery as proof that Catholicism, not evangelical Protestantism, was the ideal religion for Southern society. Insofar as it exalted individual freedom to the detriment of social order and moral authority, abolitionism, Catholics argued, was simply Protestantism in modern secular form—a dangerous, anarchic philosophy alienation from the traditions of Latin Christendom and infected by the modern cult of the individual. By linking Protestantism with abolitionism, and Catholicism with moral traditionalism, Southern Catholics could thus present the Roman Catholic Church as a spiritual pillar of the Southern social order. Condemning Northern Protestant support for antislavery, one Baltimore-based Catholic journal boasted in 1855 that the “scholastic theologians of the middle ages,” unlike the Protestant divines of New England, “never in their most subtle argumentations discovered a sin in the relation of master and slave.” The Church’s support for systems of hierarchy, tradition, and order could no doubt prove attractive to the dominant classes of a slave-based society.

As Northern Protestant support for abolitionism swelled in the years before the Civil War, and Protestant churches split into Northern and Southern camps over the issue of slavery, Catholics’ unwavering tolerance for slavery would indeed earn them praise from Southern leaders. The Catholics “have never warred against us or our particular institutions,” the Georgia Congressman Alexander Stevens, later the Vice President of the Confederacy, wrote in 1855. “No man can say as much of the New England Baptists, Presbyterians, or Methodists: the long role of abolition petitions with which Congress has been so much excited and agitated for years past come not from the Catholics; their

39 Murphy, Jesuit Slaveholding in Maryland, 1717-1838, 136.
40 “The Catholic Church and the Question of Slavery,” The Metropolitan 3 (June 1855), 266.
Pulpits in the North are not desecrated every Sabbath with anathemas against slavery.”\(^{41}\) By persistently condemning abolitionism, Catholics had, as one prominent Maryland Catholic noted in 1857, earned the gratitude and admiration of “the most prominent and distinguished citizens of our Southern States.”\(^{42}\)

Due to their wealth, genteel origins, longstanding community ties, and stalwart support for chattel slavery, Catholics in the South, in short, would maintain into the Civil War era a level of social respectability and public acceptance widely denied to their immigrant counterparts in the urban North. Indeed, Orestes Brownson’s observation in 1863 that the “public opinion of the Catholic body” in the United States was “formed mainly by the Catholics in the Border Slave States” reflected the staggered social geography of antebellum Catholicism: from Supreme Court Justice Roger B. Taney (the Maryland Anglo-Catholic who authored the infamous Dred Scott decision) to General Pierre Beauregard (the Louisiana French Creole who commanded the Confederate Armies before Robert E. Lee), to Natalie Benjamin (the Louisiana-born Catholic wife of Judah Benjamin, the first Confederate Secretary of State), the Catholic elite in antebellum America subsisted principally below the Mason Dixon line.\(^{43}\) Anglo and French in culture and ethnicity, buoyed by the upper class migrations from Napoleonic Europe, and

\(^{41}\) Quoted in Zanca, ed., *American Catholics and Slavery: An Anthology of Primary Sources, 1789-1866* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America), 105.

\(^{42}\) Letter from Maryland Catholic quoted in Henry Brownson, *Orestes A. Brownson’s Later Life: From 1856 to 1876* (Detroit: H.F. Brownson, 1900), 104.

deeply invested in chattel slavery, the old-line Catholics of Maryland, Kentucky, and Louisiana lent credence to the trope of the Catholic Cavalier.

Brownson, moreover, was certainly right to suggest that these Southern elite continued to exert a powerful influence over the Civil War-era American Church.\(^{44}\) Although the steady flow of Irish and German migration had shifted demographic base of the Church northward in the 1840s and 1850s, the Church’s institutional foundations, including its episcopal leadership, its religious orders, and its educational institutions, had taken root in the Upper South and the lower Mississippi Valley, since these had been relative strongholds of Catholic power and influence in the early nineteenth century. In the 1860s the see of Baltimore, for instance, remained the ecclesiastical and administrative capitol of American Catholicism. As the formal head of the U.S. Church,

\(^{44}\) Brownson, “Are Catholics Proslavery and Disloyal?” 385.
the Archbishop of Baltimore presided over national councils of the American bishops (held in 1829, 1842, and 1852) and served as the country’s chief liason to Rome. (“Baltimore Catholics,” in this respect, possessed de facto leadership over the U.S. Church.) The nation’s premier educational institutions, such as Georgetown College and St. Louis University, had been founded below the Mason Dixon line, and by the Civil War remained under the control of the Southern Catholic elite. The U.S. Church’s oldest and most prestigious institutions, in other words, remained tied to Southern interests and Southern prerogatives. Through these institutions the Southern Catholic elite would exert its influence on the immigrant church.

The Institutional Origins of a Southern-Dominated Church

As the strongholds of Catholic population and wealth in the young republic, the states of Maryland, Louisiana, and Kentucky were, unsurprisingly, home to the first religious orders in the United States. The oldest and most influential male religious order in the nineteenth century, the Jesuits, had of course established institutional roots in colonial Maryland, where since the reign of Lord Calvert they had ministered to the local Anglo Catholic gentry and supported themselves from the profits of a half-dozen tobacco plantations around Chesapeake Bay. Freed from state religious persecution by the First Amendment of the constitution, the Jesuits would found their first U.S. novitiate (or “school of introduction” for prospective members) in 1807 in Prince George County, a traditional Anglo-Saxon Catholic stronghold in southern Maryland. The second oldest religious order in the United States, the Religious Sisters of Saint Ursula (also known as

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46 *The Laity’s Directory to the Church Service, for the Year of Our Lord 1822* (New York: William Greagh, 1822); see also Murphy, *Jesuit Slaveholding in Maryland, 1717-1838.*
the Ursulines), had, at the request of French colonial authorities, established a convent in New Orleans in 1727. Anti-Catholic legislation precluded the establishment of additional religious orders in British North America, but the successful war against the crown enabled the founding of several female religious orders in the early Republic, all under the patronage of old-line Anglo and French Catholics: the Carmelites (1790) and the Sisters of Charity (1809) in Maryland; the Sisters of the Visitation (1816) in the District of Columbia; the Sisters of Loretto (1812), the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth (1812), and the Sisters of St. Dominic (1822) in Kentucky; and the Ladies of the Sacred Heart in Louisiana (1826). Founded below the Mason Dixon line, all of these religious orders owned slaves, either as domestic servants or agricultural workers.47

Like the Catholic population in general, Catholic religious orders in the U.S. thus had their deepest institutional roots in the soil of slave states.48 Of course, in response to the burgeoning Catholic population of the industrial north, religious orders would gradually shift their priorities to working-class Catholics in the free states. In 1833, for example, 22 of the 25 operating convents in the United States were below the Mason Dixon line. By 1860, however, more than half of the nation’s 110 convents were in free states.49 Nevertheless, the governing branch (or “mother branch”) of most religious

48 “In important ways, before the massive immigration of Irish and German Catholics to the North in the 1840s and 1850s,” the historian Randall Miller has written of the antebellum Church, “Catholicism was more firmly rooted in Southern places than in many Northern ones”; Miller and Wakelyn, eds., Catholics in the Old South, vi; see also Dolan’s recognition of this trend in Jay Dolan, The American Catholic Experience (New York: Doubleday Religious Publishing, 1987), 123-124. “The southern character of Catholicism,” Dolan noted, “goes a long way toward explaining why in later years Catholics were so reluctant to join the antislavery crusade.”
49 The Catholic Almanac for the Year of Our Lord 1833 (Philadelphia: P. Gallagher, 1833); The Metropolitan Catholic Almanac and Laity’s Directory for the United States (Baltimore: John Murphy and Co., 1860). Of the 145 Catholic “colleges and academies” operating in the United States in 1860, 71 were in slave states.
orders in the Civil War era was typically in Maryland, Kentucky, or Louisiana, since governing authority generally rested with the foundational branch of each order. Moreover, unlike the Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian Churches, the U.S. Catholic Church did not split into distinct Northern and Southern ecclesiastical bodies during the late antebellum period. As a result, religious orders in the free states retained strong institutional ties to the South, often serving under the jurisdiction of ecclesiastical superiors in the slave states.

Such institutional ties and investments in the slaveholding states limited Catholic agitation on the question of slavery. While many priests, nuns, and Catholic journalists in the North may have personally regarded slavery as an abomination, they nonetheless recognized that the Church’s financial and institutional integrity in the U.S. rested, in part, on its professed toleration of Southern slavery. Such pressures were particularly acute, for instance, for the nation’s Jesuits, whose institutional stability depended on their reputation as educators and whose crown jewel in North America, Georgetown, was closely dependent on Southern wealth; even the College of the Holy Cross, for example, lacked an independent charter before the Civil War and eked out an existence as a subsidiary of Georgetown. That Catholic religious orders operated as financially independent entities, often with few financial ties to local dioceses, furthermore ensure that regular clergy and women religious had a great deal at stake in the financial stability of their counterparts in the South, many of whom depended, either directly or indirectly,

on the institution of slavery. Many female religious orders in the antebellum United States, for example, employed slave labor, and thus even women religious in free states generally found themselves tied, through their order’s collective financial investments, to the “peculiar institution.”

Orestes Brownson learned firsthand how such institutional ties could throttle discussion of slavery and abolitionism in the Catholic North. In January 1862 Brownson traveled to Boston to give an antislavery speech for the Emancipation League. Though originally invited to board at the Jesuit House adjacent to Boston College, Brownson found himself, upon arrival, refused entry by the Jesuit Rector, Rev. John Bapst. Though opposed to abolitionism, Bapst explained that he respected Brownson as a scholar and as Catholic, and did not personally object to Brownson’s stay at the Jesuit House, but that he felt “officially bound” by his Jesuit superiors to deny Brownson entry. The Jesuits had a large institutional base in the South, and they feared that a close association with Brownson, especially at a time of war, could imperil their holdings in the slave states. Furious at the slight, and shocked that “worldly prudence or property considerations” could have such influence over a religious order, Brownson would later write a withering critique of the American Jesuits, furnishing the Boston episode as “proof” of the Jesuits’ paltry commitment both to the Union war effort and to American ideals in general. Such conflict with the Jesuits’ no doubt reaffirmed Brownson’s suspicion that “Baltimore Catholicism” permeated the American Church as a whole.

53 On Brownson’s point that the “public opinion of the Catholic body is formed mainly by the Catholics in the Border Slave States,” see Brownson, “Are Catholics Proslavery and Disloyal?” 385.
Catholic seminaries also first took root in the Upper South and lower Mississippi Valley, and as a result many of the leading churchmen in the immigrant enclaves of the northeast had in fact received their clerical training south of the Mason Dixon line. Though Catholics founded nearly a total of eight seminaries in Maryland, Kentucky, and Missouri between 1790 and 1830, no Catholic seminary existed in the northeastern United States before the mid-1830s. By 1839 there were two Catholic seminaries in the northeast, St. Charles Borromeo in Philadelphia and St. Vincent de Paul in New York, but their enrollments lagged far behind their Southern counterparts: that year there were 65 seminarians in Maryland, 36 in Missouri, and 20 in Kentucky, compared to only 12 seminarians in Philadelphia and 9 in NY.\(^5^4\)

Because the nation’s oldest and most popular seminaries were in slaveholding states, generations of American priests, North and South, developed a familiarity with Southern culture and Southern institutions. Mt. St. Mary’s in Maryland, founded in 1809, was home to the country’s oldest seminary, dubbed the “nursery of the Catholic Church in America”\(^5^5\) for its role in producing native clerical elites. The episcopal chair of the archdiocese of New York, for example, was from 1842 until 1902 occupied by graduates of Mt. St. Mary’s—Revs. John Hughes, John McCloskey, and Michael Augustine Corrigan. Hughes, in particular, exemplifies the long-term influence of Southern Catholic institutions on the northern immigrant church. An Irish immigrant to the United States, Hughes wanted to enter the priesthood but could not afford the tuition at Mt. St. Mary’s seminary. School administrators, however, agreed to pay his tuition if he agreed to pay off the debt by working in the college garden. It was there that Hughes was

\(^{54}\) Metropolitan Catholic Almanac and Laity’s Directory for the Year of Our Lord 1839 (Baltimore: Fielding Lucas Jr., 1839).

\(^{55}\) Taaffe, A History of St. John’s College, 53.
required to oversee the labor of the college’s two enslaved men. While historians have often interpreted Hughes’ bitter opposition to abolitionism as the outgrowth of a distinct Catholic worldview, a contempt for Protestant social reform, or Irish working class racism, it is nonetheless noteworthy that Hughes was himself closely tied to the “peculiar institution,” as was the alma mater, Mt. St. Mary’s, that he remembered fondly in later years.

But perhaps the most important institutional legacy of Southern Catholicism was the creation of an elite educational system in the South that forged enduring ties between the Church and the Southern planter elite. Brownson’s apparent shock that Catholic religious orders could act according to “worldly prudence or property considerations” was a bit naïve: in a nation devoid of state support for religion, men and women religious needed worldly means to support their otherworldly mission. Often educated in the leading universities of Europe, and proficient in a wide array of modern and classical languages, men and women religious in American would find such a financial resources through their vocation as educators, particularly of the Southern upper class. Since 1727 the Ursulines of New Orleans had operated an elite convent school that educated the

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57 For an overview of Catholic colleges in the U.S., see Philip Gleason, Contending With Modernity: Catholic Higher Education in the Twentieth Century (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). On the role of Catholic educational institutions in antebellum Southern life, see Raymond H. Schmidt, “An Overview of Institutional Establishments in the Antebellum Southern Church” and Jon L. Wakelyn, “Catholic Elites in the Slaveholding South,” in Miller and Wakelyn, eds., Catholics in the Old South, 53-76, 211-239; and Stern, Southern Crucifix, Southern Cross, 69-108. None of these works, however, trace the impact on the Southern Catholic educational system on the character of American Catholicism more broadly.
daughters of the Louisiana elite, using the school’s income to fund missions to the poor. Following the Ursulines’ example, Catholic religious orders would found more than two dozen Catholic colleges and female convent academies in the Upper South and lower Mississippi Valley between 1790 and 1830, including Georgetown, Saint Louis University, Spring Hill College (in Mobile, Alabama), and the premier female boarding school for the D.C. elite, Georgetown Visitation Academy.

These schools adhered to a standard organizational pattern. The student body consisted of both boarding students and “day scholars.” The boarding students, often drawn from wealthy Southern families, lived full-time at the college for the academic year, while the day scholars, generally drawn from the local community, attended the college for daily instruction. Between 1830 and 1860, tuition for a boarding student was typically between $150 and $200, roughly the yearly income for an unskilled laborer.

Tuition for day boarders, by comparison, was generally closer to $50, and the colleges often used this income to defray expense for local Catholic “free schools.” The male colleges routinely offered a classical course of instruction that, while including standard courses on religion, history, mathematics, and the modern languages, stressed the reading and writing of Latin and ancient Greek. Some colleges, like Saint Louis University, also offered a “commercial” track that, in lieu of the classics, emphasized “bookkeeping” and other clerical skills more germane to the career prospects of the non-boarding students.\(^6\) The convent schools, by comparison, patterned themselves as “finishing schools” for upper class women, offering courses on music and the domestic arts in place of ancient languages. Georgetown Visitation, for instance, offered training in “vocal music,” “painting in water colors,” “needle work,” “tapestry,” “lace work,” and “bead work.” In short, the schools provided a genteel education for the Southern upper class, using the proceeds in turn to fund various ecclesiastical prerogatives, including education for the middle class, free schools for the poor, and Catholic seminaries.

These Catholic colleges and academies, moreover, generally depended on the matriculation of Protestants. Needing wealthy boarding students to offset institutional costs for fee schools and day scholars, Catholic colleges and academics could not afford to rely solely on the Catholic upper class given that Catholics remained a small religious minority. As a result, these schools welcomed Protestant students, often including assurances in their advertisements that non-Catholic students were welcome, though including the qualification that for the “sake of good order” Protestants would be required

to attend Catholic religious exercises. Founded at a time when anti-Catholic prejudice had subsided, these schools were quite successful at recruiting Protestant students. In 1830, for example, “more than half” of the boarding-school students at Georgetown, the crown jewel of Jesuit education in America, were non-Catholic. As a result, generations of upper class Protestants from the south received their education at the hands of Catholic instructors. For example, Jefferson Davis had enrolled in a Catholic college in Kentucky as a young boy—an experience he recalled fondly in his autobiography—and even considered converting to Catholicism. While Davis remained a Protestant, one of his sisters, also educated at a Catholic school, did ultimately convert. Catholic colleges and academies thus “wove a nexus of intellectual, social, and political ties” between Southern Catholic and Protestant elites.

That Catholic educators could thrive in the culture of the Old South should be unsurprising. In an era when the Southern upper classes increasingly romanticized the aristocratic values of the European ancien regime, Catholic colleges could offer a classical education led by leading churchmen of the Old World. The Jesuits, in particular, long held the reputation as the educators of the European aristocracy. When in 1827 Charles X of France, under pressure from secular republican opponents, banned the Jesuits from teaching in France, Catholic colleges in the U.S. benefited from a new influx of leading European educators.

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61 The Laity’s Directory to the Church Service, for the Year of Our Lord 1822, 99.
63 Davis was educated at St. Thomas’s College in Kentucky. Varina Davis, Jefferson Davis: Ex-President of the Confederate States of America: A Memoir by His Wife (New York Belford Company, 1890), 13-16.
64 Miller and Wakelyn, eds., Catholics in the Old South, xiii.
In addition, these educators had a pragmatic advantage over their non-Catholic peers: celibacy. While Protestant teachers were often married, Catholic priests and nuns had no familial responsibilities and thus could devote themselves fully to education. The Protestant novelist Sarah Hale suggested that Catholic schools were widely successful “because of the careful attention paid to the pupils.”\(^6^5\) Letters from parents to Catholic school administrators during these years suggest that Southern parents regarded Catholic priests and nuns as leading disciplinarians who had a reputation for building moral character, especially among unruly youth. Rev. Bernard Maguire, the President of Georgetown from 1839-47 and again from 1852-58, remarked in his journal that many Southern parents sent their children to Catholic boarding schools because “they could not handle them at home.”\(^6^6\)

Perhaps most importantly, Southern elites regarded Catholic educators as political conservatives largely immune to the social and theological liberalism of the Yankee North. Commencement addresses at Catholic colleges often stressed the dangers of European socialism to property and social order, and exalted personal piety and divine providence, not social reform, as the solution to contemporary social ills. Comparing Georgetown graduates to alumnae from the Ivy League, Henry Thompson, a Georgetown alumnus from Alabama, remarked that Georgetown men were “lovers of law and order” who were “universally opposed to the ‘isms’ of the day.”\(^6^7\) Catholic rejection of abolitionism, no doubt, was the focal point of this ideological kinship with the Southern elite. President of Georgetown, Rev. Bernard McGuire had a meeting with a wealthy

\(^6^6\) Bernard McGuire, S.J. Papers, Special Collections at Georgetown University, Lauinger Library, Box 1, Folder 1.
Louisiana Protestant who was interested in having his son attend the college. When McGuire asked the father how he would respond were his son “to wish to become a Catholic,” the father merely said that he wanted what was best for his son and that he would have no quarrel with such a conversion. He did, however, have “one point on which [he] was particular.” “[I]f my son leaves this college anything but a good Democrat”—that is, the proslavery party of the South—“let him not come home to me.”

Sectional tensions between 1830 and 1860 would only enhance such institutional ties between Catholic educators and Southern elites. By the late 1850s, the nation’s oldest and most prestigious Catholic colleges and academies were essentially boarding schools for the Southern upper class. Students from New England, by comparison, were virtually nonexistent at such schools. Georgetown Visitation Academy, the elite female boarding in Washington, was typical of this pattern. Though in the nation’s capital, the Visitation Academy in the 1850s was dominated by students from the South. Though

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68 Ibid.
69 On this point I echo the argument of Robert Emmett Curran, who contends that Georgetown by the Civil War had essentially became a boarding school for Southern elites, who feared sending their children to be educated by liberal Northerners. But this trend also seems to have been true for most of the premier Catholic colleges and academies in the nation, including Spring Hill College, Saint Louis University, Mount St. Mary’s, and Georgetown Visitation. See Walter Hill, Historical Sketch of the St. Louis University (St. Louis: Patrick Fox, 1879), 94-95; Mary Meline and F.X. McSweeny, The Story of the Mountain: Mount St. Mary’s College and Seminary, Volume 2 (Emmitsburg, Md.: Weekly Chronicle, 1911), 1-60; Thomas A. Courtney, “Mount St. Mary’s and the American Civil War,” Analecta: Selected Studies in the History of Mt. St. Mary’s College an Seminary 1 (2004): 1-20. On student enrollments at Spring Hill College, see the “Catalogues of Spring Hill College,” for the years 1847-1855, Archives and Special Collections, Burke Memorial Library, Spring Hill College; for Saint Louis University, see the “Studentium Album,” Special Collections, Pius XII Memorial Library, Saint Louis University; for Mount St. Mary’s, see Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Mount St. Mary’s College, Emmitsburg, Md., for the Academic Year 1855-56 (Baltimore: John Murphy, 1856), and Catalogue of the Officers and Students of Mt. St. Mary’s College, Emmitsburgh, Maryland, for the Academic Year 1856-57 (New York: D.J. Sadlier and Co., 1857); for Georgetown, see Curran, The Bicentennial History of Georgetown University, vol.1, 161-189.
70 George Parsons Lathrop and Rose Hawthorne Lathrop, A Story of Courage: Annals of the Georgetown Convent of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, from the Manuscript Records (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1895), especially 361; Eileen C. Sullivan, Georgetown Visitation Since 1799 (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown Press, 1975). The Lathrops claim that by the Civil War era “Southern parents” were “the chief patrons of the school.” Reports on commencement ceremonies for the academy from the years 1859 and
political and military families from both North and South resided in the nation’s capital, those from below the Mason Dixon line seemed much more inclined to entrust their daughters to Catholic educators.

![Image 1.3: Saint Louis University, founded by the Jesuit Order in 1818. Like many of the premier Catholic colleges in the antebellum U.S., Saint Louis University was located below the Mason-Dixon line, owned slaves, and depended on the matriculation of Southern elites. Image from Walter Hill, *Historical Sketch of the St. Louis University* (St. Louis: Patrick Fox, 1879), i.](image)

Given this pervasive Southern influence, the nation’s premier Catholic educational institutions would emerge as hotbeds of pro-Confederate sentiment during the Civil War. An alumnus of Mount St. Mary’s recalled that during the Civil War era “a large number of students” were from the South and that “their companionship and arguments greatly influenced” the student body on the topics of slavery and Southern secession. While “the general aspect of the college was neutral ground” during the Civil War.

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1860, which include background information on some students, affirms the Southern character of the school. Of the eighteen students who received prizes in 1859, fourteen were from slaveholding states or territories; the other four were from New York and New Jersey. Of the sixteen students who received prizes in 1860, thirteen were from slaveholding states or territories; the others were from New York, Pennsylvania, and Illinois. See “Academic of the Visitation—Exercises and Premiums,” *Baltimore Sun*, July 7, 1859; “Academy of the Visitation, Georgetown…” *Baltimore Sun*, July 11, 1860.
War, “the prevailing sentiment of the college was in favor of the South.”\textsuperscript{71} Such pro-
Confederate allegiances among the student body received little pushback from the college
President, Rev. James McCaffrey, a native of Carolina, who was reportedly “a Southerner
of the most uncompromising type.”\textsuperscript{72} The bankruptcy of many Southern families at the
conclusion of the Civil War, unsurprisingly, would cast many leading Catholic colleges
and academies into near financial ruin.

Finally, many of the influential Catholic voices in Northern society in the Civil
War era would have spent significant time in slaveholding states and forged relationships
with Southerners and Southern institutions. The small Catholic middle class that existed
in the North—the Catholic doctors, lawyers, merchants, and professors—often relied on
Southern schools like Georgetown and Mount St. Mary’s to educate their children. As a
result, members of the Catholic middle class in the North would have mingled in their
youth with Southerners, been exposed to the culture of slaveholding, and often
maintained friendships with Southerners even after returning home to the North.

Overall, the Church’s institutional dependence on the Southern elite begs an
obvious question: why weren’t Catholic educators able to forge similar institutional ties
with the Northern upper class? Catholic attempts to establish elite boarding schools in the
Northern states during this period were generally met with fierce, and often violent
opposition from native-born Protestants. In the mid-1820s, for example, a group of
Ursuline sisters from Montreal founded an all-female convent academy in Charlestown,
Massachusetts, modeled on the traditional French boarding school so popular in the

\textsuperscript{71} Mary Meline and F.X. McSweeny, \textit{The Story of the Mountain}, 15. One seminarian recalled that “a very
bitter feeling towards the North” prevailed throughout the college in these years.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., 9. On the Confederate sympathies of students at Georgetown, see James Easby-Smith, \textit{Georgetown
American South. Initially, the convent school thrived, “enrolling the daughters of the Boston elite, mainly Harvard educated Unitarians,” while using the tuition to fund local Catholic missions. In contrast to the Boston upper class, local Protestant workers, however, denounced the convent school as a papal plot to ensnare young Protestant women into converting to Catholicism, and in 1834, amid rumors that Protestant girls were being held captive inside, a nativist mob ransacked the convent, ultimately setting it ablaze. Attempts to establish all-male Catholic colleges in Boston and Philadelphia met with similar, albeit less violent, opposition from native-born Protestants. Even the successful establishment of The College of the Holy Cross, a Massachusetts Catholic boarding school founded by the Maryland Jesuits in 1843, was marred by the refusal of state authorities to grant a college charter until 1865. Convinced of the dangers of recruiting Protestant students, many Catholic colleges and academies in the North would have to settle for the status of “exclusively Catholic” institutions, dependent on the South and Latin America for wealthy Catholic boarders.

Scholars have traditionally attributed such Northern opposition to Catholic schools to the cultural legacy of New England Puritanism, which for centuries had fostered a climate of religious intolerance and anti-Catholic bigotry unrivaled by the Anglican establishment of the Southern colonies. In recent decades, however, historians have offered a more nuanced explanation: that unlike the Northern states, which possessed both a strong tradition of denominational colleges as well as an incipient

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common school system by the late antebellum era, Southerners had limited educational options for their children, and thus Catholic schools filled a pressing need in Southern society. In the North, by contrast, ample educational alternatives diminished the comparative value of Catholic colleges and academies, leaving old prejudices intact and fortifying the walls of a culturally segregated immigrant Church.\(^\text{75}\)

This argument, however, must account for the fact that attitudes toward Catholics in the North often split across class lines, and that Catholicism in the antebellum South had quite different ethnic and class inflections than in the North. As the Charlestown convent episode demonstrated, upper class Protestants in the North, like their Southern counterparts, valued the Old World pedigree of an elite Catholic education, and were quite willing to submit their children—especially their daughters—to the care of Catholic educators. It was indeed lower- and middle-class Protestant resentment against Catholic outsiders, stoked by the fiery enthusiasm of evangelical revivalism, that provoked widespread backlash against Catholic schools. Violent outbursts of anti-Catholicism, in short, resulted from combustible mixtures of class, religion, and ethnicity; and in the North and South Catholicism had very different ethnocultural origins. Anglo and French Catholics had deep historical roots south of the Mason Dixon line, and their communities had supported the founding of Catholic institutions during the early national era, when anti-Catholicism was at low tide. Having forged strong ties to the local elites, and widely respected within their communities, these institutions continued to flourish despite the resurgent anti-Catholicism of the late antebellum period.

In the North, by contrast, the foundation of Catholic institutions coincided with the mass migration of Irish and German Catholic migrants in the later decades of the

\(^{75}\) See Stern, *Southern Crucifix, Southern Cross*, 109-144.
antebellum era. The rise of this immigrant Church, moreover, took place in the shadow of the Protestant revivals of the Second Great Awakening and the resurgence of Catholic absolutism in Europe. Bereft of communal ties to native-born elites and denounced as an immigrant horde beholden to Old World despotism, Catholics in the North thus often faced a much more combative Protestant majority than did their Southern counterparts.

From the South to the North: The Careers of Augustus Thebaud and Mary Alyosia Hardey

The leading commercial city of the United States, New York City was by 1860 the indisputable center of the immigrant Church. But many of the city’s premier Catholic institutions remained in the hands of a Catholic elite strongly influenced by the culture and institutions of the Old South. The careers of Mary Aloysia Hardey and Augustus Thebaud, two of the foundational figures of the immigrant Church, lay bare the complex social geography of American Catholicism at midcentury.

Though distinguished as a scholar, writer, and educator, Thebaud was in many respects typical of the generation of French-born Jesuits who dominated Catholic education in antebellum America. Born in 1807 to an affluent Catholic family in Brittany, Thebaud as a young man imbibed the strongly monarchical and ultraconservative brand of Catholicism ascendant in post-revolutionary France. Joseph de Maistre, the reactionary Catholic firebrand who exalted royal and papal absolutism as the solution to modern social ills, was a principal intellectual influence. A bright student and pious Catholic, Thebaud received his religious training at seminaries in Nantes and later studied science at the Sorbonne. In 1835 he entered the Jesuit Order, which, despite Charles X’s 1828 decree barring Jesuits from teaching at French schools, remained the intellectual
ornament of the French Catholic elite. Precluded from teaching in France, Thebaud
decided to emigrate to the United States, where, free from governmental intrusion, Jesuit
schools had already taken hold in Maryland, Missouri, Kentucky, and Alabama. In early
1839 he arrived at St. Mary’s, a small Catholic college in southwestern Kentucky
operated by the Jesuits. For the next seven years he would remain at St. Mary’s, assuming
the office of president in 1845. Though his later career would be spent among the Irish
immigrants of New York, Thebaud’s introduction to American culture thus came in the
form of the rural slaveholding society of the frontier South.

Despite its frontier environs, St. Mary’s had little trouble attracting students from
the leading families of the southwest. The French Jesuits who ran St. Mary’s, a former
boarding student recalled, quickly acquired a high reputation among “the most influential
families” of the region. As a result, boarders at the school included the children of “state
governors, of United States officers, and of members of Congress.” Like most Catholic
academies of the time, St. Mary’s depended on the matriculation of wealthy Protestant
students; just 314 of the 675 students enrolled at St. Mary’s between 1831 and 1846 were
Catholic. Exiled from the Catholic Old World, the French Jesuits of St. Mary’s, as

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77 Thebaud has received scant attention in American Catholic historiography. See Augustus Thebaud, *Three
Quarters of a Century*, Three Volumes (New York: The United States Catholic Historical Society, 1912);
Thebaud’s other writings include *The Irish Race in the Past and Present* (New York: Peter Collier, 1879).
79 “Some Reminiscences of St. Mary’s College, Kentucky,” *Woodstock Letters* 20 (1891), 30; Thomas C.
80 Thomas C. Hennessey and Joseph O’Hare, *Fordham*, 47. On the French Jesuits and the history of
Fordham, see also Thomas J. Shelley, *Fordham: A History of the Jesuit University of New York* (New
elsewhere, found the wealthy Anglo-Americans of the South an unexpected but indispensable source of financial support.

Though initially hesitant about mingling with American Protestants, Thebaud soon came to appreciate the distinguished reputation of the Catholic Church in the American South, especially among the wealthy and educated upper classes. Often traveling down the Mississippi River to meet with the families of boarders, many of whom hailed from Mississippi, Missouri, and Louisiana, Thebaud was delighted to discover the “favorable impression made by everything connected with the Catholic Church” in Southern culture.”81 In one of his first trips on the Mississippi River, for example, Thebaud was approached by a wealthy Mississippi planter who inquired if it would be possible to enroll his wife at a Catholic convent school, even though she was already married. Thebaud assured his inquisitor that his wife would be welcome at a Catholic convent school, but inquired why he seemed so willing to entrust his wife to Catholic teachers. The planter responded that he “had frequent commercial dealings with the French creoles of Louisiana, who were all Catholics,” and that he had “found in them honesty and gentlemanliness.”82 Moreover, he knew many Southern families that had sent their children to Catholic academies, and they had great respect for the education and discipline instilled by Catholic instructors. Southerners “did not belong to the Yankee race,” he insisted, and it was only the “children of the Puritans” in the North who debased true Christianity with violent outbursts against the Catholic Church.83

Such cordial relations endeared Thebaud to the Southern elite. The “creole aristocracy of Louisana,” in particular, impressed upon Thebaud a deep reverence for the

82 Ibid., 207.
83 Ibid., 208.
manners of the South, including the professed paternalism of Southern slaveholding. During one sojourn in Louisiana, Thebaud visited the plantation estate of a wealthy Creole family with ties to St. Mary’s. “The language, the traditions, the table, the very amusements after meals, took me back to my native country,” he later wrote. After dinner, Thebaud asked to inspect the outer reaches of the plantation, in order to “form a correct opinion of the treatment to which the slaves were subjected.” After observing “the joy the sudden presence of the master produced” among his slave hands in the fields, Thebaud concluded that his host “was a humane man,” and that “the negroes in his eyes were not merely useful animals, but human beings like himself.” He was certain, moreover, “that the majority of planters in Louisiana shared these opinions and treated their slaves with humanity.” Though at first a stranger to the slave societies of the New World, Thebaud had in short order internalized the self-deceptions of the master class.84

In 1846 Thebaud and his fellow Jesuits departed St. Mary’s to assume control of St. Johns College, Fordham, an all-male Catholic college in New York City founded by Bishop Hughes in 1841. Though reluctant to abandon their Kentucky mission, the St. Mary’s Jesuits recognized that, given the glut of Catholic colleges in the South, their talents as educators and missionaries would be better spent in the urban northeast, where the growth of the Catholic immigrant population had far outpaced the growth of Catholic institutions. (In 1840 there were two Catholic colleges in western Kentucky alone—St. Mary’s and St. Joseph’s—but none in New York City, Philadelphia, or Boston.) For the next forty years Thebaud would remain a key figure in the New York immigrant Church, serving as a faculty member and administrator at St. John’s, a steady contributor to

84 Ibid., 129-130.
Catholic journals, the author of a half dozen books, and, for much of the nativist agitation of the 1850s, the pastor of an Irish-American parish in upstate New York.

Charmed by the manners of the Southern Cavaliers, Thebaud would be less impressed by the Spartan virtues of the Northern Yankees. As pastor of St. Joseph’s Church in Troy, New York, Thebaud ministered to a predominantly working-class Irish constituency in perpetual conflict with city’s Protestant majority. Though favorable to the city’s old-line Episcopalian and Unitarian elites, who generally showed respect and sympathy for the Catholic religion, Thebaud found the city’s Presbyterian establishment particularly hostile to the Irish and their faith; one leading Presbyterian minister, who routinely denounced “the Pope, the Papists, the foreigners in general, and the Irish in particular,” objected to communal efforts to provide charity to the city’s poor on the grounds that such alms would go to Irish paupers. Because the Irish generally labored in factories owned by wealthy Presbyterians, such ethnic and sectarian tensions, moreover, spilled over into disputes between labor and capital. Appalled by the impersonal relations of the free-labor system, in which obligations between worker and employer rarely extended beyond wages-for-work, Thebaud bristled at the “brutal insensibility” of Protestant factory owners to the poverty and physical hardship of the working classes. He recalled a case of three Irish laborers scalded to death while unloading hot coals from the local mill: “As usual a collection was taken up among the workmen for the bereaved families, and the employers did nothing.” Such episodes hardened Thebaud against the industrialists who came dominate the North in the Civil War era.

Though rarely sensitive to the plight of African American slaves under Catholic slaveholders, Thebaud could thus discern, in the struggles of Irish Catholic workers

85 Ibid., vol. 3, 120.
against their Protestant employers, the subtle coercions of the Northern capitalist order. Such hypocrisy, of course, reflected not only Thebaud’s internalization of American racial attitudes, but also his cumulative experiences as a Catholic clergyman living between two social worlds: among Southern slaveholders he had found kinship and support, among Northern industrialists animosity and indifference. Even in the 1880s, when Thebaud composed his three-volume memoir, he remained adamant that the “immense majority of slaveholders” were innocent of the brutalities charged to them, and juxtaposed the paternalism of Southern masters with the utter lack of “Christian spirit” among Northern capitalists. On the subject of the Civil War Thebaud was mostly silent, but he insisted that “emancipation came too soon” and that the Civil War-era Republican party was an “anti-Catholic” institution filled with “Protestant bigots and infidel cynics.” Such sentiments suggest that Thebaud, like many Northern Catholic leaders, sought during the sectional crisis to balance personal sympathies with the South with civic obligations to Northern authorities. Regardless, at his death Thebaud remained a stern defender of the Old South, a Frenchman who found among the Creole plantations of the lower Mississippi Valley a Catholic culture that seemed to bridge the Old World and New.

While Thebaud was a Southerner in spirit, Mary Aloysia Hardey, who transformed Catholic education at midcentury, was a Southerner both by birth and conviction. Born in southern Maryland in 1809 to affluent Anglo Catholic family, Mary Aloysia Hardey was at an early age swept up in the cotton boom that transformed the South in the early decades of the nineteenth century.\(^{86}\) When Hardey was still a child, her

\(^{86}\) “Madame Mary Aloysia Hardey,” *Catholic World* (September 1886), 844-45; Mary Belinda McCormack, “Mary Aloysia Hardey,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia* 7 (New York: Robert Appleton
father, enticed by the lucre of the lower Mississippi cotton trade, decided to resettle the family in Grand Coteau, Louisiana. The decision would not go unrewarded: aided by the ever-rising demand for cotton, the Hardeys would amass great riches in Louisiana, owning, at the peak of their wealth, nearly 100 slaves. As pious Catholics, the Hardeys desired that their children receive a formal education in line with their faith and social status. The Society of the Sacred Heart, a Catholic religious order founded in France in 1800, had in 1818 established an all-female convent school near St. Louis, and planned to found a second female academy in Grand Coteau. Mary’s parents decided that she would join the academy’s inaugural class of pupils. In October of 1821, Mary, along with four other young women, enrolled at the Grand Coteau academy. In lieu of full tuition, Mary’s father agreed to allow the academy occasional use of his slaves. The French sisters, he was certain, would cultivate in Mary a sense of refinement and social graces suitable to a young woman of rank in Southern society.

Academies operated by the Sisters of the Sacred Heart were intended as finishing schools for the better classes, but student life under the supervision of the Sisters was hardly one of leisure or self-indulgence. As a pupil at Grand Coteau, the young Mary Hardey was subjected to unrelenting discipline, including corporal punishment, and an exacting schedule of educational instruction and religious devotions. Chastened by the violent anticlericalism of revolutionary France, the Sisters considered themselves defenders of an embattled Church, and they considered the role of educator—and disciplinarian—to be a spiritual vocation. The sisters, moreover, spoke little if any

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87 Williams, The Life of Mary Aloysia Hardey, 36.
88 Campbell, Mary Aloysia Hardey, 1-34; Williams, The Life of Mary Aloysia Hardey, 49.
English; classes were generally conducted in the French tongue. Native English-speakers like the young Mary Hardey simply had to adapt. Despite these challenges, Hardey excelled as a pupil, earning widespread praise and formal honors for her piety, intelligence, and self-discipline. Hardey, in turn, grew to admire the tenacity and moral fervor of the Sisters, and began to contemplate a life of religious devotion. Against the wishes of her father, who desired for his daughter a life of genteel sociability, not cloister, Mary decided in September 1825 to take the veil as a novice in the Society of the Sacred Heart.\textsuperscript{89}

Beginning her novitiate at a convent in St. Michael, Louisiana, Hardey rose quickly through the ranks of the Society. “She has an upright mind, excellent judgment, great prudence, experience beyond her years, and without exception she is the most promising subject in the Community,” her Mother Superior remarked in 1827.\textsuperscript{90} In 1835, at the age of twenty-six, Hardey was appointed Mother Superior of the St. Michael’s convent. Her years at St. Michael’s would be her last in Louisiana. Quickly garnering the attention of Catholic leadership at home and abroad, her next position of authority would be in the nation’s commercial capital, New York City.

Indeed, in 1840 Bishop John Hughes of New York had begun the search for a society of women religious to found and oversee an elite female academy in New York City. Hughes hoped that an exclusive Catholic boarding school would help endear the Church to people of New York, remove the working-class stigma associated with Catholicism, and possibly foster conversions among the city’s leading Protestant families. Since 1817 the Sisters of Charity had served the parishes of New York, but their mission

\textsuperscript{89} Williams, \textit{The Life of Mary Aloysia Hardey}, 35-45.  
\textsuperscript{90} Campbell, \textit{Mary Aloysia Hardey}, 45.
was to found free schools and orphan asylums, not elite boarding schools for the “better classes.”

Aware of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart’s exalted reputation in the South, Hughes petitioned the order’s European leadership to found a convent school in New York City. In response, the Mother House selected Hardey, based on her varied talents and “universal esteem” within the order, to lead the New York mission. (So impressed was Hughes by Hardey’s administrative acumen that he later proclaimed her “a woman who could govern the United States.”)

Despite fierce opposition from nativist Protestants, in 1847 Hardey and Hughes purchased a bucolic fifty-acre estate in upper Manhattan, in a quiet neighborhood called Manhattanville, relying on a loan from Belgium banks to finance the purchase.

Within a decade Hardey had turned the Manhattanville property into the most prestigious female Catholic academy north of the Mason Dixon line. Modeled on the Sacred Heart academies of France and Louisiana, the academy at Manhattanville aimed to attract New World wealth by conveying Old World charm and elegance. French was “universally spoken” on school grounds, and the Sisters paid “strict attention to the cultivation of elegant manners.” With tuition of $200 per annum (more than the yearly salary of most Americans), the academy was only affordable to the wealthy few, but the income helped support Catholic free schools in the city. Despite nativist hostility, the academy was able to attract some wealthy Protestant pupils, though Catholic students

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92 Williams, *The Life of Mary Aloysia Hardey*, 100, 146.
remained the majority. For example, the daughters of Horace Greeley, the distinguished editor of the New York Tribune, were students at the academy, as were two female relatives of President George Washington.95

![Image 1.4: Etching of the Sacred Heart Convent at Manhattanville, one of the elite female Catholic academies in the United States. Image from undated newspaper clipping from The World, 1893, in the Special Collections of Manhattanville College.](image)

Nevertheless, like most premier Catholic schools before the Civil War, Manhattanville relied on the enrollment of wealthy Catholics from the Upper South and lower Mississippi Valley.96 The school was able to attract affluent Catholics from Cuba and Latin America, including the daughter of President Juarez of Mexico, but only the steady matriculation of affluent Catholics from Maryland, the District of Columbia, Virginia, Kentucky, Mississippi, and Louisiana sustained the academy before the Civil War. In this respect Sister Hardey’s personal and familial roots in the slaveholding South

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96 Campbell, Mary Aloysia Hardey, 239.
were no doubt critical to the success of the academy in its early years. The daughter of wealthy cotton planters with personal and institutional ties to slavery, Hardey proved a trustworthy custodian of Southern youth, even in a city buffeted by sectional conflicts. Hardey’s sterling reputation among wealthy Catholics in the Mississippi Valley, owing to her years of service at convents in Louisiana, likewise bolstered Manhattanville’s recruitment of wealthy Southerners. So pivotal was Hardey to Manhattanville’s national reputation that in 1859, when the Society of the Sacred Heart considered removing Hardey from Manhattanville and re-assigning her to oversee the expansion of the Society in South America, Hughes wrote a forceful letter to the Mother House in France arguing that such a course of action would devastate Manhattanville’s national reputation and imperil the progress of the Church in the New York. The academy, Hughes cautioned, “will not be the same institution if she is removed.”

The outbreak of civil war, however, would make these Southern attachments a source of tremendous strain, both for Hardy personally and for the academy in general. Eager to dampen sectional tensions within the student body, Hardey sought to throttle discussion of politics among students and faculty. But amid the turmoil of civil war, sectional loyalties proved irrepressible, and open conflict between Northern and Southern students threatened to overturn the strict order of convent life. Mindful of the academy’s dependence on the Southern upper class, Hardey made sure to distance herself, and her subordinates, from the insurgent nationalism and abolitionist fervor gripping the Northern states. For instance, when Brownson’s Review adopted an aggressively pro-Union and antislavery stance in 1862, Hardey wrote to her confessor to express extreme

97 Letter from Archbishop Hughes to Madame Sophie Barat, AANY, Hughes Papers, Box 1, Folder A-1; Campbell, Mary Aloysia Hardey, 213-14.
disappointment with Brownson, as well as her intent to cancel her subscription to the
review. Students sympathetic to the Northern war effort, however, did not take kindly to
Hardey’s apparent ambivalence toward the Union and emancipation. After Lincoln’s
assassination, Hardey barred Northern students from wearing black badges in honor of
the fallen president, but Horace Greely’s daughter, Ida, then a student at Manhattanville,
decided to wear the badge in protest. Eventually one of the Sisters forcefully removed he
badge from Ida’s breast, leading to widespread protest by Northern students against the
perceived Confederate sympathies of the administration. Hardey ultimately managed to
defuse tensions, but not without privately rebuking several teachers whom she suspected
of complicity in the Northern students’ revolt.98

That the incident did not derail Hardey’s career is a testament to her ambition and
skill as a teacher and administrator, if not deft management of her personal and
professional reputation. After the war she would continue to oversee the operation of
more than twenty convent schools throughout North America, dying in 1886 as perhaps
the most powerful Catholic woman in the United States.99

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The Catholics of the South, in short, were culturally and institutionally far more
integrated into elite society by the time of the Civil War than were their northern co-
religionists. In this respect Charles Chiniquy had put his finger on something important in
his assessment of Catholic loyalties during the Civil War. Having taken root in the Upper
South and lower Mississippi Valley, Catholic religious orders indeed had their
institutional roots south of the Mason Dixon line. Prominent families in the South,

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exalting Catholicism as the religion of the Old World aristocracy, often had their children educated in Catholic academies. And the Anglo and French Catholic elite permeated the professional, financial, and military leadership of the Old South. Catholicism thus maintained a cultural foothold among the Southern upper classes unparalleled in the antebellum North. Such cultural and institutional ties would bear heavily on the sectional loyalties of the Northern Catholic leadership, whose origins were often Southern and whose sympathies often lay with a Southern civilization that, to many observers, seemed more congenial to traditional Catholic values than did the ascendant middle classes of the Yankee North.

Nonetheless, Catholics in the South did experience outbursts of nativist sentiment in the antebellum years. In the mid-1850s anti-Catholic riots convulsed Southern cities like New Orleans, Baltimore, and Bardstown. Though Southern Democrats helped to quell the influence of the Know-Nothing Party in 1855, so-called “American” parties made considerable inroads with Southern voters between 1850 and 1854, particularly in Catholic strongholds like Louisiana and Maryland. Southerners, like their Northern counterparts, were swept up in the anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant hysteria that roiled American society and politics in the decade before the Civil War.

Catholics in the North, likewise, did often experience cordial relations with their Protestant peers, particularly in the years between 1790 and 1830. For instance, the French-born Bishop Chevrus was a widely celebrated figure in the “Puritan” city of Boston in the 1820s, counting among his friends and supporters many of the leading

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Protestant citizens of the city. In the early nineteenth century the Jesuits founded a flourishing academy in New York City, called the Catholic Literary Institute, that included among its pupils many children of the city’s leading Protestant families. (The Jesuits closed the Institute after a few years, not because of Protestant opposition, but out of deference to Georgetown University, which the Jesuit Order hoped to affirm as the premier Catholic college in the nation.) And even John Hughes, who come to embody the militant style of the Irish-dominated Church at midcentury, had as a young priest in Philadelphia in the 1820s secured the financial and personal support of a broad array of the city’s leading Protestants, many of whom viewed the hypersectarianism of the evangelical movement with contempt. In this respect the mythology of the bitterly anti-Catholic “Puritan” North stands in need of historical revision.

In general, anti-Catholicism in both the North and South adhered to several patterns. First, anti-Catholicism in the antebellum period was most pronounced in urban areas with large Irish-immigrant populations. Of course, the largest immigrant populations at midcentury were in Northern cities like New York and Philadelphia, and unsurprisingly these places witnessed some of the most virulent outbreaks of nativism. Nevertheless, there were also large Irish-immigrant populations in Southern cities like St. Louis, New Orleans, and Baltimore, and these cities were likewise convulsed by

104 Unfortunately, there has been scant historical work in the last fifty years on the subject of nativism and Know Nothingism. Indeed, the standard text on the subject remains Ray Billington, The Protestant Crusade, written nearly eighty years ago. As a result, many myths around anti-Catholicism in the North persist.
outbreaks of nativism and Catholicism.\textsuperscript{105} (In cities like New Orleans and Baltimore many native-born Catholics, fearful of Irish influence over politics, embraced the Know Nothing movement, which in Catholic-dominated states like Louisiana and Maryland adopted a much less sectarian and more anti-immigrant posture.)\textsuperscript{106} Second, Anglo-Saxon and Francophone Catholics, many of whom were of genteel provenance, enjoyed cordial relations with Protestants in both the North and South between 1790 and 1840. Such populations of “respectable” Catholics, however, were much larger in the in the Upper South and lower Mississippi Valley than in New England and the mid-Atlantic region, and had forged a Catholic institutional network that rarely extended north of the Mason-Dixon line. When Irish immigration sparked nativist hostilities in the 1830s, this older generation of Catholic elites in the South was able to at least temper more virulent expressions of anti-Catholicism. In the North, by contrast, where Catholic elites and Catholic institutions were fewer in number, there was no such check on outbursts of anti-Irish sentiment.

\textsuperscript{105} Gleeson, \textit{The Irish in the South.}

\textsuperscript{106} Broussard, “Some Determinants of Know-Nothing Electoral Strength in the South, 1856.”
Chapter Two:
Catholic Cavaliers, Protestant Yankees: Cross-Regional Expressions of Catholicism in the Civil War Era

In 1863 Father John Bannon of Missouri, an Irish-American Catholic priest serving as a Confederate agent abroad, published a series of pamphlets in Ireland addressed to the local Catholic clergy. Intended to quell Irish-Catholic support for the Union Army, which relied heavily on the enlistment of immigrant Irish, the letters cast the American Civil War as an epic spiritual struggle between the “all-domineering materialism” of the Yankee North—a society purportedly defined by vulgar industrialism, rampant individualism, and a tawdry ultra-republican political culture—and the “remnant of Christian civilization” that still prevailed in the rural South. The spiritual conflict between North and South, Bannon insisted, owed to the very origins of the European settlement in North America. Whereas New England Yankees were the spiritual heirs of anti-Catholic Protestant radicals like Oliver Cromwell, the planters of the South were descended from the aristocratic families of Catholic Europe, and retained many of the pieties and prejudices of their Old World ancestors. In an age of ever-advancing secularism, liberalism, and materialism, the Southern planter class, much like the Roman Catholic Church itself, remained a pillar of conservative Christian culture.

The Southern People,” Bannon affirmed to his Irish-Catholic audience, were “by race, religion and principles, the natural ally of the foreigner and Catholic.”

Bannon’s depiction of the slaveholding South as a bulwark of Christendom in an increasingly liberal and secular age was a common article of Southern self-

mythologizing, one cannily deployed by various Confederate agents and diplomats in their attempts to secure the sympathies of European conservatives between 1861 and 1865. Nonetheless, the portrayal of the American South as a deeply conservative and hierarchical society, more ideologically akin to the Catholic ancien regime than the Yankee North, exerted a powerful hold over Catholic and non-Catholic thinkers alike at midcentury, both in the United States and Europe. In 1864 Martin John Spalding of Kentucky, soon to be appointed Archbishop of Baltimore (by tradition the premier position in the American Catholic hierarchy), wrote a lengthy missive to Rome parsing the Civil War as a conflict between a “conservative,” “antirevolutionary” rural South and a radical, increasingly authoritarian industrial North. Clearly partial to the Confederacy, Spalding’s self-styled “dissertation on the American Civil War” denounced the North as a ultra-democratic haven of secular liberals and European revolutionaries, ruled by a political class of former Know-Nothings who “hate[d] the Catholic religion with an almost Satanic hate.”

Such sentiments reflected the Catholic Church’s uneven integration into American life. In the North, where institutional Catholicism was virtually non-existent into the 1830s, Catholics and Protestants alike cast Roman Catholicism as a foreign counter-culture, deeply opposed to the “Yankee” values of freedom and individualism.

In the South, by contrast, Catholicism had deep institutional roots, and leading Catholics had long sought to align their religious principles with the Southern status quo. Rome’s embrace of a much more reactionary brand of “ultramontane” Catholicism only aided such attempts to harmonize Catholicism with the slaveholding culture of the South.

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As the nation lurched toward secession and civil war, such contrasting attitudes toward Catholicism North and South would only intensify.

This chapter explores the cross-regional expression of American Catholicism in the Civil War-era. Part one examines the politics of conversion in the antebellum North, exploring the trials of Anglo-American converts who embraced Catholicism as a refuge from Yankee orthodoxy. Part two examines the intellectual traditions of the Southern Catholic elite, who sought to fuse Catholic apologetics with proslavery thought. Part three explores how such cross-regional expressions of Catholicism shaped Confederate and Union diplomacy during the Civil War, especially with respect to the Catholic powers of the Old World.  

The “Foreign Colony”: The Politics of Conversion in the Antebellum North

The legacy of anti-Catholic penal laws ensured that, for much of the nineteenth century, the institutional Church in the North lacked a native-born Anglo-American elite. As a result, the burgeoning immigrant Church had to look either below the Mason Dixon line or to Catholic Europe for clerical leadership. In this respect the Catholic Church in the North was something of a missionary enterprise—a “foreign colony,” in Brownson’s phrase, alien to the culture and values of the Yankee establishment. No doubt, of the thirteen bishops assigned to the Catholic dioceses of New York, Philadelphia, and Boston

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3 Scholars have of course previously examined popular attitudes toward the Catholic Church in various regions of the U.S., but this chapter attempts a cross-regional approach that illuminates the contrasting attitudes toward Catholicism in the North and South. This chapter, moreover, also links these contrasting expressions of Catholicism with the global debate over the American Civil War, demonstrating how European sympathy with the Confederacy owed, in part, to the perception of the Confederacy as a “quasi-Catholic” society distinct from the liberal, revolutionary North. The best regional studies of popular Catholicism in the North and South are by literary scholars Jenny Franchot and Thomas Haddox. See Franchot, Roads to Rome: The Antebellum Protestant Encounter With Catholicism (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), and Haddox, Fears and Fascinations: Representing Catholicism in the South (New York: Fordham, 2005).
before 1860, only one, Bishop John Fitzpatrick of Boston, was born in the Northeast, and, like many of his Catholic contemporaries in New England, Fitzgerald was the child of Irish immigrants. (By comparison, five of the seven bishops appointed to Baltimore before the end of the Civil War were descended from the old-line Anglo Catholics of Maryland.) As the New England-born Brownson knew all too well, a Catholic Yankee was very much a contradiction in terms.

The “foreign” character of American Catholicism troubled Brownson to no end. A convert himself, Brownson believed that the Catholic Church could only prosper in America by appealing to, and ultimately converting, the native-born Anglo-Saxon middle class. The Church in America, however, remained strongly tied to the culture and values of the European ancien regime, and as a result Catholicism in America tended to attract those already alienated from the “American order of civilization.” Rather than Americanize Catholicism, such Anglo-American converts, Brownson lamented, tended to “join the foreign colony, becom[ing] far more assimilated to the foreign colony, than Catholic foreigners settled here do to the American people proper.” And if such converts were to search for fellow native-born Catholics, they were much more likely to find them in Baltimore, the seat of the Southern Catholic elite, than in New England. For Yankees to convert to Catholicism, in short, was to align themselves with the despots of Europe or the slaveholders of the South—to become, in Brownson’s words, “foreigners in their own land.”

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4 The Metropolitan Catholic Almanac and Laity’s Directory, for the Year of Our Lord 1850 (Baltimore: Lucas Fielding, 1849), 71-74.
5 Brownson, “The Church Not A Despotism,” Brownson’s Quarterly Review 3 (April 1862): 166.
Of course, given the fraught history of Catholicism under the English crown, Catholic converts throughout the wider Anglo-Protestant world generally experienced conversion as a traumatic break from the bonds of nation, family, and community. But ethnic and class stigma was particularly strong in the Northeastern United States, which lacked both a native-born Catholic elite and an older tradition of religious ecumenism, embodied in Catholic colleges like Georgetown and Mt. St. Mary’s, which had helped forge social bonds between Catholic and Protestant elites in the Upper South and Lower Mississippi Valley. In Maryland and Louisiana, in short, converting to Catholicism did not necessarily entail a break with genteel society. But in the Northeast, especially New England, to convert to Catholicism was “to put up with rough, makeshift churches and chapels and the company of uncouth Irish laborers.”

Elizabeth Bayley Seton, the most prominent American Catholic convert of the early nineteenth-century (and, incidentally, the first American-born Catholic saint), experienced such loneliness and social ostracism in her native city of New York that she ultimately withdrew to Catholic Baltimore. Born in 1774 to wealthy New York City Episcopalian family, Elizabeth Bayley married William Seton, a prominent merchant, in 1794. Drawn to the sacramentalism and magisterial liturgy of High Church worship (including a fondness for Christian ornaments like the crucifix), Elizabeth remained active in the Episcopal Church. In line with her wealth and social rank, she supported various philanthropic endeavors, earning among her peers the affectionate title of a “Protestant Sister of Charity” for her benevolent treatment of the poor. The deterioration

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of William’s health, however, compelled the couple to depart New York in 1803 for the more salubrious environs of Tintoretto, a port city on the western coast of Italy.

As her husband’s health worsened, Elizabeth found comfort in the spiritual counsel of her husband’s friend Philip Filicchi, a wealthy Italian merchant and devout Catholic. Encountering, for the first time, a class of Catholics whose status and social graces matched her own, Seton gradually came to embrace the mystical allure of Old World Catholicism, which soothed her grief and anxiety. The piety of the Filicchi family, in particular, impressed upon her a deep reverence for the Catholic sacraments and liturgy.⁸ “How happy would we be,” she wrote to an American acquaintance, “if we believed what these dear souls believe—that the possess God in the sacrament, that he remains in their churches, and is carried to them when they are sick!”⁹ After her husband’s death, Elizabeth, still distraught, returned home to New York, intent on pledging fidelity to Rome.

The Irish Catholics of New York, however, bore little resemblance to the Catholic nobles of the Old World, and Elizabeth’s decision to convert received a chilly reception within the Protestant establishment, earning little “but angry words and cross looks” from her peers.¹⁰ But despite the pleadings of former Episcopalian pastor, Seton converted to Catholicism in 1806. Unsurprisingly, the decision forever alienated Seton from the New York Protestant establishment. Estranged from her former friends, who regarded her conversion with a mixture of disdain and bemusement, Seton commenced a lively correspondence with Bishop John Carroll of Baltimore and Jean Louis Chevrus, a respected French-born cleric later appointed the Bishop of Boston, in search of spiritual

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⁹ Ibid., 95
¹⁰ Ibid., 227.
counsel and personal companionship.\textsuperscript{11} Her social and financial fortunes in New York, however, continued to founder, and in 1808, at the urging of her clerical mentors, Seton decided to abandon the city of her birth and remove her family to Baltimore. Enrolling her sons at the nearby Mt. St. Mary’s College, Seton quickly found comfort and support with the Catholic establishment of Maryland, and founded a successful Catholic academy for girls in Baltimore. “We removed to Baltimore the middle of June,” she wrote to a friend in Europe, “and I find the difference of the situation so great that I can scarcely believe it is the same existence.”\textsuperscript{12} Happily exiled from her native New York, and at peace in the Catholic milieu of Baltimore and Washington, D.C., Seton would ultimately enter the order of the Sisters of Charity, spending the remainder of her life in Emmitsburgh, Maryland.

As anti-Catholic prejudice in the urban North increased in subsequent decades, so too did the psychic and emotional toll of conversion. The rapid influx of Irish laborers to the urban enclaves in the middle decades of the nineteenth century reaffirmed the ethnic and class stigma of Roman Catholicism, rendering the faith, by midcentury, vulgar and distasteful to even the most open-minded of Northern middle-class intellectuals. Although Yankee philosophers like Walt Whitman and Henry David Thoreau objected, in the abstract, to the authoritarian character of Catholicism, disdain for Irish poverty and ignorance no doubt deepened their anti-Catholic prejudices. (“The culture of an Irishman,” Thoreau remarked in \textit{Walden}, “is an enterprise to be undertaken with a sort of

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., On Chevrus, see Clarke, \textit{Lives of the Deceased Bishops of the Catholic Church in the United States}, 164-184.

mental bog hoe.”) Of course, as the literary critic Jenny Franchot has suggested, precisely because Catholicism signified in New England a foreign and otherworldly religious counterculture, it appealed to spiritually adrift women and men in search of “alternative[s] to the economic and domestic pressures of middle class life.” Acolytes of the Transcendentalist movement, such as the convert Sophia Ripley (the wife of George Ripley, who founded a Transcendentalist commune in Massachusetts) were often drawn to the mystical aspects of Catholic worship, as were New England-born artists like Eliza Allen Starr, who converted after a long fascination with Catholic medieval art and architecture. But, theological curiosities notwithstanding, the ethnic and class inflections of American Catholicism generally precluded the conversion of the New England intellectual elite. Upon hearing of Starr’s conversion in 1858, Ralph Waldo Emerson, who himself had occasionally expressed admiration for Catholic theological principles, recoiled with disgust. “She was born for social grace,” Emerson wrote, “and that faith makes such carnage of social relations!”

There was, to be sure, a small but devoted coterie of Yankee converts, led by Brownson himself, who sought to reinterpret Roman Catholicism for the American middle-class by harmonizing Catholic teaching with liberal and individualist values. Drawn to Catholicism for theological and philosophical reasons, these converts had little interest in joining the “foreign colony,” but sought instead to popularize Catholicism in

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14 Jenny Franchot, *Roads to Rome: Antebellum Protestant Encounters with Catholicism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 281. Franchot’s study is illuminating and well-written, but she treats New England as a universal expression of American culture, ignoring the regional variations in popular attitudes toward Catholicism. She also ignores the role of sectionalism in popular debates over Catholicism.
America by purging it of European influences and associations. For instance, Brownson’s close friend Isacc Hecker, a native-born Catholic convert and religious mystic, founded the Missionary Society of St. Paul in 1858 principally as an instrument for converting middle-class Protestants. An autonomous American order, the Paulists were subject neither to the rule of European superiors nor to the authority of their local bishop, and as a result native-born converts like Augustine Hewit, George Deshon, Francis Baker, and Clarence Walworth could remain devoted members of a Catholic religious order while having only minimal interaction with the European-dominated Church hierarchy.17

Such Yankee converts, to be sure, felt great loneliness and exasperation in their dealings with a predominantly foreign-born and working-class Church. John Murray Forbes, the pastor of St. Luke’s Episcopal Church in Manhattan and a close ally of Brownson, initially earned great acclaim from the Catholics of New York when he announced his conversion to Rome in 1849. But Forbes struggled both in his pastoral duties to immigrant Catholics as well as with the ecclesiastical machinery of the immigrant church—in particular, with what Forbes perceived as the autocratic rule of the Irish-American bishops.18 Condemned by Catholic leaders for valuing “pride and respectability” over the needs of the Church, Forbes nonetheless renounced Catholicism in 1859 and returned to the Episcopal Church, citing the demands of “private conscience,” not personal vanity, as his motive.19

19 Henry J. Browne, History of St. Anne’s on 12th Street, New York City, 1852-1952 (New York: St. Anne’s Church, 1952), 6-9; “Dr. Forbes Secession from the Catholic Church,” New York Times, October 24, 1859, 4; Diary of Richard Burtsell, AANY, Notebook 1, February 15, 1865. Bishop Hughes called Forbes “public
Opposed to this “American party” of missionaries and thinkers, however, was a larger and more influential class of native-born converts who willfully embraced “the foreign colony” as a spiritual refuge from Yankee orthodoxy. Often born to wealthy and established families, these converts discovered in Catholicism a formalized system of tradition, hierarchy, and moral authority that provided spiritual relief from the increasingly liberal and egalitarian tendencies of the Northern social order. Drawn to the aristocratic culture and aesthetic achievements of the Catholic Old World, they looked askance at the vulgarity and materialism of the ascendant bourgeoisie, and objected, in particular, to the aggressive proselytizing, reformist impulses, and perfectionist morality of middle-class evangelicalism. Unsurprisingly, these converts were typically raised in High Episcopalian or Unitarian congregations (the traditional denominations of the “better classes” of New York and New England) and had inherited from their social station a preference for order, tradition, and social harmony. Like Elizabeth Seton before them, these converts typically converted to Catholicism after lengthy sojourns in Catholic Europe, where they encountered, perhaps for the first time, Catholics of great wealth, manners, and social status. Such converts included James Roosevelt Bayley, Elizabeth Seton’s nephew, who later served as the Bishop of Newark from 1853 to 1872 and the Archbishop of Baltimore until his death in 1877); Edward Welch, the Harvard-educated Boston Brahmin who joined the Jesuit Order in 1851 and had a distinguished career as a professor at Georgetown; and Joseph Coolidge Shaw, another wealthy Harvard-

\textsuperscript{apostasy} “the heaviest blow that was ever inflicted on my heart.” See Archbishop John Hughes to Orestes Brownson, November 2, 1859, AANY, Hughes Papers.

\textsuperscript{20} Undated newspaper clippings on Welch, Welch Papers, Archives and Special Collections of Georgetown University.
educated Bostonian, who jointed the priesthood in 1847 after spending several months in Catholic Europe.\(^{21}\)

Moreover, as descendants of wealthy established families imbued with traditional notions of communal stewardship and *noblesse oblige*, these native-born converts tended, like Seton before them, to view the charitable treatment of the poor as a prerequisite of Christian piety and morality—a tendency that so endeared them to the Catholic immigrant poor. For instance, before his conversion to Catholicism, James Bayley had been rector at a wealthy Episcopalian Church in Manhattan, and his generosity in providing alms, particularly during outbreaks of disease, won him great sympathy from the city’s Irish Catholics.\(^{22}\) Indeed, paternal affection for the poor, commingled with anxiety over the corrosive effects of industrialization, strongly influenced the conversion of elite antebellum Protestants to Rome. The daughter of a distinguished Unitarian family from Cambridge, Massachusetts, the convert Emma Forbes Cary, later a prominent New England journalist and socialite, cited the influence of her mother’s Irish Catholic hairdresser (who was “possessed of faith such as I had never seen”) over her decision to convert in 1855. “We became intimate friends,” she recalled, “and she took me with her to visit her sick poor, to whose desolate rooms she brought cheer and sunshine. Surely charity has not appeared in such fascinating shape as it did when she encouraged the weary to bear their suffering a little longer, or taught the earth-bound soul to long for heaven.”\(^{23}\) Convinced that “spiritual feeling” and “high ideas” of liberal Protestantism


had proved hollow, Cary embraced Catholicism as a spiritual elixir for the modern malaise, capable of restoring moral order and social harmony to the body politic. Born to great social privilege but deeply sensitive to social privation, native-born converts like Carey would find their mixture of paternalism and idealism well-suited to the needs of the immigrant Church.

Of course, amid the fierce nativism and anti-Catholicism of midcentury, such attachment to the “foreign” elements of Catholicism all but assured that Catholic converts would have to repudiate their Anglo-Saxon heritage if they hoped to gain acceptance within an immigrant-dominated Church. Assimilation into the “foreign colony,” in this respect, often necessitated a psychic break from ethnic and national attachments. George Foxcroft Haskins, a New England convert from High Church Episcopalianism, was typical of this phenomenon. A Boston native, Haskins graduated from Harvard in 1826 and promptly decided to study theology in pursuit of a vocation in the Episcopal Church. Committed to serving the city’s poor, Haskins would, after receiving his ordination in 1830, spend the next decade working in various Boston poorhouses and reformatories, where he ministered to the city’s predominantly Irish-Catholic working classes.24 Deeply suspicious of Protestant evangelicals who sought to purge the Irish both of their rural folkways and ancestral allegiance to Rome, Haskins came to admire the piety and fidelity of the Irish Catholic men and women under his charge; he later recalled “a little Irish boy, my own pupil, who in exchange for the letters I taught him, first taught me Christianity.” Haskins faith in the divine authority of the Episcopal Church, meanwhile, began to

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founder, and in 1840 he elected to receive baptism into the Catholic Church. After visiting Rome, he entered a seminary in Paris, where he studied alongside his close friend, James Roosevelt Bayley. After completing his studies, he returned to his native Boston, where in 1851 he opened the House of the Angel Guardian, a home for Catholic orphan boys, devoting his life to shielding young Catholics from Protestant influence.

Born into the New England elite, Haskins would continue to use his influence with the city’s Protestant upper class to secure broad support for the House of the Angel Guardian. But in his public writings Haskins would sentimentalize Catholic Europe while condemning middle-class Anglo-American culture. After an 1854 tour through Europe, Haskins would publish a lengthy travelogue, entitled *Travels in England, France, Italy, and Ireland*, that compared Catholic and Protestant nations in their culture, habits, artistic achievements and, above all, collective treatment of the poor. Echoing Martin John Spalding’s writings on Catholic Europe and the Protestant ethic, Haskins cast Protestant nations, like Britain and the United States, as commercially prosperous but spiritually bankrupt. There was “no country in the world,” he remarked of Britain, “where the higher and middle classes are more rich and comfortable, and the lower orders more ignorant and depraved”—no country that had “so many religions and so little religion, so much money raised and expended for the propagation or religion, and so little result.” Mindful of English influence on the habits and culture of his native countrymen, Haskins

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lamented that “we Anglo-Americans, inheriting the prejudice of our English progenitors, as well as the language, are to apt to regard the poor with contempt and disdain.”27

In comparison, Haskins recorded the cheerfulness and health of the Catholic peasantry of Europe, noting that in traditionally Catholic nations, “poverty and suffering are kindly and cheerfully relieved, not punished.” In particular, he expressed wonder at the facilities in Catholic Europe devoted to the poor and infirm. After a visit to an immense Roman hospital, possessing over 1,600 beds for city’s sick, Haskins mourned the indifference of his own countrymen to the sick and infirm. Was there such a hospital, he asked plaintively, “on the whole continent of America?”28

Most importantly, Travels in England, France, Italy and Ireland expressed a clear political message in the context of antebellum nativism and anti-Catholicism: that native-born Protestants, not foreign-born Catholics, posed the greatest threat to the American social order. Sentimentalizing the Irish peasantry as a pious and conservative race impervious to sectarianism or secular materialism, immigrant Catholics, Haskins argued, would save the republic from the “wild excesses and fanaticism” of the native-born Protestant majority. The Protestant emphasis on individual interpretation of the Scripture, Haskins asserted, had undermined confidence in traditional moral authorities and inspired men and women to rely solely on “natural instincts” for resolving moral and scriptural questions. The result was moral anarchy: an endless profusion of Christian sects, a rise in immorality and godlessness, the exaltation of wealth and power, and the general drift of the nation “toward barbarism.” Only the absolute moral authority of the Catholic Church, Haskins insisted, could counteract the ultra-individualism and permissiveness of “the

28 Ibid., 149, 114.
present age.” As proof of the fealty of the Irish to law and order, Haskins pointed to their rejection of the “morbid philanthropy” of the antislavery movement and their support for the rights of property under the Constitution. It was native-born Protestants, Haskins wrote, who threatened to destroy the Constitution in the name of a “higher law” against slavery. “We need not go abroad in search of the enemies of our liberties, or the disturbers of our union. They exist and plot here at home. They are among us, and they are of us.”29

The implication, of course, was that the true threat to moral order came from the native-born Protestants of New England—the very social class into which Haskins himself had been born, but from whom he had, at least symbolically, broken irrevocably by converting to Catholicism. Indeed, conservative Protestants like Haskins looked to the Catholic Church as a bulwark against what they perceived as increasingly liberal and secular tendencies within New England thought and culture. That the Catholic Church had virtually no institutional presence in New England before 1840 no doubt heightened the cultural taboos around Catholicism, but such taboos could themselves endow the Church with an otherworldly allure and reinforce the view (increasingly common among the postbellum liberal Protestant elite) that Catholicism offered a refuge from the spiritual sterility, cultural decadence, and democratic excesses of modern civilization.30 In this respect, Catholicism was for many New England converts a spiritual force at once traditional and subversive—subversive precisely in that it affirmed the prerogatives of tradition and authority in an increasingly liberal and permissive age.31

29 Ibid., 283, 285.
31 On the radicalness of tradition, see Lears, xx.
At its most extreme, such antipathy to Yankee thought and culture could cultivate among native-born converts strong political sympathies for the slaveholding South. To be sure, in an era of intense sectionalism, opposition to the increasingly liberal, heterodox, and reformist theology of New England Protestantism (epitomized in the antislavery “fanaticism” of William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips, and Henry Ward Beecher) often shaded into support for the perceived conservatism and traditionalism of slaveholders. For instance, James Alphonse McMaster, the native-born convert who edited the *Freeman’s Journal and Catholic Register*, New York’s leading Catholic weekly, was ultimately jailed in 1861 for publishing seditious editorials against the Lincoln administration.\(^{32}\) The son of a Presbyterian minister, McMaster had converted to Catholicism in 1845, and as editor of the *Freeman’s Journal* (which Abp. Hughes named official organ of the New York Archdiocese in 1854) he championed the various causes of ultramontane Catholicism and the immigrant Church: the temporal rights of the Holy See amid the political convulsions of Europe at midcentury, the need for parochial schools to shield Catholics from Protestant and secular influences, and the threat of Protestant sectarianism both to Catholic piety and national unity.\(^{33}\) A political and religious reactionary who vigorously defended the Catholic *ancien régime*, McMaster interpreted anti-Catholic nativism and Protestant social reformism as outgrowths of the broader secular and democratic tendencies of the age.\(^{34}\) Abolitionism, in his view, was

\(^{32}\) On the suppression of the paper by the Lincoln administration, see James A. McMaster, “The Freeman’s Appeal,” *Freeman’s Journal*, Aug. 31, 1861.


but “the American manifestation of the lawless Liberalism that has been making havoc of society in Europe.”

In line with his social views and strong attachment to the immigrant Church, McMaster was a fierce states-rights Democrat who supported the South as a conservative counterweight to the political power of New England “fanatics.” During the Civil War he emerged as a leader of the Copperhead faction of York City, even plotting with Confederate officials to foment a rebellion against Union authorities in New York City. Indeed, Brownson no doubt had McMaster in mind when, in 1862, he denounced Catholic journalists for having exalted “the slaveholding power” as the Catholic Church’s staunchest ally against the moral and political influence of Yankee Protestantism.

By portraying Catholicism as a spiritual haven from the moral disorders of “the universal Yankee nation,” Northern converts like McMaster and Haskins both echoed the Southern critique of the North and reaffirmed the widespread view that Catholicism was incompatible with the values of the Northern middle-classes. Expressions of contempt for New England “Puritans”—a term that linked age-old sectarian conflicts between Catholics and Protestants with contemporary immigrant struggles against the perceived “fanaticism” of New England moral reformers—no doubt helped Northern converts gain acceptance in the “foreign colony,” even as it further distanced them their native-born Protestant peers. And while Catholic converts may have exaggerated their contempt for Yankee America out of social and political expediency, there is little doubt that the

37 The term “universal Yankee nation” was shorthand for New England cultural nationalism. See “The Intestinal Questions,” Freeman’s Journal, August 6, 1859, 4.
psychic toll of conversion, combined with the social persecutions that flowed from it, hardened their attitudes toward native-born Protestants in general and evangelical reformers in particular. Even the genteel and mannered James Roosevelt Bayley, one New York priest noted in his journal, harbored a “petty prejudice, especially against Puritans” in his dealings with Protestant society. But in a Church strongly tied to Southern slaveholders and Northern immigrants, such prejudices certainly did little to thwart personal advancement, particularly for those who spoke with the zealousness of a convert.

Martin John Spalding and the Southern Tradition

If Northerners saw Catholicism as a foreign counterculture, in the antebellum South Catholics and Protestants alike viewed Catholicism as a pillar of social order. This perspective owed to the Church’s deep institutional ties in the South, the Church’s tolerance for slavery, and ideological affinities between Southern conservatism and ultramontane Catholicism. “Insomuch as Southern culture respected the family, ascriptive authority, and the ethic of honor,” Randall Miller has argued, “the Catholic Church did not enter a wholly alien society” in the antebellum South. The apparent “harmony” of Southern culture with Roman Catholicism, however, was also the handiwork of a generation of native-born Southern Catholic writers who sought to fuse Catholic apologetics with Southern ideals. In their writings on Protestantism, the morality of slavery, and the threat posed by industrialization, these Southern Catholics synthesized Catholic apologetics with proslavery critiques of free-labor societies, forging a Catholic

38 Diary of Rev. Richard Burtsell, AANY, Notebook 1, 8.
39 See Randall Miller and Jon Wakelyn, eds., Catholics in the Old South, especially 7; and Andrew Stern, Southern Crucifix, Southern Cross, 165-190; Andrew Stern, “Southern Harmony: Catholic-Protestant Relations in the Antebellum South,” Religion and American Culture 17 (Summer 2007).
reading of history and political economy that aligned the Church with the Southern status quo.

The most influential proponent of this worldview was no doubt Martin John Spalding, the Kentucky-born churchman who served as Archbishop of Baltimore during the final years of the Civil War. Though lacking the charisma, political savvy, and indomitable drive for power that made Archbishop Hughes such a formidable presence in the immigrant Church, Spalding possessed a range of knowledge, command of the English language, and clear expository style unsurpassed among his fellow American churchmen. Writing for leading Catholic journals like the Baltimore-based *United States Catholic Magazine* and *Brownson’s Quarterly Review*, Spalding published original essays on church history and theology, while reviewing popular works of scholarship and fiction by both Protestant and Catholic authors. Even the New England-born Brownson, who frequently sparred with Spalding in the Catholic press, praised the Kentucky-born cleric as an intellectual ornament of the U.S Church whose bold writings had inspired a “marked change” in the self-regard of American Catholics. Nevertheless, as a native-born Anglo Catholic with strong attachments to slavery, Spalding embodied the precisely the kind of genteel, Southern-inflected “Baltimore Catholicism” that Brownson sought to counteract in his later years. A stalwart defender of Southern institutions who condemned a fellow bishop’s support for emancipation as “almost Satanic,” Spalding strongly sympathized with the South during the Civil War, going so far as to pen a series of clandestine missives to Rome offering a Confederate interpretation of the war and its origins. Indeed, Spalding’s 1864 election to the archepiscopal chair of Baltimore would draw the ire of Union officials deeply suspicious of his political loyalties.
Spalding, like Mary Hardey, was born to a prosperous slaveholding family descended from the Anglo-American Catholics of southern Maryland. In 1791, Spalding’s grandfather, Benedict, joined the westward migration of Maryland Catholics to the Kentucky frontier, ultimately settling in Washington County, about fifty miles southeast of Louisville. Benedict would enjoy great commercial success and political renown in Kentucky, amassing a landed estate of over 2,000 acres and serving five terms as a Kentucky state congressman. The Spaldings quickly emerged as one of the leading families of Kentucky. Reared amid wealth and political influence, the young Martin was, from birth, expected to cultivate the habits and learning of a gentleman, and so in 1821 his parents, devout Catholics, enrolled him at St. Mary’s College. Quickly establishing himself as something of an intellectual prodigy, particularly in the field of mathematics, the young Martin would rise, by the age of fourteen, to the position of instructor at the college, and the mathematical wizardry of the “boy professor” soon garnered widespread attention. The deeply pious Martin, however, decided to spurn a career in mathematics for a life of religious devotion, entering the Bardstown theological seminary in 1826. Martin’s instructors, however, recognized the immense talents of their pupil, and aware of his potential value to the church, decided to send him to Rome to complete his education.

In 1830 Spalding would enroll at the Urban College, a Roman seminary devoted to Catholics from so-called “missionary” territories, which included nations under Protestant dominion. Accompanied by a fellow Kentuckian, Spalding would be one of the

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first American citizens to attend the Urban College. (Many of the first American students at the Urban College were from the South, a likely result of the development of Catholic academies below the Mason Dixon line.) Despite his unfamiliarity with Old World mores, Spalding flourished at the College, gaining a fluency in Latin and Italian, distinguishing himself in the college’s rigorous courses in theology and philosophy, and ultimately earning his doctorate in only four years. Spalding, nevertheless, retained a strong attachment to the land of his birth. “I am sure that my attachment to the institutions of my own country has been increased by my absence from it,” he wrote his father from Rome, “and I feel confident that no American can travel in Europe without being more thoroughly convinced that the United States, in natural and civil advantages, is inferior to no country in the world.”

In 1834, his Roman education complete, Spalding returned to Kentucky, where he commenced pastoral work in the city of Bardstown. His natural aptitude for theological debate greatly strengthened by years of intellectual engagement with the leading Catholic minds of Europe, Spalding would, over the next three decades, enlist his considerable talents in defense of his faith from Protestant ridicule. Indeed, the increasingly immigrant and working-class character of the American Church, coupled with the Church’s political alliance with the forces of reaction in Restoration Europe, had unleashed a torrent of anti-Catholic prejudice in American arts and letters reminiscent of the colonial era. Given his status as a native-born American Catholic with ample experience in religious controversy, Spalding no doubt occupied a privileged position in the American Church from which to rebut Protestant propaganda. Publishing countless essays in Catholic

journals based in Kentucky and Maryland, some of which he later collected and published under the titles *Miscellenea* (1853) and *The History of the Protestant Reformation* (1860), Spalding would in particular seek to refute the popular assumption that the moral and material improvements of the modern age owed to the historical advance of Protestantism.

Indeed, the nineteenth century saw the emergence of a new form of religious controversy, one rooted less in scriptural debates over religious authority than in arguments over the comparative influence of religious traditions on society and morals. This shift in religious controversy from essentially theological to sociological discourse had its roots in Enlightenment debates over the social value of religion itself—a debate that compelled Catholic apologists, such as Franciois-Rene de Chateubriand in his *The Genius of Christianity* (1802), to argue that the Catholic Church had greatly contributed to the moral and cultural improvement of European society. The rapid commercial and industrial advances in Great Britain and the United States in the first half of the nineteenth century, moreover, prodded countless Anglo Protestant evangelists to suggest that Protestantism itself lay at the root of British and American industrial progress. Bolstered by a revolution in printing technology that enabled an unprecedented mass production of religious publications for an increasingly literate public, as well as by marked improvements in transatlantic travel that fostered middle-class tourism to Europe, the comparison of Catholic and Protestant civilizations emerged as a distinct genre of Anglo-American literature. Indeed, long before Max Weber published his influential thesis in 1905, works like *Rome Seen by a New Yorker* (1843) and *Italian Sights and*

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Papal Principles (1855) waxed unapologetically on the assumed relation between the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism.\(^{43}\)

In his attempt to respond to such anti-Catholic tracts, Spalding did not necessarily look to the Catholic Old World for inspiration. Despite his Roman education, Spalding was a Kentucky gentleman immersed in the intellectual currents of the Anglo-American world, and in attacking the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism he would draw on oppositional tendencies within Anglo-Protestant thought itself. In particular, Spalding seized on the emergent English Romantic tradition that condemned industrialism as a blight to the nation’s poor. At the forefront of debate over the “condition of England question” had been William Cobbett’s *A History of the Protestant Reformation in England and Ireland* (1830). Though a Protestant, Cobbett glorified the “Merry England” of the Catholic Middle Ages as an era of class harmony and social peace, underpinned by the Church’s unifying moral authority and the largesse of the Catholic monasteries, which provided charity and education for the English poor.\(^{44}\) Protestantism, Cobbett argued, destroyed the spiritual and institutional basis of the medieval social order and infused English society with a spirit of self-interested individualism—a corrosive ethos that, over time, had pauperized the laboring classes, provoked conflict between labor and capital, and littered the countryside with “lung-swelling Cotton factories.”\(^{45}\) Cobbett’s glorification of medieval Catholic England resonated with critics of British industrialism, such as Thomas Carlyle, whose *Past and Present* (1843) contrasted the heroic spiritual values of the Middle Ages with the crass materialism of the “mechanical age,” and

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\(^{45}\) Ibid., 41.
Benjamin Disraeli, the future Conservative Prime Minister, whose 1845 novel *Sybil, Or the Two Nations* mourned the decline of *noblesse oblige* among the British upper class.\(^\text{46}\)

Such thinkers, in short, recast the Protestant ethic as a vice, not a virtue, of English society, and as such offered Spalding a powerful rebuttal to triumphalist narratives that linked Protestantism and progress. Citing the works of Cobbett, Carlyle, and Disraeli as proof of the baneful influence of Protestantism on the English poor, Spalding’s essays would contrast the social harmony of the Catholic Middle Ages with the poverty, exploitation, and class conflict of industrial societies. “If there were, then, no railroads, no canals, no steam power, no vast factories,” he wrote in the *U.S. Catholic Magazine* in 1844, “there were also no twenty hour system, no starvation wages, no calculating the minimum that would keep soul in body to enable the poor worker to toil on and increase dividends for those already rolled in wealth.”\(^\text{47}\) Comparing Catholic and Protestant cultures, both past and present, Spalding defined Catholic civilizations as essentially traditional and rural societies that fostered harmonious relations class relations. Bereft of the traditional moral constraints of Catholicism, which sanctioned good works and counseled the kind treatment of the poor, Protestant societies were dominated by the ruthless pursuit of profit and the allure of material goods, such that everything was “in the market” and commodities were sold “at the price of souls.” Under the reign of the Protestant ethic, Spalding cautioned, the industrial worker was “yoked to

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the car of Mammon, and the lash and the goad drive him on until he faint and fall and die.”

Such indictments of modern industrialism no doubt compelled Spalding, the erstwhile defender of American institutions among his Roman brethren, to acknowledge that his own nation had been perverted by the “spirit of the age.” Spalding’s writings suggested that the commercial centers of the urban North, in particular, had been infected with the Protestant vice of mammonism. In his scathing review of *Rome as Seen by a New Yorker*, Spalding cautioned that, were Rome controlled by Yankees, the ancient city’s treasures would likely “be sold for large sums in order that the amount might be invested more profitably in commerce,” artist’s studios would be transformed “into shops for the Wall Street brokers,” and, in general, “mammon would riot over the ruin of all that is most beautiful, magnificent, and precious in the ‘eternal city.’”

Spalding’s willingness to condemn the acquisitiveness of Northern Yankees demonstrated the degree to which sectionalism, especially the Southern critique of free-labor capitalism, shaped his attitudes toward labor and capital. A Kentucky slaveholder who ardently opposed abolition, Spalding never embraced slavery as a “positive good,” but like many Southern intellectuals he drew on British indictments of industrialism to deflect moral criticism of slaveholders. Denouncing antislavery agitation as itself a symptom of Protestant individualism, which upheld individual conscience, not institutional authority, as the guarantor of moral order, Spalding would depict abolitionists as agents of a new industrial system that sought to supplant chattel slavery with wage slavery. “Enfranchise the slaves who are groaning in bondage in your own

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48 Ibid., 552
land,” he wrote of British abolitionists, “and then think of adopting measures for emancipating slaves elsewhere.”

Amid the rising sectional tensions of the 1850s, Spalding remained committed to the view that unfettered capital, not slavery, was the gravest threat to the nation’s moral order. In his magnum opus, “Mammonism and the Poor,” published in 1858 in *Brownson’s Quarterly Review*, Spalding condemned Mammonism as Protestant-borne contagion that had infected the United States and Britain, and threatened to contaminate all of human civilization, unless men and women revived the institutional base of Catholicism. Contrasting the allegedly cheery demeanor of Southern slaves with the miserable condition of English workers, Spalding affirmed the view, popularized by Southern proslavery writers, that wage laborers were “slaves without masters.” “Capital,” Spalding declared “is the worst task-master and the most remorseless tyrant that the poor can ever have.”

Spalding’s writings, of course, ignored the inconvenient truth that Southern slaveholders were themselves merchant capitalists deeply immersed in the materialistic and utilitarian “spirit of the age.” In truth, the export of cotton to the “lung-swelling” textile mills of Great Britain was the principal source of Southern wealth in the antebellum years; chattel slavery and wage slavery, no doubt, existed in economic harmony, enriching slaveholders and manufacturers alike while pulling the American South into the economic orbit of industrial Britain. Nevertheless, Spalding’s essays

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51 [Martin John Spalding], “Mammonism and the Poor,” *Brownson’s Quarterly Review: The New York Series* 3 (January 1858): 165.
appealed to moral sentiments and cultural self-perceptions, not political-economic realities. In fashioning a Catholic apologetics that fused British neo-medievalism with the Southern critique of the Northern social order, Spalding helped to generate a popular image of antebellum Catholicism that resonated, in the words of literary critic John Haddox, with a “reactionary Southern identity” that “sought models of society that made virtues of inequality and hierarchy.”52 In his role as essayist, lecturer, and editor of major Catholic publications, Spalding, in short, was the nation’s leading influence in adapting Catholic apologetics to suit the mind of the master class.53

The perception that Catholic beliefs and traditions reinforced the culture and values of the slaveholding elite helped to foster among Southern conservatives a deep intellectual attraction, if not an outright admiration, for the Church of Rome. Like Spalding himself, many Southern conservatives at midcentury conceived of the controversy over slavery and free labor as part of the broader transatlantic debate over modern industrialism. Like Spalding, they drew from English writers like Cobbett and Carlyle a psychically powerful, if historically flawed, narrative of history that situated the overthrow of Catholic feudalism as the genesis of the modern liberal and industrial order. For instance, the proslavery theorist George Fitzhugh, whose 1854 proslavery treatise Sociology for the South, or the Failure of Free Society scandalized Northern readers with

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52 John Haddox, Fears and Fascinations: Representing Catholicism in the South (New York: Fordham, 2005), 8, 10. Haddox’s analysis, while deeply incisive, suffers from a lack of familiarity with American Catholic history. For instance, Haddox identifies Bishop John England as the archetype of a Southern neo-medieval Catholic identity. In fact, England, his tolerance of slaveholding aside, was a stalwart democratic-republican who wanted to draft a constitution for his congregation and bring democracy into the Church. He was no neo-medievalist. See Patrick Carey, An Immigrant Bishop: John England’s Adaption of Irish Catholicism to American Republicanism (Yonkers: Catholic Historical Society, 1982).

its blistering attack on the Anglo-American liberal tradition, from John Locke’s social-contract theory to Adam Smith’s economic doctrine of *laissez-faire*, indicted the Protestant ethic of individualism as a source of the “purely utilitarian and material” focus of modern life.\(^{54}\) In particular, Fitzhugh pointed to the dissolution of the Catholic feudal regime as the provenance of the modern ethos of competitive capitalism that had engendered poverty, class conflict, and wage slavery in the putatively “free societies” of Europe and the Northern United States. Fitzhugh’s intellectual fascination with Catholic medievalism never translated into a personal attraction to the Church of Rome, but his work helped to fortify the popular image of Catholicism as a bulwark of traditional vales—faith, order, and hierarchy—against the liberal currents of the nineteenth century.

For some Southern thinkers, however, an intellectual fascination with Catholicism did provoke stirrings of religious enthusiasm. For George Frederick Holmes, a professor of ancient languages at the University of Virginia, Catholic social thought provided clear moral bearings in age roiled by scientific innovation and political upheaval. A British subject who immigrated to the American South in 1837 at the age of seventeen, Holmes in his early years was something of a religious skeptic and intellectual contrarian, entranced by the potential of modern science to reshape the world. By middle age, however, Holmes had grown disillusioned with the spirit of modern reformism, particularly as embodied in the abolitionist movement. Like Fitzhugh, he came to regard

the liberal social order of “free society” as “an overwhelming social disaster.” Having married into a wealthy and politically connected Catholic family from Virginia, in the mid-1850s Holmes began to gravitate toward Roman Catholic theology, eventually immersing himself in the writings of Thomas Aquinas, the twelfth-century Italian scholastic who had sought to synthesize Aristotelian philosophy with Christianity. Like Fitzhugh before him, Holmes considered Aristotelian philosophy—with its emphasis on the needs of the polity over the rights of the individual, and its embrace of rigid social hierarchies and systems of servitude—as a system of thought ideally suited to Southern society; he soon declared Aquinas’ masterwork, *The Summa Theologica*, “the groundwork of my future studies.” Holmes never formally entered the Catholic Church, but on the eve of the Civil War, Catholic social thought and theology provided the anchor of his intellectual life.

In many cases, however, deep intellectual admiration for Catholicism could lead to formal conversion to the Roman faith. Abbot Henry Brisbane, a decorated military officer and college professor who owned a slave plantation outside Charleston, South Carolina, converted to Catholicism under the influence of Bishop England, the exalted Charleston churchman whose 1840 treatise on slavery had eased the conscience of Catholic slaveholders and endeared the Church to Southern elites. A critic of the contemporary doctrines of *laissez-faire*, Brisbane believed that the free reign of capital, or “mammonism,” degraded labor by subjecting it to the whims of the marketplace and corrupted the state by subordinating the will of the people to the economic prerogatives of mercantile elites. In 1848 Brisbane published a utopian novel, *Ralphton: or the Young*

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Carolinian of 1776, about a revolutionary-era American Jesuit seeking to found a utopian colony where relations between labor and capital would be subject, not to international fluctuations in supply and demand, but to the dictates of Christian conscience in line with “the common good.” But in its search for alternative forms of political economy that could allay the “concentrating power of commercial capital,” the novel sanctified Catholic paternalism as the basis for “the proper organization of industrial economy.”

But no doubt the most heralded Catholic convert of the antebellum South was Levi Silliman Ives, a former Episcopal Bishop of North Carolina whose conversion to Rome provoked widespread controversy at midcentury. Like many Anglo-American converts of the era, Ives had embraced Roman Catholicism after immersing himself in the theology of the Oxford Movement, a midcentury Anglican reform movement that sought to revive the traditions, customs, and theology of the early Christian Church. (Unsurprisingly, the Oxford’s Movement’s emphasis on ecclesiastical authority, tradition, and hierarchy resonated with a Southern culture increasingly hostile to modern notions of progress and equality.) But like many converts in the South, Ives also embraced the highly stylized version of reactionary Catholic paternalism propounded by Southern Catholics like Spalding, a close personal friend. Elected to the episcopate of Raleigh, North Carolina, in 1831, Ives grew increasingly dispirited with the materialism and

57 Abbot Hall Brisbane, Ralphston, Or, The Young Carolinian of 1776: A Romance on the Philosophy of Politics (Charleston: Abbot Hall Brisbane, 1848), pp. 60. Dense in style and often incoherent in plot, the novel consists primarily of lengthy dialogues between Father Duane and various interlocutors, as he attempts to win over converts to his idiosyncratic brand of Christian socialism. Though the novel concludes with the successful foundation of Father Duane’s utopian colony, the novel provides scant detail as to the social structure and institutional operation of the settlement itself, Father Duane’s benevolent oversight notwithstanding.

individualism that had become a “national contagion,” and feared that the moral purity of rural life would “be destroyed” by the commercial spirit of the age. A stern defender of Southern traditions who denounced industrial wage labor as worse than slavery, Ives gravitated toward what he called Roman Catholicism’s “peculiar fellowship with ‘the poor’”—embodied in the Church’s emphasis on charity, class harmony, and the theological sanctioning of good works—as a superior alternative to the Protestant ethic of self-help. Drawn to the allure of Catholic monasticism, and even going so far as to establish a monastic Order of the Holy Cross within the Episcopal Church, Ives in the late 1840s gradually drifted toward the Catholic Church, ultimately embracing Roman doctrines on the adoration saints, the “real presence” in the Eucharist, and the efficacy of the sacraments. After years of wrangling with Episcopal leaders alarmed by his “Roman” tendencies, Ives finally announced his conversion to Rome in 1852, becoming the first Episcopal Bishop in the United States to enter the Catholic Church.

Having resigned his episcopal chair in North Carolina, Ives resettled in New York, where he sought to carry out his spiritual mission of combating “mammonism” and offering relief to the urban poor. As a lecturer in the 1850s, Ives echoed the sentiments of his close friend, Martin John Spalding, in recounting how the Protestant ethic had overturned the harmonious social order of the Catholic Middle Ages and brought “hopeless degradation” and “wasting misery” to the working class. Quickly gaining the affections of the Irish poor, who embraced both his paternalist ethics and disdain for Yankee philanthropy, Ives would eventually serve as the founder and president of the

59 O’Grady, Levi Silliman Ives, 8.
60 L. Silliman Ives, The Trials of a Mind in its Progress to Catholicism (London: Thomas Richardson and Son, 1854), 10, 30-31. For an overview of Ives’ views on capitalism, poverty, and religion, see L. Silliman Ives, State and Church Charities Compared; With Special Reference to the System of New York State Charities (New York: Edward Dunigan and Brother, 1857).
Nonetheless, Ives’ conversion to Rome came at a great personal cost. Married with children, Ives was ineligible to enter the Catholic priesthood, his exalted pedigree as an Episcopal Bishop notwithstanding. Denied a stable financial position within the Church, Ives had to make ends meet as a respected but penniless Catholic laymen, eking out an existence as a lecturer and professor at Catholic colleges while relying on the largesse of his Catholic friends. Ives’ personal and financial tribulations never seemed to have prompted thoughts of leaving the Church, but certainly aroused concern among leading Catholic churchmen for the “poor condition of Bishop Ives.”

Overall, the Catholic Church’s vibrant presence in the upper South and lower Mississippi Valley ensured that Catholic conversion in many parts of the slaveholding South was less wrenching, socially and psychologically, than it was in the North. Of course, given the deeply rooted anti-Catholic prejudice of evangelical Protestants, even in Catholic strongholds like Baltimore converts to Rome could expect some degree of social ostracism and persecution. But as Elizabeth Seton discovered, in cities like Baltimore, Washington, D.C., and New Orleans there was at least a long-standing native-born Catholic elite, such that conversion to Rome did not necessitate an unqualified withdrawal from fashionable society. The Church’s toleration of slavery, moreover, buoyed its reputation among the Southern upper class, particularly at a time when many of the leading Protestant denominations of the country had splintered into proslavery and antislavery factions. And the vast network of Catholic convent schools and academies below the Mason-Dixon line, which educated thousands of young women and men from

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leading Southern families, helped to produce widespread conversions and promote general familiarity with Roman Catholic traditions. Jefferson Davis himself contemplated conversion during his time at a Catholic academy in Kentucky, but was ultimately dissuaded by a priest from doing so. However, Davis’ older sister, Amanda Jane Davis, did convert, remaining a practicing Catholic until her death in 1881.

Indeed, for many converts in the South, the embrace of Rome hardly posed the threat to social advancement that it did for Northerners of similar social rank. For instance, George Henry Miles, the Catholic convert who authored “God Save the South,” the informal anthem of the Southern Confederacy, found his faith less an obstacle than a pathway to professional success in literary Baltimore. Born into a socially prominent Maryland family, Miles enrolled at Mount St. Mary’s College in 1836 at the age of 12. Taking as his mentor the Rev. John McCaffrey, a fiery Carolinian notorious both for his fervent defense of the South and his deep distrust of the liberal tendencies of the nineteenth century, Miles converted to Catholicism while a student. After graduation, he embarked on a career in law, but soon began to pursue more literary pursuits. In the early 1850s he launched his literary career by writing stories for Catholic publications like Baltimore’s Metropolitan Magazine, as well as a series of novels, including The Governess and Loretto; or the Choice, that explored various pathways to Catholic conversion. Having established a literary reputation in Catholic Baltimore, Miles began to compose more secular literary fare, and by the end of the decade had achieved mainstream success with a series of successful stages plays for high-end theaters in Baltimore, New York, and Boston. A fixture in Baltimore literary and social circles, Miles in 1859 accepted a position as Professor of English at his alma mater, where he

62 Diary of Rev. Richard Burtsell, AANY, Notebook 1, 95.
remained during the Civil War. In 1861 Miles, a fervent supporter of the South, composed the 40-line poem that would become the de facto anthem of the Confederacy.

No doubt, the Catholic Church’s status as a defender of hierarchy, tradition, and moral order gave it a powerful cachet among Southern upper class, Miles included. Like many Southerners of his generation, Miles seemed to find comfort, not distress, in the Church’s stalwart opposition to modern liberalism and “the rights of man.” In 1850 Miles delivered a blistering speech at Mount St. Mary’s commencement that attributed “all the evils of modern society” to the contemporary disregard for “authority” and “tradition.” Such sentiments reflected not only the long-standing influence of his mentor John McCaffrey, the outspoken Southern conservative, but the also ease with which ultramontane Catholicism could be adapted to the mind of the master class.

From Richmond to Rome: Southern Catholicism and Confederate Diplomacy

By midcentury many leading American Catholics held that Catholicism melded more easily with the hierarchical and illiberal culture of the slaveholding South than with the ultra-democratic and commercial values of the Yankee North. This notion of the South as a kind of “quasi-Catholic society,” flawed and superficial as it was, would soon spread beyond American shores and exert a powerful hold over the Catholic elite of Europe. As the United States descended into Civil War, many of the Catholic monarchists, nobles, and reactionaries of the Old World came to regard the struggle between an abolitionist North and slaveholding South as a mirror image of the longstanding struggle between liberal democracy and reactionary monarchism that had roiled Catholic Europe since 1789. The Confederacy, on this view, was a traditional,
aristocratic society besieged by the modern forces of democracy and industrialism embodied in the “Yankee Leviathan” of the North. Eager to witness the dissolution of the American Republic, the Catholic elite of France, Spain, Germany, Austria and Italy, including many of the leading representatives of the Holy See itself, would prove among the most stalwart allies of the Confederacy.

Of course, the defenders of the European ancien regime had long viewed the United States with suspicion, if not outright contempt. The heretical doctrines of the French Revolution—the abolition of aristocratic prerogatives in favor of civic equality, the winnowing of ecclesiastical power and privilege, the embrace of religious toleration and pluralism, and the overthrow of monarchy in favor of representative government—had no doubt first found expression among the American revolutionaries of 1776. After the fall of the Napoleonic order in 1815 and the resurgence of conservative rule across Europe, European radicals and revolutionists looked to the United States as both of model of government and a source of personal hope. Carl Schurz, the German-born revolutionary who fled to New York in 1852, had as a young man revered “the great Republic” of the United States as the “conscious embodiment of the highest aims of the modern age.” Lajos Kossuth, the Hungarian liberal nationalist and harsh critic of papal power, heralded the United States as the “asylum of the oppressed of all nations” upon arriving on American shores in 1851. The ruling classes of Europe, in turn, naturally abhorred the American experiment in democracy. “The Royalists everywhere detest and

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65 Kossuth quoted in William Lloyd Garrison’s introduction to Giuseppe Mazzini, Joseph Mazzini: His Life, Writings, and Political Principles (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1872), vii. Kossuth was one of the leading exponents of liberal nationalism in Europe and embarked on a fundraising tour through the United States in 1851 to great acclaim from American liberals.
despise us as Republicans,” John Quincy Adams, serving on a diplomatic mission to Europe, wrote to his father in 1816. “Emperors, kings, princes, priests, all the privileged orders, all the establishments, all the votaries of legitimacy eye us with the most rancorous hatred.” The failed uprisings of 1848, which resulted in mass exodus of European democrats and revolutionaries to American shores, only affirmed the common perception of the United States as the ultra-democratic haven of European radicals, anarchists, and revolutionaries.

It was not politics alone, however, that earned the United States such scorn among the Catholic ruling classes of Europe. Among Catholic conservatives, the highly individualistic and materialistic civilization of the United States, like that of Great Britain, represented a stark break from the traditional values of rural societies, where ancient custom, the assuaging power of the Church, and the residual traditions of feudal rule supposedly harmonized the relations between peasant and landholder. Inverting the Anglo-American narrative that linked Protestantism with material progress, European Catholic elites at midcentury typically denounced industrial capitalism—a system scorned for its vulgar materialism, unrestrained individualism, and valorization of economic self-interest—as the corrosive legacy of Anglo-Saxon Protestantism. (The basic tenets of Anglo-American political economy, embodied in the writings of Adam Smith, were on this view but the secularized orthodoxies of Protestant individualism.) Contempt for the “all-absorbing greediness for money” that supposedly defined Anglo-American civilization was especially potent in Rome. During a private meeting with Martin John Spalding at the Vatican, Pius IX identified the United States as the nation in

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the world “most devoted to the worship of Mammon.” Torn between “his pride as an
American citizen” and his personal sympathy with the pontiff’s remark, Spalding could
only counter that Protestant England, the world’s leading industrial power and the
scourge of Rome, “should be placed first, and our country second, on the list of
Mammon-worshippers.”

Only gradually did European archconservatives come to embrace the slaveholding
Southern Cavalier as a kind of grand exception to the American archetype. For much of
the nineteenth century Europeans had only a dim understanding of American political
affairs and scant familiarity with the country’s varied regional cultures. “Before the war,”
an American diplomat to Europe recalled, “the differences of character, habits, and
manners between the Northerner and Southerner, the Eastern and the Western man, were
understood by few persons abroad. The whole American population was classed under
the general title of ‘Yankee,’ and supposed to have the same peculiarities,” including
crassness of speech, a knee-jerk egalitarianism, and a general insensitivity to custom and
tradition.

The sharpening of the sectional divide over slavery and abolition, however,
opened European eyes to the political and cultural divisions that existed within the United
States. In particular, the mutual admiration of American abolitionists and European
democratic radicals helped to convince conservatives on both sides of the Atlantic that

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67 [Martin John Spalding], “Mammonism and the Poor,” 144.
(Topeka: University Press of Kansas, 2005). DeLeon was one of the Confederacy’s leading diplomatic
agents in Europe. After the Civil War he published a series of articles in American newspapers that came to
be known as his “secret history.” These articles were finally collected and published in 2005. See also
Deleon’s much more curated account of Confederate diplomacy in Edwin DeLeon, Thirty Years of My Life
on Three Continents, 2 Volumes (London: Ward and Downey, 1890).
abolitionism “was but the domestic import of European revolutionism.” Abolitionist leaders like William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips, and Frederick Douglas widely proclaimed the antislavery causes as part of a broader transatlantic movement in favor of democracy, human rights, and national self-determination. (“We cherished the same hostility to every form of tyranny,” Garrison remarked of Giuseppe Mazzini, a leading advocate of Italian nationalism.) European radicals, in turn, widely embraced the abolitionist cause, at times with a zeal that exceeded that of their American counterparts; Giuseppe Garibaldi, the Italian revolutionary and longtime adversary of Pius IX, famously declined an offer to command the Union army on the grounds that Lincoln had yet to embrace immediate emancipation. Such affinity between European liberals and American abolitionists lent credence to the idea, encouraged by Southerners themselves, that American slaveholders “as a class corresponded most nearly to the aristocracy in European countries,” especially with respect to their rigid conservatism and contempt for


revolutionary theories. Projecting European ideological divisions onto the American political landscape, a European conservative like Prince Leopold I of Belgium could thus uphold the Confederacy as a champion of the “monarchical-aristocratic principle” against a rabidly republican North.\textsuperscript{72}

European Catholic support for the Confederacy, in other words, was rooted much less in ideological support for slavery than in hostility to the liberal-democratic ideas that underwrote the Union cause. Among the rulers of the Continent, the war was, in the words of one American diplomat, “a struggle between the ‘fierce democacie’ and a privileged class who denied the great democratic dogma dear to Mazzini, Garibaldi, and all foreign revolutionists—that all men should be free and equal.”\textsuperscript{73} Lincoln himself defined the Civil War as a referendum on democracy—a struggle undertaken so that “government by the people, of the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth”—and abolitionists like Wendell Phillips described the conflict as a “social revolution” aimed at destroying the slaveholding “Oligarchy” of the South.\textsuperscript{74} As European radicals and revolutionaries, including a young German-born socialist named Karl Marx, rallied to the Union cause, a wide array of Catholic aristocrats, monarchists, and ultramontanes embraced the Confederacy in kind.\textsuperscript{75} Among the jostling political factions of Europe, in short, the American Civil War crystallized the broader ideological struggle between liberalism and conservatism, modernity and tradition, at least as


\textsuperscript{75} Karl Marx famously proclaimed the Union a “Bourgeois republic” that would destroy the slave-based quasi-feudal Confederacy and move history closer to a proletarian revolution. On Marx and the Civil War, see Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, \textit{The Civil War in the United States}, ed. Andrew Zimmerman (London: International Publishers, 2016).
refracted through the varying prisms of European domestic politics.\textsuperscript{76} Given that that Catholic Church under Pius had positioned itself as a bulwark of tradition and moral order against the liberal “spirit of the age,” it should come as little surprise that ultramontane Catholics would thus welcome the defeat of the Union and the dissolution of the “Great Republic.”

Moreover, the view of the Confederacy as a traditional, aristocratic society besieged by a revolutionary and ultra-democratic North was itself a key article of Confederate propaganda during the Civil War. Eager to enlist foreign allies and shape public opinion overseas, the Confederacy between 1862 and 1864 funded an extensive agitprop campaign in Europe aimed at reinforcing the perception of the American South as a conservative, traditional society at war with the radical and materialistic “Yankees” and “Puritans” of the industrial North. Particularly in France, Ireland, Spain, and Italy, a central pillar of this propaganda campaign was the argument that the aristocratic South was, in terms of culture, religion, politics, and national origins, a kind of colonial outpost of the Catholic Old World. To help disseminate this message, the Confederate government enlisted a number of American Catholic churchmen, including Rev. John Bannon of St. Louis and Bishop Patrick Lynch of Charleston, to travel to Europe as diplomatic agents.\textsuperscript{77} But this propaganda campaign also benefited from the more informal support of a wide array of pro-Confederate American Catholic clergymen, including Martin John Spalding, the intellectual luminary of the American hierarchy, who sought to

leverage their Old World influence into stronger diplomatic ties between Richmond and Rome.

The irony of this propaganda campaign was that, at least for the first two years of the Civil War, the Confederacy had sought to portray itself as the loyal ally of Great Britain, the world’s foremost Protestant power and longtime adversary of Catholic Rome. From the very beginnings of the Civil War, Confederate leaders in Richmond recognized that political independence from the Union rested in part on securing formal recognition from the international community of nations. Given the deep economic ties between Southern cotton-planters and English textile-manufacturers, as well as the longstanding political rivalry between Washington and London, an Anglo-Confederate alliance seemed a genuine possibility. Hoping to secure formal recognition, Confederate leaders, diplomats, and foreign agents between 1860 and 1862 leaned heavily on the sympathies of the British ruling class, emphasizing the centrality of Southern cotton to the British economy and portraying Confederate secession as a movement in harmony with liberal principles of nationalism and self-determination. (The attempt to identify the Confederacy with European liberal nationalism was particularly ironic, given later attempts to enlist the sympathies of Catholic conservatives.) While such efforts helped to arouse British sympathy for the Confederacy, at least among the “higher class” of England, the attempt to secure formal recognition proved futile. Indeed, the British ruling class, though eager to assist in the dissolution of the American republic, feared that offering diplomatic recognition to the Confederacy would no doubt provoke war with the

78 The best overview of Confederate diplomacy is Doyle, *The Cause of all Nations*, 50-84.
80 Deleon, *Secret History of Confederate Diplomacy Abroad*. 
Union. And given the antislavery sentiments of the British people, British politicians of all stripes hesitated to support an insurgent nation that, in the words of its own Vice President, took African slavery as its “cornerstone.”

By late 1862 Confederate officials had grown frustrated with British inaction. As a result, Richmond decided to pivot away from a potential Anglo-Confederate alliance and pursue what David Doyle has termed “the Latin strategy”—a foreign policy aimed at establishing alliances with the Catholic reactionaries of Europe, especially the “Latin Catholic regimes” of France, Spain, and Italy. Abandoning previous efforts to portray Confederacy as a modern nation acting in accord with liberal-democratic principles, Confederate agents would now portray the American South as a bulwark of Latin Christendom, willing and able to defend Catholic Europe from the aggressive expansion of an Anglo-Protestant power.

There was no doubt clear logic to this diplomatic pivot. Among the nations of Europe the Kingdom of Spain seemed perhaps the most likely ally of the Confederacy. The only European nation not yet to abolish slavery in its New World colonies, Spain viewed Anglo-American abolitionism a grave threat to its slaveholding empire in Cuba and Puerto Rico, where many of Spain’s political and economic elites maintained extensive land holdings. The Catholic conservatives of Spain, long hostile to the American experiment in democracy, naturally sided with the Confederacy, as did many members of the Spanish ruling class, including Queen Isabella II. Even Spanish

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82 Doyle, The Cause of all Nations, 185-209.
moderates, less enthused by the ideological ramifications of the American Civil War, saw the potential division of the Union as an opportunity for Spain to revive its flagging empire in the Caribbean; in 1861, amid the outbreak of war between Union and Confederacy, Spain proceeded to reoccupy its former colony of Santo Domingo. Spain and the Confederacy, at least in the eyes of many Southerners, seemed “natural allies.”

At the center of the “Latin strategy,” however, was the Empire of France, the preeminent power of the Continent. Though the liberals and republicans of Paris strongly supported the Union, the French upper classes, the Church hierarchy, and the innermost members of the Imperial Court typically sympathized with the Confederacy. As elsewhere in Europe, French conservatives loathed the American Republic for its “unbridled democracy” and de jure secularism. But French conservatives also acknowledged a deep kinship with the Confederate States on account of race, religion, and history; as one French newspaper put it, the Southern states were “for the most part out former possessions, keeping our customs, our ideas, our language and the religion of the common patrie.” The visible social presence in France of the Louisiana Creole class, known for their Confederate sympathies and conspicuous displays of wealth,

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helped lend credence to this sentiment, even in republican bastions like Paris. Finally, the notion that the war pitted Anglo-Saxon liberalism against Latin Catholic conservatism influenced even the highest reaches of the Imperial Court. The Empress Eugenie, a Spanish national and ultramontane Catholic, was among the most spirited defenders of the Confederacy, convinced that the Civil War was a sectarian struggle of “religion and race” fought against an ascendant Anglo-Saxon power.

But within France no opinion mattered more than that of the Emperor himself, Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte. A ruthless pragmatist forced to reckon with the wild vagaries of French sectarian politics, the Emperor sympathized with the Confederacy, but largely as a matter of political expediency: he believed that an alliance with the Confederacy would enable France to pursue a bold strategy of imperial expansion in North America. This so-called “Grand Design” took as its focus the Republic of Mexico, which since 1858 had been convulsed by sectarian strife between the Conservative Party, backed by the military and the Catholic Church, and the anticlerical Liberal Party of Benito Juarez, the incumbent president. With the support of Mexican conservatives, Napoleon planned to invade Mexico, expel the ruling Liberal Party, and install an European Catholic monarch who would rule Mexico in accord with Church prerogatives and French political interests. (Napoleon would ultimately select the Austrian Archduke Ferdinand Maximilian, a Habsburg and Roman Catholic, as his candidate of choice.)

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The major obstacle to this plan was of course the anticipated backlash from Washington, D.C., which vehemently opposed European intervention in the western hemisphere. The American Civil War, however, altered the geopolitical calculus by introducing in the form of the Confederacy a regional power that could balance the military influence of Washington. By aligning with the Confederacy, which could promise non-intervention in Mexico in exchange for military aid and diplomatic recognition, France could circumvent US military power and forge a Latin-Catholic empire in the Atlantic basin.89

Between 1862 and 1864, in short, one of the central aims of Confederate propaganda was to construct an image of the American South as a traditional, aristocratic civilization sympathetic to the culture, religion, and political prerogatives of Catholic Europe. Aimed at securing the sympathies of the European Catholic powers, especially France and Spain, this stylization of Southern society drew on traditional stereotypes of the Southern Cavalier, as well as popular conceptions (embraced by many American Catholics themselves) of the South as a kind of quasi-Catholic society. According to this reading of history, the “Yankee” North was a liberal, ultra-democratic society deeply admired by the secular liberals and revolutionaries of modern Europe. Founded by the anti-Catholic Puritans of England, it was moreover a materialistic and utilitarian civilization controlled by ruthless industrial capitalists and a political class that loathed and persecuted Catholics. The South, by comparison, was a traditional, rural society inimical to the revolutionary schemes of modern liberals. Founded in part by French and

vs. Maximiliano: Mexico’s Experiment with Democracy” in Doyle, ed., American Civil Wars; M.M. McAllen, Maximilian and Carlota: Europe’s Last Empire in Mexico (Trinity: Trinity University Press, 2014).

89 On the Confederacy’s support for a Franco-Confederate alliance built around the “Grand Design” in Mexico, see James Mason to Judah Benjamin, September 4, 1863, in Richardson, ed., A Compilation, 555-556.
Spanish Catholics, it retained many of the cultural values of the Latin world, and had helped to dispel the Know Nothing movement. As one Confederate claimed, among the Southern elite Catholicism “was fashionable, and native Protestants are proud of the priests acquaintance.” While Protestants constituted a clear majority, the South could “reckon old Catholic families among the wealthiest and foremost of its citizens,” and in general the Church occupied a position of great power and influence in Southern society.

It hardly needs to be said, of course, that this narrative was a useful fiction. Though the South was far less urban and industrial than the North, it was no less immersed in transatlantic networks of finance, debt, and commercial exchange; cotton, the lifeblood of the South, was the premium commodity of the age and the raw material at the heart of British industrialism.\(^90\) Considering the influence of English political ideas on Southern ideals of liberty and progress, many Southerners would have been aghast at the depiction of the South as a Latin-Catholic enclave hostile to Anglo-Saxon values.\(^91\)

The South, moreover, was hardly immune to outbreaks of anti-Catholic prejudice, as evidenced by anti-Catholic riots in Louisville, Baltimore, and New Orleans. And the Catholic population of the Union Army, swelled by the mass enlistment of Irish and German Catholics, dwarfed that of the Confederacy.

Nonetheless, there was at least a glimmer of truth in this narrative, particularly in its portrayal of the contrasting attitudes toward Catholicism in the North and South. By

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virtue of their deep-seated opposition to reformist ideas that could challenge the rigid hierarchy of master and slave, white Southerners at midcentury typically were more conservative than their Northern counterparts, especially in their attitudes toward revolutionary nationalism. (European liberals and revolutionaries, often feted in the North, received a far less enthusiastic reception in the South.) Catholics, to be sure, were more numerous in the North, but organized Catholicism had much deeper roots in the South, particularly with respect to education. Moreover, many of the old-line Catholics of the South, typically those of French and English extraction, occupied positions of high social rank, whereas the immigrant Catholics of the North were of a much humbler social stripe. The claim that Catholicism was “fashionable” in the South, in this respect, was not without merit. Many non-Catholics in premier positions in the Confederacy, for instance, had intimate connections to the Catholic Church through marriage, family or education. Jefferson Davis had received a Catholic education in Kentucky and had a sister who was a devout convert. Henry Hotze, one of the Confederacy’s leading propagandists and the architect of the Latin strategy, had received a Jesuit education in Europe. And Judah Benjamin, the Confederate Secretary of State, and John Slidell, the Confederate diplomat to France, had both married into wealthy Louisiana Creole families. By comparison, while the Union army could boast a large number of Irish-Catholic recruits, and even a handful of Irish-Catholic generals, Irish Catholicism in the North was anything but “fashionable.”

93 For instance, Lajos Kossuth, the Hungarian liberal nationalist and critic of papal power, arrived in New York in 1851 to a sterling reception, described by the New York Times as “the most magnificent and enthusiastic” welcome “ever extended to any man, in any part of the world.” The enthusiasm for Kossuth was more modest in the South. See “The Welcome to Kossuth…,” New York Times, December 8, 1851.
The aim of propaganda, however, is of course not to provide an accurate account of reality but to influence opinion in pursuit of a political goal. And while “the Latin strategy” may have strengthened pro-Confederate sympathy abroad, it failed to elicit from the Catholic nations of Europe even formal recognition of the Confederacy, let alone promises of foreign intervention. As a weakened power, Spain would not act without the support of France or Britain. Napoleon, though sympathetic to the Confederate cause, believed he could carry out his “Grand Design” on Mexico without agreeing to pledge formal recognition to the Confederacy as a quid pro quo. Mindful of the Confederates’ weak bargaining position, Napoleon would invade Mexico and install a puppet government under Ferdinand Maximilian, while offering virtually nothing in return for the Confederacy’s policy of non-interference. Like most foreign leaders, Napoleon feared that formal recognition of Confederacy could provoke war with the United States, and without formal cooperation from the other great European powers, especially Great Britain, he balked at the prospect of openly supporting the Confederacy. Common disdain for slavery also hampered Confederate diplomacy with Europe, as did persistent doubts about whether the Confederates could win the Civil War, even with foreign aid. Few European dignitaries, no doubt, dared to risk war to back a losing cause.

Desperate to prod the Catholic powers of Europe into action, Confederate diplomats did have a final recourse: to seek recognition from the spiritual leader of Catholic Europe himself, Pope Pius IX. Pius’s disdain for democracy, liberalism, and modern capitalism—all of which found their quintessential expression in the United

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States—was no secret. In 1849 Italian revolutionaries, proclaiming the rights of man and the iniquities of papal power, had stripped Pius of his temporal rule over the Papal States, expelled him from Rome, and inaugurated a Roman Republic. (Pius was restored to power by the intervention of French troops a few months later, but his reign as a secular ruler would end abruptly in 1870 with the invasion of Rome by liberal nationalists and the declaration of a unified Italy.)95 As his temporal power gradually diminished amid the rise of liberal nationalism in Italy, the Pope had grown ever more hostile to the modern world, ultimately declaring himself opposed to “liberalism, progress, and modern civilization.”96 Pius had made few public remarks about the American Civil War, but the L’Osservatore Ramono, the news organ of the Vatican, had consistently disparaged the Union and the party of Lincoln.97 Privately, Pius had informed the British minister that “all his sympathies were with the Southern Confederacy,” by virtue of the Church’s respected position within the South.98

The American Catholics of Rome, many of whom strongly sympathized with the Confederacy, no doubt helped to foster such pro-Southern attitudes within the Vatican. The traditional influence of “Baltimore Catholics” within formal ecclesiastical channels ensured that Vatican officials received a decidedly pro-Confederate perspective from American churchmen. For instance, Father William McCloskey, the rector of the newly established American College in Rome, was notorious among American expatriates for

98 Pius reportedly believed that there were “far more conversions to Catholicism in the South than in the North.” Heisser, Patrick N. Lynch, 112.
his “secession sympathies.” Though born to Irish-American parents in Brooklyn in 1823, McCloskey had studied, trained, and ministered in Maryland since 1835, and under the influence of the Baltimore Catholic elite he had gradually embraced the prejudices of the Maryland planter class. As one of the few American clerics occupying a position of authority in Rome, McCloskey had the power to shape local opinion in favor of the Confederacy, and his unwavering support for the South led the Northern students at the college to despise him. As one pupil later claimed, McCloskey forbade Northern students “to speak on politics,” invited Confederate agents to address the student body, and “abolished the July 4th holiday” after the war out of respect for Southern sensibilities. Such was the influence of perhaps the leading American churchman in Rome.

Moreover, many of the leading American alumni of the Roman seminary, such as Bishop John Lynch and Bishop Martin Spalding, were Southern partisans who leveraged their influence in Rome to strengthen pro-Confederate sentiment. Though Spalding had no formal role in Confederate diplomacy, his controversial “dissertation” on the Civil War, composed in Italian and submitted to Vatican officials in the spring of 1863, reaffirmed the central premises of the “Latin Strategy” and strengthened pro-confederate sympathies in Rome. (The dissertation was even published anonymously in the Vatican’s informal news organ, the Osservatore Romano, much to the distress of U.S.

100 Diary of Rev. Richard Burtsell, AANY, Notebook 1, 67.
101 David Heisser notes that “more letters and written reports were reaching Rome from Southern bishops and alumni of the Urban College” than from their Northern counterparts. Heisser, Patrick N. Lynch, 112.
officials in Washington.) Bishop Lynch, in contrast, took up a formal position as a
Confederate envoy, using his influence in Rome to push for formal recognition of the
Confederacy. In Europe he would seek to counter the pro-Union influence of Bishop
John Hughes of New York, a fervid anti-abolitionist who had nonetheless accepted a
formal appointment from President Lincoln to represent the Union cause in Europe.

Eager to exploit Rome’s growing sympathy for their cause, Richmond decided to
make a direct appeal to the pontiff. In September 1863 Jefferson Davis drafted a formal
letter to the Pope, expressing the Confederates’ desire for peace and lamenting their “dire
oppression” at the hands of the Union. On November 18th the letter was hand
delivered to the pontiff by Dudley Mann, a Confederate agent in Rome. Moved by
Davis’ appeal, Pius drafted a formal reply, addressed to the “Illustrious and Hon.

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J.C. Hooker to Richard Blatchford, November 21, 1863, in Stock, ed., United States Ministers to the Papal
States: Instructions and Dispatches, 300-302. Hooker warned Washington that “a Kentucky priest has been
writing a series of articles in the Osservatore Romano saying that the party in ascendance in the U.S. is the
one that favors Garibaldi, Kossuth, [and] the radicals all over the world.”

104 On Lynch’s mission, see Jefferson Davis to Judah Benjamin, April 4, 1864, in Official Records, 172-
173. David Heisser and Stephen White, Patrick Lynch, esp. 94-126. After the war Lynch remained in
Rome, fearful that he would be prosecuted for treason if he returned to the U.S. He appealed to John
McCloskey, Archbishop of New York, to intercede on his behalf with Secretary of State William Seward.
Lynch was ultimately re-admitted to the United States. Bishop John Lynch to Archbishop John McCloskey,

105 On Hughes’ role in Union diplomacy, see Abraham Lincoln to Archbishop John Hughes, AANY,
Hughes papers; Alexander W. Randall to William H. Seward, June 11, 1862 in Stock, ed., Ministers to the
Papal States: Instructions and Despatches, 247; “Archbishop Hughes on the War…,” New York Times,
September 4, 1861; “Thurlow Weed and Archbishop Hughes Going to Europe,” New York Times,
November 4, 1861.

106 Jefferson Davis to Pius IX, September 23, 1863, in James Richardson, ed., A Compilation, 571-572. Pius
in October of 1862 had written letters to John Hughes, the Archbishop of New York, and Jean-Marie Odin,
Archbishop of New Orleans, calling for a cessation of hostilities between North and South. Confederate
leaders took this as a sign that Pius might be interested in brokering a peaceful resolution to the conflict that
would result in Confederate independence. See Pius IX to Archbishop John Hughes, October 18, 1862, in
Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion, Series II, Volume 3,
Proclamations, Appointments, etc. of President Davis; State Department Correspondence with Diplomatic

107 Mann claimed that “[e]very sentence of the letter” from Jefferson Davis, which was read aloud to Pius
and translated into English, “appeared to sensibly affect” the Pontiff. “At the conclusion of each he would
lay his hand down upon the desk and bow his head approvingly.” A. Dudley Mann to Judah Benjamin,
November 14, 1863, Richardson, ed., A Compilation, 591-592.
Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederate States of America,” that thanked Davis for his letter and expressed hope that “peace and tranquility” would return to the United States.\(^{108}\) Although the Confederate Secretary of State Judah Benjamin downplayed the letter’s significance, noting that it hardly conferred “the regular establishment of diplomatic relations,” Confederate agents nonetheless seized on the letter as proof of the Pope’s Confederate sympathies.\(^{109}\) On December 20th the missive appeared verbatim in a Paris newspaper, and by mid-January American journals had published the correspondence, giving rise to accusations of diplomatic meddling by the Holy See and rumors that the Pope had “recognized” the Southern Confederacy.\(^{110}\)

Diplomats on both sides of the conflict would wrestle with the political implications of Pius’ letter.\(^{111}\) But one thing was clear: his personal sympathies aside, Pius had chosen to withhold formal recognition of the Confederacy. Like many Old World potentates, Pius was hesitant to forge an alliance with a pro-slavery power and deeply skeptical of the Confederates’ ability to fight Union forces to a standstill. Pius


\(^{109}\) Judah Benjamin to A. Dudley Mann, February 1, 1864, in Richardson, ed., *A Compilation*, 622. Mann had preemptively declared the Pope’s letter proof that the Confederates had been “virtually if not practically recognized here.” See A. Dudley Mann to Judah Benjamin, November 21, 1863, in Richardson, ed., *A Compilation*, 600.


\(^{111}\) William Seward to Rufus King, February 9, 1864, in Stock, ed., *Instructions and Despatches*, 285. Pius’ ambiguous response to Confederate overtures was a clever gambit. By acknowledging Davis as the “President of the Confederate States of America,” Pius’ letter lent moral support to the Confederate cause, but Pius himself could claim publicly that the honorific was nothing more than a polite formality devoid of any diplomatic significance. Pius and his advisers would indeed make the latter argument in their conversations with Union diplomats. See Rufus King to William Seward, March 19, 1864, in Stock, ed., *Instructions and Despatches*, 287.
may have resented American democracy and the party of Lincoln, but he wisely resisted a diplomatic ploy that would have irreparably damaged U.S.-Vatican relations and further imperiled the Holy See’s influence with pro-Union U.S. Catholics. The courtship between the Confederacy and the Holy See, to be sure, had already rattled diplomatic relations between Washington and Rome. In 1868 the Republican-controlled Congress voted to defund the American embassy in Rome, with speakers on the Congress floor alleging that the Pope had “recognized” the Confederacy.\textsuperscript{112} The US would not restore full diplomatic relations with the Vatican for more than a century.

In the aftermath of the Civil War, pro-Union Catholics would struggle to quash rumors of a longstanding alliance between Catholics and Confederates. In addition to reports of papal diplomatic intrigue and the brutal violence of the Draft Riots, loyal Catholics had to contend with the sensational case of John Surratt, a conspirator in the Lincoln assassination who evaded capture from federal authorities by fleeing to Rome and serving in the papal army.\textsuperscript{113} Like his mother Mary, who was hanged for her participation in the assassination, John Surratt was a Maryland Catholic with strong Southern sympathies and close ties to the Baltimore clergy. After Lincoln’s murder, Surratt took refuge with two French Canadian priests in Montreal, before boarding a steamer to England, where he hid at a Catholic parish in Liverpool. Surratt next fled to Italy, where he received accommodations at the Catholic English College of Rome, before enlisting in the papal army in December 1866.\textsuperscript{114} Surratt was eventually captured


\textsuperscript{113} A clearly partisan account can be found in Thomas Harris, Rome’s Responsibility for the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln (Pittsburgh: Williams Publishing Company, 1897). See also Oliver Murray, The Black Pope: Or, the Jesuits Conspiracy Against American Institutions (New York: Patriot Company, 1892).

\textsuperscript{114} Rufus King to William H. Seward, April 23, 1866, in Stock, ed., Instructions and Despatches, 359-360; Life and Extraordinary Adventures of John H. Surratt (Philadelphia: Barclay and Co., 1867); Andrew
and extradited to the United States, where in February 1867 he stood trial for conspiring to murder the President. (The jury split and he went free.) But despite the eager cooperation of papal authorities in Surratt’s eventual capture, the complicity of various Catholic clergymen in Surratt’s escape from prosecution lent credence to charges that Rome sympathized with the Confederates, and American newspapers waxed that Surratt had “connected the sovereignty of the Catholic faith with the murder of the President of Democracy.”

Image 2.1: John Surratt, accused of conspiring to kill Lincoln, was a devout Catholic from Maryland who evaded capture by enlisting in the papal army (or “papal Zouaves”) in Rome. He was later extradited to the U.S. and tried for conspiracy. Image from Life and Extraordinary Adventures of John H. Surratt (Philadelphia: Barclay, 1867).

It hardly needs to be said that accusations of the Vatican’s complicity in the Lincoln assassination were absurd. But overall Pius did seem to harbor a strange affinity for the Confederacy, one often reciprocated by Confederate leaders. While imprisoned in Virginia after the war, Jefferson Davis received an unexpected gift from the Holy Father: an autographed photograph of the Pontiff, bearing a Latin inscription from the Gospel of

Jampoler. The Last Lincoln Conspirator: John Surratt’s Flight from the Gallows (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2009).
Matthew: “Come to me, all ye who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” After his release from prison, Davis kept the photograph mounted on the wall in his study. (Davis also wore around his neck “two Roman Catholic scapulas and a religious medal” given to him by Catholic nuns during his imprisonment.) Whatever motivations were behind the gesture, Pius certainly showed greater affection for Davis than for his presidential counterpart, Abraham Lincoln. Upon learning of Lincoln’s assassination, Pius gave no public utterance of grief or sympathy. Privately, he expressed consternation that Lincoln, who was shot at the Ford’s Theater in Washington, had dared to attend “the theatre on Good Friday.” To Pius, the late President of “the Great Republic” was less a martyred hero than an emblem of a new world order, one that left little room for a traditional Catholic alliance of altar and throne.

The Decline of the Southern Catholic Tradition

The influence of the Southern Catholic elite would rapidly dwindle in the decades after the Civil War. The overthrow of the planter elite bankrupted many of the major educational institutions in the Catholic South, and the steady influx of Catholic emigrants from Ireland, Italy, and Eastern Europe shifted the demographic base of the Church to ethnic enclaves in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago and San Francisco. Irish-dominated Catholic institutions, empowered by the political influence of the immigrant vote, would come to prevail in vast stretches of the North, including New England, once a landscape all-but devoid of organized Catholicism. Popular attitudes toward

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116 Varina Davis, Jefferson Davis’ second wife, later donated these objects to the Louisiana Historical Association. For an account of the donation, see J.A. Chalaron, “Louisiana Historical Association,” *Confederate Veteran* 7 (1899): 299-300.
117 Diary of Rev. Richard Bursell, Notebook 1, AANY, 57.
Catholicism would themselves gradually shift, as the Catholic Church, once a “foreign colony,” now moved to the center of social life and politics in the urban North. Among Yankee Protestants, Roman Catholicism by 1920 was less an eccentric otherworldly religion, freighted with strange but alluring Old World resonances, than a rough-hewn parochial power buttressed by the immigrant working-class. By comparison, the South, once the seat of institutional Catholicism, was by 1920 a bastion of anti-Catholic sentiment, fueled by white-rural resentment of the ascendant political power of the multiethnic city. The near riot on the floor of the 1924 Democratic convention, pitting urban white-ethnic Catholics against Southern rural Protestants, crystallized the dramatic cross-regional transformation of American Catholicism between 1860 and 1920.

The overthrow of the Southern planter elite, the abolition of slavery, and the triumph of Northern industrial capital also vanquished the intellectual tradition of “Baltimore Catholicism,” which had fused Catholic apologetics with Southern paternalism. For Catholic churchmen at the turn of the century, Martin John Spalding’s indictments of the Northern social order would have seemed perilously akin to socialism—an ideological pestilence that threatened both God and country. While Catholic thinkers would in subsequent decades draw on the traditions of their faith to condemn the Northern industrial order, rarely again would such sentiments emanate from the upper reaches of the Church hierarchy.

A few prominent Southern Catholics, melding Catholic social thought with Southern paternalism, would remain influential in the 1870s and 1880s. For instance, Abram J. Ryan, the notorious “poet-priest” of the Confederacy, helped to conjure the mythology of the Lost Cause by fusing proslavery nostalgia with ultramontane jeremiads
against modern liberalism. Widely celebrated in the South for his 1865 ode to the Confederacy, “The Conquered Banner,” Ryan would eke out an existence as a writer and lecturer until his death in 1886, mixing condemnations of modern Protestant societies with elegies to the antebellum South as a traditional, rural society destroyed by a imperial, commercial power.¹¹⁸ An Irish nationalist as well as Confederate apologist, Ryan mourned Catholic Ireland and the Christian South as traditional, rural civilizations colonized by the leading agents of modern industrialism, the Yankee North and Great Britain.¹¹⁹ By the time of Ryan’s death, however, the Catholic Church had become a decidedly Northern institution, with limited demographic expansion south of the Mason Dixon line and few patriotic Catholics wishing to revisit the fraught legacy of Southern Catholicism.

Perhaps the last of the Southern Catholic luminaries was James Corcoran, a native Carolinian who emerged as the nation’s foremost Catholic theologian after the Civil War.¹²⁰ A disciple of Bishop John England of Charleston, Corcoran was, like his close friends Martin Spalding and Patrick Lynch, educated at the prestigious Urban College in Rome, where he received his holy orders in 1842. Returning to his native South Carolina, he secured a position as editor of the Charleston United States Catholic Miscellany, then

¹¹⁸ Abram Joseph Ryan, Poems: Patriotic, Religious, Miscellaneous (New York: P.J. Kenedy and Sons, 1880). A collection of Ryan’s unpublished writings can be found in the Abram Ryan Papers at the Spring Hill College Archives and Special Collections in Mobile, Alabama.


the oldest Catholic journal in the United States. A rabid secessionist with a
“monomaniacal antipathy to the Yankees,” Corcoran as editor was unequivocally pro-
Confederate in his sympathies, using the Miscellany to provide theological justification
for Southern orthodoxies about slavery and states’ rights. (Corcoran, who as a priest
refused to allow his congregants to pray for the assassinated Abraham Lincoln, even
changed the name of the journal to the South Carolina Catholic Miscellany in line with
his secessionist views.) After the defeat of the Confederacy, Corcoran, who possessed a
preternatural knowledge of ancient history and near eastern languages, focused his talents
on scholarly pursuits, ultimately gaining a reputation among Catholic clergy as “the
smartest man in America.”

Despite his Confederate past, Corcoran gradually ascended the ranks of the
American hierarchy. In 1868 the U.S. Catholic bishops selected Corcoran to travel to
Rome as a theological adviser to American churchmen at the First Vatican Council in
1870. In 1876 he assumed the editorship of the American Catholic Quarterly Review, a
leading journal of Catholic opinion based in Philadelphia. Corcoran’s writing for the
magazine tended to focus on ancient Church history and scriptural apologetics, but in
January 1889 he co-wrote an editorial on modern industrialism that betrayed his long-
standing prejudices toward “Yankee” civilization. Pointing to a worldwide social crisis,
Corcoran inveighed against the rise of the “Liberal economic and social system,” which
he claimed was “un-Christian in is essence.” Echoing his old friend Martin John

121 Paul J. Foik, “Pioneer Efforts in Catholic Journalism in the United States, 1800-1840,” The Catholic
Historical Review I (October 1915): 265.
122 Diary of Rev. Richard Burtsell, AANY, Notebook 1, 104.
123 Ibid.
124 James A. Corcoran to Archbishop John McCloskey, March 6, 1869, McCloskey Papers, AANY.
125 “The Year 188—A Retrospect and a Prospect,” American Catholic Quarterly Review XIV (January
Spalding, Corcoran declared that “the absolute freedom” of the liberal social order had reduced labor to “the absolute slave of the employer.” “Poor always did exist; they will always continue to exist as long as human beings people the globe,” Corcoran wrote. “But ‘paupers’ are a creation of Liberalism.” Raging against a modern world that, in his view, had destroyed the rural civilization of his youth, Corcoran died a few months later, still railing against the liberal “spirit of the age” and the subjugation of his native land to the Yankee North.

By then the romance between the antebellum South and the Catholic Church was all but forgotten, the cultural ties between Catholic and Cavalier willfully ignored by a generation of Catholic historians eager to overlook the Church’s ties to slavery and rebellion. In the early twentieth century a few Southern intellectuals would embrace Catholicism as a bulwark against secular modernity, but such intellectual gestures never developed into a coherent philosophical tradition. The closest the South ever came to a “Catholic revival” in the first half of the twentieth was the advent of the Southern Agrarians, the Southern literati who sought to resurrect the rural anti-modern tradition of the South. Allen Tate, who later converted to Catholicism, alighted on the ideological affinities between the Catholic Old World and the “feudal” Old South in his essay “Remarks on the Southern Religion” in 1930. Denouncing the ultra-individualist impulses of evangelical Protestantism as ill-suited traditional Southern culture, Tate lamented that the South had never found its “appropriate religion” and suggested a longing for the integrative Catholic spirituality of medieval Europe. By Tate’s time,

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however, the Catholic Church was a stranger to the rural South, and his embrace of a Catholic tradition, like his embrace of Catholicism itself, would prove fleeting.
Chapter Three
Pathways to Power: Religion, Ethnicity, and Political Capital in New York City

Between 1835 and 1860 roughly two million Catholic immigrants, drawn primarily from Ireland and the German-speaking provinces of Central Europe, poured into the commercial and manufacturing hubs of the northeastern United States. As the Catholic population increased, so too did Protestants complaints about the poverty, crime, and lawlessness of immigrant Catholics. Even those sympathetic to Catholicism cringed at the destitute condition of the Catholic laity in America. “[T]he Roman Catholic Church,” Isaac Hecker confided to his diary in 1844, “is the most despised, poorest and according to the world the least respectable on account of the order of foreigners which it is chiefly composed of in this country.”

This perception of Catholicism as the religion of the poor and uprooted was not, of course, unfounded. Many of the Catholics who immigrated to the U.S. in these years came from humble stock. The Irish in particular had by midcentury firmly established themselves as the nation’s most reliable source of cheap labor north of the Mason-Dixon line. The combination of declining corn prices, intermittent crop failures, and rising

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rents had spurred steady emigration from the heavily rural and Catholic populations of western and southern Ireland beginning in the mid-1830s, but it was the cataclysmic potato famine of 1847-1851 that resulted in a “mass exodus of the poor and the starving” to American port cities.\textsuperscript{3} Equipped with few economic skills or resources, and unacquainted with the practices of land-ownership and commercial farming, the Irish clustered in urban enclaves, where they found employment as unskilled laborers and domestic servants. By 1860 Irish immigrants (not including their children) comprised 32 percent of the total population of New York City, 26 percent of Boston, and 17 percent of Philadelphia, stoking fears among the native-born that the Irish and their descendants would soon outnumber Anglo-Protestants in urban America. Complaints about the poverty, violence, and crime of Irish neighborhoods, moreover, were not merely expressions of religious and ethnic bigotry, but reflected the dire conditions of tenement life. For instance, 68 percent of the persons admitted to New York City’s almshouses in the 1850s were Irish-born, and in 1858 and 1859 (the only years from the decade for which relevant information is available) Irish immigrants comprised 55 percent of the city’s prison population.\textsuperscript{4}

But if the mass immigration of midcentury transformed the American Church into a predominantly foreign-born and working-class institution, it also opened new pathways to Catholic power and influence. The advent of universal white-male suffrage in the


\textsuperscript{4} On these statistics, see the appendix in Robert Ernst, \textit{Immigrant Life in New York City, 1825-1863} (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1975).
1820s, coupled with generous naturalization laws that allowed a five-year path to citizenship, endowed even the lowly Irish pauper with the power of the ballot. As the rate of immigration swelled, so too did the potential influence of the “Catholic vote.” If unified as a political bloc, immigrant Catholics could indeed wield enormous influence over city and state officials, strong-arming the appointment of Catholic leaders to lucrative positions in city government and pressuring local assemblies to funnel municipal resources to Catholic institutions. As immigrant Catholics poured into the country’s urban centers, native-born Protestants railed against the rise of “political Catholicism.” Catholics were no doubt poor in economic resources, but in the age of mass politics they could secure power through sheer force of numbers.

While Irish-Catholic political influence would come to dominate many of the country’s leading urban centers by 1900, including San Francisco, Boston, Chicago, and Jersey City, the alliance between priest and politician first took shape in New York City and Brooklyn. (Before 1898 Manhattan and Brooklyn were separate municipalities.) That Irish-Catholics first emerged as powerful political bloc in greater New York was hardly surprising. Drawn to the surfeit of available low-skill jobs in greater New York, Irish immigrants comprised nearly 40 percent of total population of New York City and Brooklyn by 1860. In the years after the Civil War the native-born Protestants of New York were already convinced that the Catholic vote controlled city government—a refrain that would be echoed for decades. “Practically, in this city, Catholicism is the

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state religion,” the journalist Matthew Smith wrote of New York in 1867. “It carries the city at every election. It holds every position of emolument and trust within the bounds of the municipality.” Such municipal influence would prove particularly useful to the New York Archdiocese, which by midcentury had emerged as the anchor of a rapidly expanding “immigrant Church” in the United States.

The rise of Irish-Catholic political power in New York, however, was not solely the work of immigrants themselves. To reap the benefits of immigrant political power, the New York Archdiocese relied on a class of American-born Irish-Catholic lawyers, jurists, politicians, and party bosses with strong ties both to the Irish-immigrant community and Democratic party elites. (While Anglo-Saxon converts and Southern Catholic transplants could provide much-needed ecclesial leadership, intellectual direction, and social prestige to Catholic institutions in the urban North, they lacked the local party connections and ethnic ties needed to leverage immigrant political influence into social and economic privileges for the Church.) Closely tied to the Democratic Party and well-acquainted with the intricacies of mass politics, these men used the power of the Catholic vote both to bolster their own careers while also advancing the institutional interests of the Church. Though they never fully assimilated into an increasingly sectarian

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and parochial Catholic counterculture, they nonetheless helped establish the basic foundations of the immigrant Church, forging an alliance between Democratic powerbrokers and Catholic white ethnics that would persist into the middle decades of the twentieth century.8

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Before the mass migrations of midcentury, Catholics in New York were at the outer edges of organized Catholicism. The lingering effects of the English penal laws, combined with the general poverty of the Catholic immigrant community, throttled Catholic institutional growth in the North well into the nineteenth century. In 1822, when John McCloskey was twelve years old, there were only two Catholic churches and four parish priests in New York City, despite a metropolitan Catholic population of nearly 20,000.9 (As residents of Brooklyn, which had no Catholic Church at the time, the McCloskey family had to take a “primitive ferry” across the river to Manhattan just to attend mass or meet with a priest.)10 Five itinerant clergymen, meanwhile, were alone responsible for the vast outer regions of the diocese, which comprised all of New York State, including cities like Albany, Utica, and Rochester as well as northern New Jersey.11 Conditions were hardly better elsewhere in the Northeast, save perhaps for Philadelphia, where a tradition of de facto religious toleration had enabled Catholics to

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8 Because scholars have traditionally depicted the mass European migrations of the 1840s and 1850s as the watershed event in the development of an American Catholic Church, and portrayed immigrant Catholicism as an adaption of European models of piety and organization, the influence of this older urban Catholic middle-class has received scant attention. For examples, see Joseph Chinnici, Living Stones: The History and Structure of Catholic Spiritual Life in American Life (New York: Orbis Books, 1996); Jay Dolan, In Search of American Catholicism; John T. McGreevy, Catholicism and American Freedom.  
9 The Laity’s Directory to the Church Service (New York: William Greagh, 1822), 103-106.  
11 The Laity’s Directory, 104.
erect two chapels before the Revolutionary War. When the Maryland Jesuit Joseph Fenwick was appointed to the episcopacy of Boston in 1825, there were only three Catholic clergymen and nine Catholic churches in all of New England, and no Catholic church or chapel in the entire state of Connecticut.

In terms of class and ethnic background, the majority of Catholics in these older urban communities were no doubt Irish-born laborers and servants with little wealth or social influence. But, at least in some respects, the urban Catholicism of this era had a perceptibly cosmopolitan cast. Alongside the humble Irish was a very small but influential European-born Catholic elite, principally French, Spanish, and German in origin, whose wealth and genteel manners gave the Church a glimmer of social respectability. A corps of Spanish and French dignitaries, including the Spanish ambassador to the United States and both the French and Spanish Consuls-General in New York, had in fact established the first Catholic church in the city in 1785. Distinguished foreign-born clerics like the Rev. Anthony Kohlmann, a German-born Jesuit scholar, and Father Felix Valera, a Cuban political exile and journalist, meanwhile assumed a heavy share of pastoral and administrative duties, all the while impressing local elites with their literary and scholarly talents.

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French émigrés and their descendants, in particular, would provide a lay leadership class for the New York Church into the Civil War era. Political and social unrest in France and the French Caribbean between 1790 and 1815 brought successive waves of French-speaking Catholic émigrés to Philadelphia, Boston, and New York. Embarking upon careers as merchants, lawyers, teachers, and physicians in their adopted homeland, the Francophone Catholic elite would gradually assimilate into the moneyed aristocracy of New York, while several prominent French churchmen, including Jean-Louis Lefebvre Chevrus, the Bishop of Boston from 1808 to 1823, and John Dubois, the Bishop of New York from 1825 to 1842, assumed prominent positions in the national hierarchy. Catholic émigrés like Anthony Frenaye, a wealthy businessman and trusted financial adviser to Bishop Kenrick of Philadelphia, and William Rodrigue, a New York-based architect and future brother-in-law to Archbishop Hughes, provided the Church hierarchy with much-need financial assistance and expertise.

In contrast to the working-class Irish, whose poverty and ill-bred manners proved “a public nuisance” to the better classes, the Franco-American Catholics of New York helped introduce Catholicism to American high society, offering a more refined and aristocratic version of the faith that challenged prevailing notions of the Church as an exclusively working-class institution. One of the leading figures in antebellum New

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16 The Church in Philadelphia also benefited from an influx of Francophone Catholics between 1790 and 1815. See Kirlin, *Catholicity in Philadelphia*, 136-139. One of the most commercially successful Catholic novels of the mid-nineteenth century, *Rosemary*, which was written by Catholic convert Jehediah Huntington, took as its subject the wealthy French Catholics of New York. Jehediah Huntington, *Rosemary: Or Life and Death* (New York: D. and J. Sadlier and Co., 1861). In his review of *Rosemary*,
York high society was Charles Brugiere, a French-born émigré who had fled Santo Domingo amid the slave uprisings of the early 1790s. First settling in Philadelphia, where he embarked on a highly lucrative career as an importer of European dry goods, Brugiere moved to New York City in 1823, where he assumed the role of director of the U.S. National Bank. In an era when the American moneyed aristocracy exalted French style and taste, Brugiere and his French-born wife had little trouble ingratiating themselves to the city’s fashionable classes. In 1825, the couple hosted at their Broadway mansion one of the city’s first European-style dress balls, an event that attracted many of the leading families of Philadelphia, Boston, and Baltimore. Brugiere would die in 1838, but his influence over American high society would continue beyond his death. In 1886 his great-grandson, Louis Keller, would found the New York Social Diary, an index of the nation’s premier families that would prove a vade mecum for the American upper class well into the twentieth century.

Orestes Brownson wrote that Huntington “celebrates no virtue not of Celtic or Gallic origin, and finds real vice, crime, and iniquity only in those like him and us of Yankee origin.” Orestes Brownson, “Literary Notices and Criticisms,” Brownson’s Quarterly Review 2 (April 1861): 269.


The broader influence of the Franco-American Catholic elite, however, would weaken considerably in the middle decades of the century, as mass immigration from Europe vastly expanded the working-class base of American Catholicism and strengthened the ecclesiastical influence of the Irish. (Unsurprisingly, the Francophone elite often clashed with the less genteel Irish, whose uncouth appearance and manners they considered something of an embarrassment. Indeed, the Franco-American Catholics of New York founded a French-speaking parish in the city, the Church of St. Vincent De Paul, in 1841 in part as a reaction to the increasing presence of poor Irish in city parishes.\(^{19}\) It would be an older generation of native-born Irish-American politicians, not the French émigré elite, who would come to exercise lay leadership within a vastly expanding immigrant Church. Contemporaries of Archbishop John McCloskey, these native-born Irish Catholics would serve as a bridge between the more cosmopolitan urban

Catholicism of the early Republic and the militantly sectarian and institutionally expansive immigrant Church of midcentury.

Born between 1800 and 1825, this class of native-born Irish-Americans had typically come of age more under the influence of Irish revolutionary statesmen than Catholic priests. The failed Irish uprisings of 1798 and 1803 had inspired a mass exodus of Irish political radicals to American cities like New York and Philadelphia, where they established Irish-themed newspapers, served as esteemed members of the Bar, and embraced the egalitarian ideals of Jeffersonian republicanism against the perceived cultural elitism and pro-British sympathies of the Federalist Party. Nearly four-fifths of these Irish émigrés were Protestants, but there were nonetheless several prominent Catholics among them, such as Dr. William MacNeven and Thomas O’Connor of New York. (Another prominent Catholic radical of the period, Matthew Carey of Philadelphia, had immigrated in the 1780s but strongly identified with the politics of the so-called ‘98-ers.) Religious dogma, however, had played little role in the political ideology of the Irish radicals; the republican ideals of the French Enlightenment, which included religious toleration, had thoroughly shaped their political sensibility and minimized sectarian conflict within their ranks. In short, civic leadership among the Irish in the early republic lay with a highly politicized but largely secular middle-class that had few personal links to the clergy but strong institutional ties to the Democratic-Republican Party.

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21 Foik, “Catholic Journalism in the United States,” 259-263.
22 On this exile generation, see Gilje, “The Development of an Irish American Community in New York City before the Great Migration.”
As a result, Irish-Americans by 1830 were little schooled in the minutiae of religious doctrine but well tutored in the art of democratic politics. Even avowedly Catholic journals like the *Truth Teller*, which was founded by a Catholic priest in New York City in 1825, gave ample attention to Irish and Irish-American political issues, while promulgating a republican ideology (“that the people are to be sovereign of themselves”) more in line with the enlightened radicalism of MacNeven and O’Connor than the pious conservatism of the Franco-American clergy. Given their radical-democratic political tilt, their traditional attachment to the party of Jefferson, and their predominantly working-class origins, it comes as little surprise that the Catholic Irish embraced the politics of Andrew Jackson in the 1820s and 1830s, even as some of the most respected Irish radicals, including Matthew Carey, ultimately broke with Jackson over economic policy.

The upsurge in Irish emigration that began in the mid-1830s, as well as the nativist and anti-Catholic movements that arose in response, increased Irish-Catholic attachment to the Democratic Party while also fomenting religious divisions within the Irish community itself. Eager to win over the Irish vote, Democratic politicians opposed any change to the country’s liberal naturalization laws, inveighed against evangelical moral reform movements that stigmatized immigrant working-class culture, and promised ample patronage and party favors to immigrant voters. They cast the Whigs as intolerant aristocrats in the tradition of the Federalists.

The very definition of what constituted the Irish vote, however, was itself shifting. Because Irish immigration to the United States post-1835 was overwhelmingly Catholic in origin, the very terms “Irish” and “Catholic” became nearly interchangeable,
particularly as a result of nativist propaganda linking Irish poverty to the spiritual tyranny of the Catholic Church. Wary of inclusion in a despised class, Irish Protestant elites gradually withdrew from Irish civic and benevolent organizations like the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick, a nearly century-old nonsectarian Irish fraternal older plagued by declining membership, factional infighting, and a notable loss of social prestige after 1840. Working-class Irish Protestants—descendants, for the most part, of eighteenth-century Presbyterian and Methodist emigrants from more prosperous counties of northern Ireland—likewise severed their attachments to the Irish immigrant community, enlisting en masse in anti-Catholic organizations like the Native-American Party and provoking violent altercations with Irish-Catholic gangs on the streets of New York and Philadelphia. By 1850 to be Irish was to be, almost by definition, to be Catholic, and the vast majority of Irishmen pledged loyalty to the Democratic Party.

Two important developments within the Democratic Party of this era closely shaped Irish-Catholic political life going forward. The first was the increasing influence of Southern slaveholders over national policy and political ideology. Of course, Southern planters had long exerted enormous influence over the party of Jefferson and Jackson, particularly in its embrace of white supremacy, states’ rights, and a non-interventionist federal government. But amid the dissolution of the second American party system in 1853 and the rise of the anti-slavery Republican Party in 1855, the “Democracy” became more than ever the de facto political party of the South, dominated by a slaveholding elite and radically committed to the protection of Southern rights and interests. Eager to prove their loyalty to the party, which had long presented itself as the defender of immigrants

from the forces of nativism and anti-Catholicism, Irish-American voters and politicians steadfastly proclaimed their support for the South and their contempt for abolitionism. (Such support for slaveholders came at a great shock to leading Catholic statesmen in Ireland, such as Daniel O’Connell, who considered abolitionism, religious toleration for Catholics, and the struggle for Irish freedom as unified objectives within the British liberal-Whig tradition.)24 Widely cast as “northern men with southern principles,” Irish-Catholics by the coming of the Civil War had proved themselves the most stalwart defenders of slavery north of the Mason-Dixon line.25

The second development was the rise of the urban political machine, which greatly enhanced immigrant political power at the state and municipal levels.26 With the advent of universal white-male suffrage in the 1820s, a host of urban political clubs, such as New York City’s Tammany Hall (later the most powerful Democratic political organization in the country), sought to harness working-class political power by offering political patronage, such as city contracts, jobs on the municipal payroll, or even cash handouts, in exchange for votes.27 Democratic party bosses could dictate local elections


while using the spoils of public office to reward partisan loyalty by feverishly working to
naturalize recently arrived immigrants, and transform the fraternal institutions of urban
working-class life—street-gangs, brothels, grogshops, and boxing clubs—into a
sprawling but efficient network of street-level political organizing. Precisely because of
their meager social and economic rank, the Catholic Irish proved particularly susceptible
to the inducements of the urban machine. Lacking the requisite wealth to acquire
farmland or the economic skills to compete with native-born (or, in most cases, even
English- or German-born) artisans, the Catholic Irish subsisted as a highly urbanized
people with scant resources save the power of the ballot; that they would embrace politics
as a “secular vocation,” in Daniel Moynihan’s apt phrase, is unsurprising. By 1855 Irish
Catholics had emerged as an invaluable constituency to the Democratic Party in New
York, and within a generation Irish bosses would all but control Tammany Hall.

Native-born Irish-Catholic leaders, who could serve as liaisons between
Democratic Party leaders and the Irish immigrant community, proved crucial to the rise
of the machine politics in New York City. Coming of age under the influence of Irish
political émigrés like MacNeven and O’Connor, and well acquainted with saloon- and
club-based associational life of urban working-class men, Irish-Catholic politicians like
Peter B. Sweeny, the Manhattan-born son of an Irish saloon-owner, possessed both the
ethnic ties and local party connections to mediate between embattled Irish-Catholic
immigrants and native-born Democratic leaders. A graduate of Columbia College who

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apprenticed in the law office of one of the city’s premier Irish-American attorneys, Sweeny cut his political teeth in the mid-1850s as a lobbyist for the New York Consolidate Stage Company (a stage-coach manufacturer that sought to block state subsidies to railroads) at the New York State Assembly in Albany. Earning the nickname “Brains” for his political and financial savvy, Sweeney exploited his success in Albany to ascend the political ranks of the New York City Democratic establishment, ultimately serving as secretary and later chairman of the organizing committee of Tammany Hall.  

Far more comfortable as a backroom political tactician than a candidate for public office, Sweeney resigned from a brief tenure as New York City District Attorney in 1858 to devote himself fully to a career of political wire-pulling and municipal graft. Alongside Richard “Slippery Dick” Connolly, another New York-born Irish Catholic Tammany boss, Sweeny emerged as chief adviser to William M. Tweed (a native-born Protestant), the Tammany powerbroker whose political ring dominated the New York municipal spoils system until 1871. 

The most successful Irish-Catholic political boss of the Civil War era was “Honest” John Kelly, the Manhattan-born son of Irish immigrants who ultimately supplanted Tweed as political boss of Tammany Hall. Like Sweeny and Connolly, Kelly came from modest origins, but he exploited his local political connections and his Irish-Catholic pedigree to reap the benefits of immigrant political power. A successful political boss, Kelly built a political ring that controlled New York City from 1871 to 1890, a period known as the “Kelly Ring.”

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soapstone mason with little formal education, Kelly gained entry to the hardscrabble world of municipal power and graft by mastering the informal politics of male sociability in a ruthless, often violent urban milieu of street-gangs, grogshops, and interethnic rivalries. A much-respected sportsman and amateur boxer renowned for his personal toughness, Kelly joined a neighborhood fire-fighting unit in his youth, enlisted in a local Irish-American militia battalion (the Emmet Guards, named after the Irish statesman and martyr, Robert Emmet), and socialized at popular midtown saloons, such as the “Ivy Green” and “the Comet,” frequented by Tammany insiders. Already a revered figure in Manhattan’s Irish-dominated Sixth Ward, Kelly emerged as a local folk-hero in 1853, after leading an assault on a gang of nativists accused of strong-arming Irish voters at a local polling station on Election Day. Kelly’s resultant notoriety, combined with his personal ties to Tammany Hall, helped launch a successful career in electoral politics that included a seat on the City Board of Aldermen from 1853-54 and two terms in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1854-58.31

Despite his truculent demeanor and close ties to the urban underworld, Kelly, like many Irish-American politicians of his generation, presented himself as a pious Catholic in good standing with the Church hierarchy—a public image that no doubt helped burnish his credentials as an icon of Irish-American power and prestige. Unsurprisingly, political rivals sniped that Kelly’s weekly attendance at Sunday mass was merely “for effect,” and

that his vaunted reputation as a “high man in the Church” was the product of political calculation, not earnest piety. Such rumors, however, did little to tarnish Kelly’s relationship with the city’s clergy, who embraced Kelly both as an outspoken defender of the city’s Catholic immigrants and a trusted patron whose largesse included generous donations to the archdiocese, including a $1000 stained-glass window for St. Patrick’s Cathedral, and scholarships for aspiring priests to study in Rome. In turn, clerical backing helped strengthen Kelly’s claims to social respectability in the eyes of the emerging Irish-Catholic middle classes, while also conferring moral legitimacy on the Democratic political machine. In particular, Kelly’s close friendship with Cardinal McCloskey helped sanitize his public image, investing him with moral capital and broad middle-class support needed to resurrect the Tammany organization after Tweed’s precipitous downfall in 1871 on charges on corruption.32 With the support of both the New York Archdiocese and the Irish working-class, Kelly would rule Tammany until his death in 1886.

32 Kelly had a close relationship with Cardinal McCloskey by virtue of having married his niece. See The Brooklyn Eagle, March 8, 1885, 2. Kelly also claimed to be a disciple of Archbishop Hughes, and often appeared alongside him at Irish-American functions. See, for example, “Annual Exhibition of the Roman Catholic Orphan Asylum,” New York Times, June 25, 1859.
Irish-Catholic bosses had similar success across the river in the City of Brooklyn, (or “Kings County), which by 1860 was already the third most populous city in the United States. Hugh McLaughlin, the self-proclaimed “original political boss” of urban America, controlled the Kings County Democratic machine for nearly forty years, until the consolidation of Brooklyn into New York City in 1898 forced Kings County Democrats to accommodate to the more powerful Tammany Hall. Like “Honest” John, McLaughlin had ascended the ranks of the Democratic establishment by leveraging neighborhood ties and working-class loyalties into political capital. Born in Brooklyn in 1825 to Irish immigrants, McLaughlin was from an early age drawn to the rough-hewn world of municipal politics. He immersed himself in various working-class neighborhood clubs, like the local volunteer fire-fighting unit, and impressed party leaders with his knowledge of local and national affairs. Anointed as a future party lieutenant, McLaughlin used his growing influence within the Kings County urban machine to secure a plummy position as foreman at the Brooklyn Navy Yard (the heart of the city’s shipbuilding industry), where he disbursed jobs in exchange for personal and political fealty. “Hughey” had little formal education, but ample skill in the art of managing men, and he used his vaunted position as boss of the Navy Yard and patron of the Irish working class to gain control of the city’s Democratic machine by 1860.33

As was true for John Kelly, for McLaughlin piety and politics generally went hand in hand. Hughey was much less ostentatious than Honest John in his displays of religious devotion, but his close ties to the Brooklyn diocese helped cement his position as a trustworthy and respectable member of the city’s Irish-Catholic community. A friend and confidante of Bishop John Loughlin, the Irish-born churchman who ruled the Brooklyn diocese for nearly a half-century, McLaughlin offered financial and managerial support to various Catholic charities in the city, even serving as a director of the Brooklyn Catholic Orphan Asylum. It was the public philanthropy of his wife, Sarah Ellen, however, that fortified McLaughlin’s standing as a committed Catholic and steadfast patron of the institutional Church.\footnote{On the philanthropic efforts of Sarah Ellen McLaughlin, see “Mrs. Hugh McLaughlin,” \emph{New York Times}, April 3, 1915.} The recipient of a papal title in recognition of her service to Catholic hospitals, charities and orphanages in the diocese of Brooklyn, Sarah Ellen sought to translate her husband’s personal wealth—fattened by municipal graft and insider real-estate deals—into charitable endeavors that would help legitimate his political power while demonstrating fidelity to the Church. Buoyed by his wife’s
efforts, Hugh would receive widespread support from Catholic clergy for “his conduct in the Church, and for the Church,” including a formal benediction from Pope Leo XIII in 1895.35 This gendered division of labor within the McLaughlin household was but a testament to the marriage of religion and politics within the broader Irish-American community.

Alarmed by such entanglements between religious authority and temporal power, political rivals, unsurprisingly, argued that Irish-American party bosses merely exploited ethnic and religious loyalties for personal profit, while offering little more than token gestures of support to their immigrant political base. No doubt, men like Kelly, Sweeney, and McLaughlin amassed vast fortunes through political wire-pulling and real-estate speculation; they dined at upscale Manhattan restaurants, raced thoroughbred horses on weekends, and spent their summers in fashionable beachfront locales in Long Island and New Jersey, far removed from the social world of their urban constituents. But Democratic political machines nonetheless provided tangible benefits to the Irish-Catholic working class, offering a modicum of economic security in an otherwise tumultuous urban labor market.36 With virtual control over city government, Democratic powerbrokers could offer loyal supporters a steady supply of liquor and carting licenses, clerical jobs within the ever-expanding city bureaucracy, or appointments to the police, fire, and street-cleaning departments. A far more lucrative form of party patronage, however, came via bloated municipal contracts awarded to politically connected businessmen and developers, especially those employing large numbers of Irish-Catholic

workers. Through such public-private partnerships, party bosses could convert municipal funds into work and wages for its political base. Tammany Hall, for instance, supplied much of its party patronage though exorbitant contracts for Manhattan public-works projects, including the construction of the infamous “Tweed” Courthouse of Lower Manhattan, built between 1858 and 1871 at an astronomical cost of nearly $14 million.  

![Image 3.5: The “Tweed” County Courthouse in lower Manhattan. Image from Harpers Weekly.](image)

Democratic party bosses and their working-class constituents, however, were hardly the sole beneficiaries of Irish political power. The institutional Church itself benefited considerably from the rise of urban machine politics. In addition to making personal financial contributions to Catholic orphanages, parochial schools, and benevolent associations, Democratic bosses used their political influence to help underwrite the brick-and-mortar expansion of organized Catholicism. Municipal officials, for example, sold off sizable blocks of city property to Church leaders at heavily discounted rates. (The block of Madison Avenue real-estate used for the construction of St. Patrick’s Cathedral, later to be among the most valuable properties in Manhattan, was

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acquired from the City of New York in 1850 for a mere $83.00.) Party bosses likewise arranged to have funds from municipal coffers channeled directly into Catholic schools and charities, much to the dismay of Protestant ministers and middle-class taxpayers.\textsuperscript{38} Working at the behest of Tammany Hall, Peter Sweeney arranged to have $1.5 million allocated to Catholic parochial schools between 1869 and 1881; Protestant institutions, by comparison, received only $500,000 in the same period.\textsuperscript{39} Democratic leaders also tapped Catholic bishops for recommendations for municipal appointments, and invested Catholic chaplains with exclusive control over religious services within select city prisons and reformatories.\textsuperscript{40} Such patronage of the Church—maligned by critics as proof of an “absolute alliance of the city government with political Romanism”\textsuperscript{41}—no doubt strengthened ties between the Democratic establishment and the New York Archdiocese. In 1870 one prominent Irish-Catholic clergymen deemed it a “disgrace” for any priest to support the city’s Republican opposition.

The urban political boss, however, could never serve as the public face of the Irish-Catholic community. Conversant in the working-class idioms of the street and the saloon but deaf to the cultural and intellectual pretensions of genteel society, Irish party bosses like Kelly and McLaughlin—let alone the more modest ward-heelers who staffed their machines—generally preferred backroom deal-making to the personal demands and

\textsuperscript{38} Fighting for the City, 59; Gotham; Brown, The Catholic Philanthropic Tradition in America.
\textsuperscript{40} Fernando Wood, for example, solicited Archbishop Hughes for recommendations about municipal appointments. See Archbishop John Hughes to Fernando Wood, Fernando Wood Papers, Manuscript and Archives Division, The New York Public Library; the letter is also quoted in Werner, Tammany Hall. Democratic leaders and Church officials would often use a third party—typically an Irish-American layman—to carry out such negotiations. See, for example, the exchange between Archbishop John McCloskey and Governor Samuel Tilden about appointments to the State Board of Charities in Samuel Tilden, Letters and Literary Memorials of Samuel J. Tilden, ed. John Bigelow (New York: Harper and Brother Publishers, 1908).
\textsuperscript{41} Gibson, The Attitudes of the New York Irish, 250.
heightened scrutiny of public life. As a result, civic leadership in the Irish-Catholic community often devolved to a more culturally refined and socially respectable class of native-born Irish-Catholic lawyers and jurists, typically middle-class in origin and cosmopolitan in outlook, who rarely balked at the opportunity to deliver a public speech on behalf of the Democratic Party, attend a ball-room fundraiser for a Catholic charity, or host a dinner on behalf of an Irish benevolent organization.42 Much more erudite and oratorically inclined than the typical Tammany ward boss, these distinguished members of the Bar moved seamlessly between the overlapping worlds of politics and the law, securing prestigious positions as city attorneys and municipal judges through their Tammany ties and the strength of the immigrant vote.

These lawyer-politicians were in many respects the spiritual heirs (and often the biological descendants) of the Irish barristers, statesmen, and political radicals who had immigrated to New York and Philadelphia in the aftermath of the 1801 Act of Union between Ireland and Great Britain. Indeed, many of the leading Irish-Catholic members of the New York Bar at midcentury had received their education at the private academy of Thomas S. Brady, an Irish-Catholic political radical and classical scholar who fled Ireland in 1812.43 Brady would ultimately carve out a successful career both in law and Democratic politics, but in his early years in New York City he sustained himself and his wife by serving as tutor to the city’s small Irish-Catholic middle class, a valuable trade given the absence of Church-run academies and boarding schools in the Northeast. Counting among his students the future Cardinal John McCloskey, Brady would helped

to produce a coterie of Irish-Catholic gentlemen capable of reaping the benefits of Irish political power in future years.

Two of Brady’s most successful students were his sons, James T. and John R. Brady, whose celebrated careers as members of the New York Bar evinced the ample opportunities—political, professional, and social—open to the city’s educated and well-connected native-born Irish Catholics. An attorney in his father’s Manhattan firm and a stalwart Democrat, James Brady in 1845 secured an appointment through Tammany as Corporation Counsel (the head attorney in the municipal law department), a prestigious office that advanced his status as a rising star within the city’s legal profession and an icon of the Irish-American community. After two terms as Corporation Counsel and a brief tenure as District Attorney, James commenced a highly lucrative and exalted career in private practice, ultimately garnering distinction as one of the city’s premier criminal defense attorneys. (In light of his success, he would decline subsequent Democratic nominations to public office, including the opportunity to serve as U.S. Attorney General under President Andrew Johnson.) At ease “in the midst of the jingling of glasses and the popping of champagne,” James garnered equal fame for his exploits in New York high society, particularly in his role as the city’s foremost “professional Irishman.” A gifted orator and fiery Irish patriot, he was elected President of the Ancient Order of Hibernians in 1863, a position ideally suited to his talents for grand speeches, impromptu dinner-table toasts, and informed speculations on city politics. One keen observer of New York society, mindful of Brady’s reputation for prolific speech-making and whirlwind
socializing, joked of a standing offer of $10,000 for anyone who could identify a single “public or private occasion” in New York at which “James T. Brady did not speak.”

John R. Brady, who was six years James’ junior, was by all accounts more socially reserved than his brother but no less a beneficiary of the ample patronage that flowed from party deference to the Irish vote. Born in 1823, John first found professional success as a lawyer in his father’s firm. But with city Democrats under pressure to field Irish-American candidates for public office, John lobbied for a nomination in 1855 to a seat on New York’s Court of Common Pleas (a municipal court with jurisdiction over

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civil suits). For the next four decades “Judge Brady” would prove a pillar of the city’s Irish and Catholic communities, enlisting in voluntary religious associations like the Young Men’s Catholic Lyceum and serving as president of the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick. John never attained the wealth or social prominence of his older brother, but in 1869 he achieved a distinction open to a rarefied few—a nomination to the state’s Supreme Court. In his ascent through the state judiciary, Judge Brady would thus join a slate of prominent native-born Irish-Catholic attorneys—among them John McKeon, Robert Dillon, Charles Daly, Charles O’Conor, John E. Develin, and, of course, his brother James—who leveraged their ethnic credentials and party ties into enviable legal positions in city and national government.45

Because their social and professional standing owed, at least in part, to their ethnic and sectarian attachments, these high-ranking members of the bar labored to maintain strong ties both to the Church and the Irish community. While they socialized at posh establishments like the Manhattan Club, where they rubbed elbows with the city’s leading Democratic bankers, lawyers and financiers, these laymen also donated to Church-run charities and hospitals, served as trustees for newly established Catholic colleges and parishes, and helped found benevolent societies for recent Irish immigrants.46 Their collective legal knowledge and experience, in particular, proved highly critical to the expansion of organized Catholicism.47 For example, the Georgetown-educated John E. Develin, who served as city Corporation Counsel during

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the Civil War, made use of his legal expertise and political connections to help Archbishop Hughes secure state charters for Fordham College and the Roman Catholic Protectory. The chief partner at a leading Manhattan law firm and a director of the New York Mutual Life Insurance Company, Develin also provided legal and managerial expertise to various archdiocesan institutions, even serving as in-house counsel for the Catholic Protectory.\(^{48}\) Given that the Catholic Church 1870 was one of the city’s largest owners of real estate, and laid claim to a rapidly expanding network of charitable, educational and medical institutions, such legal expertise proved especially valuable to the New York Archdiocese.

Figure 3.8: The Manhattan Club, the city’s premier Democratic social club, included among its members numerous leading Irish-Catholics from the city, including James T. and John R. Brady, Charles O’Conor, John McKeon, and Charles Daly. Image from Miller’s Illustrated New York, 81.

But if the claims of both church and ethnicity exerted a powerful influence on the loyalties of the Irish-American elite, so too did the claims of party. Attached to the Democracy as the clearest pathway to social advancement both for themselves and their people, and deeply absorbed into a fraught political culture undergirded by highly partisan social clubs and newspapers, Irish-Catholic leaders steadfastly defended the cardinal values of the Southern-dominated Democratic Party. “Upon the Democracy of New York the South has invariably relied for a first protection of its true history,” boasted the New Leader, an organ for Tammany Hall edited by the Irish-Catholic politician John Clancy, “and never within the history of New York has the Democratic party in success or defeat failed to respond to the call made upon it.”

The city’s Irish-Catholic leaders were particularly vocal on the social inferiority of black men, the dangers of abolitionism, and the chivalry of the South—sentiments that earned them notoriety as “traitors” and “copperheads” during the Civil War. A self-professed “Democrat of the Southern type,” James T. Brady, for example, shocked the city’s Republican establishment with his vitriol for African-Americans and his professed deference to the Southern leadership of the Democratic Party. Though he would give nominal support to the Union war effort, Brady nonetheless maintained ties with Southern secessionists. In this respect the most influential voices within the Irish-Catholic community were also among the most persistent defenders of Southern slavery.

The eventful career of Charles O’Conor, widely regarded as the “unquestioned head of the New York bar” at midcentury, lays bare the intimate entanglement of

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50 “Mr. Brady,” New York Tribune, September 8, 1860; Maria Lydig Daly, Diary of A Union Lady, ed. Harold Earl Hammond (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000).
in institutional Catholicism, the Irish elite, and proslavery Democratic politics in the era.  

Born in 1804 in New York City, Charles was the son of Thomas O’Connor, the Irish political radical who had fled to New York after the failed Irish uprising of 1798. A founder of one of the first Irish-themed newspapers in the United States, the elder O’Connor struggled to eke out an existence as a journalist, and perhaps as a result he prodded his son toward a more stable, and much more lucrative, career in the law. At the age of 12 Charles had secured an apprenticeship with a New York lawyer, and after clerking at several city firms (“with lawyers who had little practice,” he recalled, “and no libraries”) he entered the New York Bar in 1824, at age 20. An unrelenting work ethic and obsessive drive for professional success contributed to the dissolution of O’Conor’s marriage, leaving him childless and a life-long bachelor, but also bolstered his reputation as one of the city’s premier attorneys. His tenure as a U.S. attorney in the Buchanan administration advanced his stature nationally, as did several high-profile trials, including the sensational Forrest divorce trial of 1852. When after the Civil War Jefferson Davis faced prosecution by the federal government for treason, he appointed O’Conor as his lead counsel.

52 Sloan, “Charles O’Conor.”
53 Foik, “Catholic Journalism in the United States,” 259-263.
54 On the controversy over the Forrest divorce case, see Proceedings of the Bar Association in the city of New York on a publication in the New York Times of March 26th, 1876, censuring the counsel for the plaintiff in the Forrest divorce case (New York: John Polhemus, 1876).
55 According to the New York Times, O’Conor called the opportunity to represent Davis to be the “grandest professional effort of his life.” “Death of Charles O’Conor,” New York Times, May 14, 1884; New York Tribune, May 24, 1866. O’Conor also defended Southern planters who had their cotton seized by federal forces during the Civil War. See Charles O’Conor, Opinion of Charles O’Conor, Esq., on the Treasury Agent System of Cotton Seizures in the South (New York: John M. Burnet, 1866).
Of course, Jefferson Davis did not select O’Conor on the basis on legal credentials alone. A lifelong devotee of the Democratic Party, O’Conor had been a stalwart defender of the South throughout his career and an outspoken Copperhead during the Civil War. Indeed, like many Irish-American men of his generation, O’Conor had inherited from his Irish-born father a strong identification with the legacy of Jeffersonian republicanism, and as a young man he developed a fierce attachment to the political ideals of Andrew Jackson and James Calhoun. Dubbed the “Democrat of the Democrats” by the Republican-leaning New York Times, O’Conor was, in particular, unwavering in his support for the doctrine of states’ rights and the political rights of slaveholders. Stridently opposed to abolitionism, he asserted in an 1859 speech that chattel slavery was a noble and paternal institution “ordained by nature”—a claim that horrified New York’s African-American community.56 Despite his outspoken partisanship and exalted social status in New York, he nonetheless declined repeated offers to run for political office, including a potential presidential bid in 1872, preferring a more informal role as political adviser and ceremonial stump-speaker for the party’s New York establishment. (“Office has many times sought him,” Harpers Weekly observed in 1858, “but he has never sought it.”) A member of Tammany Hall, he nonetheless kept his distance from the party spoils system, even spearheading the prosecution of William Tweed for corruption.57 Politics, he claimed, was a calling, not a career.

O’Conor’s lucrative career as a Wall Street attorney, however, can hardly be divorced from his professed political philosophy or his party ties to Southern Democrats. O’Conor’s reputation as a loyal defender of Southern rights and institutions was instrumental in helping him secure the trusted business of wealthy Southern clients seeking legal representation in the North. In particular, O’Conor argued several high-profile fugitive-slave cases on behalf of Southern plaintiffs, including the controversial 1835 New York State Supreme Court case *Martin v. Jack*, in which he successfully petitioned to have a fugitive slave residing in New York returned to his Louisiana master.\(^{58}\) O’Conor’s spirited defense of Southern property rights also no doubt also endeared him to potential clients among New York City’s old-line mercantile and business elite, many of whom had strong commercial ties to the South. O’Conor’s infamous 1859 proslavery speech at the New York Academy of Music (“Negro Slavery Not Unjust”), for instance, received glowing endorsement from a committee of conservative New York businessman, who abhorred abolitionism as a threat to the city’s lucrative ties to Southern cotton merchants.\(^ {59}\) O’Conor’s political ideals, in short, blended seamlessly with his professional ambitions. As was the case for many of his Irish-American peers within the Democratic Party, partisan loyalty begot economic opportunity.

\( ^{58} \text{N.Y. Court of Appeals Report of the Lemon Slave Case: Contains Points and Arguments of Counsel on Both Sides, and Opinions of all the Judges (New York: Horace Greeley, 1860).} \)

\( ^{59} \text{O’Conor, Negro Slavery Not Unjust, 1-4, 9.} \)
As one of the wealthiest and most esteemed Irish Catholics in New York, O’Conor naturally assumed various positions of civic leadership within the city’s Catholic community. He was a prominent member of the city’s various Irish civic and benevolent associations— including, among others, the Hibernian Provident Society, the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick, and the Catholic Association of Ireland—and in 1841 helped found the Irish Emigrant Society, an organization “devoted exclusively to aiding the Irish immigrant.” A dutiful if perfunctory Catholic who attended St. Peter’s Church in downtown Manhattan, O’Conor compensated for his modest religious enthusiasm with grand displays of financial generosity to Catholic causes and institutions, donating more than $10,000 to the Catholic Protectory and another $1,000 toward the construction of St. Patrick’s Cathedral. As a symbol of Irish-Catholic wealth and respectability, and an old acquaintance of many of the city’s leading Catholic citizens, including Archbishop John McCloskey, O’Conor was also a much-desired guest, speaker, and master of

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60 *Thirteen Annual Reports with the Charter and By-Laws of the New York Catholic Protectory* (Westchester, New York: New York Catholic Protectory, 1876), 64, 96.
ceremonies for Catholic social events in the city.\textsuperscript{61} The fact that O’Conor served as host for the Archbishop’s episcopal-appointment banquet in 1864 was hardly surprising, for few Catholics in the city better exuded professional success and prestige.\textsuperscript{62}

But if native-born Irish-Catholic leaders like James T. Brady and Charles O’Conor played a key role in advancing both the social influence and temporal fortunes of the immigrant Church, such men never fully assimilated into the increasingly militant and parochial subculture of immigrant Catholicism. Given the general absence of Catholic schools, religious orders, and civic organizations from the urban environs of their youth, this generation of Irish-Catholics came of age with minimal ties to organized Catholicism. Unlike subsequent generations of well-to-do Catholics, whose education at exclusively Catholic colleges like Fordham, the College of the Holy Cross, and Boston College did much to limit social interaction with Protestants and routinize the formal practice of the Roman faith, Irish-Catholics of O’Conor’s generation mixed comfortably with Protestants and had only intermittent contact with Catholic clergy or nuns. To be sure, they often looked upon prominent Irish-Protestant lawyers and statesmen, not Catholic churchmen, as their models of personal ambition and professional achievement. As a result, careers in politics and the law, not service to the Church, seemed the most obvious pathways to power and respectability. (Thomas Brady’s insistence that the young John McCloskey study for the bar, not the priesthood, reflected the predominantly secular ethos of Irish-Catholic professionals in the early Republic.) The fierce nativism of the 1840s and 1850s no doubt strengthened their ties to the Church, and in some cases may

\textsuperscript{61} O’Conor also often offered his legal services to the New York Archdiocese. In 1848, for example, he represented Hughes and the \textit{Freeman’s Journal and Catholic Register} against a lawsuit by Gordon Bennett, the editor of the \textit{New York Herald}. See “The New Code of Practice…” \textit{New York Times}, May 26, 1848.\textsuperscript{62} “The Cardinal’s Red Cap,” \textit{The Sun}, April 7, 1875.
have even rekindled their personal piety. But, culturally and temperamentally, they remained a generation apart, seldom comfortable with the militant sectarianism of the immigrant Church.

Judge Charles Patrick Daly, who rivaled Charles O’Conor as perhaps the most esteemed Irish-Catholic layman of the Civil War era, personified the more secular and cosmopolitan tendencies of the midcentury Irish-Catholic social elite. The son of an Irish-born New York hotel manager, Daly received his education at Thomas Brady’s private academy, and like many of his classmates ultimately embarked on a career in politics and the law. Quickly ascending the ranks of both the city’s legal profession and Democratic political machine, Daly served a term as state assemblyman before receiving a gubernatorial appointment in 1844, at the age of 28, to a judicial seat in the New York Court of Common Pleas. Though maintaining strong ties to Tammany Hall and the Democratic Party, the Judge gained a reputation as a fair-minded and prudent public official, equipped with a razor-sharp wit and an eclectic knowledge of literature, history, philosophy, music and art that endeared him to city’s fashionable classes. Despite his ethnic and religious heritage, Daly gained admission into many of the city’s elite civic institutions and social clubs, including the Century Club, the Union Club and the American Geographical Society, and served as de facto ambassador of the city to visiting statesmen, writers, and dignitaries. A leading figure in the various Irish civic and philanthropic organizations of the day—he was President of the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick and chairman of the Committee of the Relief of Ireland—Daly proved to be an
Despite his exalted status within the Irish-Catholic community, however, Daly was hardly a paragon of religious zeal, though he did at least profess the faith and occasionally practiced. As a child he had attended St. Peter’s Catholic Church with his parents, and in middle-age he rented a pew at St. Francis Xavier Church on 16th Street, where he befriended an Irish-Canadian Jesuit named Bernard O’Reilly, later the chaplain of the 69th Irish Regiment during the Civil War. Respected by many of the diocese’s clergy for his wide erudition and stature within the Irish community, Daly was old friends with Cardinal McCloskey, and had at least a cordial and friendly relationship with Archbishop Hughes, with whom he often shared a platform at Irish-American civic functions. But, overall, Daly seemed to have only moderate interest in the supernatural and ritualistic elements of organized religion, preferring elite cultural refinement and the courtly manners of New York high society to the moral and spiritual guidance of churchmen. A polymath who penned books and articles on Shakespeare, geography, international law, the history of the Jews in America, and various aspects of American jurisprudence, the judge had come of age largely outside the purview of the institutional Church. And as a young man he had learned to emulate, not only Irish barristers and statesman, but also the cosmopolitan Anglo and Dutch Protestants who comprised the moneyed aristocracy of New York.

63 “Charles P. Daly Dead,” New York Times, September 20, 1899; “Daly, Charles Patrick,” in The History of the Bench and Bar of New York, 117-118. Perhaps the most illuminating source on Daly’s life is the journal kept by his wife, Maria Lydig Daly, Diary of a Union Lady (Omaha: University of Nebraska Press, 2000). See also the Charles P. Daly Papers, Archive and Manuscript Division, The New York Public Library, which contains Daly’s personal and professional correspondence as well as the original copy of Maria Lydig’s diary.
Perhaps most illustrative of Daly’s ambivalent relationship to organized Catholicism was his 1855 marriage to Maria Lydig, a wealthy Episcopalian who belonged to one of New York’s premier merchant families. Though deeply enamored by Catholic ritualism and the dedication of Catholic priests (“[t]he more I see of the working of Catholicism in this country, the better I like it,” she noted in her diary), and increasingly drawn into Irish-Catholic social circles by virtue of her husband’s civic ties, Maria nonetheless resisted the urge to convert, in part out of philosophical objects to Catholic doctrine but also because she likely feared that such a decision would aggrieve her Protestant family. 64 Maria’s decision to remain a Protestant, however, seemed of little concern to her husband, who despite his prominence among the city’s Catholics never pressured his wife to break from the Episcopal Church. To have married outside the faith was, of course, a breech of Catholic orthodoxy, but on matters of the heart, if not matters of the conscience, the judge seemed quite willing to flout clerical influence. Daly, moreover, was hardly alone in this regard. Charles O’Conor’s failed marriage, for instance, had likewise been to a member of the city’s Anglo-Dutch aristocracy. John R. Brady, would later marry Maria’s sister, Kate Lydig, in a ceremony at a fashionable Episcopal church. Under pressure from Kate’s family, the couple would raise their children as Episcopalian.

Of course, many of Daly’s Irish-American contemporaries did in fact marry within the Church. “Honest” John Kelly, for instance, would ultimately marry Archbishop McCloskey’s niece, a nuptial pairing that helped to strengthen ties between Tammany Hall and the New York Archdiocese. 65 But within Daly’s generation to marry

64 Lydig, *Diary of a Union Lady*, 74.
65 The marriage gave Kelly unrivaled access to the Cardinal. See: *The Brooklyn Eagle*, March 8, 1885, 2.
outside the church was simply not, as it would be for later generations, an obvious social
taboo that threatened one’s status within the Irish-Catholic community. If anything, for an
Irish-Catholic of Daly’s modest origins to marry a wealthy Episcopalian was itself a
marker of social prestige for the Catholic community at large—proof that Catholics, too,
could gain admission into the American moneyed aristocracy, if only they had the right
mixture of talent, self-discipline, charm, and luck. And despite their tepid religious
enthusiasm and close attachments to Protestant elites, native-born Irish Catholics like
Daly, Brady, and O’Conor could provide the immigrant Church with much-needed
political capital, financial patronage, and civic leadership, even if in their private lives
they remained at the outer edge of clerical influence. They would never fully belong to
the emergent Catholic subculture, but they would at least facilitate the Church’s rise to
power.

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The rise of Irish-Catholic political influence, having commenced in New York
and Brooklyn at midcentury, would continue apace in the decades after the Civil War,
extending outward into many of the nation’s premier urban centers. In 1881 a New York-
transplant and Irish-Catholic saloonkeeper named Christopher Buckley (dubbed the
“Blind Boss” after a bout with alcoholism destroyed his vision) would gain control of the
San Francisco Democratic machine by engaging in precisely the kind the back-room
political wire-pulling pioneered by Democratic bosses in New York and Brooklyn. In

66 William A. Bullough, *The Blind Boss and His City: Christopher Augustine Buckley and Nineteenth Century San Francisco* (Berkeley: The University of California, 1979). The Irish actually achieved political prominence in San Francisco as early as the 1860s, in part because municipal San Francisco was from its inception a multiethnic immigrant city devoid of an old-line Anglo-Protestant elite. But the population of San Francisco at midcentury was so small relative to the cities of the east coast that Irish power there was usually an afterthought. See Robert Arthur Burchell, *The San Francisco Irish, 1848-1880*
1884 the city of Boston, once the stronghold of the Anglo-Protestant elite, would elect its first Irish-Catholic mayor; eleven years later the city of Chicago, the nation’s second most populous city after New York, would follow suit. By the early twentieth century Irish-Catholic politicos like Frank Hague, overseer of the Jersey City Democratic machine and political boss of New Jersey, and Charles “Silent” Murphy, the teetotaler who controlled Tammany Hall into the 1930s, had all but perfected the political techniques introduced by their antebellum forbears, and had emerged as powerbrokers within the national Democratic Party. And in return for their continued political loyalty, Irish-Catholic voters gained steady employment via patronage appointments to the municipal payroll, as well as the informal protection and support of the neighborhood ward boss.

Buoyed by the tacit alliance of politician and priest, the Catholic Church would likewise reap the benefits of municipal favoritism well into the twentieth century. At the behest of his Catholic allies, Frank Hague in the 1920s and ‘30s would slash funding to the Jersey City public school system in an effort to increase enrollments to Catholic parochial schools. And New York City’s municipal law department, under the sway of Irish-dominated Tammany leadership, would strictly enforce Catholic proscriptions against birth control, prostitution, and homosexuality while largely ignoring federal prohibitions against alcohol and gambling. Antebellum screeds against the dangers of “political Catholicism” had proved, at least in some respects, prophetic.

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Overall, the absorption of Irish-Catholics into the Democratic Party, and especially into the political culture of the urban machine, would have considerable implications for the conflict between labor and capital in industrial America. As the historian Amy Bridges has suggested, the fact that Irish assimilation into the Democratic Party predated industrialization ensured that the Irish-American working-class would approach labor conflicts through the lens of party politics, not class-based social action. “To the strike was added the ballot; to the riot, the nominating convention; to protest, partisan insurgency; to class, party.” 68 By elevating pragmatism, party loyalty, and ethnic and religious fealty above class solidarity, urban machines like Tammany Hall, in particular, served to unify “rich and poor in common enterprise,” despite sporadic eruptions of working-class discontent. Indeed, for the most part working-class patrons of the machine would accept the pro-business policies advanced by party elites—low taxes, limited economic regulation, and trimmed welfare benefits—in exchange for patronage, protection, and a share of political power. By alienating the Irish from the rhetoric of class conflict, the political culture of the urban machine thus did much to limit Irish-Americans’ embrace of “more radical forms of working-class politics,” 69 especially those animated by Marxian principles. And because Catholic institutions in the United States would come to be dominated by the Irish and their descendants, such instinctive political conservatism would suffuse the American Church itself, providing fertile ground for the cultivation of a rigid anti-socialism in line with the social teachings of Rome. 70

Chapter Four:
The Populist Revolution in American Catholicism, 1840-1860

On January 7th, 1838, at St. Patrick’s Cathedral in lower Manhattan, John Hughes received his consecration as assistant Bishop of the New York diocese. The cathedral, Manhattan’s second oldest Catholic church and the predecessor to the much grander St. Patrick’s that would be completed in 1879, was filled beyond capacity, with crowds of eager onlookers, mostly Irish-born, having descended upon the cathedral early that morning. “The staircase was thronged thickly,” one newspaper reported, “and every windowsill was filled with persons, curious or devout, who imperiled their lives to witness the consecration. Some persons upon the outside of the Church erected a most dangerous platform under one of the windows, in order to look into the building.”

John McCloskey, then but a young parish priest at St. Joseph’s on 34th street, was one of the lucky few to have secured a seat in the packed church. Like many of the man and women in the cathedral that afternoon, McCloskey knew of Hughes’ growing legend in the diocese of Philadelphia—of his rousing debates against Protestant preachers in crowded lecture halls, of his unflinching assaults against anti-Catholic bigots in the local Catholic press, of his impassioned sermons at St. John’s Church that drew both crowds and converts. “Every pulse within that vast assembly,” McCloskey recalled years later, “both of clergy and of laity, was quickened with a higher sense of courage and of hope.”

1 “St. Patrick’s Church—Consecration of Dr. Hughes,” New York Herald, January 10, 1838.
Image 4.1: The “Old” St. Patrick’s Cathedral on Mott Street in Manhattan. St. Patrick’s was the seat of the New York archdiocese until 1879, when the much grander St. Patrick’s Cathedral on 5th Avenue was completed. Image from Miller’s Strangers’ Guide for the City of New York With Map (New York: James Miller, 1872), 79.

No doubt, the ceremony at St. Patrick’s was in many respects a formal changing of the guard within the American Church. The churchmen who presided over the consecration were among the luminaries of the old ecclesiastical order. John Dubois, the French-born bishop who had ruled the New York diocese since 1826, officiated the ceremony. A native of Paris who had studied at the celebrated College Louis le Grand, Dubois had fled revolutionary France in 1791 for Virginia, where, furnished with a letter of introduction from the Marquis de Lafayette, he ingratiated himself with leading citizens like James Monroe and Patrick Henry. In 1806 Dubois had founded Mt. St. Mary’s in Maryland, where he educated many of the future leaders of the American Church.

Assisting in the consecration was the Bishop of Boston, Joseph Fenwick. A former professor at Georgetown who was descended from one of the leading Anglo-Saxon Catholic families of Maryland, Fenwick was a leading Jesuit scholar whose personal charms and erudition endeared him to the genteel classes. Like Dubois, he
prided himself on having converted native-born gentlemen of wealth and status, including several distinguished Episcopal clergymen, to the Roman faith. And delivering the homily that afternoon was the president of Georgetown University, the Jesuit clergyman Thomas J. Mulledy. Mulledy’s sermon on the Church through the ages, “delivered in a strain of pure eloquence,” impressed even the skeptics in the audience, and brought the gathered masses into “almost perfect silence and rapt attention.”

The churchmen who presided that day, in short, were men of rank and erudition, gentlemen scholars who mixed easily among the upper classes. For decades they had sought to impress upon their Protestant neighbors the dignity, grace, and prestige of the Roman church. But among the mass of Catholic immigrants, especially the hardscrabble Irish, they were seldom at ease. To the immigrant Irish of New York, the elder Bishop Dubois had long seemed distant and out of touch. Once welcomed into the homes of Virginia aristocrats, he had made few friends in New York. To rule the city he needed the help of someone like John Hughes: an Irishman who could court the adulation of the crowd.

The men and women who crowded into cathedral that afternoon were a testament to the transformation of the American Church. They were Irish and poor, mostly immigrants—what the respectable classes considered the dregs of society. James Gordon Bennett, the editor of the Morning Herald, sniped that for Mulledy to deliver such an

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eloquent sermon to an Irish rabble was akin to putting “gold rings through pig’s noses.”

“It might as well have been preached in Latin, Greek, or Hebrew,” Bennett snarled.4

Hughes, however, would transform the Irish rabble into a revolutionary force. Fusing ethnic, class-based, and religious resentments, Hughes would lead a populist insurgency in the Church that would strengthen the Church’s hold over the Irish working class, advance the Church’s influence in urban politics, and throttle the influence of secular and cosmopolitan traditions within the Irish community. Hardly an import of European religious traditions, this tribal Catholicism flowed from both the hypersectarianism of the American religious marketplace and the realities of urban poverty and electoral politics. While Catholic leaders like Hughes would embrace many of the reactionary values of the transatlantic “Catholic revival,” this embrace of ultramontanism took root in the unique conditions of Catholic working-class life in the antebellum city, gathering its power less from any identification with European devotional practices than from the desire to destroy the secular and republican influences within the Irish-American community. Ultimately, this new brand of Irish-Catholic sectarianism would, paradoxically, move the Church to the very center of American political culture in cities like New York, Boston, and Philadelphia.5

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5 This chapter attempts to knit together three distinct historiographies: the literature on the transatlantic Catholic revival, the literature on antebellum American ethnic politics, and the history of the nineteenth-century Irish diaspora. The rise of a militant and tribal Irish Catholicism at midcentury, I argue, was less a manifestation of “Roman” tendencies and values than an adaption of Catholicism to the unique conditions of American religion and politics in the antebellum period. While Catholics would embrace many aspects of the “ultramontane” revolution, this shift occurred in response to Anglo-American nativism, the failure of an Irish republican revolt in 1848, and unsuccessful efforts by secular Irish revolutionaries to gain influence within the Irish-immigrant community. For works that emphasize this period as one of increasing “Romanization” of the Church, see Jay Dolan, The American Catholic Experience (New York: Doubleday Religious Publishing, 1985); Anne Taves, The Household of Faith: Roman Catholic Devotions in Mid-Nineteenth Century America (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986); Joseph Chinnici, Living
Over the course of his career John Hughes would adopt many personas—controversialist, confessor, political wire-puller, theologian, statesman, simple priest—but no persona was more crucial to his rise to power and influence than that of a loyal and embattled Irishman. The immigrant poor embraced him because he was one of their own: an Irishman driven from his native land by poverty and persecution, who had encountered in his adopted homeland of America widespread opportunity but also widespread resentment. Convinced of his loyalty and kinship, the immigrant Irish had offered Hughes their trust, and in return he had offered them his protection.

But Hughes was more than just the leader of the Irish-immigrant clan. He was also an emblem of what the Irish believed they could accomplish in America. As the widely revered Bishop John England of Charleston noted to a fellow Bishop in 1837, Hughes was unmistakably a “self-made man”—someone who had come from nothing, whose worldly successes owed to a combination of pluck, tenacity, and sheer force of

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will. As a paragon of the upwardly striving, resilient, and entrepreneurial Irish-American, Hughes would indeed come to embody a variant of Irish working-class assimilation that embraced individual uplift, self-discipline, and ethnic and religious solidarity over and against the nostrums of class-based politics and utopian reformism. But central to this vision of Irish-American uplift was the personal narrative of Hughes himself: his origins, his tribulations, his personal and political triumphs. He himself could embody the aspirations of the Irish people in America, for he was, after all, one of their own.

The common perception of Hughes as the triumphant immigrant bishop, who had overcome the handicaps of poverty and persecution to achieve greatness in America, was itself a mixture of historical fact and popular myth. Born in 1797 in the county of Tyrone, in northern Ireland, Hughes as a young man had endured the myriad social handicaps and civil humiliations suffered by Irish Catholics under the penal laws. “They told me, when I was a boy,” he recalled in his later years, “that for five days I was on a social and civil equality with the most favored subjects of the British empire. These five days would be the interval between my birth and my baptism.” As Bishop of New York he would often recount, with a mixture of sadness and anger, the memory of his young sister’s funeral—how no priest could offer a final benediction as her coffin was lowered into the earth because, by law, no Catholic clergyman could enter a public burial ground. A few years later he was held captive, and nearly killed, by a gang of armed Protestant Orangemen. Such episodes no doubt implanted in Hughes a deep sense of anger, grief, and shame toward the circumstances of his upbringing, and the plight of his fellow Catholics under English rule. When he left Ireland in 1817, at the age of 19, for the United States, Hughes
thus brought with him a sense of personal animosity toward Anglo-Protestant rule in Ireland that would strongly resonate with his immigrant flock.

But unlike the great flood of emigrants who left Ireland in the wake of famine at midcentury, most of whom were from the impoverished and heavily Catholic regions of western and southern Ireland, Hughes was the son of respectable middle-class farmers. A devout Catholic who prized education, self-discipline, and economic independence, John’s father, Patrick Hughes, was hardly wealthy, but he earned enough income from the farm and a successful linen trade to have his son educated at private day schools.\(^7\) Given his education and the family’s close ties to the Church, John began to consider the priesthood, which in Ireland remained one of the few available careers for educated and ambitious Catholic men. Poor harvests and declining overseas markets for linen, however, nearly bankrupcted the family farm, forcing John to withdraw from school. Intent on improving his family’s social and economic fortunes, Patrick decided to remove the family to America, and, after a few years laboring in Maryland, purchased a plot of land in southeastern Pennsylvania. An industrious farmer and canny businessman who quickly earned the respect of his neighbors, Patrick found in America what had seemed so elusive in his native land: prosperity, opportunity, and stability. But John, perhaps emboldened by the family’s first taste of poverty and desperation, which had halted both his education and his prospects for a career in the Church, remained resolute in his desire to enter the priesthood. He no doubt had sufficient ambition, as anyone who knew him could attest. But he hoped his adopted homeland would provide sufficient opportunity.

It was during his early years in America, as a young man in pursuit of a vocation, that Hughes garnered the reputation of a “self-made man.” In the hopes of earning

\(^7\) Hughes, *Life of Archbishop Hughes*, 7-14.
Hughes labored at various odd jobs in city of Baltimore, often working alongside his fellow Irishmen at menial tasks like digging trenches and carting bricks for city contractors. But though he worked with his hands, Hughes was nonetheless a young man of education and enterprise, intent on rising in the world, and proud of his respectable origins; in his spare hours he sought the company, not of his fellow laborers, but of local Irish Catholic professionals and tradesmen with connections and expertise. After two years of constant labor and little luck, Hughes finally caught a break: John Dubois, then the president of Mount Saint Mary’s College and Seminary, agreed to enroll Hughes at the seminary if, in return, the young Irishman agreed to supervise the two men who worked as slave laborers the college garden. “It was a contract between us, nothing more,” Hughes recalled. Dubois was deeply suspicious of the growing Irish influence in the American Church—like many of his French-born contemporaries, he feared that the lowly Irish would all but destroy the Church’s claims to respectability in America—but he must have discerned Hughes’ talents and ambition.

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8 Hassard, The Life of the Most Reverend John Hughes, 24-27.
Hughes enrolled in Mt. St. Mary’s in November of 1819, and instantly was thrust into a social world far removed from the working-class environs of urban Baltimore. Among his fellow Irish-born carters, diggers, and bricklayers, Hughes had been something of a gentleman. But among the students of Mt. St. Mary’s—typically native-born young men of wealth and privilege, drawn from Maryland, Virginia, and Louisiana—he was little more than a lowly and half-educated farmer’s son. His status as an Irishman, meanwhile, did little to boost his claims to respectability. Irish parentage could serve as a kind of social capital within the immigrant-dominated saloons and dance halls of Baltimore, but among the well-bred Anglo-Saxon students of St. Mary’s, an Irish surname was little more than a cause for ridicule and mockery.\(^9\) (One St. Patrick’s Day during Hughes’ tenure, a fellow student placed an effigy of an Irish “Paddy” in the main

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\(^9\) On Mt. Saint Mary’s in this era, see Mary Meline and F.X. McSweeny, *The Story of the Mountain: Mt. St. Mary’s College and Seminary* (Emmitsburg, MD: The Weekly Chronicle, 1911).
study hall.) The dramatic shift between social worlds no doubt caused the young Irishman a great deal of consternation, but the experience helped cultivate an invaluable skill, one central to his long-term success: the ability to navigate between the divergent social worlds of the genteel and the proletarian, the Irish and the American. Nevertheless, it would take Hughes years to master the subtle politics of self-presentation, and at Mt. St. Mary’s his attempts to cultivate a more genteel persona often struck others as hypocritical. “You are nobody but John Hughes,” a worker at the college, offended by Hughes’ newfound air of respectability, bellowed in a drunken rage. “Don’t I remember when you used to work with your two hands, as I do?”

Gradually remolding himself into an American gentleman (“I have almost forgotten that I am a foreigner” he would later confess), Hughes would eventually thrive at the Mount. Though lacking the polish and social graces of his well-bred classmates, Hughes proved a diligent and focused scholar. One St. Mary’s faculty member noted that Hughes would have been “at least the equal” of the school’s most celebrated pupils, if not for the limited vocabulary that betrayed his humble roots. As he earned the respect of the faculty, Hughes also rose in the estimation of his classmates. He joined the college literary society, published articles in local newspapers, and gained the reputation as a natural leader of men. When brush fire threatened to damage several buildings belonging to the college, Hughes responded promptly and decisively, organizing a team of fellow students to help repel the flames.

But nowhere did Hughes shine more brilliantly at the Mount than in the field of public oratory and debate, where his fiery personality and razor-sharp wit more than

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11 Ibid., 316.
12 Shaw, *Dagger John*. 
compensated for his modest erudition. Adept at channeling personal feelings of anger, frustration, and resentment into controlled but impassioned displays of intellectual prowess, Hughes had an all almost pathological attraction to sectarian controversy, both on the public stage and in print. “He needed the occasion, the excitement of actual collision, to bring him out fully,” a friend remarked of Hughes’ intellectual talents. While still in the seminary, he published an impassioned defense of the relationship between Catholicism and the Holy See in a local newspaper. Fearful that such public displays of sectarian zeal would arouse Protestant resentment, the college faculty considered Hughes’ editorial ill-advised, if not reckless. But it was precisely Hughes’ inclination toward theological controversy that would make him such a powerful force in the American Church.

To be sure, the temper of religious ecumenism, tolerance, and indifferentism that had characterized the revolutionary generation had all but vanished by the mid-1820s, giving way to dynamic religious marketplace defined by bitter sectarian controversy, widespread theological innovation, and explosive denominational growth and competition. The seeds of this religious revival—later dubbed the Second Great Awakening—had been sown by the revolution itself. Severed from the tithe and the disciplinary apparatus of the state, churches under the new constitutional order were little more than voluntary societies, dependent on their parishioners for financial and institutional support. Forced to adopt more aggressive and innovative forms of popular persuasion to keep parishioners in the pews, American churchmen in first third of the nineteenth century launched an unprecedented campaign of religious activism and organization, founding networks of missionary societies to encourage religious

13 Hughes, Complete Works, vol. 1, ii.
revivalism and exploiting the emergent market in newspapers and periodicals to cultivate popular piety. Central to this evangelical campaign was the theology of the “conversion experience”—the belief that men and women could participate in their own salvation by embracing the transcendent power of divine grace, which, when willfully accepted, would beget an all-encompassing spiritual regeneration. Originating among the rural communities of the western frontier, the tempest of religious revival had by the 1820s reached the urban middle-class congregations of the Northeast, with a diverse array of urban religious entrepreneurs now engaged in feverish competition for parishioners and popular attention. By 1835 the Reverend Charles Finney, one of the chief exponents of the post-Calvinist theology of spiritual rebirth through conversion by choice, could fill a lecture hall in New York City with 20,000 ecstatic followers, all craving the promise of religious renewal.

Fear of a resurgent Catholic Church, moreover, underlay the evangelical revivals that swept through the urban Northeast between 1821 and 1838. Of course, the anti-Catholic tenor of American evangelicals in this era was hardly surprising or unprecedented. Anti-Catholicism had deep roots in Anglo-American politics and culture, and Rome’s emphasis on the redemptive power of the sacraments and the spiritual power of the priesthood proved a powerful negative reference for evangelicals striving to cultivate a deeply personal relationship with Christ. The bitter anti-Catholic rhetoric of the 1830s, however, was not reducible to ancestral prejudices or old-line doctrinal disputes. Broader changes in the North Atlantic political and economic order had created

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the ideal conditions for a resurgent anti-Catholicism. The restoration of Catholic absolutist regimes in Italy, Austria, and France after Napoleon’s defeat in 1814, coupled with the 1829 passage of the Catholic Emancipation bill by British Whigs in Parliament, had by 1830 awakened Anglo-American evangelicals to a perceived Roman Catholic “revival” in Europe and the United States.\textsuperscript{15} As the influx of Irish-Catholics into the U.S. accelerated in the 1820s, Protestant jeremiads against the resurgent power of the papacy fused with ethnic and class resentment towards the Irish working-class, giving rise to a popular iconography that cast the ignorant and impoverished Irishman as the political tool of Rome. This new sectarianism, an explosive amalgam of revivalist passion, religious controversy, and ethnic and class resentment, would within two decades all but reshape the American political order.

Receiving his holy orders in 1827, and taking up an assignment in the diocese of Philadelphia, John Hughes thus embarked upon a career in the priesthood at precisely the moment when Catholic-Protestant relations in the U.S. had begun to descend into bitter sectarian conflict. Unlike his clerical mentors at Mount St. Mary’s, who in their younger years had benefited from interreligious cooperation, close ties to Protestant elites, and a general aura of respectability, Hughes would have to endure countless slurs and protests against his Church and his fellow Catholics from an increasingly hostile Protestant majority.\textsuperscript{16} To be sure, priests of Hughes’ generation would bear witness to a series of outrages against their Church in their first years of ministry, including the burning of the


Charlestown convent in 1834 and, two years later, the widespread dissemination of *The Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk*, a tawdry and sensational faux-expose of murder and sexual debauchery in a Montreal convent. Repeatedly challenged by aggressive Protestant clerics intent on exposing both the theological and political dangers of “Romanism,” churchmen of Hughes’ generation would embrace a much more confrontational and aggressive style of Catholic apologetics while working to shield the immigrant faithful from Protestant and secular influences. The result, over the next few decades, would be the creation of an insulated and hypersectarian Catholic subculture that sought to define itself in opposition to mainstream Protestant society. By embracing a new ethos of sectarianism, Catholic clerics like Hughes, however, were in many respects simply reacting to, if not imitating, the hypersectarian polemical style that had already come to define the American religious marketplace.

Given his education, Irish roots, and contentious personal style, Hughes was perfectly suited to confront the newfound challenges facing American Catholicism. Educated at the country’s leading Catholic seminary among native-born men of wealth and respectability, Hughes possessed the social polish and rigorous theological training to curry favor with the native-born Catholic middle-class, but also the personal charisma, combative temperament, and oratorical prowess needed to contend with a generation of anti-Catholic preachers well-trained in the populist techniques of the pulpit. Hughes’

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17 *Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk of the Hotel Dieu Nunnery of Montreal* (New York: Maria Monk, 1836).

status as an Irishman and an immigrant, meanwhile, endeared him to the American Church’s rapidly growing Irish-immigrant base. Though he had adapted himself to his new homeland, and even dropped his Irish brogue, Hughes was a native son of Eire whose personal narrative of immigrant triumph and deep disdain for British colonialism would strongly resonate with the Irish-Catholic working-class. Moreover, unlike many of his predecessors in the American Church, Hughes craved public notoriety, had few misgivings about directly criticizing the Anglo-Protestant establishment, and was willing to make use of the burgeoning popular press to combat anti-Catholic bigotry.

The heightened sectarianism of the United States in the late-antebellum era, however, is hardly the only important social context for understanding Hughes’ ascent to power. Changes in the political and religious landscape of Ireland also contributed to the rising influence of Irish-American clergy among the growing immigrant community. Unlike in other traditionally Catholic nations like Italy, Spain, and Portugal, where the traditional alliance of altar and throne had provoked rampant anticlericalism among the laboring classes, in modern Ireland the persecution of the Catholic Church under English rule had in fact strengthened popular attachment to the clergy. Though the Irish bishops in the eighteenth century had rarely sanctioned the nationalist aspirations of the Irish middle class, and had even condemned outright the 1798 insurrection of the United Irishmen, the Church in the nineteenth century nonetheless retained the loyalty and respect of the Irish peasantry, who viewed the local parish priest as one of the few reliable sources of moral and civil authority in a nation under foreign occupation.19

The Irish clergy’s engagement in national politics advanced considerably, however, in the 1820s, when the Irish barrister Daniel O’Connell mobilized a national movement in Ireland to abolish the last of the penal laws, which since the 1690s had denied Catholics basic civic and political rights in Ireland. While the Irish clergy had traditionally refrained from meddling in national politics, the campaign for Catholic emancipation received the staunch support of the Church, with the parish clergy even serving as local organizers and fundraisers for O’Connell’s Catholic Association. The passage of the Catholic Relief Bill in 1829, which lifted the last of the social and political restrictions on Catholics, vindicated the Church’s entrée into electoral politics and elevated the Catholic clergy’s standing in national affairs. Irish peasants who poured into the United States between 1830 and 1860, as a result, would have been accustomed to clerical leadership not only in the realm of religion and personal morality but in the broader arena of politics and civil affairs. Daniel O’Connell’s campaign for Catholic Emancipation in Ireland, in this respect, set the stage for Hughes’ ascent to power in America.20

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In 1826, however, Hughes was but a young priest, talented and ambitious but lacking any real-world experience as a churchman. Dispatched to the city of Philadelphia, one of the largest and fastest growing Catholic dioceses in the country, he also faced no shortage of obstacles in his first assignment as pastor. A city with a rich tradition of religious toleration, Philadelphia had in the eighteenth century attracted a number of

respectable Irish and French Catholics, and by 1789 could already lay claim to three distinct Catholic parishes. In the first three decades of the nineteenth century, however, the reputation of the diocese declined considerably, largely as a result of the public controversy over the so-called “trustee system.” Following the ecclesiastical model adopted by most Protestant congregations in the U.S., lay trustees of Philadelphia’s Catholic churches had for decades claimed the legal right to elect their own priests and manage parish finances, despite stalwart opposition from Church officials. “Let the clergy confine their intention to the spirituals,” the trustees averred, “and we will manage the temporals.” Tensions around trusteeism and the “rights of the laity” reached a boiling point in 1822, when the disaffected trustees of St. Mary’s provoked a de facto schism with Rome after refusing to accept a new pastor installed by the local Bishop. Catholic officials could now only look on in horror as the trustees restored to the pulpit their ex-pastor, a fractious Irish priest named Michael Hogan who delighted his parishioners by denouncing the Vatican bureaucracy and declaring St. Mary’s “the property of the laity.”

In other words, when Hughes arrived in 1826, the diocese of Philadelphia was in the midst of prolonged crisis marked by public scandal, institutional dysfunction, and factional infighting—what one prominent layman later described as “ten years of agitation and warfare” among the city’s Catholics. Despite his reputation as a tough-

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22 In response to the trustee crisis of the 1820s, the U.S. bishops issued formal decree in 1829 ruling that “henceforth no church be erected or consecrated unless the title thereof, whenever it can be done, shall be assigned by a written document to the bishop of the diocese in which it is to be erected.” See Hughes, Complete Works, vol.1, 551.
23 Hughes, Complete Works, vol.1 vi.
minded and decisive churchman, however, Hughes recognized that he needed to gain standing within Philadelphia establishment before he could mount an aggressive campaign against trusteeism. His personal charisma, tireless work ethic, and oratorical gifts would serve him well in this regard. Promptly earning the reputation as one of the city’s most eloquent and engaging clergymen, Hughes often traversed the county of Philadelphia on horseback to deliver sermons to eager crowds. Assigned to St. Joseph’s Church, the oldest Catholic parish in the city, he also had no shortage of weddings, confirmations, baptisms, and funerals to officiate. In his spare time, Hughes penned articles for the local press defending Catholic beliefs and practices; a member of several literary societies in the city, he even published a novel, *Andrew Dunn*, in 1828 about a young Protestant’s conversion to Catholicism.25 “I am working as busy as a nailer every day,” an exhausted Hughes wrote to a friend.26

Hughes’ heavy workload, however, soon paid dividends. Regarded even by rivals as “one of the most the most distinguished ministers” in the city, Hughes gained admission to the exclusive Wistar Club, a prestigious social club for Philadelphia’s leading citizens. His popularity, however, extended to all classes. “The church where he officiated was crowded, Sunday after Sunday,” a fellow churchman recalled, “with Catholics and Protestants who came to hear him preach.” Gradually assuming additional administrative duties within the diocese, he also served as the secretary and amanuensis for the Bishop. By 1833 the country’s leading Catholic churchmen, though wary of the young priest’s ambition, had already begun to consider Hughes for an episcopal appointment.

To combat the influence of trusteeism, however, Hughes needed more than a just a sterling reputation; he needed organizational support and ample financial resources. As a result, Hughes strove to ingratiate himself with powerful and wealthy members of Philadelphia’s Catholic community. Already a popular figure among the city’s leading Irish-Catholics, Hughes in 1830 forged a close friendship with Marc Anthony Frenaye, a wealthy merchant and land speculator who later served as financial manager for the archdiocese of Philadelphia. Born in the French West Indies in 1778 and educated in France, Frenaye had immigrated to the United States in 1806 and grown wealthy in the silk trade. After two-decades of constant travel and labor the field of international finance, Frenaye in 1827 decided to abandon his worldly career and pursue a life of personal holiness and service to the Church. In 1829 he settled in Philadelphia and began to attend St. Joseph’s Church, where Hughes served as his confessor. Unified in their disdain for the institutional chaos that had befallen the diocese, the two men forged a close personal bond that would last for nearly thirty years. With Frenaye agreeing to provide capital and financial expertise, Hughes at last proffered a scheme “to destroy the trustee system” in Philadelphia.

The plan was simple: with Frenaye’s personal fortune at his disposal, Hughes would found a new Catholic Church in Philadelphia that was under the exclusive legal control of the clergy but also of such “unparalleled grandeur” as to attract the city’s leading Catholics. As Hughes no doubt understood, church institutions in the United States operated within a religious free-market defined by denominational competition and clerical entrepreneurship. If offered the prospect of attending a vastly superior parish,

27 On Frenaye’s role as a leading financial adviser to the Philadelphia Archdiocese, see the Marc Anthony Frenaye Papers, MC 16, Catholic Historical Research Center of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.
Hughes reasoned, the city’s Catholics would have few misgivings about abandoning their old congregations, including those still under lay control. By building a church that would “be the handsomest in the United States,” Hughes would simply drive the trustee system out of business.²⁸

Furnished with $40,000 from Frenaye, and aided by a “committee of superintendence” composed of leading citizens from St. Joseph’s Church, Hughes in 1831 purchased a plot of land in west Philadelphia for the construction of a new parish.²⁹ Named for St. John the Evangelist, the prospective church would “make the Protestant wish it were his,” Hughes boasted, and “make all the bishops of all the churches jealous.”³⁰ As Frenaye and Hughes worked to balance the financial costs and solicit additional contributions from the laity, construction on the church proceeded apace. The Church “is purely gothic,” reported the National Gazette in March 1831, “and if the execution corresponds with the plan, the building will be an ornament to the city, and an honor to the Catholic religion.”³¹ After more than a year of unrelenting labor by contractors, masons, and carpenters, St. John the Evangelist opened its doors on April 8th, 1832. At a total coast of $70,000, the church edifice did not disappoint in its gothic grandeur, and as a result was promptly nominated by city officials to host Philadelphia’s forthcoming July 4th celebration. Widely regarded “the handsomest and best attended church in Philadelphia,” the fashionable new parish even helped produce a number of

²⁹ National Gazette and Literary Register, March 12, 1831.
³⁰ Griffin, “History of ‘Old St. Joseph’s,” 361; Hughes to Purcell, September 1831, reproduced in Hassard, The Life of the Most Reverend John Hughes, 120.
conversions among the city’s genteel classes. The institutional strife that had long afflicted the Philadelphia diocese, meanwhile, was soon forgotten, as were the lay trustees who had dared to challenge clerical authority.

But if Hughes had succeeded in securing the trust of the Philadelphia’s Catholic establishment, he also worked to maintain the loyalty of the city’s Catholic poor. The future of the Church in Philadelphia lay with city’s ever-growing Irish immigrant population, and Hughes knew that to appeal to the laboring classes he needed to offer more than ornate gothic architecture. As a result, Hughes labored in his early years in Philadelphia to found both an orphanage and day school to serve the city’s Catholic poor. To staff these institutions, Hughes recruited four women religious from the Sisters of Charity motherhouse in Emmitsburg, Maryland. Accomplished educators, nurses, and caretakers, the Sisters could provide numerous social services on behalf of that Church that would directly benefit the poor and working-classes. The Sisters’ service during the

city’s 1832 cholera outbreak, in particular, would earn praise from common laborers and city officials alike.\footnote{William Watson, “The Sisters of Charity, the 1832 Cholera Epidemic in Philadelphia, and Duffy’s Cut,” Catholic Historian 27 (Fall 2009): 1-16.}

In addition to his charitable endeavors, Hughes also took care to cultivate his reputation as a champion of Irish nationalism. One of Hughes’ first acclaimed speeches in Philadelphia was a discourse on Catholic Emancipation delivered in St. Augustine Church in 1829. Dedicated to Daniel O’Connell and later published in pamphlet form, the sermon celebrated the Irish people as a spiritually superior race subjected to seven centuries of “civil thralldom and religious persecution” under foreign rule. Such discourses on the Irish character gave Hughes a forum to reaffirm his ethnic and national attachments.\footnote{Hughes, “Great Sermon on the Emancipation of Catholics,” in Life and Speeches, 39.} “There is in the heart of every man that which interests him in the land of his nativity,” he announced to the mostly Irish audience at St. Augustine Church, “and until that heart ceases to beat, no distance either of time or of place will be able to extinguish the sensation.”\footnote{Ibid., 39.} Hughes may have won the affection of the Philadelphia elite, but he still professed to be a humble Irishman at heart.

The Catholic Church’s growing institutional presence in Philadelphia, however, would come at a considerable cost. Despite Hughes’ success in courting members of the city’s Protestant establishment, the perceived growth of “Romanism” in Philadelphia would provoke a virulent backlash among the city’s middle-class evangelicals and native-born laborers in the 1830s. The city’s Protestant clergy led the assault, penning editorials in sectarian journals like The Churchman, The Christian Advocate, and The Presbyterian ridiculing “Romish” superstitions and denouncing the passage of the Catholic Relief Act.
in Britain. In 1832 Rev. John Breckenridge, the city’s leading Presbyteri\-an minister and a
former chaplain to the U.S. Congress, challenged the city’s “bishops and priests” to a
public debate on the merits of the Catholic faith—an offer that was more a public taunt
than an open invitation for dialogue. Meanwhile, a city-wide cholera outbreak, the cause
of which many residents attributed to the poor sanitary habits of Irish immigrants, only
served to exacerbate nativist sentiment among the lower classes. As ethnic tensions
escalated amid increased Irish immigration to the city’s working-class neighborhoods,
Catholic-Protestant relations in Philadelphia would steadily deteriorate over the next
decade, giving way to violent sectarian rioting, neighborhood vigilantism, and interethnic
gang warfare in the mid-1840s.

This upsurge in sectarian conflict, however, merely furnished Hughes with
additional opportunities to bolster his standing as one of the country’s preeminent
Catholic apologists. Having already published numerous editorials in the city press
defending Catholic beliefs and practices, Hughes in October of 1832 publicly accepted
Breckenridge’s invitation to engage in a theological controversy. In lieu of a public
encounter, the two agreed that the debate would take the form of an extended public
correspondence in the local press. Between January and October of the following year,
Hughes and Breckenridge exchanged three-dozen public letters touching on various
theological and ecclesiastical controversies. Though the two clergymen largely confined
the debate to competing interpretations of scripture and classical theology, the exchange
included no shortage of ad hominem attacks and displays of male bravado, with Hughes
at one point asserting that he could discern nothing “that reaches the difficulty or
approaches the character of manly argument” in Breckenridge’s contentions. Shortly thereafter, Hughes and Breckenridge met in crowded Philadelphia auditorium for a lively “oral discussion,” the content of which was published in 1836 by a local Philadelphia printing house. Unsurprisingly, partisans on both sides of the debate claimed victory for their respective theological champion. But regardless of the outcome, the controversy advanced Hughes’s stature nationally in the mid-1830s, winning him praise even in the secular press. When in 1837 Rome moved to appoint an assistant Bishop to the New York diocese, Hughes seemed the obvious choice.

New York, like Philadelphia, was a diocese plagued by escalating sectarian strife, internal dissension, and lax clerical leadership. When Hughes arrived in New York in January 1838, the city’s Catholic churches, many of which teetered on bankruptcy, remained in the grip of trusteeism. ( Forced to preach to barren pews and denied a pastoral salary, John McCloskey, Hughes’ eventual successor as archbishop of New York, was at the time mired in bitter conflict with the lay trustees of St. Joseph’s parish.) Relations with the city’s Protestant majority, meanwhile, had rapidly deteriorated amid increasingly aggressive Protestant proselytism, with organizations like the New York Protestant Association, founded in 1831 by local Protestant clergy, underwriting countless lectures on the grave evils of popery. And long-standing ethnic tensions between Irish and native-born workers had finally given way to outbursts of mob violence during the turbulent summer of 1835, when efforts to found a local Irish-American militia (the “O’Connell Guards”) provoked widespread rioting, clashes between rival ethnic gangs, and rumors of

36 Controversy Between the Rev. John Hughes, of the Roman Catholic Church, and the Rev. John Breckenridge, of the Presbyterian Church, Relative to the Existing Differences in the Roman Catholic and Protestant Religions (Philadelphia: Joseph Whetam, 1833), 17.
an imminent mob assault on St. Patrick’s Cathedral. Such conflict, moreover, had proved intractable for the city’s embattled French bishop, John Dubois, whose aristocratic mien and faulty grasp of the English language had alienated many of the city’s Irish Catholics. Eager to halt the institutional dysfunction and ethnic squabbling that had plagued Dubois’ regime, Rome looked to Hughes—an Irishman with a reputation as a reformer—to take charge of the New York diocese.

Secure in his reputation as an icon of the Irish-immigrant community and a rising star in the American Church, Hughes decided to mount an aggressive campaign against trusteeism. After Bishop Dubois issued a pastoral letter in February of 1839 formally denouncing lay interference in church affairs, Hughes immediately called for a public gathering of the pew-holders and trustees of St. Patrick’s Cathedral. Promptly seizing control of the meeting, Hughes called upon the predominantly Irish audience to recall the myriad sufferings and unfailing piety of their ancestors, who, even in the darkest hours of foreign oppression, had huddled in “the solitude of the mountain or the dampness of the secret cave around their priest, for whose head the laws offered the same premium as for that of a wolf.”38 To foment rebellion against clerical authority was not only a violation of their duties as Catholics, Hughes asserted; it was a disgrace to the legacy of the Irish people, who had “long upheld the freedom of her faith at the sacrifice of all that men hold dear.” The conceit worked brilliantly. “The whole evil,” a fellow priest recalled of the speech, “may be said to have ceased at that moment.” The trustees agreed to respect episcopal authority and cede control of church affairs to the clergy; the few trustees who refused to yield were soon replaced. Under Hughes’ oversight, the overthrow of

trusteesim would soon be carried out at parishes across the city. 39 Within a decade virtually all parish property in the diocese was under the legal control of the Bishop.

Hughes, however, would not be content merely to serve as Dubois’ disciplinarian; he had much grander aspirations, both for himself and for the diocese he now served. Having restored order to the institutional church, he now looked to greatly expand its social and political influence, particularly among the city’s working-class immigrants. In pursuit of this goal Hughes in 1840 turned to an issue that would long vex Catholic-Protestant relations in America: the role of religion in public schools.

Since 1805 common-school education in New York had been under the supervision of the Public School Society, a private cooperation that received funds from state to instruct “children not otherwise provided for.” 40 Though the Public School Society was, at least in theory, strictly non-sectarian, the trustees and officials who comprised the Society’s board of directors were Protestants, as were the vast majority of teachers employed in its school system. Wary of Protestant proselytism in the classroom, the Catholic clergy had since the mid-1820s forbidden Catholic parents from enrolling their children in the city’s public schools. Given the paucity of Catholic parochial schools in the city before 1840, this clerical ban all but ensured that immigrant parents would have to choose between educating their children and obeying their clergy—a predicament that posed a serious threat to the Church’s social and moral standing in the city.

The election of William Seward to the governor’s office in 1838, however, introduced a new wrinkle into the public-school debate. A Whig politician eager to make inroads into the state’s solidly Democratic immigrant vote, Seward in his 1840 gubernatorial address pledged to reform the common-school system so that “children of foreigners” could be instructed “by teachers speaking the same language with themselves and professing the same faith.” Unsurprisingly, Seward’s proposal irked the nativist faction of the Whig Party and provoked the ire of Irish Tammanyites, who accused the Governor of scheming to foment political divisions within the immigrant community. The New York diocese, however, saw Seward’s proposal as an opportunity to secure state funding for a separate Catholic school system, and with the support of a coterie of leading Irish-American laymen, including Thomas O’Connor, the émigré journalist and ex-radical, began to agitate in the early months of 1840 for a reform of the common-school system. Though Hughes at the time was on fundraising mission to Europe, he followed the early movements of the Catholic-school campaign closely in the press, and in June wrote from Dublin to voice his opposition to a system that would “tax the Catholic father” for the purpose of “perverting his child” in a Protestant-run school. Returning to New York City in mid-July, Hughes promptly thrust himself into the center of the school-fund controversy. The imminent battle over “sectarian schools” would come to define his early years in New York, and fortify his reputation as the most feared, if not most respected, Catholic prelate in the country.

43 Truth Teller, June 27, 1840, pg. 207.
Truth be told, Hughes had various motives for embracing the school-fund campaign, only some of which he acknowledged publicly. Like his fellow diocesan clergy, Hughes was of course eager to procure government funding for the Church’s understaffed school system, but he also recognized that the campaign itself could advance the interests of the Church. “Whether we shall succeed or not in getting our proportion of the of public money or not,” he wrote to a fellow bishop that summer, “at all events the effort will cause an entire separation of our children from those schools—and excite greater zeal on the part of our people for Catholic education.” By underscoring the nativism and intolerance of Protestant-run public schools, the campaign could inflame the sectarian passions of the Irish while casting the Church as a champion of the “poor and oppressed.” Moreover, by focusing on parochial education—an issue palatable to the city’s Catholic business and financial elite—Hughes could appeal to the immigrant community without dividing Catholics across class lines.

Political concerns also shaped Hughes’s decision to take up the school-fund issue. Though he publicly maintained that he had no opinion on “political controversies and party questions,” in truth Hughes had strong convictions about the political fortunes of Irish-Catholics. In particular, Hughes believed that the “party men” of Tammany Hall, confident in the unbending loyalty of the immigrant vote, seldom felt pressure to delivery tangible benefits for the city’s Irish-Catholics. “[T]hey care very little for us or our rights,” Hughes said dismissively of the ward politicians, “provided they can have our services.” By uniting his flock around a political issue advanced by the Whig party, Hughes believed he could teach Tammany Hall “a lesson for the future”: that Irish-Catholic political loyalty extended only as far as the social and economic rewards it

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44 Hughes, *Collected Works*, 47.
conferred. By proving their independence from the political machine, Irish-Catholics could at least reap the benefits of machine politics.

For the next fourteen months Hughes led a mass-mobilization campaign unprecedented in U.S. Catholic history. Denouncing the common-school system as “prejudicial to the faith” of Roman Catholics,\(^45\) Hughes delivered more than a dozen stump-speeches on the school-fund question, typically speaking before large crowds in the schoolroom of St. Patrick’s Cathedral and the basement of St. James Church.\(^46\) In October 1840 he stood before the city’s Board of Alderman and debated, for over six hours, the legal counsel for the Public School Society, in an auditorium so crowded that the speakers could hardly “obtain a passage through the mass of bodies that struggled for admission, even with the aid of a body of police officers.”\(^47\) In his public remarks Hughes alternated between invocations of American constitutional liberties and verbal taunts of the Protestant establishment. Citing the “right of conscience” and “the sacred right of every man to educate his own children,” Hughes could at times sound like a seasoned legal advocate, furnishing for his audience ample evidence—typically drawn from prejudice-laden common-school textbooks—that Catholics students educated in non-sectarian schools would be “influenced, alienated, and imperceptibly drawn from their own faith.” In his more rousing speeches, however, Hughes adopted the style of a political firebrand, railing against Protestant intolerance and condemning public schools as “infidel” institutions that taught “morality without religion.” Unsurprisingly, Hughes’

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\(^45\) Hughes, *Collected Works*, vol. 2, 45.
\(^46\) “Adjourned Meeting of the Catholics, for the Purpose of Obtaining a Portion of the Common School Fund,” *The Truth Teller*, October 24, 1840, 343.
stump-speeches received thunderous applause from immigrant-heavy crowds and caustic remarks in the Protestant and secular press.

Not all Catholics, of course, were enthused by Hughes’ school-fund campaign. Irish Tammanyites, in particular, feared that the school-fund agitation would weaken Irish-Catholic ties to the urban political machine and lend legitimacy to Governor Seward’s pro-immigrant agenda. Concerned that a decline in Tammany influence could endanger their own political ambition, and perhaps envious of Hughes’ growing political power, many of the rising stars in the New York Democratic establishment, including James T. Brady and Charles P. Daly, publicly condemned the bishop for meddling in politics and advancing the agenda of the Whigs. Nonetheless, Hughes received public backing from an older generation of Irish-American social and financial elites, including Andrew Carrigan, a wealthy grocery merchant; Gregory Dillon, an Irish-born banker and philanthropist; Captain James W. McKeon, an attorney and celebrated veteran of the War of 1812; and several other prominent Irish-Catholic lawyers, doctors, and philanthropists. (Having already attained financial and political success, these men perhaps felt less vulnerable to the whims of Tammany Hall than did less established

48 Even before the campaign began, local Democrats railed against attempts by Catholic clergy to distribute school-fund literature in St. Peter’s Church, calling such pamphleteering a “political desecration” of the church. “Desecration of St. Peter’s Church,” The Truth Teller, April 18, 1840.
public figures like Brady and Daly.) Such pledges of support from the better classes of Irish-America lent an aura of respectability to Hughes’ campaign.

Despite its growing popularity, the school-fund campaign nonetheless encountered fierce resistance from municipal authorities, much as Hughes had anticipated. In January 1841 the Common Council of the City of New York rejected the Catholics’ petition for a portion of the school fund, arguing that such a course of action violated both the freedom-of-religion clause in the New York constitution and state laws pertaining to the administration of common-schools. Undeterred, that spring the city’s Catholics petitioned the state legislature in Albany for a reform bill “to extend and improve the benefits of common school education in the city of New York.” Despite the vigorous support of Governor Seward, the bill, denounced by nativist factions in both parties, was soundly rejected by the Whig-controlled state legislature in May. Intent on pressing the issue and electing state assemblymen friendly to their cause, the city’s Catholics now looked to the forthcoming November elections. Having already consolidated his power among the immigrant masses, Hughes now planned a brash maneuver that would radically alter the political fortunes of the Church.

In a nation founded on the constitutional separation of church and state, Hughes, a sitting Catholic bishop, was about to intervene directly in a political election. On October 29th, just five days before Election Day, Hughes called for a mass meeting in Manhattan’s Carroll Hall for the purpose of announcing an “independent” Catholic political ticket.52

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51 Among the younger generation Hughes did, however, gain the support of James McKeon’s son, John McKeon, the attorney and political iconoclast who in later years would serve as one of the archdiocese’s closest legal advisers.

“You are for once to stand up for yourselves,” he told the crowd, “for neither in honor, nor in principle, nor in conscience, can you now vote for those whom you already know are prepared to do you injury.”

Hughes, long resentful of Tammany’s influence, would now teach the ward-politicians a lesson. He furnished of a list of nominees to the state legislature, all of whom, he claimed, had expressed support for public-school reforms. The so-called “Carroll Hall ticket” included ten of the thirteen candidates for state assembly nominated by Tammany Hall, as well three additional candidates, all Catholics, running as independents. “You have often voted for others, and they did vote for you,” Hughes counseled, “but now you are determined to uphold with your own votes, your own rights.” After the secretary read the names of the nominees, Hughes exhorted those in the audience to “prove themselves worthy sons” of their adopted homeland, a challenge met with thunderous applause and exclamations of “We will ‘til death.” “The cheering—the shouting—the stamping of feet—[the] waving of hats and handkerchiefs,” one newspaper reported, “beggared all powers of description.”

Though he would later publicly deny that the rally was a “political meeting,” or that he was “a politician of any description,” Hughes had in essence just crossed the threshold from religious pastor to urban ward boss.

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Ibid., 113-115.

On Hughes’ denial, see “Bishop Hughes’ Card,” Truth Teller, November 11, 1841. Hughes would later claim that his entry into politics was a defensive act, provoked by the willingness of native-born Protestants to “mingle religion with politics.” Irish-Catholic sectarianism, in other words, was simply a response to Protestant sectarianism. See “Bishop Hughes Reply,” Commercial Advertiser, December 1, 1841.
News of the Carroll Hall meeting roiled the state’s political establishment. Whigs and Democrats alike denounced Hughes as a “political hack” and a “political juggler” who dared “to control politics by the force of religious sentiment.”\textsuperscript{56} Citing the bishop’s outsize influence over the immigrant community, a letter to the \textit{New York Herald} argued that the Irish-born citizens who endorsed Hughes’ plot had “disenfranchised themselves” of their rights as Americans. Irish-Catholics loyal to the Democratic machine, meanwhile, rushed to condemn Hughes’ political gambit. James T. Brady, speaking at a Democratic rally at Tammany Hall on November 3rd, denounced the Carroll Hall ticket as a treacherous “connection of church and state.”\textsuperscript{57} “When any priest forgets the dignity due to his calling, and mingle in temporal strife” Brady cautioned, “the constitution of this state places an insuperable bar to his unholy and ambitious progress.”


Nonetheless, the Carroll Hall ticket had its desired effect. In the contest for state assembly, the ten candidates who appeared on both the Carroll Hall and Tammany tickets won their races handily, while the three Democrats running solely on the Tammany ticket lost their seats to the Whigs. The “independent” slate of Catholic candidates had received only a few thousand votes, but its support among the immigrant community had proved sufficient to upend Democrats deemed hostile to Catholic interests. The results of the election, one historian has remarked, “demonstrated without reasonable doubt that the Democrats could not afford to cast off their Catholic supporters if they wanted success.” Indeed, the Truth Teller, the city’s Irish-Catholic paper mostly closely connected to Tammany Hall, acknowledged that the election had exposed a widening “breech” between the Democratic establishment and Catholic voters. If Tammany hoped to rule the city’s immigrant masses, it would need to reckon with the Church’s growing moral influence.

Chastened by the Catholic electoral revolt, Democrats in Albany moved to placate the immigrant vote by forging a compromise on the school-fund issue. After several months of deliberation, the state legislature passed a reform bill in May that overhauled the New York City common-school system, replacing the Public School Society with a democratically elected Board of Education. Though the bill denied public funding for sectarian schools, it ceded control of common schools to municipal officials elected at the ward-level. For the city’s Protestant establishment, such reforms ensured that public education, in the words of a Public School trustee, would now be subject to the “blighting influences of party strife and sectarian animosity.” To the city’s Catholics, by comparison, the bill offered the possibility of local control of neighborhood schools and
freedom from Protestant meddling in the classroom. The power of the Catholic vote, in
other words, would dictate Catholic influence in city schools.

The true beneficiary of the school-fund campaign, however, was Hughes himself.
By stoking sectarian passions and prejudicing the immigrant community against
mainstream Protestant and secular institutions, Hughes had both strengthened lay
attachment to the institutional Church and demonstrated to the political establishment the
decisive power of the Irish-Catholic vote. Heralded even by some non-Catholics as “one
of the great men of the age” and courted by New York City mayors, federal officials, and
even American presidents, Hughes would henceforth wield considerable influence in
temporal affairs, dispensing advice to political insiders and undertaking diplomatic
missions on behalf of the American government. Eager to maintain the loyalty of the
Catholic vote and the favor of the Catholic clergy, Tammanyites would steadily disburse
patronage to the Irish-immigrant community, in the form of municipal appointments, city
contracts, and even direct funding of Catholic institution. To be sure, many of the Irish-
American elites who had distrusted Hughes’ brand of sectarianism now benefited from
the emerging alliance of priest and politician. James T. Brady, who in future years would
appear alongside Hughes at various Irish-American civic functions, in 1845 received
Tammany’s nomination to the prestigious office of Corporation Counsel. (Appointed as
Brady’s clerk was Peter “Brains” Sweeny, the Tweed protégé who later helped funnel
millions of municipal dollars to Catholic schools.)\(^{58}\) While such patronage no doubt

owed, in part, to the increasing political power of the Irish at midcentury, Tammany’s continuing efforts to placate Catholic leadership was a direct result of Hughes’s aggressive and confrontational style.

But if the school-fund campaign helped fortify Hughes’ position as the most influential Catholic prelate in the country, it also unleashed a virulent nativist backlash unprecedented in the country’s brief history. During the 1842 elections, nativist mobs attacked Hughes residence, hurling rocks and threatening to burn the building to the ground—an early manifestation of the anti-Catholic mob violence that would convulse American cities for the next few years.59 Equally threatening to Church’s institutional stability, however, was the massive growth of anti-Catholic political and religious groups between 1840 and 1844. Warning of the imminent threat posed by authoritarian bishops to American schools and political institutions, organizations like the Christian Alliance, American Protestant Society, and American Protestant Association inundated the country with a steady stream of anti-Catholic propaganda.60 This upsurge in anti-Catholic feeling provoked the advent in 1841 of the so-called Native American Party (or “American Republicans”), an independent political organization that pledged to throttle immigrant political influence, ban Catholics from positions in government, and preserve the Protestant character of public schools.61 Running on the Native-American ticket, James

60 Noll, Bebbington, and Rawlyk, Evangelicalism, 182.
61 According to the Herald, the Native American party was “instigated by the late political demonstration of Bishop Hughes, under a conviction that they may ride into power on the torrent of indignant sentiment” aimed at the bishop. “A New Move in Politics,” New York Herald, November 17, 1841.
Harper, the publisher of *The Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk*, was even elected to New York’s City Hall in 1844.\(^{62}\)

The rise of political nativism, however, only served to strengthen Hughes grip over the immigrant faithful. In May 1844 rumors that the Philadelphia diocese had agitated for the removal of bibles from public schools provoked widespread rioting and violent street clashes between Irish and nativists, resulting in the destruction of two Catholic Churches, the declaration of martial law, and the flight of the Irish-born bishop from the city.\(^{63}\) Wary that such outrages would be re-enacted in New York, Hughes enjoined several thousand loyal Catholics to take up arms and guard the city’s Catholic churches, commanding his men to “take as many lives as they could in defense of their property.” (Among those enlisted to guard St. Patrick’s Cathedral on Mott Street was 22-year-old “Honest” John Kelly, later the chieftain of Tammany Hall.) In his calls for armed self-defense, Hughes refused to defer to Protestant authorities, even provoking city officials with threats to retaliate against nativist mobs and plunge the city into open warfare “if a single Catholic Church were burned.”\(^{64}\) Hughes’ militant posture provoked public threats against his life, but his defiant stand against nativism prevented further outbreaks of violence and re-affirmed his status as folk-hero to the immigrant Irish. The

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following year Tammany Hall, buoyed by overwhelming support from the Irish, retook City Hall from the nativists.\textsuperscript{65} While nativism would return ten years later in the guise of the Know-Nothing Party, in the short term the Native-American Party had done little more than strengthen Irish-American attachment to Church and Party.

As the breech between immigrant Catholics and native-born Protestants widened, Hughes and the diocese labored to develop a network of institutions capable of sustaining the emergent Catholic subculture. While Hughes in the long-term would endeavor to create separate systems of Catholic healthcare and charity, his immediate concern was education. To this end he recruited a number of Catholic religious orders from Europe and the southern United States to provide education for Catholics of all social classes. In Hughes vision, a vast network of free and low-cost parochial schools, run by the Sisters of Charity, Sisters of Mercy, and Christian Brothers, would cultivate the piety of the immigrant masses, while prestigious academies like the Jesuit-run Fordham College and Manhattanville’s Convent of the Sacred Heart would develop a financial, cultural, and political elite capable of providing lay leadership for the Catholic body.\textsuperscript{66} (Elite academies like Fordham and Sacred Heart could also, by winning the affection of upper class Protestants, help endear the Church to parties of influence and produce a new generation of influential converts.) To provide clerical leadership over the laity, Hughes founded St. Joseph’s seminary in Westchester, which, by training a generation of American-born priests, could end the diocese’ dependency on European-trained clergy. In the coming decades Catholic dioceses across the United States would develop similar

institutional networks, forging a separate Catholic institutional life in urban America that would endure for over a century.67

At the center of this emergent Catholic subculture was Hughes’ own carefully constructed public persona, that of the god-fearing but politically ruthless Irish-American churchman who would deliver the immigrant masses from poverty and persecution. In the aftermath of the school-fund controversy Hughes continued to burnish his reputation as the country’s Irish-Catholic standard-bearer, delivering lectures on behalf of Catholic and Irish-American charities in New York and Philadelphia and engaging in public controversies with Protestant clergymen. In public discourses on topics like “The Influence of Christianity on Social Servitude” and “The Mixture of Civil and Ecclesiastical Power in the Middle Ages,” Hughes cast the Church as an institution awash in power and prestige but nonetheless sensitive to the plight of working people. But it was Hughes’ brazen and unapologetic style—aimed at provoking outrage and controversy among the Protestant majority—that perhaps most endeared him to the laboring classes. In response to the popular claim that the Catholic Church aspired to conquer and subdue the American Republic, Hughes famously remarked that there was “no secret” about the Church’s ambitions: “Everybody should know that we have for our mission to convert the world—including the inhabitants of the United States—the people of the cities, and the people of the country, the officers of the navy and the marines, commanders of the army, the Legislatures, the Senate, the Cabinet, the President, and all!” Such provocations, even if laden with a heavy does of irony, proved a powerful tonic to the Catholic masses.

67 The most illuminating overview of the Catholic subculture at the turn of the century is Paula Kane, Separatism and Subculture: Boston Catholicism, 1900-1920 (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2001).
By 1847 John Hughes was, without question, the most powerful and respected Catholic clergyman in the United States, heralded by Catholics and Protestants alike as the standard-bearer of an increasingly Irish-dominated church. “If you cannot confute me,” a leading Protestant controversialist wrote to Hughes in May 1848 “no man of your church in these United States can.”68 The Church’s demographic base, moreover, was about to experience an unprecedented surge, as widespread famine in Ireland, provoked by a mysterious blight on the yearly potato crop, resulted in a mass exodus of Irish women and men across the Atlantic.69 Between 1847 and 1851 more than one million Irish women and men would immigrate to the United States, the vast majority settling in port cities like New York, Boston, and Philadelphia. Immigrants of the so-called “famine generation” would gradually adapt to the hypersectarian Irish-Catholic culture that had already taken root in the urban U.S. Like the Irish migrants who came before them, these naturalized citizens would look to Catholic priests and Democratic politicians for social leadership. And naturally they would look to the man who was in many respects both priest and politician, John Hughes.

69 The impact of the famine generation on US history is the dominant theme of Irish-American historiography. Significant works include Handlin, Boston’s Immigrants; McCaffrey, The Irish Catholic Diaspora in America; Miller, Emigrants and Exiles; Kenny, The American Irish; Campbell, Ireland’s Other Worlds; Kenny, “The Global Irish as Case Study.” The notion that the famine-generation radically altered the textures of American Catholicism and helped launch “the Catholic revival” has also been an unquestioned assumption of American Catholic historiography. In my view, however, the basic architecture of the US Catholic revival—which gave rise to a dominant strand of militant urban Catholicism that linked class, religion, and ethnicity—was already in place by the time of the famine and owed as much to American developments (ethnic pluralism, Protestant revivalism, urban democratic politics) as to developments in Irish culture and society. On the impact of the famine generation on US Catholic history, see Dolan, The American Catholic Experience; Dolan, Searching for an American Catholicism; McGreevey, Catholicism and American Freedom. Since the 1970s historians of modern Ireland have argued that the “devotional revolution” in Ireland transpired after the famine, and largely as a result of it. See Emmet Larkin, “The Devotional Revolution in Ireland,” The American Historical Review 77 (June 1972): 625-652; Stewart J. Brown and David W. Miller, eds., Piety and Power in Ireland (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000).
Having gained the loyalties of the Irish working class, Hughes and his acolytes would now seek to forge new a concept of Irish-American identity, one closely tied to the prerogatives of Roman Catholicism. No doubt, Hughes and his fellow Irish-American clergy would prove loyal emissaries of the ultramontane revolution that swept through the Catholic world between 1848 and 1870. In accord with the counter-revolutionary ideals of Pius IX, whose clash with Italian nationalists in 1848 foreclosed any prospective Catholic rapprochement with Enlightenment liberalism, the institutional Church in these years sought to cultivate a sentimental and baroque piety in opposition to the increasingly secular and humanistic values of the age. Undertaken in the hope of inoculating the Catholic masses against the ascendant influence of the liberal middle class, this devotional revolution entailed the standardization of liturgical practice and canon law under Roman auspices, the tightening of Vatican control over episcopal appointments and clerical training, and the promulgation of a wide range of popular devotions—the cult of

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various local saints, the veneration of Marian apparitions, the recognition of modern miracles—once dismissed as folk superstitions but now formalized under clerical control. At the center of the ultramontane revolution, of course, was the growing cult of the papacy itself, buoyed by the charismatic leadership, militant populism, and highly publicized persecutions of the beloved Pio Nono. As Pius’ spiritual authority reached its apogee with the declaration of papal infallibility in 1870, Catholics across the world pledged their fealty to a Roman pontiff hailed as the champion of illiberal values in a liberal age.

The ultramontane revolution, however, did not go unchallenged among Catholics in the United States. If anything, the reactionary ethos of ultramontanism proved nearly incompatible with the radical republicanism of the Irish-American laity. Steeped in the enlightened republicanism views of ‘98ers like Wolfe Tone and the democratic populism of Jefferson and Jackson, leading Irish-American laymen like Thomas O’Connor and William MacNeven had voiced support for a wide range of democratic insurrections, including the French revolution of 1830 and the failed Polish uprising of 1832, that directly contravened the counter-revolutionary edicts of the Holy See. Indeed, for this older generation of Irish-born radicals, a fierce republican tradition centered on contempt for the British monarchy proved a powerful link between Irish and American nationalism. By midcentury virtually all of leading organs of Irish-Catholic America, including the Truth Teller and the Boston Pilot, remained under the control of radical democrats for whom the ultramontane emphasis on order, hierarchy, and authority evoked traditional justifications for British dominion in Ireland.72 A spirit of revolutionary nationalism,

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72 For instance, The Boston Pilot, edited by Patrick Donahoe, praised the revolutionary uprising that rippled across Europe in 1848. “Arrival of the Cambria! Revolution in France! Triumph of the People,” The Boston
moreover, prevailed even among the Irish-born clergy, including Bishop Hughes, whose speeches during the school-fund campaign demonstrated fluency in the rights-based language of American republicanism. In early 1848 Hughes even went so far as to publicly support an Irish uprising against the British crown, pledging $500 to an Irish nationalist organization for the purpose, in his words, of purchasing “a shield to interpose between the oppressor and his victim.”

Three key developments between 1848 and 1853, however, hastened the triumph of ultramontanism in the immigrant church. The first was the spectacular failure of the Irish uprising of 1848. As revolutionary insurrections rippled across the continent of Europe in the spring of that year, a new generation of middle-class Irish revolutionaries, dubbed “Young Ireland,” had begun to agitate for an armed uprising against the British Crown. Centered around the radical Dublin journal, *The Nation*, which advocated a nonsectarian nationalism under the aegis of the Irish literary and cultural elite, Young Ireland received exultant praise from Irish-American journals like the *Boston Pilot*, which exhorted its readers not “to LOSE one moment in gathering up the resources by which the gallant stand of the Irish army be aided in its struggle.” This “gallant stand” however, quickly proved a farce. Physically devastated by three years of famine, barred from taking up arms by the pacifist Catholic clergy, and generally uninspired by the romantic rhetoric of middle-class nationalism, the Catholic peasantry failed to produce a

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revolutionary insurgency.\textsuperscript{75} Young Ireland’s desperate calls for rebellion in late July, as a result, provoked little more than an isolated skirmish in the rural village of Ballingarry, which was promptly put down by the local constabulary. The abortive uprising provoked outrage, recrimination, and soul-searching in the Irish-American press, as former advocates of rebellion now struggled to explain the apparent “moral and physical cowardice and fear” that had stricken the Irish people.\textsuperscript{76} Though the jailed leaders of Young Ireland would remain heroes in the Irish-American press, the embarrassing episode throttled popular support for revolutionary nationalism and restored confidence in the moderating influence of the Catholic Church.

The second development was the increasingly radical, violent, and anticlerical tilt of the Italian nationalist movement, which resulted in Pius’ exile from Rome and the implosion of the Church’s moderate-liberal faction. Agreeing to countenance increased political expression, liberate political prisoners, and invest in agricultural and technological development for the Papal States, Pius IX had originally been hailed as a liberal reformer, with some Italian nationalists proposing that the Pope serve as temporal sovereign over a unified Italy. The tide turned, however, in November 1848, when Pius refused to sanction an Italian war of independence against Catholic Austria, a decision that alienated his liberal supporters and empowered radical and anticlerical elements within the nationalist movement. The popular uprising in the Papal States soon spiraled into a violent revolution against papal authority, reaching its nadir with the assassination

\textsuperscript{75} On the failed Irish uprising of 1848, see Christine Kinealy, \textit{Repeal and Revolution} (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009).

\textsuperscript{76} “A Cruel Hoax,” \textit{Boston Pilot}, September 2, 1848, 6; “Why Did Not the Irish Fight?” \textit{Boston Pilot}, September 16, 1848, 6; “The ‘Leaders’ and ‘People’ of Ireland,” \textit{Boston Pilot}, December 23, 1848, 7;
of Pius’ prime minister, Pellegrino Rossi, on November 15. As insurgents moved to strip the Church of its temporal power and inaugurate a Roman republic, Pius fled to the Bourbon-controlled province of Gatea, where he issued a furious denunciation of the “authors and favorers of the demagogical anarchy” that had convulsed the Papal States.

Though Pius would return to Rome in April 1850 under the protection of French troops, the chaos of the previous two years convinced many Catholics, both in Europe and the United States, of the imminent threat posed by liberal nationalism to the values and traditions of the Church.

But perhaps nothing more strongly influenced the rise of ultramontanism in the American Church than the outspoken support of Protestant nativists, middle-class reformers, and urban evangelicals for the political convulsions that had roiled Catholic Europe. Covering the uprisings in Italy as a correspondent for the New York Tribune, one of the leading organs of the Whig Party, Margaret Fuller, the Massachusetts-born reformer and literateur, wrote glowingly of the Italian “cause for freedom” while condemning the backwardness and conservatism of the Catholic clergy. (She was particularly critical of the Jesuit Order, which she accused of being “always against the free progress of humanity.”) After nationalist forces conquered the Papal States and drove Pius into exile, a wide array of American Protestant luminaries, including Horace Greeley, voiced

80 Margaret Fuller Ossoli, At Home and Abroad; Or Things and Thoughts in America and Europe (Boston: Brown, Taggard, and Chase, 1860).
vigorous support for the Roman Republic, much to the horror of the nation’s Catholics. “They have plundered the churches—they have extorted money from the people—they have almost legalized assassination where ever their authority,” Hughes said of nationalist uprising in Italy. “And this is the phalanx recognized by Mr. Greeley as the Roman Republic.” Such objections, however, did little dampen American Protestant support for liberal nationalism. In the aftermath of the Roman revolution a number of leading European radicals, including Louis Kossuth of Hungary and Alessandro Gavazzi of Italy, made extended tours through North America, denouncing “popery” as a threat to human freedom while soliciting financial contributions for nationalist insurgents in Europe. Typically sponsored by leading American evangelicals, these lecture tours only reinforced the obvious parallels between anti-Catholic nativists in the U.S. and secular liberals in Europe. By the mid-1850s, the apparent links between European liberals and American Know-Nothings had all but extinguished the radical democratic strain of Irish Catholicism.

As immigrant Catholics’ disaffection with liberal nationalism increased, so too did missionary efforts by the American clergy to channel nationalist passions into militant devotion to the Holy See. At the forefront of this missionary campaign was Bishop Hughes, whose brief dalliance with Irish revolutionary nationalism in 1848 gave way to an outright rejection of secular liberalism. In the aftermath of the failed Irish revolt at Balingarry, Hughes indeed sought to distance the Church from the revolutionary

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fervor of Young Ireland, denouncing the radical politics of the Dublin *Nation* as “a mixture of Infidel poison and pretended Irish patriotism.”

> “Whoever separates Ireland from Catholicity,” he cautioned in an 1849 editorial in the *Freeman’s Journal*, “is an enemy of both. They are identified and mutually endeared, by the memory of the stripes which each had borne for the other.”

As middle-class Protestants exalted the Roman revolution as a victory for democracy, Hughes and his fellow American bishops rallied in defense of the Holy See, soliciting financial contribution from the Catholic laity on behalf of the exiled pontiff and furiously condemning the “sacriligious usurpers” who had driven him into exile. The Pontiff, once a peripheral figure in the American Catholic imagination, now moved to the center of Catholic devotional life, his persecutions at the hands of Italian nationalists trumpeted as proof of a “universal conspiracy” against the Church. The image of the persecuted pontiff, encircled by hostile and irreigious forces, would deeply resonate with an immigrant body beset by nativist intolerance and anti-Catholic bigotry, forging an affective bond between people and pontiff that reinforced the Church’s growing institutional authority.

As sympathy for the exiled pontiff strengthened the connective tissues of the Catholic subculture, American churchmen cultivated the highly sentimental, romantic,

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83 [John Hughes], “To the Editor of the Freeman’s Journal,” *Freeman’s Journal and Catholic Register*, January 13, 1849.
84 Ibid.
and reactionary piety that would define Roman Catholic devotion for the next century.\textsuperscript{87} Embracing the supernatural aspects of revealed religion, this ultramontane sensibility exalted tradition over progress, order over liberty, and faith over reason. “Genuine liberty,” Hughes cautioned in an 1849 sermon at St. Patrick’s, was “tempered by moderation, order, reason, gradual progress, and the increasing capacity of nations to comprehend its duties, as well as to appreciate its high privileges.” Emphasizing the need for traditional institutions of law, church, and family to restrain human passions and preserve moral order, clerical sermons henceforth would underscore pervasiveness of sin, the fallibility of reason, and the inherent depravity of the individual. “What! Do you dare to think that a human mind like yours, created, limited, and full of darkness,” a common mission book from the period warned, “is able, of itself, to comprehend the mind of God?” Especially when fused with ethnic and class resentment, this rejection of liberal and humanistic values had a powerful populist appeal for Catholic population weary of the cultural and intellectual pretensions of the Protestant middle class.

The ultramontane assault against the secular world, however, rarely applied to the world of urban machine politics, where support for the Democratic Party remained a hallmark of immigrant life. If anything, the ultramontane revolution actually strengthened Irish-Catholic attachment to the increasingly reactionary Democrats, which amid the bitter sectional debates of the 1850s emerged as the de facto party of the South. By steadfastly denouncing abolitionism as an outgrowth of “the Lawless liberalism” that had convulsed Europe, the ultramontane Church legitimized the proslavery stance of Southern Democrats and further estranged Irish-Catholics from the reformist impulse of

the Whig and Republican parties. In truth, the democratic-republicanism of Irish-born radicals like Thomas Addis Emmet and Thomas O’Connor had always mixed uneasily with the proslavery apologetics of Jefferson and Jackson, and in this respect the ultramontane emphasis on tradition, order, and hierarchy helped resolve longstanding cultural differences between aristocratic Southern elites and hardscrabble working-class Irish. When Charles O’Conor in 1859 praised African slavery as an “institution ordained by nature,” he voiced a sentiment that would have rattled his father, the former political radical, but hardly seemed out of place to the reactionaries who dominated both the Catholic Church and the Democratic Party at midcentury.

Overall, the rightward shift in the Catholic population between 1848 and 1853 proved highly advantageous to Catholic conservatives. The rising influence of ultramontanism among the immigrant faithful empowered theological hardliners and lent legitimacy to clerics and writers who otherwise lacked ethnic or national ties to the “foreign colony.” Anglo-American converts, in particular, found in ultramontanism a pathway to acceptance among an otherwise hostile Irish-Catholic population. For instance, despite his Anglo-American roots and occasional royalist sympathies, the fiercely conservative James McMaster, who converted to Catholicism in 1845 after a brief sojourn at the Union Theological Seminary in New York, emerged as one of the leading lights of the Catholic press in the early 1850s. Hired by Hughes to edit the *Freeman’s Journal and Catholic Register*, the official organ of the New York Archdiocese, McMaster in the summer of 1848 offended much of his predominantly Irish readership by offering only tepid support for Irish nationalism and expressing skepticism,

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if not outright contempt, for the revolutionary fervor sweeping through Europe. In the aftermath of the failed Irish uprising and the Pope’s expulsion from Rome, however, McMaster’s reactionary politics and unswerving fealty to the Holy See endeared him to the embattled immigrant community, and for the next three decades his bitter opposition to liberalism, secularism, and socialism helped make the *Freeman’s Journal* one of the leading organs of American Catholicism. Modifying his surname from the traditionally Scottish spelling of “MacMaster” in an attempt to Hibernicize his origins, McMaster, to be sure, ultimately found that nothing proved more illustrative of one’s Celtic *bona fides* than a fierce devotion to Rome.

The ultramontane revolution, however, did not merely empower long-standing reactionary elements within the American Church; it also inspired a conservative turn in many of the nation’s leading Catholic radicals. Perhaps the most influential ex-radical of this generation was Father James T. Roddan, an Irish-American clergyman who gained notoriety in the late 1840s for his heterodox theological speculations and ultra-republican politics. Born in Boston in 1819 to Irish immigrants, Roddan received his seminary training in the mid-1840s in Rome, where, captivated by the intellectual and political ferment of the *Risorgimento*, he gradually melded his Catholic faith with the radical-democratic traditions of Italian nationalism. Returning to New England in 1848 as both a Catholic clergyman and a full-throated Irish-American radical, Roddan acquired an editorial position at the *Boston Pilot*, where he penned articles praising the revolutionary uprisings then convulsing Europe and calling for a violent insurrection in Ireland. Devastated by the failure of the Irish rebellion and the increasingly anticlerical tilt of Italian nationalism, Roddan, however, quickly grew disillusioned with the revolutionary

89 “The Other Side,” *Boston Pilot*, October 21, 1848.
spirit of the age, and by the summer of 1850 he was heaping praise on Americans’
respect for civil authority and condemning the European uprisings as the deranged
handiwork of “socialists, red-republicans, and the mob generally.”90 Confessing that he
had erred in the past, Roddan insisted that he was now “undeceived” as to inherent
dangers of secular nationalism.91 Roddan’s conservative turn provoked skepticism among
some Catholic editors, but nonetheless helped preserve the standing of the Boston Pilot as
the country’s preeminent Catholic newspaper.

But perhaps nothing better illustrated the conservative and sectarian turn in
American Catholicism than the fraught history of the Irish expatriates of the Young
Ireland generation.92 In the aftermath of the disastrous Irish uprising at Bailingarry, many
of the leaders of Young Ireland fled to the United States, where they were hailed, at least
initially, as Irish patriots. (While the reputation of the Young Ireland had suffered a
serious blow in the Irish-American press after the failed 1848 rebellion, the British
government’s overzealous prosecution of the young Irish revolutionaries did much to
restore their standing as Irish heroes). These exiles, however, soon discovered that their
brand of revolutionary nationalism had little traction with the conservative priests and
cynical ward-politicians who exercised leadership within the Irish immigrant community.

90 J.P. Roddan, “Political Priests,” Boston Pilot, June 8, 1850; “Foreign Anarchists in American,” Boston
Pilot, August 24, 1850, 6; Catholic Press And Nativism, 152; Thomas O’Connor, Fitzpatrick’s Boston
1846-1866 (Boston: Northeastern, 1984). 91. Roddan also denounced abolitionism; see “Slavery and
Abolitionism,” Boston Pilot, February 16, 1850. For a biographical overview of Roddan, see Donna
University Press, 1972), 204-205.
92 On Young Ireland, see R. F. Foster, Modern Ireland, 289-317; Richard P. Davis, The Young Ireland
Movement (Trenton, New Jersey: Gill and Macmillan, 1988); Jackson, Ireland, 1798-1998; Christine
Ireland in the U.S., see Brown, Irish-American Nationalism, 1-45; Florence Gibson, The Attitudes of the
New York Irish Toward State and National Affairs, 1848-1892 (New York: Columbia University Press,
1951), 27-35; Brundage, Irish Nationalists in America, 54-110.
The former leaders of Young Ireland had to either embrace the reactionary and sectarian values of the immigrant community or forsake power and influence on American shores. The tumultuous literary career of Thomas D’Arcy McGee, one of the leading Irish exiles of 1848, lays bare the kind of the social and institutional pressures that could turn Irish radicals into Irish-American reactionaries.  

93 Born in 1825, McGee came of age in a middle-class Catholic family steeped in the pious nationalism of Daniel O’Connell. In lieu of a career in politics, the law, or the church, McGee in 1842 elected to leave Ireland and try his hand at journalism in America, using a family connection to secure a position at the Boston Pilot. A natural provocateur, McGee delighted the Catholic readers of Boston with spirited essays lampooning New England literary culture (“an eccentric museum of ill-assorted ideas”) and proclaiming his desire to “unProtestantize” the United States. Word of McGee’s literary exploits soon reached across the Atlantic, and in 1845 he accepted an offer to return to Ireland and write for Dublin’s Freeman’s Journal, a nationalist organ long associated with the pragmatic constitutionalism of O’Connell.  

94 Like many Irish nationalists of his generation, however, McGee had grown weary of the dry, procedural politics of the O’Connellites, and began to gravitate toward more radical expressions of Irish nationalism. Immersing himself in the genteel literary circles of Dublin, he soon embraced the romantic rhetoric of the Younger Irelanders, who regarded the cultivation of a distinctively Irish (or “Celtic”) literature, mythology, and racial

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93 By far the best scholarly account of McGee is David A. Wilson, Thomas D’Arcy McGee: Passion, Reason, Politics, 2 Volumes (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2008).
94 Many of the Young Ireland intellectuals had grown weary of the proceduralism of O’Connell and desired more poetic and militant expressions of Irish identity. On these tensions see Charles Gavan Duffy, Young Ireland: A Fragment of Irish History, 1840-1850 (New York: Cassell, Petter, Gaplin and Co., 1880), 288-89.
consciousness as a gateway to nationalist revolution. Devoting himself to the crafting of Celtic-themed poetry, literature and history, McGee by 1848 was editor of the Dublin Nation, and had begun to agitate for violent resistance against England. When the 1848 Irish uprising collapsed amid internal dissension and crackdowns by British police, he eluded capture and escaped on a ship bound for the United States, ultimately finding refuge among the Irish of New York.

Though forced into exile, McGee remained committed to the nationalist cause. Within three weeks of his arrival in New York he had already founded a new Irish-radical journal, The Nation, named for its now-suppressed Dublin predecessor. Intent on defending the honor of Young Ireland, McGee attributed the failure of the uprising to the Catholic clergy, whom he claimed had “systematically squeezed the spirit of resistance out of the hearts of the people.” Had the Irish clergy given even modest support to the uprising, he insisted, “we would have beaten the English.” McGee remained loyal to the spiritual authority of the Church, but he had gleaned from the failed rebellion a painful lesson: that institutional Catholicism, unwittingly or not, was a barrier to Irish freedom. How “religion may be reconciled with liberty” was now a vexing question for Irish radicals, as it was for Catholic revolutionaries across the Continent. Whether the Church could ever be reconciled to democratic “spirit of the age,” in McGee’s view, remained unclear.

McGee’s attack on the Irish clergy, however, would prove a costly error. Laments of clerical conservatism may have resonated with the avant garde of Dublin, but among the embattled Irish poor of New York, still reeling from more than a decade of nativist

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95 James Quinn, Young Ireland and the Writing of Irish History (Dublin: University of College Dublin Press, 2015).
persecution, the Catholic clergy retained far-reaching influence. Backed by archconservatives like McMaster and Roddan, Bishop Hughes took the lead in denouncing the “infidel principles” of the *Nation.*

McGee’s aim of “reconciling” religion and liberty, Hughes wrote in the *Freeman’s Journal and Catholic Register,* “was the cry of every modern infidel from Voltaire down to the cut-throats who have expelled the Pope from his capital.” Every “anti-Catholic bigot in the land,” moreover, would seize upon McGee’s slander of the Irish clergy and use it as evidence of the monarchical sympathies of Rome. “I have often before now had to ‘defend the character and duties of the church,’” Hughes continued. “But in all previous cases their assailants were open and avowed enemies. In the present instance, however, the assault is by one who professes to be a friend.”

If McGee did not adopt a more conservative course, Hughes recommended that *The Nation* “be excluded from every Catholic family.”

Fearing that the attack would all but destroy his standing among the American Irish, McGee rushed to repair his relationship with the Bishop. The damage, however, was already done: *The Nation,* at least in the eyes of devout Catholics, was now an “infidel paper.” Estranged from the Catholic masses and humiliated by his controversy with Hughes, McGee by the end of 1849 had closed the paper and departed New York for New England.

Returning to the familiar environs of Boston, McGee launched a new journal, the *American Celt,* in the hopes of reviving his literary career. Accusations that he had

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97 [John Hughes], “To the Editor of the Freeman’s Journal,” *Freeman’s Journal and Catholic Register,* January 20, 1849.

98 [John Hughes], “To the Editor of the Freeman’s Journal,” *Freeman’s Journal and Catholic Register,* February 3, 1849.
advanced the cause of infidels and nativists, however, continued to gnaw at his conscience. “What excited my apprehension was that, those I knew to be the social enemies of our religion and race applauded my career,” he recalled. “I hesitated—I reflected—I repented.” Increasingly disillusioned with secular nationalism, he sought the spiritual counsel of John Fitzpatrick, then the Bishop of Boston, and began to immerse himself in the philosophical writings of European Catholic reactionaries. By early 1851 McGee had transformed into a stalwart defender of ultramontane Catholicism. Casting Rome as the “one power on earth greater than Great Britain” and “the pillar and ground of all truth,” McGee would henceforth exalt the Irish as a spiritually superior race, destined to defend Christendom from the modern contagion of socialism, anarchism, and secularism. Much to the delight of the Catholic hierarchy, McGee now called upon his fellow Irish to forsake revolutionary nationalism and embrace bourgeois respectability, asserting that the best way to defeat “Anglo-Saxonism” was “by becoming good Catholics, good citizens, and good Celts.” By the mid-1850s McGee was one of the country’s foremost Catholic apologists, the architect of a militant Irish-Catholic sensibility that fused ultramontane orthodoxies with a racial cult of the “Celto-Catholic.”

Of course, few of McGee’s fellow Irish exiles experienced such a dramatic ideological about-face. But most Young Irelanders were willing to renounce radical politics in America, provided they could reap the ample patronage that flowed to

politically connected Irish-Catholics. For example, Richard O’Gorman, a Trinity-educated Catholic barrister and leader of Young Ireland, abandoned revolutionary politics for a lucrative career as a New York attorney and Tammany loyalist. Having fled Ireland in the wake of the failed 1848 uprising, O’Gorman and a fellow Irish revolutionary, John B. Dillon, founded a law firm in New York City, using their celebrity to attract clients and make inroads into the local Democratic machine. Renowned for his patrician demeanor and soaring oratory, O’Gorman was no doubt ambivalent toward the rough-and-tumble world of urban machine politics. “In all political proceedings—primary elections—smashing ballot boxes—personating citizens—filling minor public offices of all kinds—and plundering the Public for the Public—in readiness to gull others and be gulled ourselves,” he wrote to a friend in 1859, “the children of our native land are eminently successful.”

But the pursuit of power soothed his conscience, and by 1865 O’Gorman was Corporation Counsel to the City of New York, a position he used to abet the Tweed Ring’s massive campaign of municipal fraud and embezzlement. As he ascended the ranks of party politics, O’Gorman also grew more deferential to organized Catholicism. Like many Irish radicals of his generation, O’Gorman had blamed the failure of the 1848 uprising on the clergy, but in America he cultivated a close relationship to the Church, purchasing a pew at St. Xavier’s Church on 16th Street and

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106 O’Gorman often appeared at Irish-American functions alongside members of the Catholic hierarchy. See, for example, “The Suffering Poor of Ireland,” New York Times, April 7, 1863.
giving charity lectures for sectarian lay groups like the Young Men’s Catholic Association.\(^\text{107}\) Retiring as a Superior Court judge revered by church and party, O’Gorman made a seamless transition from Irish revolutionary to Irish-American politician.

Irish exiles who refused to renounce secular radicalism, by comparison, typically found themselves relegated to the margins of Irish-American life. Such was the fate of John Mitchel, perhaps the most talented and influential writer of the Young Ireland generation.\(^\text{108}\) The Trinity-educated son of a Presbyterian minister, Mitchel outpaced many of his fellow nationalists in advocating for open rebellion, to the point that he ultimately broke from the writers of The Nation and founded his own journal, The United Irishman, in 1848. Deeply influenced by Continental secular republicanism, the romantic anti-industrialism of Thomas Carlyle, and the agrarian radicalism of Irish writers like James Fintan Lalor, Mitchel also alienated the conservative wing of Young Ireland by agitating for a social revolution that would uproot the Anglo-Irish landlords and redistribute the nation’s land to the peasantry.\(^\text{109}\) Rarely reserved in tone or content, Mitchel’s writings soon garnered the attention of British authorities, and in 1848 he was arrested, jailed, and convicted for treason. Deported to the British penal colony at Port Arthur, Tasmania, Mitchel would remain in British custody until 1853, when he


\(^{109}\) James Fintan Lalor argued that a nationalist revolution in Ireland must take the form of a social revolution that would restore the right of land ownership to the people of Ireland. His ideas had a strong influence on Mitchel, as well as on the Irish Land-War activists of the late 1870s and early 1880s. See James Fintan Lalor, The Writings of James Fintan Lalor, With an Introduction Embodying Personal Experiences, edited by John O’Leary (Peabody, Mass.: Francis Nugent 1895), vii-xxiv.
undertook a dangerous seaboard escape, later chronicled in his widely popular *Jail Journal*, that took him through Tahiti, Hawaii, and finally to California.\(^{110}\) Arriving in San Francisco, Mitchel ultimately found his way to New York City, where he received a hero’s welcome from leading Irish-Americans like Charles O’Conor and John McKeon, including a grand banquet at the Broadway Theater.\(^{111}\) But the cordial reception would be short-lived.

Mitchel discovered, almost immediately, that his brand of secular radicalism had little appeal to the militant Catholics of Irish America. At the banquet held in his honor, Mitchel provoked outrage by praising European secular radicals and casting the Irish struggle for liberty as part of a broader struggle for “European democracy.” *The Freeman’s Journal and Catholic Register*, among other organs of the Catholic press, condemned Mitchel for trying to “link the holy cause of Ireland’s liberation” with “the infidel and Red Republican struggles” of Continental Europe. Mitchel continued to court controversy by founding *The Irish Citizen*, a secular journal of Irish and American politics. Like Thomas D’Arcy McGee before him, Mitchel quickly ran afoul of Archbishop Hughes, who bitterly denounced *The Irish Citizen* for its radical sympathies and opposition to the temporal power of the pope. Unlike McGee, however, Mitchel, a Protestant, refused to bow to ecclesiastical censure,\(^{112}\) and the resultant controversy with Hughes destroyed the paper standing among the Irish-Catholic masses. Estranged from both the militant Catholicism of the immigrant Irish and the nativist bigotry of Anglo-Protestants, Mitchel decided to leave New York altogether and try his luck in the

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American South, where he had already gained a loyal readership by virtue of several much-publicized screeds against abolitionism. Eventually settling in Tennessee, Mitchel would carve out a successful literary career as a Southern apologist and Confederate nationalist, fusing his contempt for “Anglo-Saxon” industrialism and materialism with the proslavery critique of Northern “free-society.” By the mid-1850s, in other words, the strength of organized Catholicism and the lure of party politics had all but extinguished the revolutionary fervor of the Irish exiles.

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Amid the rise of nativism and Know-Nothingism, the bitter controversy over the Pope’s temporal power, and the mass immigration of the famine-generation Irish, Hughes and his allies had molded together a powerful Irish-Catholic sectarian identity strengthened by overlapping ethnic, class-based, and religious resentments. Buttressed by the sprawling and ever-expanding institutional network of the immigrant Church, this tribal Irish-Catholicism proved a formidable force in the parochial world of urban mass politics, while leaving little room for secular or cosmopolitan expressions of Irish identity. By 1860 the populist revolution was all but complete in the New York Archdiocese, and had begun to take hold in Irish-dominated Catholic parishes across the country.

Unlike the Jacksonian populism of the 1830s, this populist revolt did not attack the corruption of the financial system or the undue influence of the mercantile elite. To be sure, Irish-American churchmen like Hughes continued to rely on the financial largesse of wealthy laymen like Marc Anthony Frenaye and Charles O’Conor, and typically sought legal and financial counsel from a wide array of Catholic merchants, lawyers, and
politicians. Nor did the new Irish-Catholic populism assault the pretensions of the leisured classes, given the Church’s close ties to the Catholic elite of the slaveholding South. Rather the new Irish-Catholic sectarianism took as its bête noire something more specific: the perceived moral and cultural pretensions of the middle-class “Yankee,” the historic persecutor of the Irish immigrant and bitter enemy of the Church. This Yankee stereotype—an amalgam of various contradictory tendencies within Anglo-American middle-class culture, from deep evangelical piety to pronounced secularism, genteel respectability to radical individualism—provided a powerful negative reference for the emergent Irish-Catholic subculture. The stereotype of the Yankee would, over time, evolve into that of the Anglo-Saxon, and then the WASP, but the psychic relationship between these stereotypes and the rudiments of Irish-Catholic sectarianism remained much the same.

This tribal Irish-Catholicism was, however, deeply ambivalent toward at least one aspect of American society: the emergent system of industrial capitalism, which had provided ample opportunity but also great hardship for millions of Catholic immigrants. In the eyes of many Catholic immigrants, the capitalist ethic—and its attendant virtues of industry, sobriety, competition, individualism, self-discipline, and ingenuity—was no doubt one of the defining features of “Yankee” society. And yet Catholics in America, the immigrant Irish included, could not easily dismiss the relevance of such values to modern urban life. In attempting to define the Church’s place in a capitalist society, Catholic leaders would have to answer, if not combat, the prevailing view that Protestant values lay at the very heart of the emerging capitalist order.
Chapter Five: Celts, Catholics and Capitalists

On January 18th, 1844, Bishop Hughes delivered a lecture at the Carroll Institute in Baltimore denouncing the Anglo-American science of “political economy” and condemning the acquisitive ethos of modern capitalism as the secular outgrowth of Protestantism. By abolishing the theological sanction of good works and exalting individual conscience at the expense of ecclesiastical authority, the Protestant Reformation, Hughes maintained, had destroyed traditional checks on human avarice and forged an economic system governed purely by “material self-interest.” Protestant Britain, the world’s foremost industrial power, exemplified the outrageous accumulations of wealth, crushing poverty, and ubiquitous class strife that flowed from the ultra-individualist credo of Protestantism. “I am willing, then, to ascribe to the Protestant religion, the credit of England’s wealth,” Hughes bellowed, “but her poverty, and the destitution of her millions, must, I insist, be charged to the same account.”

After recounting the horrors of a modern industrial system that pitted “the starving laborer” against “the bloated capitalist,” Hughes described in rich detail a harmonious and deeply pious medieval Europe sustained by the moral authority of the One True Church. “To every class and condition,” Hughes claimed, the Church of the feudal age had “assigned its own peculiar range of Christian duties.” Among the wealthy, she preached “moderation in enjoyment, and liberality to the poor.” Among the poor, she counseled “patience under their trials, and affection for their wealthier brethren.” Her

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religious festivals, later abolished by Protestant reformers, granted the humble laborer “repose from toil.” For the truly indigent, Catholic monastics provided alms, spiritual uplift, and compassion. Thus “the political economy of the ancient Church” moderated the relations of peasant and landholder, upheld the dignity of the workingman, and united rich and poor “on an equality around the altars.” Only by forsaking the Protestant ethic and returning to the values of the ancient Church could true Christians save modern society from the ravages of industrialism. “Go back among the ruins of former things,” Hughes concluded, and “you may still find and trace out the deep foundations of the better edifice you destroyed.”

Hughes’ lecture, delivered at a high tide of anti-Catholic nativism in the United States, was soon published for a mass audience, receiving widespread praise in the Catholic press. (Martin John Spalding, the leading exponent of “Baltimore Catholicism,” would reference Hughes’ lecture in one of his first articles devoted to the contagion of “Mammonism.”) In the process Hughes helped to popularize the notion, flawed as it was, that the social evils of modern industrialism owed to uniquely Protestant attitudes toward labor, poverty, and wealth. That such a narrative of history would deeply resonate with working-class American Catholics is, of course, hardly surprising, particularly at a time of intense nativist backlash. By placing Protestantism at the heart of the modern capitalist order, Hughes linked the brutalities of the emergent industrial economy with ago-old sectarian antagonisms between Catholics and Protestants. And by offering an idealized “Catholic” vision of society and history, Hughes enabled the immigrant working class to interpret their own tribulations as part of a grand spiritual struggle between virtuous

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2 Ibid., 534
laboring Catholics, empowered by their Mother Church, and a soulless Protestant ruling class.

The notion of a separate “Catholic” tradition of political economy may have helped to foster a Catholic sectarian identity and strengthen lay attachment to the clergy. But such rhetoric, popular as it was, did not necessarily match Hughes’ personal attitudes towards labor, poverty, and charity. Indeed, in terms of his personal conduct as a minister of the Church, Hughes’s personal attitudes toward labor, industry, and personal achievement rarely diverged from that of his Protestant peers. Widely regarded as a “self-made man,” Hughes abhorred idleness, exalted the virtues of thrift, industry, and self-discipline, and counseled the poor on the importance of education and self-improvement. In 1850, for instance, he helped to found the Emigrant Industrial Savings Bank of New York, a private Irish-run institution intended to cultivate among immigrant habits of thrift, industry, and personal savings.  

When, in 1858, some Catholics question Hughes’ plan to construct a gothic cathedral on Fifth Avenue on the grounds that the money “would be better devoted to charity for the poor,” Hughes fumed that “compensation for honest labor is much better than alms for the relief of poverty.” Hughes respect for labor and professed solidarity with the poor, moreover, seldom translated into support for working-class self-assertion. When 100 stone-cutters working at the cathedral

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construction-site struck for higher wages in 1860, Hughes refused to intervene on their behalf, despite persistent pleas for his support.\(^5\)

Nor was Hughes a stranger to the world of mercantile capitalism, his jeremiads against the materialistic “spirit of the age” notwithstanding. Since his days as a young priest in Philadelphia Hughes had surrounded himself with merchants of great wealth and standing, such as his old friend Marc Anthony Frenaye, who could provide capital and financial expertise for the management of Catholic properties. As Archbishop of New York, he relied on a small circle of established Irish-born merchants to help oversee the brick-and-mortar expansion of the archdiocese. In particular, Hughes’ close ties to the directors and trustees of the Emigrant Industrial Savings bank—all distinguished Irish-born Catholic merchants—enabled him to use the institution as the de facto bank of the archdiocese, both for managing mortgages of Catholic institutions and funding large-scale construction projects. In his attempts to centralize diocesan finances and expand the brick-and-mortar base of the Church, Hughes was no doubt something of a religious entrepreneur, keen to imitate the financial strategies of the merchant elite.\(^6\) And as the cathedral strike demonstrated, in his relations to labor he often adopted the managerial approach of the typical capitalist boss, demanding, for instance, that workers who consumed alcohol be fired immediately.\(^7\)

Historians like Kirby Miller and Mike Davis have assailed Irish-Catholic leaders like Hughes as enemies of working-class liberation who sought to use their clerical


influence to uphold the class interests of the bourgeoisie. While there certainly is some truth to this view, this Marxian narrative overstate the importance of class interests to clerical leaders while also understating the ambivalence of Irish-Catholic leaders to American capitalist values. Catholic leaders like Hughes no doubt embraced an ethic of self-improvement that harmonized with the predominant values of the capitalist order, but they fused this ethic of self-uplift with a rabid sectarianism that assailed secular and Protestant influences. Many working-class Catholics, moreover, resisted the middle-class inflections of the Catholic social gospel, fusing the traditions of Irish-Catholic sectarianism with working-class values out of step with clerical orthodoxy.\(^8\)

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Hughes’ lecture on the political economy of “the ancient church,” was, of course, hardly the first attempt to link the acquisitive ethos of modern capitalism to Protestant theology. Since the 1830s debate over the “condition of England question” had inspired writers on both sides of the Atlantic to plumb the relation between Protestantism and the birth of the modern capitalist order. Many of these writers, like Hughes, glorified the Catholic Middle Ages as a kind of paternalist utopia untainted by the various social ills of modern society. Evan among American Catholics, Martin John Spalding, the luminary of

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\(^8\) Miller’s critique is aimed at Irish-American leaders of the Gilded Age—Irish-American nationalists, politicians, and clergymen—who in his view embraced radical nationalist rhetoric while at the same time upholding the interests of the American bourgeoisie. Davis, on the other hand, argues that the Catholic Church as a whole was an agent of middle-class assimilation. Both arguments are provocative but overstated. Paula Kane applies Miller’s critique to the case of Boston Catholicism at the turn of the century, though with much greater nuance than Miller. This chapter attempts to trace the origins of many of the Catholic middle-class ideals Kane discerns in early-twentieth-century Boston. The views of Miller, Davis, and Kane harmonize with the argument of Catholic theologian Joe Holland, who contends that the Catholic Church had by the end of the nineteenth-century embraced many of the values of the moderate bourgeoisie. See Mike Davis, “Why the US Working Class is Different,” New Left Review 1 (1980); Paula Kane, Separatism and Subculture: Boston Catholicism, 1900-1920 (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1989); Kerby Miller, Ireland and Irish America: Culture, Class, and Transatlantic Migration (South Bend: University of South Bend Press, 2008), 66-78, 245-280; Joe Holland, Modern Catholic Social Teaching: The Popes Confront the Industrial Age (New York: Paulist Press, 2003).
the Southern Catholic elite, wrote much more extensively on the topic than Hughes did, in part because such arguments suggested the incompatibility of Protestantism with the Southern status quo.

For Irish-American churchmen like Hughes, however, the concept of the Protestant ethic had a particular salience in light of the fraught history of Ireland under English rule. No doubt, arguments about the relationship between Protestantism and capitalism focused, almost invariably, on the nature of English Protestantism and its influence on the culture and society of modern Britain. As Hughes own lecture demonstrated, discourses on Protestantism as the engine of modern industrialism often descended into lengthy expositions of English cruelty, selfishness, materialism, and general callousness toward the poor—a subject that strongly resonated with the Irish-immigrant base of the U.S. Catholic Church. Contempt for the English only grew stronger as a result of the Irish famine of 1846-49, which Irish nationalists often attributed to English doctrines of “political economy” that valued free trade and the pursuit of profit over the Christian values of compassion and service to the poor.9 Lectures on Catholic notions attitudes toward political economy,” this respect, typically fused Irish nationalism with working-class Catholic sectarianism, upholding the Mother Church as the ancestral guardian of the Irish laborer against a ruthless Anglo-Protestant ruling class.

The argument that Protestantism was at the core of the modern capitalist ethic was, of course, a variation on a basic theme of midcentury Catholic apologetics: that the Catholic Church was everywhere the guardian of the poor, while Protestant churches

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9 Among Irish nationalists John Mitchel was perhaps the most vocal supporter of the idea that the famine was a direct result of British political and economic policy. See John Mitchel, *The Last Conquest of Ireland (Perhaps)* (Glasgow: Cameron and Ferguson, 1876).
exalted material success, ignored the plight of the laboring classes, and catered almost exclusively to the rich and middle class. “You have been the rich man’s Church,” Frederick Faber, an English Catholic, remarked of Protestantism in 1842. “You have left it to Rome to honor poverty.” This narrative was itself a legacy of the “condition of England” debate, which had inspired many English writers, alarmed by the social crisis of modern industrialism, to glorify the supposed paternalism of the medieval Church. (It was also an attempt by Catholic leaders to wrestle with the awkward and inconvenient truth that Protestant-dominated nations like Britain and the United States were wealthier and more industrially developed than their Catholic counterparts.) Though this narrative exerted a strong pull on the broader Anglophone world, it was particularly central to the rhetoric and self-identity of the U.S. immigrant church, which sought to maintain the loyalty of a working-class base threatened by the superior wealth and power of the Protestants majority.

To be sure, a vast chorus of Catholic churchmen, journalists, and novelists at midcentury routinely celebrated the Church’s unique “fellowship” with the laboring classes. Contrasting Catholic paternalism with the Protestant ethic of self-help, these discourses typically exalted the Catholic Church as the “protector of the poor” while condemning Protestants for their “deference to success” and obsession with “material prosperity.” “Catholics look upon the poor as representatives of Christ on earth, and love to do to them as they would do to him,” James McMaster, one of the premier Catholic editors in the country, wrote in 1855. “In Protestant countries they are piled away out of sight, and looked upon as a class of malefactors.”

10 Frederick William Farber, Sights and Thoughts in Foreign Churches and Among Foreign Peoples (London: J.G.F. and J. Rivington, 1842).
Such professions of Catholic solidarity with the poor, however, rarely translated into a critique of capitalist social relations or support for programs of economic and social reform. Their lofty rhetoric aside, Catholic leaders at midcentury rarely advocated meaningful reforms to free-labor capitalism, let alone revolutionary changes to the organization of wealth and power in American life. True, Hughes and others often spoke glowingly of the “political economy of the ancient Church,” but they widely acknowledge that the feudal system of the Catholic Middle Ages was incompatible with American ideas of freedom and human dignity. Indeed, the problem with the modern capitalist order, according to Catholic leaders, was not that structural inequality in the marketplace gave the “the bloated capitalist” unchecked power over “the starving laborer,” but that the capitalist class subscribed to a set of Protestant values that supposedly encouraged selfishness, materialism, and callous disregard for the poor. Rather than advocate reform of the capitalist social order, working-class Catholics should simply encourage a religious revival that would bring even the most ruthless capitalist under the moderating influence of Catholicism. The mission of the Church, on this view, was to reshape the world only insofar as it could reshape individual conscience.

In contrast, reform movements that encouraged transformation of the social order received little support from Catholic leaders. Aside from the temperance movement, which most Irish-American clergy supported, Catholic leaders denounced most movements for social or economic reform as the handiwork of secular liberals and anticlerical Protestants. Such suspicion of reform extended even to labor unions. Before 1886 most U.S. Catholic bishops denounced trade unions as “secret societies” that would

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expose Catholics to secular or radical influences.\textsuperscript{12} Even Catholic-led social movements founded on putatively Catholic principles typically came under suspicion from the upper clergy. In the 1850s several prominent U.S. Catholics, including Thomas D’Arcy McGee, organized a so-called “Irish colonization” movement to help poor Catholics in urban centers like New York, Philadelphia, and Boston relocate to farms in the Midwest. Intended to rescue working-class Catholics from the baneful influences of the urban slum, the movement nonetheless incurred the harsh denunciation of Bishop Hughes, a farmer’s son, who belittled the organizers for their naïve idealization of rural life. (Among other considerations, Hughes likely feared that such “colonization” efforts would shrink the demographic base of urban Catholicism and thereby strip the Church of its outsize political and social influence.)\textsuperscript{13} While Hughes suspicions of the colonization movement may have been well founded, his strictures against the sufferings of rural life suggested that his romantic odes to the rural Middle Ages were more rhetorical flourishes than true statements of principle.

In reality, Catholic leaders at midcentury embraced a set of attitudes toward labor, wealth, and individual achievement that rarely diverged from those of their genteel Protestant peers. (Hughes’ tough-minded advice to Catholic workmen was hardly an exception to the rule.) Though careful never to condemn poverty itself as a form of divine judgment, Catholic leaders counseled immigrant men to cultivate habits of industry, ambition, sobriety, and self-discipline in pursuit of material success and economic independence. Loyal adherence to the teachings of the Church, meanwhile,

\textsuperscript{12} On the controversy over the Knights of Labor within the U.S. Church, see Henry Browne, The Catholic Church and the Knights of Labor (New York: Arno Press, 1976).

would protect immigrants from the vices of the working-class Irish underworld, where
tendencies toward idleness, gambling, alcohol and a hypermasculine code of violence
prevailed against a life of honest toil. On this view, personal piety reinforced an ethic of
personal industriousness, self-discipline, and upward mobility, ensuring that personal
salvation and material success could go hand in hand.

*The Irish Emigrant’s Guide for the United States*, an advice manual written by J.
O’Hanlon, an Irish-born priest, distilled the essential elements of this Catholic code of
self-improvement. Intended to aid the Irish immigrant in securing a “station of comfort,
honor, and independence,” the guide cautioned that an immigrant’s “success or
disappointment” in America was principally “dependent on his own conduct.” “Activity
of mind and body, perseverance, industry and energy,” O’Hanlon asserted, “will always
lead to profitable employment.” “Idleness and trifling away of time,” by contrast, “should
be avoided, as habits of irresolution are thereby contracted and money wasted.” In his
attempt to “raise himself in the social scale,” the immigrant would furthermore need to
adopt habits of personal “neatness and cleanliness,” especially with respect to his attire
and “house management.” Overall, the virtues of frugality, industry, “personal exertion,”
and “self-reliance” would greatly aid the Irish immigrant in his quest for American
respectability, safeguarding him from the “hopeless pauperism” that had stricken so many
of his countrymen.¹⁴

Clerical advice for Irish-immigrant women followed a similar theme, albeit with
several important caveats. In general, Catholic leaders were much less likely to encourage
working women to pursue upward mobility and financial success, since marriage, not an
independent career, was considered the ideal path for young women. Nonetheless,

Catholic leaders had to reckon with the reality that more than half of Irish-born workers in the U.S. at midcentury were women, most of whom labored in low-paid positions as domestic servants, textile workers, and bartenders. Given these conditions, Catholic leaders typically advised Irish-Catholic women to temper their professional ambitions but, like their male peers, to embrace the values of thrift, industry, and personal cleanliness in the workplace. And as was the case for immigrant men, Catholic advice manuals for women, in short, insisted that religious values and worldly prosperity went hand in hand. For instance, *Advice to Irish Women in America*, written by Mary Francis Clare, an Irish-born nun, argued that working women could enlarge both their faith and their personal wealth by cultivating habits of piety, diligence, order, honesty, and personal responsibility. While Sister Clare acknowledged greed as a dangerous vice, she insisted that there was “no harm in itself in having money, or in wishing to earn money,” so long as a young woman conducted herself “honestly and religiously,” using her wages “to keep herself respectable” rather than indulge in aimless amusements. Overall, the manual suggested that by adhering to a code of sobriety, honesty, responsibility, industry, and diligence, working women could expect to reap rewards “both in this world and the next.”

In line with such counsel, Catholic leaders at midcentury founded a number of Irish-dominated municipal savings banks intended to cultivate frugal and forward-

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17 Ibid.
thinking habits among Catholic immigrants. The Emigrant Industrial Savings Bank of New York, founded by Hughes and a cadre of prominent Irish-Catholic merchants in 1850, was indeed just one example of a broad effort to establish an independent network of Catholic financial institutions at midcentury.\(^ {18} \) In Philadelphia, Archbishop Francis Kenrick had established a local Catholic savings bank, known colloquially as the “Bishop’s Bank,” in 1848 under the management of Marc Anthony Frenaye, Bishop Hughes’ longtime financial adviser.\(^ {19} \) In San Francisco, a handful of Irish merchants, many of whom had close personal and financial ties to the Catholic diocese, founded a “Hibernian” savings bank to serve the Irish-American community. Inspired by such efforts, leading Irish-Catholic laymen would found similar institutions in Boston, New Orleans, and Cincinnati.\(^ {20} \) Though careful to present themselves as non-sectarian, these institutions catered almost exclusively to the Irish-Catholic community, offering savings accounts for Irish-American workers, helping immigrants send remittances to Ireland, and managing loans and properties for the local Catholic diocese. Though such banks provided a private financial network for Catholic bankers, merchants, and the institutional Church itself, in general Catholic leaders praised these institutions for their


\(^ {19} \) Many thanks to Shawn Weldon, the archivist at PAHRC, for providing background information about the Bishop’s Bank. See Shawn Weldon, “The Bishop’s Bank,” at http://www.chrc-phila.org/the-bishops-bank/.

influence over the working class, arguing that savings banks helped to imprint “lessons of self-respect, of thrift, of independence” on immigrant Catholics.  

This ethic of self-improvement, moreover, pervaded even the Church’s vast network of charitable institutions. Admant that Protestants were insensitive to the plight of the poor, leading Catholics praised the vast network of Catholic charities, reformatories, and orphanages as proof of the Church’s moral superiority over Protestantism. (Unsurprisingly, prominent Catholics and Protestants at midcentury engaged in numerous public controversies over who better served the poor.) Nonetheless, like their Protestant–run counterparts, Catholic charities and orphanages typically embraced the underlying values of the American capitalist order—industry, sobriety, self-disciplined achievement, and, above all, the dignity of labor. Idleness, laziness, and vulgarity, on this view, were working-class vices that could only be purged from young men and women by a strict regimen of labor, prayer, and self-denial. The Catholic Protectory of New York, established by the New York Archdiocese in 1863, typified this approach. The founders, one director recalled, “recognized idleness as the main cause of all juvenile delinquency.”

To cure poor children of their tendency toward “idleness” and inculcate “habits of industry,” the directors of the Protectory mandated

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several hours of manual labor per day, on a variety of tasks ranging from boot-making to sewing. Combined with religious instruction and formal instruction in reading, spelling, and arithmetic, this regimen of physical labor would both mold personal character and invest children with habits and skills germane to the modern industrial economy.

The Catholic ethic of self-improvement was most pronounced at Catholic colleges, where churchmen aimed to develop a new generation of Catholic lawyers, doctors, merchants, and priests. Speakers at college commencements often hailed the importance of industry, discipline, and ambition in the pursuit of personal advancement and material success. At the 1860 commencement at Fordham, a student praised the American imperative to “rise higher” in the social scale through sheer effort, noting that material wealth was fitting compensation for energy, ingenuity, and the American entrepreneurial spirit. “We are sometimes reproached for being a money-making people, but is it not the recompense of our activity, and who will dare assert that activity is not a virtue?” Like their Protestant counterparts, such Catholics had clearly internalized the prevailing orthodoxies of the Northern capitalist order.

There was, no doubt, some ambivalence among Catholic leaders toward the “materialism of the age.” In private Hughes himself confessed that the modern world of finance, debt, and money at times seemed “unreal.” Such ambivalence, however, rarely

24 Catholic leaders, of course, insisted that the Church did not regard poverty itself as an evil. It was Protestants, they claimed, who despised the habits of the poor and denounced poverty itself as proof of moral turpitude. In reality, however, one of the principal aims of Catholic orphanages and reformatories was to eliminate habits of speech and dress associated with the rough-hewn, clannish, and often violent culture of the Irish slum. The children at the Roman Catholic Orphan Asylum in Manhattan, one visitor observed, “were plainly but neatly attired in light dresses and white aprons, and looked the very perfection of neatness and cleanliness.” The moral progress of the child, moreover, could be measured by how successfully he or she had internalized middle-class notions of cleanliness, order, and self-presentation. During a routine “examination and exhibition” at the Orphan Asylum, a priest praised the children above all for their sense of “order and regularity” and how “clearly and distinctly” each of them spoke. Such rhetoric reinforced the apparent link between middle-class manners and moral behavior. See “Exhibition and Examination of the Children,” The Metropolitan Record, July, 1859.
influenced the overarching attitude of Catholic leaders toward labor and wealth: that a life devoted to piety, labor, industry, and self-discipline was the only pathway to respectability, independence, and personal success. Given Catholics’ deep contempt for “Protestant” and “secular” values, there was thus great irony in the fact that Catholic leaders at midcentury embraced a set of attitudes toward labor, wealth, and individual achievement that rarely diverged from those of the Protestant middle-class. Rail as they might against the forces of liberalism, Protestantism, and secularism in the modern world, in practice Catholic leaders in the urban North preached a bourgeois doctrine of self-improvement consonant with the competitive and ultra-individualist values of the Northern capitalist order.\footnote{On this point I differ from Jon Gjerde, who argues that Catholics articulated a corporatist critique of capitalist social relations. In my view Gjerde is too sympathetic to Catholics’ own claims of ideological distinctiveness. Jon Gjerde, \textit{Catholicism and the Shaping of Nineteenth-Century America} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 220-256.}

Irish-Catholics, of course, would have been outraged by the suggestion that they had internalized the “spirit of the age” in their attitudes toward labor and wealth. What eased this accommodation to capitalist values, however, was the ever-present caricature of the Protestant “Yankee” as a ruthless capitalist who controlled the levers of power and wealth in American life. On this view, the “striving” Irish-Catholic was disciplined, virtuous, honest, pious, and humble; his Yankee counterpart, by comparison, was vain, arrogant, duplicitous, and, above all, hopelessly materialistic. This caricature of the “cunning” Yankee capitalist, eager to exploit humble and pious immigrants, permeated Irish-American journalism and literature during the Civil War era. Irish-Catholic sectarian novels like Hugh Quigley’s \textit{The Cross and the Shamrock: Or How to Defend the Faith} (1853) and John Boyce’s \textit{Mary Lee: Or the Yankee in Ireland} (1859), both
written by Irish-American priests, recounted the machinations of designing, hypocritical evangelical Protestants who enriched themselves by exploiting the Catholic poor.\textsuperscript{26} For example, the villain of Quigley’s novel, a railroad investor and abolitionist, experiences a profound religious awakening to the truths of the Gospel, but over the course of the novel he nonetheless proves himself a “mocker and robber of the poor” and “a merciless swindler of the laborer’s wages.”\textsuperscript{27} Such caricatures of Yankee Protestants as “vile, perfidious, rapacious, and cruel” helped to absolve Irish-Catholics of their increasingly materialistic tendencies, projecting the apparent vices of the American capitalist order—selfishness, materialism, competitiveness, individualism—onto the Protestant majority.\textsuperscript{28}


27 [Quigley], The Cross and the Shamrock, 114.

Naturally, the broader motifs of Irish-Catholic sectarianism helped to sustain this narrative. Irish-Catholic literature and journalism exalted devout Catholics as spiritually superior beings, impervious to the immoral and ultra-individualistic tendencies of the modern world.\textsuperscript{29} At times the contrast between the pious Irish-Catholics and duplicitous Anglo-Protestants could harden into racialized accounts of the contrast between “Celtic” and “Anglo-Saxon” civilizations, as evidenced in the pseudo-scientific scholarship of the Irish ethnologist John McElheran, whose account of “Anglo-Saxons” as a “cold-blooded” and “rationalistic” race appeared in Irish-American journals.\textsuperscript{30} (“The spirit of English social and political action, “ McElheran charged, “is the law of supply and demand.”)\textsuperscript{31}

Perhaps the leading exponent of this mythology of “Celto-Catholic” superiority was Thomas D’Arcy McGee, the sometime Irish radical who embraced ultramontane Catholicism after a bitter feud with Archbishop Hughes. Like most Irish-Catholic leaders of his generation, McGee fused an ultra-conservative brand of ultramontane Catholicism with the middle-class doctrine of self-improvement, counseling Irish-Catholics to embrace the virtues of education, industry, and respectability in their spiritual war against the modern world. Only a generation of “good Catholics, good citizens, and good Celts,” in McGee’ view, could sustain the ultramontane revolt against liberalism, secularism, and “Anglo-Saxonism.”


\textsuperscript{31} McElheran argued that the laissez-faire doctrines of Anglo-American thought, though clothed in the language of utilitarian benevolence and evangelical piety, had in fact wrought untold suffering to the Catholic peasants of the world. John McElheran, \textit{The Condition of Women and Children among the Celtic, Gothic, and Other Nations}, 25-26, 257.
Ultimately, such narratives gave rise to the argument that Catholicism, not Protestantism, was the religious tradition best suited to the American capitalist order. Reliant on the whims of individual conscience, Protestants, on this view, lacked the moral discipline to maintain honor, personal integrity, and compassion in a highly individualistic and competitive society. By comparison, the moderating influences of the One True Church, which provided an external check on individual desire, ensured that Catholics would conduct business with honesty, integrity, and a sense of duty. “When Americans shall see that practical Catholics have a firmer basis of morals, a higher standard of conduct, and holier safeguards to virtue than Protestantism can offer,” a Catholic lecturer declared in 1859, “their interests will make them favorable to the Catholic faith. Even now, in many places, practical Catholics have the preference in places of trust. In banks, commercial houses, railroads and similar positions, even worldly men and Protestants are coming to see that there cannot be any [other] such guarantee of integrity.” Such optimism about Protestant attitudes toward Catholicism was perhaps unwarranted. But the argument that Catholics made for superior workers, and
superior Americans, would gather strength over the course of the nineteenth century, ultimately giving rise to the contention that Catholicism alone could harmonize the disintegrative tendencies of the American capitalist order.\(^\text{32}\)

That the leaders of the immigrant Church would embrace the bourgeois pieties of the free-labor North is, in the end, unsurprising. One of the central themes of nativist propaganda was the claim that Irish-Catholics lacked a middle-class ethic of industry, sobriety, and self-discipline. Irish resentment toward the Protestant ruling class, moreover, always contained an undercurrent of envy—and even begrudging admiration—for Yankee energy, confidence, wealth, and ingenuity. Some Irish-Catholic leaders, including John T. Roddan of the *Boston Pilot*, openly acknowledged that Irish-Catholics ought to absorb certain aspects of Anglo-Saxon culture.\(^\text{33}\) In their attempt to supplant the Yankee middle-class, Irish-Catholic leaders, wittingly or not, often embraced the very “Protestant” and “secular” values they publicly condemned. Within a few generations, such attitudes would give rise to an Irish “lace-curtain” middle-class as bourgeois in values, aspirations, and general outlook as its Anglo-Protestant counterpart.\(^\text{34}\)

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\(^{32}\) In 1896 Archbishop John Ireland of St. Paul declared that “thinking men” in the United States were finally “looking to the Church for aid” because they saw it as “the only constructive and conservative power in the life of man,” a moral institution that could “effect what force of arms and legislation [could] not accomplish.” A Gilded Age Republican and close friend of Theodore Roosevelt, Ireland was perhaps the most influential exponent of the view that the Church’s capacity to forge “social order out of social chaos” made it indispensable to a nation riven by class conflict. This view essentially recast the social teachings of the Church to buttress the emergent social order of a corporate capitalism. See John Ireland, *The Church and Modern Society: Lectures and Addresses* (New York: D.H McBride and Co., 1896), vi, iv; Marvin Richard O’Connell, *John Ireland and the American Catholic Church* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press), 1988.


Just as important to the development of the Catholic bourgeois ethic, however, was the social character of the Irish-American priesthood itself. Until the early twentieth century, the Catholic Church in America remained dependent on the steady influx of Irish-born clergy and women religious, whose cultural values and attitudes exerted considerable influence over the development of American Catholicism. As was true of Archbishop John Hughes, many of these men and women were the children of respectable middle-class farmers who embraced the pieties of industry, sobriety, frugality, and self-denial in opposition to the more permissive culture of the rural Gaelic tenantry. The Irish famine, which devastated rural Ireland and wiped out much of the Gaelic rural poor, had only strengthened the deeply individualistic and ascetic values of this rural middle class.\(^{35}\) The Irish-born clergy that would come to dominate the Catholic Church in the English-speaking world, especially in the United States, was in other words drawn from a petit-bourgeoisie that prized a strict code of personal morality and a ruthlessly pragmatic attitude to labor, poverty, and wealth. In urban America this ethic of self-improvement harmonized with a broader capitalist ethos of upward mobility and individual achievement.

This Catholic ethic of self-improvement, however, was hardly a “prosperity gospel” that simply justified the personal ambitions and ascendant prosperity of the Irish-American middle class.\(^{36}\) For the men and women of the famine generation, the ubiquity of rural poverty and the specter of starvation were mundane realities of Irish rural life,

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\(^{36}\) On this point see Hasia Diner, Erin’s Daughters in America.

On this point I echo Ross Douthat’s critique of the “prosperity gospel”: that, at least historically, the yoking of personal piety with worldly prosperity was “very often a gospel of upward mobility for those who haven’t made it yet.” Ross Douthat, Twitter post, July 12, 2017, 1:41 PM, http://www.twitter.com/DouthatNYT.
and in the slums of New York, Boston, and Philadelphia the Irish imperative to “rise higher” reflected as much the grating hardships of urban poverty as a fasciation with American abundance. In offering counsel to their working-class parishioners, the Irish-American clergy often repeated the advice offered by their own Irish forbears: that a life devoted to labor, industry, and self-discipline was the only safeguard against perpetual poverty and moral dissolution.

In the American land of opportunity, such fears of material privation could, of course, transmogrify into an unabashed embrace of material wealth and worldly success. The culture of American abundance, however, could never allay the survivalist mentality of a people once pushed to the brink of starvation. A lingering sense of desperation, no doubt, haunted even the most successful emigrants of the famine generation. Eugene O’Neill, the Irish-American playwright, recalled his father, James, as a man haunted by the specter of urban poverty even amid great financial success. A famine survivor abandoned by his father in America, James O’Neill had forged a successful career as a comedic actor on the American stage, ultimately securing the lead role in the wildly successful *The Count of Monte Cristo*. Having amassed a considerable fortune on Broadway, James purchased a waterfront estate in suburban Connecticut, rearing his children among the Anglo-Protestant elite. In semi-autobiographical works like *A Long Day’s Journey Into Night*, Eugene, however, portrayed his father as a man ravaged in middle age by irrational economic anxiety and persistent self-doubt, obsessed with the prospect of financial ruin and an imminent backslide into urban squalor.  

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social ascendance into the upper reaches of Yankee America, James O’Neill, unlike his bohemian playwright son, could never exorcise the “pathological fear of poverty” that consumed the famine generation.  

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In their attempts to harmonize Catholic piety with American prosperity, the leaders of the immigrant Church, in sum, preached a social gospel that fused Irish-Catholic sectarianism with an ambiguous embrace of American values. While condemning the rampant materialism, selfishness, and vanity of the Protestant middle-class, Catholic leaders counseled their working-class brethren to embrace the virtues of industry, frugality, and self-discipline in their pursuit of financial prosperity and social respectability. Loyal adherence to the teachings of the Church, on this view, would shield immigrants from the manifold vices of the capitalist order, enabling them to “rise” in social station without succumbing to the ultra-individualist vanities of the Yankee middle-class. Imploring Catholics to maintain their tribal loyalties to church and clan while embracing an entrepreneurial spirit of self-uplift, Catholic leaders thus called for a guarded, partial assimilation of American values that would infuse the Catholic subculture with a bourgeois habit of mind while tempering exposure to Protestant and secular influences. Though ambivalent toward American culture itself, this worldview nonetheless paraded the loyal white-ethnic Catholic as the most loyal and dutiful of Americans citizens.  

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As a “self-made man” whose grandest ambition was to build a Catholic cathedral of unrivaled grandeur, Archbishop Hughes was in many respects the face of this assimilationist regimen. But perhaps the most influential exponent of this worldview was Mary Anne Sadlier, the Irish-born novelist and editor who exerted unparalleled influence over Catholic publishing in the postbellum United States. The daughter of a prosperous Irish merchant, Mary Anne Madden had come of age during the high tide of O’Connelite influence in Ireland, from which she had derived a view of Catholicism as the lifeblood of Irish nationalism. Educated by private tutors, she demonstrated from an early age a predilection for the literary arts, as well as a desire to fuse the worlds of romantic fiction and popular piety. After her father’s untimely death in 1844, Mary Anne departed Ireland for Canada, ultimately settling in the Irish-Canadian enclave of Montreal. Embarking on a literary career, she soon married James Sadlier, co-proprietor of one of the largest Catholic book-publishing firms in North America. In 1860 the Sadliers moved to New York City, the hub of the American publishing world, to manage the firm and edit the *New York Tablet*, a Catholic journal of opinion acquired from Thomas D’Arcy McGee in 1857. Within a few years Mary Anne had emerged as the grande dame of the Catholic literary world, hosting fashionable parties at the couple’s Long Island estate while writing, translating, and editing a wide array of Catholic literary works, many of which appeared in serialized form in the *Boston Pilot*, the *Freeman’s Journal*, and the *Tablet*. A


41 In one of her novels Sadlier referred to Daniel O’Connell as “the greatest of living Irishmen.” Mary Anne Sadlier, *Elinor Preston: Or, Scenes at Home and Abroad* (New York: D. and J. Sadlier and Co., 1861), 76.
confidante to Catholic luminaries like John Hughes, McGee, and the ever-idiosyncratic Orestes Brownson, Sadlier by her death in 1903 had garnered distinction as the premier Irish-American novelist of her generation, celebrated in Rome, Ireland, and the United States for her service to the One True Church.42

Image 5.3: A portrait of Mary Anne Sadlier, the most influential Irish-American novelist of the nineteenth century. Sadlier combined a Victorian moral ethos of self-discipline and individual achievement with an ultramontane aversion to liberalism, Protestantism, and secularism. Image from A Roundtable of the Representative Catholic Novelists, 241.

The author of more than two-dozen novels, virtually all of which chronicled the Irish-Catholic experience, Sadlier believed that sentimental fiction could serve as form of Catholic apologetics, alerting readers to the dangers of the modern world while affirming the virtues of the Catholic faith. In her 1871 preface to Aunt Honor’s Keepsake, a novel about the mistreatment of Irish-Catholics in Protestant reformatories, Sadlier explained

42 Sadlier and McGee were close friends who corresponded frequently. Brownson, meanwhile, was an early patron of Sadlier’s work, having selected her manuscript for Willy Burke (“a work of true genius”) for a Catholic literary prize in Boston in 1849. Brownson and Sadlier held divergent attitudes toward the role of the Irish in the American Church, but they nonetheless remained close friends and mutual literary influences. Sadlier even hired Brownson to help edit the New York Tablet. Orestes Brownson, “Literary Notices and Criticism,” Brownson’s Quarterly Review 3 (October 1850): 538; Orestes Brownson, “Literary Notices and Criticisms,” Brownson’s Quarterly Review 5 (April 1852): 266.
the broad missionary power of Catholic fiction. Uneducated and overworked, the “great majority” of Catholics, she claimed, seldom read devotional manuals or treatises on Catholic theology, preferring cheap pulp fiction and sentimental romances. As a result, the tawdry secular novels of the age exercised much greater influence over “the reading public” than did the esteemed Catholic theologians of the past. In an attempt to “reach those who will not read pious or devotional books,” Sadlier aspired to craft a new genre of “didactic” Catholic literature that fused sentimental fiction with religious apologetics. “One who has eternity ever in view,” she wrote, in 1855, “cannot write mere love tales; but simply, practical stories embodying grave truths will be read by many who would not read pious books.” By introducing a Catholic alternative to the secular novel, Sadlier hoped to “foil the spirit of the age with his own weapons.”

In line with the social teachings of the immigrant Church, Sadlier’s fiction fused a bourgeois ethic of self-improvement with a deeply reactionary ultramontane Catholicism that assailed liberalism, Protestantism, and secularism as imminent threats to the moral order. Infused with a Victorian moral sensibility that sanctified self-discipline and self-restraint, her novels typically chronicled the trials of embattled Irish immigrants in the New World, seeking to achieve respectability and independence while maintaining their faith and Irish identity. In general, such novels portrayed urban America as a dangerous and unforgiving environment, suffused with the “proud, arrogant spirit of the age” and

43 Mary Anne Sadlier, Aunt Honor’s Keepsake: A Chapter from Life (New York: D.J. Sadlier and Co., 1871), vii; Sadlier, Blakes and Flanaganis, vi.
populated by bitter and hypocritical Protestants. But by practicing their faith, honoring the clergy, abstaining from social intercourse with Protestants, avoiding the vices of the Irish underworld, and committing themselves to a life of honest and industrious labor, Irish immigrants could achieve prosperity, respectability, and personal contentment in American society. Of course, such narratives depicted personal salvation, not material success, as the proper object of Irish-American ambition. But as Sadlier explained in the preface to *Willy Burke: Or, the Irish Orphan in America*, her aim was to demonstrate that, by embracing Catholic virtues, immigrants could “obtain both wealth and honor even here below.”

Sadlier’s most popular novel, *The Blakes and the Flanagans: A Tale Illustrative of Irish Life in the United States*, probes these themes in depth. Contrasting the relative social fortunes of two Irish-American families in antebellum New York City, the novel serves a kind of primer on proper Irish-American assimilation, portraying Roman Catholicism as a prerequisite of middle-class respectability. Deeply materialistic in their worldview and lukewarm in religion, the Blakes decide to send their children to a secular public school, fearing that the local Catholic schools would stymie their children’s professional ambitions. Educated among Protestants, their son Miles goes on to study law at Columbia and enjoy a lucrative career as an attorney, ultimately marrying a Protestant and gaining admission to the fashionable classes. But in ascending to the heights of the secular world, he gradually loses any emotional connection to his family, the broader Irish-American community, and his ancestral Church. Alienated and miserable, he

45 Sadlier, *Willy Burke*, iii. “If my young countrymen,” Sadlier wrote, “would all take Willy Burke for their model—humble as he is—I will venture to promise that the Irish in America would soon become wealthy, esteemed, and respected, for we are told by our Divine Master, that if we ‘seek first the Kingdom of God and His justice, all things else shall be added thereto.’”
reaches his emotional nadir when his infant son, stricken with a mysterious ailment, dies without having been received into the Church, his Protestant mother having vigorously opposed a Catholic baptism. At the conclusion of the novel Miles and his Protestant wife live on “in a cheerless old age,” “lonely and solitary,” “surrounded by cold and chilling splendor.” Miles Blake has gained the world, but lost everything of value in the process.

The Flanagans, by contrast, are a pious and industrious family who endow their children with a deep respect for faith, family and tradition. Confident in the secular wisdom of the clergy, the Flanagans send their children to the local Catholic school, where they receive religious instruction and gain an appreciation of Irish history and culture. Like the Blakes, the Flanagan children achieve material prosperity and worldly respect, but do so within the confines of the Irish-Catholic subculture. Harry Flanagan, the eldest son, attends Fordham University, and later makes a “handsome fortune” running a leather manufactory with his brother. His sister, educated at a Catholic convent school, goes on to marry an Irish-American of “good family” and “industrious habits,” who works as the “chief salesman in an eminent wholesale house” in lower Manhattan. A third brother elects to enter the seminary. In contrast to the Blakes, who try to conceal their Catholic and Irish roots, the Flanagan children deeply revere the Catholic clergy, vigorously defend the Church from Protestant ridicule, and cherish Irish culture and history. At the conclusion of the novel, the matriarch of the Blake clan, despondent at her own family’s misfortunes, gazes wistfully upon the success of the Flanagans, asserting that there wasn’t “a more prosperous” or “more respectable family”

46 Sadlier, Blakes and Flanagans, 373.
47 Ibid., 356.
48 Ibid., 357.
in New York. Her family’s belief that “religion didn’t pay well in this country,” she admits, had proved false.

Overall, like most of Sadlier’s novels, *The Blakes and the Flanagans* presents pious Irish-Catholics as paragons of Victorian moral ideals. Compared to the vain, indulgent, and self-interested Protestant ruling class, the devout Irish-Catholics in these novels prove exemplars of middle-class virtues of self-restraint, honesty, chastity, industry, and self-discipline, even amid the myriad temptations of the American city. Of all of Sadlier’s works of fiction, however, *The Blakes and the Flanagans*, is the novel most concerned with the cultural archetype of the “Irish-American.” The character of Henry Flanagan, the pious Irish Catholic who has nonetheless achieved wealth and respectability in American life, represents a kind of Irish-American beau ideal, fusing Old World charm and New World dynamism. Towards the conclusion of the novel, the patriarch of the Blake clan dismisses the concept of the “Irish-American” as an inherent contradiction, asserting that “men can’t be Irishmen and Americans at the same time; the must be either one or the other.” In response, Edward Flanagan delivers a soliloquy, presenting himself as “living proof” that one can yoke unyielding loyalty to the Republic with a pious and sentimental reverence for Eire:

I cannot agree with you there. I myself am living proof that your position is a false one. I was brought us, as you well know, under Catholic—nay, more, under Irish training; I am Irish in heart—Catholic, I hope, in faith and practice, and yet I am fully prepared to stand by this great Republic, the land of my birth, even to shedding the last drop of my blood,

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49 Ibid., 376.
50 Ibid., 376.
51 Colleen McDannell, *The Christian Home in Victorian America* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1994). According to McDannell, Sadlier articulated a Catholic version of the Victorian domestic ideal. In her reading, Catholics and Protestants adhered to a common vision of Victorian sentimental values grounded in the sanctity of the bourgeois family. Eileen Sullivan, by contrast, points out that many of Sadlier’s protagonists—orphans, working women, widowers—departed from the Victorian ideal of the nuclear family, and this respect Sadlier’s fiction should be understood as a break from Victorian domestic orthodoxy. Sullivan, *The Shamrock and the Cross*.
52 Ibid., 164.
were that necessary. I love America; it is, as it were, the land of my adoption, as well as my birth, but I cannot, or will not, forget Ireland. I pity’s the Irishman’s son who can or does, for his heart must be insensible to some of the highest and holiest feelings of our nature…I am Irish and American, and so I will continue, with God’s help.  

The argument that Irish-Catholics were among the most loyal and dutiful of Americans was a common theme of Catholic leaders at midcentury, one that blended seamlessly with the Catholic ethic of self-improvement. But as Charles Fanning has suggested, such depictions of Irish-Catholic patriotism generally cast loyalty for “the Republic” in exclusively civic and political terms, sidestepping any frank discussion of American culture itself. To be sure, Irish-Catholic leaders like Hughes, Sadlier, and McGee typically drew a distinction between the political ideals of the American republic and the cultural values of the Anglo-American ruling class. (They also distinguished between the “conservative” principles of the American Revolution and the putatively secular and anti-clerical principles of European liberalism). On this view, Irish-Catholics embraced “America” insofar as they exercised the duties of citizenship and revered the underlying political ideals of the constitutional order. But on the subject of American culture—the prevailing attitudes, mores, and cultural habits of the New World—Irish-Catholic leaders like Sadlier were notably silent. In general, Catholic

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53 Ibid., 164.
54 Fanning, 250 Years of Irish-American Fiction.
55 John T. Roddan, for example, drew a contrast between “conservative American republicanism” and the “red republicanism” of contemporary Europe. The traditions of American republicanism, Roddan claimed, were infused with a deep reverence for religion and a respect for the rule of law. “Red republicanism” by contrast, viewed religion as a source of oppression and tended to glorify revolutionary violence. J.P. Roddan, “Foreign Anarchists in America,” Boston Pilot, August 23, 1850, 6.
56 Despite their jeremiads against modern liberalism in Europe, Catholic pointed to a number of factors that ensured Irish-Catholic loyalty to the Republic. First, their Church, they claimed, was the great conservative force of the age, demanded utmost loyalty to legitimate authority. Second, their collective experience as victims of British tyranny had hastened their embrace of republican government. And third, their status as an embattled religious minority guaranteed their support for the constitutional separation of church and state. Deeply pious and politically conservative, Irish-Catholics, on this view, were far less a threat to the Republic than were Protestant “fanatics” like William Lloyd Garrison who refused to yield to the rule of law. On the Irish embrace of “pluralism,” see Sullivan, “American Politics: Catholics as Patriotic Outsiders” in The Shamrock and the Cross.
leaders condemned materialism, selfishness, and vanity as the vices of Anglo-Saxon
Protestants and Irish infidels, but they were always careful to distinguish “Yankee”
pieties from “American” orthodoxies.

“Americanism,” on this view, was an abstract political creed, not a national
character or cultural ethos. This concept of America as a purely political entity, devoid of
any singular culture or national identity, enabled Irish-Catholic leaders at midcentury to
trumpet their patriotism while simultaneously calling for a withdrawal from the
prevailing institutions of American society. Anglo-Protestants may have controlled the
levers of power in American life, in other words, but they did not define what it meant to
be American. Rather, what defined the United States was its constitutional system of
government, which afforded Irish Catholics the same political rights as their Anglo-
Saxon antagonists. In an era of heightened nativism, this view of “the Republic” as a
politically uniform but culturally pluralistic union was at once a powerful argument for
civic toleration of Catholics but also of the right of Catholics to forge their own cultural
institutions. The Catholic subculture, on this view, was a quintessentially American
phenomenon, a result of the overlapping traditions of religious freedom, minority rights,
and cultural pluralism that distinguished the New World from the Old.

What this worldview did not facilitate, on the other hand, was any protracted
discussion of American culture itself. Irish-Catholic leaders routinely condemned
individualism and materialism as the poisoned fruits of Protestantism, but they dared not
admit that such values were perhaps endemic to the American capitalist order. Nor did
they dare to probe the relation between Protestant individualism and the underlying ideals
of the American political order. Until the 1890s there was, apart from the musings of a
few rogue Catholic thinkers, a deafening silence on such questions within the Catholic subculture. In lieu of pondering such intractable concerns, Catholic leaders implored their brethren to be “good Catholics, good citizens, and good Celts.”

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The assimilations ideals of the immigrant Church, which fused aspirations of upward mobility with a strident American patriotism, facilitated the development of an Irish-Catholic middle-class. But the hypersectarian rhetoric of Catholic leaders also inspired more violent and proletarian expressions of Irish-Catholic identity, many of which ran counter to the assimilationist orthodoxies of the Catholic hierarchy. Among unattached working-class men, Irish-Catholicism was more tribal than liturgical, a sectarian identity structured around the affective bonds of neighborhood, kin, and clan. Though the clergy aimed to channel these tribal loyalties into respectable expressions of religious zeal, the institutional Church could never fully control the sectarian impulses of the immigrant community, buffeted as it was by the forces of poverty, nativism, and urban politics.

The first challenge to clerical dominion came from revolutionary Irish nationalism. Hughes and his acolytes had all but throttled the secular cosmopolitanism of Young Ireland, but an Irish cult of political violence would soon take hold among the laboring classes, whose radicalization owed both to the tortured legacy of the Irish famine and the sectarian divisions of urban America. In 1858 John O’Mahony, a Gaelic scholar and former Young Irelander, founded a secret society in New York committed to the
violent overthrow of British rule in Ireland. Named for the Fianna, the mythical Gaelic warriors of ancient Ireland, the Fenian Brotherhood would over the next decade inspire a mass following among working-class Irish-Catholic men, despite strident opposition from the Catholic hierarchy. (The Fenians were particularly successful at recruiting Irish-American Civil War veterans, many of whom hoped to exploit their newfound military training in a war against Great Britain.) Despite the Church’s formal disavowal of the movement, even many Irish-American priests, particularly those who labored among the Irish working-class, harbored Fenian sympathies. Emboldened by growing anti-English sentiment in the U.S. generated by reports of British sympathy for the Confederacy, the Fenians by 1866 had awakened sufficient curiosity to attract an audience of 100,000 people to a rally in New York City.

For the next six decades Fenianism would remain a source of constant agitation for Catholic churchmen, one that threatened to channel the sectarian impulses of the Irish community into a cult of violence deeply alien to the counter-revolutionary edicts of

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57 One of O’Mahony’s collaborators was James Stephens. For a first-hand account of the early Fenian movement in America, see James Stephens, *The Birth of the Fenian Movement: American Diary, Brooklyn, 1859* (Dublin: University College Dublin, 2009).


60 An Irish-American priest of New York, protesting the hierarchy’s condemnation of Fenianism, warned the Catholic Bishop of Cincinnati that it was “unnecessary to tell you that the clergy of New York with few and unimportant exceptions tolerate with mildness if they do not positively admire the brotherhood as well as their object.” Rev. J. Nilan to editor of *Catholic Telegraph*, March 10, 1866, in McCloskey Papers, AANY.
Rome. In response the Holy See and the upper clergy in Ireland and America would take an uncompromising stand on Fenianism, at times even withholding the sacraments from admitted members. More sympathetic Irish-American churchman like Archbishop Hughes, however, adopted a measured approach, seeking to channel Fenian sympathies into more moderate expressions of Irish nationalism.

Despite their rejection of middle-class codes of civility, Fenians, nonetheless drew strength from the rabid sectarianism of Catholic leaders. In this respect, Fenianism was a kind of working-class mutation of the broader Irish-Catholic subculture. No doubt, the Catholic hierarchy’s stalwart opposition to Fenianism in the 1860s and 1870s often provoked outbursts of anticlericalism from Fenian leaders. But given the exceedingly close ties between the Catholic faith and Irish-American identity, the Fenians confined their public statements against the hierarchy to protests against the Church’s interference in secular politics, and rarely, if ever, challenged the spiritual or moral authority of the priesthood. Lest they alienate their political base, Fenian leaders moreover claimed that a “great respect for Christian Doctrine” prevailed among their members, and forswore any connection to Marxism or Italian nationalism. In contrast to Continental variants of working-class radicalism, Fenianism possessed no worldview or metaphysics beyond the doctrine of Irish liberation; it was a nationalist insurgency, not a secular religion. Fenian ritual and group identity, moreover, typically drew on traditions embedded in vernacular

62 O’Leary, Recollections, vol.1, 182-83; Devoy, Recollections of an Irish Rebel, 118-127;
63 O’Leary, Recollections, vol.1, 55, O’Leary, Recollections, vol. 2, 32-33; Denieffe, A Personal Narrative, 97, 150.
64 Denieffe, A Personal Narrative, 150; Devoy, Recollections of an Irish Rebel, 118.
Irish Catholicism. (The Fenian oath, for instance, involved swearing on a Catholic book of prayer.) As a radical outgrowth of Irish-Catholic sectarianism, Fenianism was at anti-clerical but never anti-Catholic, a political movement that derived its visceral power from the centuries-old sectarian conflict between the Catholic Irish and Protestant Anglo-Saxons.

The world of secular urban politics, which drew strength from Irish-Catholic disaffection and class-based grievances, posed an equally pressing challenge to middle-class Catholic pretensions. In general, the institutional Church and the urban Democratic machine maintained a pragmatic and mutually beneficial relationship based on shared interests, a common constituency, and complementary needs. Though the Church formally denied any role in politics, the unyielding support of the Irish-American clergy for the Democratic Party was indisputable; the marriage of “Honest” John Kelly to Archbishop McCloskey’s niece in 1871, in particular, helped to solidify the tacit alliance between parish priest and ward politician, at least in New York. But given the machine’s close ties to the criminal underworld, as well as public opposition to clerical “meddling” in politics, the institutional Church had to at least maintain a public posture of political neutrality.

Many Catholic leaders, though avowed Democrats, were moreover deeply ambivalent about the influence of secular politics on the Irish working-class. Mary Anne Sadlier, a professed Democrat, was typical in this regard. As editor of the New York Tablet, Sadlier adhered to Democratic orthodoxy, but in her fiction she often portrayed urban politics as a morally bankrupt enterprise, undergirded by superficial relationships,

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65 Devoy, Recollections of an Irish Rebel, 29-30.
66 Hughes, for instance, commonly proclaimed that “the Church has no politics.” Hughes, “Reflections and Suggestions in Regard to What is Called the Catholic Press In the United States,” CW, vol. 2, 700.
grandiloquent rhetoric, and restless self-promotion. In *The Blakes and the Flanagan*, in particular, she cast the political world of stump speeches and mass rallies as the domain of charlatans and self-seekers, eager to exploit the Irish voting bloc for personal enrichment. Hoping to burnish his political credentials and advance his celebrity, Harry Blake, for instance, takes the stage at political rally and delivers a bombastic (and patently insincere) speech affirming his great “love of Ireland” and hatred of British tyranny. In private, however, Harry continues to sneer at his fellow Irishmen as a political class of dupes and fools, easily flattered by self-proclaimed “friends of Ireland.” Like many “respectable” Catholics of her generation, Sadlier, in short, had little sympathy for the moral cynicism and pseudo-patriotic bluster of electoral politics.

Such suspicion of urban demagogues, moreover, was not without cause. In the hardscrabble social world of saloons, sporting clubs, and grog shops that sustained working-class politics, Irish-Catholic social values mixed freely with the proslavery and white-supremacist orthodoxies of the Democratic Party, giving rise to a vitriolic and even violent Irish-Catholic political culture that channeled working-class discontent into partisan rage against the Republican establishment, the Protestant middle-class, and African-Americans.67

The career of John Mullaly, an Irish-Catholic editor and Hughes acolyte, demonstrated the pitfalls of linking the One True Faith to partisan politics. Weary of the stubborn editorial independence of James McMaster, Hughes in 1859 appointed Mullaly, a young Irish-American journalist with ties to the Democratic Party, as editor of the *Metropolitan Record*, now the official organ of the archdiocese. In its inaugural issue,

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67 The fraught relationships between the white Protestant elite, African American freemen, and immigrant Catholics in the urban North is deftly analyzed in Bernstein, *The New York City Draft Riots*, 125-192.
Mullaly declared the *Record* a “good Catholic family paper” that would “supply our readers with all the important church news of the world.”68 True to his word, Mullaly used the paper to cover various church-related events, from college commencements to lectures by distinguished Catholic laymen. As the nation lurched toward secession and civil war, however, the *Record* gradually evolved into a partisan organ of New York Democrats, mixing ecclesiastical news with shrill editorials attacking abolitionists and the Republican Party.

By 1863 the *Metropolitan Record* was an avowedly partisan newspaper, rife with denunciations of the “Puritans” and “black Republicans” who controlled the federal government.69 Hughes himself had contributed to the oppositional slant of the *Record* by publishing a lengthy denunciation of abolitionism in 1861 that praised the slave trade for delivering African-Americans from the “barbarian spirit” of Africa.70 But while Hughes remained a stalwart supporter of the Union, Mullaly by 1863 was an outright Confederate sympathizer, filling the *Record* with racist tirades against African-American soldiers and screeds against the “tyranny” of the Lincoln Administration.71 In his condemnations of the Republican establishment, Mullaly tapped into the populist rage of his Irish-Catholic base, declaring the notorious $300 exemption from the military draft as proof of

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administration’s contempt for immigrants and “the working classes.” A fierce critic of Yankee “philanthropy,” Mullaly railed tirelessly against African-Americans and New England abolitionists, denouncing the enlistment of African-Americans in the Union Army, in particular, as the “the saddest proof that could be produced of the degeneracy of our Government, and of the depth of degradation into which the Republic has been plunged by the infamous party in power.” As rumors circulated that a military conscription would soon take effect, Mullaly’s populist rhetoric reached a fevered pitch, laying the ideological groundwork for the horrific mob violence of the July 1863 draft riots, an outburst of working-class rage that overrode even the spirited opposition of the Irish clergy. Such would be the legacy of Mullaly’s “family paper.”

Perhaps the most important legacy of the Church’s embrace of Irish sectarianism was the widespread alienation of black Catholics from the institutional Church. In 1853 Harriet Thompson, a free African American woman living in New York City, wrote a letter to Pius IX decrying the failure of the Catholic hierarchy to minister to the local African American community. The problem, Thompson wrote, was that “most of the Bishops and priests” in the United States were “either Irish or descended from Irish […] and not being accustomed to the black race in Ireland they can’t think enough of them to take charge of their souls.” As a result, the city’s Protestant denominations—often beacons of black leadership in the city and bulwarks of the antislavery movement—had

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72 In a May 3rd article of the Metropolitan Record, Mullaly declared that the war effort was fought not only for “the furtherance of abolition designs” but also “[f]or the special benefit of the shoddy aristocracy,” for the “manufacturing profits” of New England, and “[f]or the impoverishment of the working classes.” Metropolitan Record, May 3: 1863. On the Irish-American embrace of white supremacy, see David Roediger, The Wages of Whiteness (New York: Verso, 1991); and Noel Ignatiev, How the Irish Became White (New York: Routledge, 1995).

73 Frederick Douglas remarked that the Irish, in particular, had learned “to hate and despise the colored people” of the United States. Frederick Douglass, My Bondage and My Freedom (New York and Auburn: Miller, Orton, and Co.: 1857), 454.
proved enormously successful in evangelizing among the city’s black Catholics. Were a papal emissary to visit the U.S and “inquire about the colored people,” Thompson lamented, “he would find many families with the parents Catholics and the children Protestants, overwhelmed with the belief that the name of Catholic amongst the black race will in a few years pass away.”

The gruesome violence of the Draft Riots, compounded with Catholics’ hostility to emancipation and support for the Confederacy, made the possibility of an exclusively white Catholic Church in the Northern U.S. seem all the more plausible.

In the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, however, the U.S Catholic hierarchy would take tentative steps toward evangelizing emancipated slaves. Though expressing concern that a “more gradual system of emancipation” had not been carried out, the U.S. bishops in 1866 issued a pastoral letter calling on the nation’s Catholics to minister to the needs of the freedmen, and to cooperate “with the plans which may be adopted by the Bishops of the Diocese in which they are, to extend to them that Christian education and moral restraint which they so much stand in need of.” Such “plans,” however, were never formalized, and efforts to missionize ex-slaves proved a failure. Sixty years later Catholic sociologists would continue to puzzle over “[t]he lack of notable progress in the work of Negro evangelization.”

The absence of African Americans from the clerical hierarchy, or from any prominent station within the institutional Church, proved particularly devastating to such

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74 Thompson letter quoted in Davis, Black Catholics in the United States, 94-95; Dolan, The Immigrant Church, 24-26. Dolan refers to African American Catholics as “spiritual orphans” of the nineteenth-century institutional Church.
75 Sermons Delivered During the Second Plenary Council of Baltimore, October, 1866, and Pastoral Letter of the Hierarchy of the United States (Baltimore: Kelly and Piet, 1866), 237.
missionary campaigns, half-hearted as they were. While Baptist and Methodist denominations in the antebellum North had promoted African American leadership, local authority, and independence, Irish Catholics’ contempt for any expression of African American manhood or self-assertion stifled the development of a black Catholic elite in the United States; only in 1886 would the U.S. Church ordain its first African American priest, Father Augustus Tolton of Missouri.77 Into the mid-twentieth century the nation’s black Catholics would endure tense relations with an Irish-American hierarchy rarely supportive of African American rights and freedoms.78

Even clergymen sympathetic to the condition of ex-slaves could not disentangle Catholic social thought from the Church’s ties deep ties to Southern slaveholding. In 1879 Father Bernard O’Reilly, the former chaplain of the Irish 69th Regiment in the Union Army, wrote a novel set during the Civil War which exalted Catholic charity and benevolence as the post facto solution to “the question of slavery.”79 Chronicling the life of Francis D’Arcy, a Southern Catholic gentleman of aristocratic European blood, the novel fused Catholic iconography with the plantation mythology of the Old South. In particular, D’Arcy’s bucolic estate in the Carolinas features no slaves, only loyal black servants. “Brought up with care, every one of them, educated under the special direction of the ladies of the family, and bound to their master and employer by uniform and unvarying kindness,” D’Arcy’s employees “loved him and his sincerely, and served them devotedly.”80 Such authority over servants, moreover, does not corrupt D’Arcy, but creates opportunities to demonstrate his virtue. In an opening banquet scene D’Arcy calls

77 Davis, Black Catholics in the United States, 146-162.
78 Shannen Dee Williams, “Subversive Habits: Black Nuns and the Struggle to Desegregate Catholic America after World War I” (PhD diss., Rutgers University, 2012).
80 Ibid., 23.
for his servants to stand before him, and declares that he has cancelled all debts owed to him:

This announcement was received with a burst of applause, clapping of hands, shouts of ‘God bless you sir!’ and cheering which, restrained at first by respect for Mr. D’Arey, grew suddenly into shouts so joyous and so loud that it was heard all over the valley, to a distance of several miles.81

The implicit racial hierarchy of this scene, emblematic of a more general racial-caste system with the nineteenth-century U.S. Church, goes a long way toward explaining the “notable lack of progress” of Catholic missionaries among African Americans during Reconstruction. Catholic churchmen like O’Reilly may have believed they were offering Christian charity and sympathy to an oppressed people, but such paternalism allowed little room for deeper expressions of African American dignity, self-respect, and autonomy.

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Despite occasional working-class revolts against clerical orthodoxy, Catholic leaders would succeed in developing an influential Catholic bourgeoisie in the decades after the Civil War. Once confined to the lower rungs of the industrial economy in the urban North, Catholics had gradually infiltrated the worlds of finance, banking, and real-estate, using their political connections in the Democratic Party to advance their personal wealth and business connections. As lay Catholics ascended in the business world, the Church in turn cultivated a class of wealthy Catholic donors to fund the brick-and-mortar expansion of urban Catholicism. Given the constitutional separation of church and state in the U.S., the Catholic Church would come to depend on such wealthy donors to uphold Catholic interests and expand the institutional base of the Church.

81 Ibid., 45.
Perhaps nothing so captured the ascendance of Catholics in American society than the formal opening of St. Patrick’s Cathedral on 5th Avenue in 1879. The origins of the project owed to Archbishop Hughes, who in 1858 had solicited contributions of $1,000 each from the city’s wealthiest Catholics for the purpose of erecting a Cathedral “worthy of our increasing numbers, intelligence, and wealth as a religious community.” The Civil War had slowed the cathedral’s construction, but by 1879, with the steady aid financial aid of the Emigrant Industrial Savings Bank, the cathedral was finally completed. 82 Cardinal McCloskey formally dedicated the Church on May 25th of that year, to widespread fanfare. The New York Herald proclaimed the Cathedral “the most magnificent temple of worship on the American continent.” 83 “The men of this age have said to us that we could possess no more cathedrals like those of past ages,” Rev. John Ryan declared in the dedication sermon. “Behold the splendid refutation of this charge!” The Cathedral would not necessarily feed the hungry, nor clothe the naked, but it would nonetheless belong to the Catholics of the city, proof of their Church’s rapid ascendance in America. And it would bear the name of their patron saint, the spiritual father of the Irish people.

82 Kate Feighery, “Everything Depends on the First Year: Archbishop John Hughes and His Fundraising Plan for St. Patrick’s Cathedral.”
Image 5.4: St. Patrick’s Cathedral in Manhattan, dedicated in 1879. Archbishop Hughes had exalted the Cathedral as a project “worthy of our increasing numbers, intelligence, and wealth as a religious community.” Image from John Farley, *History of St. Patrick’s Cathedral* (New York: Society for the Propagation of the Faith, 1908), i.

Archbishop Hughes, however, had not lived to see the project to its completion. He had died in 1864, his body riddled with gout and rheumatism. In Hughes’ place has arisen a new generation of Catholic churchmen well-versed in the worlds of finance and real-estate. In the diocese of Philadelphia, power had devolved to James Wood, an Anglo-American convert whose erstwhile career in finance proved highly useful to managing the Church’s ever-expanding real-estate and financial holdings. Hughes own successor, Archbishop John McCloskey, was a man regarded for his prudence, tact, and financial acumen. McCloskey was cautious and steady in all things, esteemed not for personal charisma but for his “perseverence, financial ability, high intelligence, and refined taste.” His first schoolmaster, Thomas Brady, had urged him to pursue a career in the law; with the right preparation, Brady had told McCloskey’s mother, John would be the “ornament of the New York Bar.” His mother, nonetheless, had thought her son best suited for business, and secured him a position as a clerk at a Manhattan accounting firm.
A head injury suffered during a freak accident at the family’s upstate farm, however, left the young McCloskey seriously injured and temporarily blind, foreclosing any opportunity with the firm. “Divine providence seems to have brought about the accident in order to prevent me from entering the world,” he recalled later. As Bishop of New York, McCloskey mixed easily with well-heeled citizens of the city, his weakness for the courtly displays and Old World accouterments often rankling the city’s Catholic working classes. When McCloskey’s wealthy admirers purchased him an elegant five-thousand-dollar horse-drawn carriage in 1875, reform-minded Catholics railed against his willingness “to adopt the ways of the lords and princes of this world.”

The Catholic Churchmen of the Gilded Age were no doubt men of wealth and status, eager to luxuriate in the pomp and prestige of ecclesiastical office. McCloskey’s successor, Michael Augustine Corrigan, was the son of one of the wealthiest Catholics in the Northeast, a former grocer who had forged a real-estate empire in Newark, New Jersey, both through hard work and through political connections. Like McCloskey before him, Corrigan mixed easily with the Irish-American bankers, merchants, and Democratic politicians who comprised the Catholic elite in the Gilded Age. Eager to curry favor with potential donors and closely tied to the Irish business elites who dominated New York Democratic politics, Corrigan often used his ecclesiastical office to

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throttle working-class assertions of rights and help legitimate the economic vision of the upper class. When in 1886 the United Labor Party in New York City ran the labor reformer Henry George for Mayor, Corrigan intervened in favor of the Tammany candidate, Abram Hewitt, an iron manufacturer, by denouncing George’s views as socialistic. In return for such loyalty the Irish-American Democratic elite leveraged their influence on the Church’s behalf.

By the 1880s Irish Catholics no doubt had ascended into the upper reaches of American business and politics, particularly in Irish dominated cities like Boston and New York. In 1880 W.R. Grace, an Irish-born merchant and close friend of Cardinal McCloskey, was elected the Mayor of New York, running on a pro-business Democratic ticket. Eight years later, Hugh Grant, a Corrigan confidante and Tammany stalwart who had grown wealthy on insider real-estate deals, captured the Mayor’s office. Irish-Catholics made similar gains in Boston, where Democratic insiders like Patrick Collins, P.J. Kennedy, and John “Honey” Fitzgerald helped cement Irish rule in the erstwhile bastion of Anglo-Saxon Puritanism. Flanking such political figures was a new generation of Irish-American business elite, many of whom had grown rich in politically connected industries like transportation, construction and real-estate. Men like Anthony N. Brady of Albany and Thomas F. Ryan of Virginia amassed enormous fortunes in municipal projects like the construction of the New York City subway system, and in turn furnished generation donations for the construction of Catholic churches, hospitals, and charities. Ryan, in particular, used his financial clout to help finance Tammany

Democrats, using his financial influence as leverage to secure plummy municipal contracts and favorable business deals.\(^{88}\)

But perhaps no one more easily traversed the overlapping worlds of the Irish-American financial elite, Democratic machine politics, and the upper clergy than did John D. Crimmins, the wealthy New York contractor, philanthropist, and socialite who emerged as a perhaps the preeminent Irish-Catholic layman of the Gilded Age. Like many of his Irish-American contemporaries, Crimmins’ dramatic rise in the world owed, in large part, to the powerful nexus of religion, class, and ethnicity that underlay the patronage–based politics of Tammany Hall.\(^{89}\) An Irish immigrant who had fled the famine of 1845 Crimmins father, George Crimmins, was a successful contractor and loyal Democrat who had reaped the largesse of generous municipal patronage of the Tweed regime in the form of bloated city contracts for public works projects. Possessed of only a limited formal education, John D. and his brother, Thomas, nonetheless ascended the ranks of their father’s company, Crimmins Contracting Co., and by 1873 had all but supplanted their father as the mutual heads of company that employed 12,000 men, most of them Irish. While Thomas typically oversaw the nuts-and-bolts of construction—which included various public works projects, like tunnels, bridges and aqueducts, as well as private construction projects for major corporations—John handled the


company’s financial dealings, negotiating contracts with city authorities and leveraging loans with the city’s private banks. Well-versed in the intricacies of municipal zooming regulations, the patronage politics of Tammany hall, and financial logic of Wall Street, Crimmins by the late 1870s had begun to expand from construction into the broader world of New York real-estate, gobbling up properties on Manhattan’s Upper East Side. By 1880 Crimmins was both one of the leading contractors and real-estate moguls in the city and an emblem of the city’s emergent Irish-American upper class.

Crimmins had long been a dutiful Catholic, but his personal faith and devotion to the Church broadened after the death of his wife, Lily Lalor Crimmins, of pneumonia in 1878. A leading financial patron of the New York Archdiocese, Crimmins and his eleven children spent every Christmas, after attending mass at the Roman Catholic Orphan Asylum, serving dinner at a poorhouse run by the Little Sisters of the poor on 59th Street. A trustee of St. Patrick’s Cathedral who made yearly charitable gifts to an array of the city’s Catholic benevolent institutions, including the Roman Catholic Orphan Asylum, St. Vincent’s Church on 59th Street, and the Convent of the Sacred Heart at Manhattanville. After his wife’s death Crimmins developed a particularly close bond with Archbishop Corrigan, who like Crimmins was the son of prosperous and politically connected Irish-immigrant parents. “His Grace” the Archbishop would frequently visit the Crimmins lavish home on 59th Street and Madison Avenue, and spend summer vacations fishing at Crimmins waterfront estate in Connecticut, surrounded by fellow distinguished Irish-American guests (and Democratic loyalists) like ex-Mayor Hugh Grant and Supreme Court Judge Morgan J. O’Brien. In turn Corrigan welcomed Crimmins into the inner sanctum of New York Catholicism, inviting him to dinners at the archdiocesan residence.
on Madison Ave and introducing him to the nation’s leading Churchmen. When the Bishop of Hartford was made a Cardinal in 1895, Crimmins attended the rarefied ceremony alongside the Archbishop, riding from New York in a private train car alongside the leading members of the American hierarchy.

The friendship between Crimmins and Corrigan was no doubt a source of personal strength for both. Crimmins, in particular, seemed to gather spiritual sustenance from Corrigan’s counsel in the wake of his wife’s untimely death. As the respective leaders of New Your Archdiocese and the Irish-American upper-class, Corrigan and Crimmins nonetheless reaped clear social and political benefits from the friendship. In 1888 Corrigan asked Crimmins to be a trustee of St. Patrick’s Cathedral, a position that gave him oversight over the Church’s acquisition of property on the Upper East Side. As a Parks Commissioner, Tammany insider, and real-estate mogul with massive investments on the Upper East Side, Crimmins was an ideal candidate to help manage the Church’s real-estate investments, particularly in the Irish and Tammany dominated neighborhoods between 59th and 86th Street. Corrigan’s connections in the world of architecture and construction were also valuable to the continuous expansion of organized Catholicism in the city.

Under the direction of leading Irish-American laymen like Crimmins, the institutional Church had by the 1880s achieved considerable social and political power, and had helped to cultivate a class of wealthy conservative donors. But such men of wealth and standing could never speak for the Church itself, nor the Catholic poor that still crowded American cities. Indeed, the institutional Church’s growing attachment to worldly power would give rise to a powerful if ephemeral working-class Catholic radical
movement, one that would seek to redefine the Church’s relation to temporal power and the prophetic traditions of the Gospels.
In December 1883, Patrick Ford, the editor of one of the premier Irish-themed newspapers in the United States, called on his fellow Irish-Americans to support a campaign of revolutionary violence against the British Empire. “I believe,” Ford wrote, “that England ought to be plagued with all the plagues of Egypt—that she ought to be scourged by day and terrorized by night.” The destructive power of dynamite, a recent invention of the Swedish scientist Alfred Nobel, would be crucial to this military campaign, which would persist “until England, hurt as well as scared, falls paralyzed upon her knees and begs Ireland to depart from her.”

Ford, however, was more than just a revolutionary Irish nationalist. Brought to Boston by his parents at the outbreak of the Irish potato famine, Ford has also imbibed the radical traditions of his adopted homeland. As a young man Ford had worked as a printer’s apprentice for William Lloyd Garrison, an experience that helped convert him to the abolitionist cause and led him to sympathize with the radical faction of the Republican Party. After a brief stint as a newspaper editor in South Carolina supporting the aims of Radical Reconstruction, Ford in 1870 moved to New York City, where he channeled the abolitionist critique of slavery into spirited editorials against both British tyranny in Ireland as well as the growing social inequalities of urban America. For the next two decades Ford’s Irish World and American Industrial Liberator gave voice to a powerful variant of working-class radicalism that fused Irish nationalism with the

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artisanal republicanism of the labor movement. Though often critical of the Church hierarchy, Ford also remained a devoted Catholic with close ties to radical New York City priests like Edward McGlynn and Sylvester Malone, and he often pointed to Church teachings to justify his attacks on both English landlords and American financiers. A supporter of radical land reform, women’s suffrage, soft money, aggressive labor unions, and the overthrow of corrupt political machines, Ford in 1886 leveraged his influence among Irish-Americans on behalf of the New York City mayoral candidacy of Henry George, the radical land reformer and author of *Progress and Poverty*. George, running on an independent labor ticket, ultimately lost the election to the Tammany-backed Abram Hewitt, but the narrow margin of victory terrified the city’s financial and political elite, and affirmed the strength of Ford’s particular brand of social and economic radicalism among the city’s Irish working class.3

Unsurprisingly, historians have often hailed Ford as a powerful counterpoint to the traditional interpretation of Irish-Americans as a deeply reactionary force in American society and politics—one supported by the twin pillars of the Roman Catholic and the urban Democratic machine, and largely impervious to the appeals of the American Left. Eric Foner, for one, has pointed to Ford and his radical supporters as proof that historians ought to “update the myth of the conservative Irish working class.” In recent years historians like Ely Janis have heeded Foner’s call, upholding Ford’s *Irish*
World and American Industrial Liberator as evidence of the compatibility of Irish nationalism with broader traditions of American working-class radicalism in the Gilded Age.4

What these narratives generally omit, however, is that Ford experienced a profound conservative turn in the aftermath of the 1886 mayoral election. Indeed, by the early 1890s the Irish-American radical who advocated the use of dynamite against British authorities and called for the radical redistribution of property in both Ireland and the U.S. had all but disappeared, replaced by an Irish-American moralist committed to the pillars of patriotism, piety, and the patriarchal family. Editorials in the Irish World now warned against the dangers of socialism and anarchism to nation and religion, and inveighed against the contagion of divorce that threatened to destroy the American family. Ford remained sympathetic to the light of the working-class, but he now suggested far more conservative remedies: education, sobriety, individual self-discipline, and personal piety, as well as moderate economic reforms that aligned with both the policies of Theodore Roosevelt and the papal teachings of Leo XIII. By the time of his death in 1913 Ford was less a denizen of an increasingly powerful American Left than a conservative champion of Christian values, committed to protecting faith, family, and nation from the threat of socialism and bohemian radicalism.5


What happened to the radicalism of Patrick Ford, and what does this transformation tell us about the relationship between the urban Irish-American working-class and the leftist tradition in America? Of course, there is no shortage of scholarship detailing a conservative shift in the Irish-American working-class at the turn of the 20th century. In the last fifty years historians have pointed to a number of important factors that contributed to the de-radicalization of the urban Irish-American working-class. These including the increasingly centralized authority of conservative bishops like Michael Augustine Corrigan, who throttled the influence of clerical radicals within the Catholic Church; the long-standing influence of Pope Leo XIII, whose commitment to moderate reformism and workers’ rights helped salvage working-class support for the Church; the successful attempts of Democratic political machines like Tammany Hall to both appropriate the language of the labor movement while also appeasing working-class supporters with the lure of political patronage and municipal welfare; and finally the increasing prosperity and political influence of Irish-Americans by 1900, which occasioned a rejection of radical politics and an embrace of middle-class respectability.  

No doubt, each of these factors played a significant role in the reshaping of Irish-American society and politics between 1880 and 1914. These narratives, however, have focused almost exclusively on social change within the Irish-American community as the principle cause of the growing divide between Irish-Americans and the American Left in this period. But if Irish-America evolved in these years, so too did the traditions of...
American radicalism. Put simply, what it meant to be Irish in America changed between 1880 and 1914, but so too did what it meant to be a radical in America. Indeed, the so-called “new” immigrations of the late nineteenth century profoundly altered the landscape of the American city—none more so than Patrick Ford’s New York—and with it the values and traditions of the American urban working-class. In reaction to the increasingly multiethnic, multicultural, and transnational currents within American radicalism, many Irish-Americans of Patrick Ford’s generation came to identify ever more strongly with the conservative values of the Victorian moral order, at a time when many Anglo-Americans were themselves in flight from these traditional “Christian values.”

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As was the case for many Americans of his generation, the anarchist bombing at Haymarket Square in 1886 did much to weaken Ford’s commitment to radical politics. Unlike many of his contemporaries, however, Ford himself was hardly opposed to violence in the pursuit of political ends; only three years prior to the Haymarket bombing, he had publicly campaigned for the use of dynamite against British garrisons in Ireland. Indeed, Ford was not outraged by the violence of the Haymarket bombing, but the ideological end toward which that violence was directed. In an attempt to justify continued Irish-nationalist violence against Great Britain in the wake of the Haymarket bombing, Ford argued that Ireland and England were two nations engaged in a centuries-long military conflict. On this view, Irish nationalists’ use of dynamite was an act of self-

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7 Rodechko attributes Ford’s conservative turn to the rise of anti-Irish “nativism” in the 1880s and 1890s, which, while no doubt relevant, seems to be something of a red-herring in trying to understand Ford’s relationship to radical culture. On the point that the Irish discovered their ethnic roots in opposition to other immigrant groups, see James Barret, The Irish Way: Becoming American in the Multiethnic City (New York: Penguin, 2012).
defense against a foreign army that had sought to “exterminate” the Irish people. The bombing at Haymarket Square, by contrast, was not an attack on a foreign army within the confines of international warfare but rather part and parcel of a “war against society” itself. As Ford would make clear in his subsequent writings, this attack on the social order entailed an assault on the moral authority of the nation-state, organized religion, and the patriarchal family. By advocating the overthrow of these “traditional” institutions, “socialists” and “anarchists” had clearly broken from the republican and Christian influences that had inspired Irish-American radicals and their Anglo-Protestant allies like Henry George.8

Of course, like many of his contemporaries, Ford used the words “socialist” and “anarchist” as broad terms of abuse that concealed important ideological differences among radicals and reformers. Nevertheless, Ford’s growing disillusionment with radical politics in the 1880s did reflect real shifts in the ideological foundation of American radicalism, particularly among the immigrant communities of New York City, where Ford both worked and lived.9 The enforcement of anti-socialist laws Germany in 1878 had inspired a wave of German political radicals to emigrate to the Kleindeutschland neighborhood of Manhattan’s Lower East Side, where they melded into a radical German-speaking intelligentsia that had taken root in New York in the aftermath of the failed German revolution of 1848. The assassination of Czar Alexander II of Russia had likewise radicalized the Lower East Side, as a generation of Russian intellectuals, nurtured on the radical politics of Mikhail Bakunin and Nikolai Chernyshevsky, found refuge in New York from the subsequent backlash by Tsarist authorities. The rash of anti-

Semitic pogroms that broke out across the Russian empire in the wake of Alexander’s assassination, moreover, had inspired a mass immigration of Russian Jews into the Lower East Side, where many embraced the secular radicalism of Yiddish-speaking German and Russian intellectuals. Finally, the completion of Italian unification in 1870 and the resulting devastation of southern Italian agriculture by the imposition of liberal trade laws sparked a mass immigration of rural Italian workers to New York’s working-class environs. By 1900 Italians had largely supplanted the Irish in the lower rungs of New York’s labor force.  

Irish-Americans’ growing alienation from the working-class radicalism of these groups owed, at least in part, to class and ethnic prejudice, as well as basic differences in language and culture. But there were deeper ideological conflicts as well. The first, and perhaps most important conflict was over organized religion and its relationship to working-class liberation. In the nineteenth century the Irish peasantry remained closely tied to the Catholic Church, which remained one of the few institutions beyond the orbit of British dominion. Colonized by a Protestant power, most Irish women and men viewed Catholicism as central to their national and ethnic identity, and the Catholic hierarchy’s critical role in Daniel O’Connell’s push for Catholic Emancipation in 1829 had only strengthened the clergy’s moral and political influence. Irish immigrants in the United States, moreover, had maintained a strong attachment to the Catholic Church, particularly

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11 Tony Michels has pointed to religion and nationalism as the primary reasons why immigrant Jewish radicals failed to forge alliances with Irish-American workers at the turn of the century. In my view this applies not only to Jewish-Irish relations but also to Irish relations with the vast majority of the so-called “new immigrants” of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. See Michels, *A Fire in their Hearts*, 42-43.
in response to the virulent nativism of the 1840s and 1850s. Though the more radical faction of Irish nationalists often criticized the clergy for refusing to sanction armed rebellion against Britain, even the most radical of “physical-force” nationalists remained nominal Catholics, largely immune to the appeal of secular ideologies like Marxism.

Many of the immigrant populations that came to comprise New York City’s working class after 1880, however, had much more complex attitudes toward organized religion. The predominance of state churches in Central, Southern, and Eastern Europe in the nineteenth-century ensured that popular movements for political and economic equality would be marked by a powerful strain of anticlericalism. In Germany and Russia, Christian churches’ support for the political and economic status quo had convinced radical intellectuals like Marx and Bakunin of the need to liberate the masses from the conservative clergy. The Russian-born Jews who immigrated to the Lower East Side in the 1880s and 1890s had endured persistent state-sponsored persecution and violence on account of their religion, and found in the secular ideologies of the German and Russian intelligentsia of New York a pathway to civic inclusion and communal identity. Finally, while the vast majority of Italian immigrants were nominal Catholics, the close ties between the Roman Catholic Church and the landowning classes has engendered a powerful strain of anticlericalism among the Italian peasantry, particularly in the more isolated villages of southern Italy. Italian working-class men, in particular, gravitated toward popular variants of anarchism that condemned organized religion as an instrument of class oppression. While Catholicism may have seemed a source of commonality

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12 Michels, 46-47.
between working-class Irish and Italians in urban America, in practice it was often a source of intense cultural conflict.  

A second source of conflict between Irish-Americans and the so-called “new” immigrants was over the moral authority of the nation-state. Many of the radical intellectuals who immigrated to New York between 1880 and 1914 were deeply distrustful of nationalism and centralized political authority. For the German socialist intellectuals who emigrated in the aftermath of the 1878 anti-socialist campaign, the rise of a unified German state under Bismarck was less an nationalistic triumph than the consolidation of a militaristic regime committed to stamping out the socialist cause. Unsurprisingly, many German socialists—none more so than Marx—rejected nationalism as an obstacle to the triumph of the international proletariat. Russian intellectuals, who had long suffered under a politically repressive and militaristic of the Tsarist regime, were even less trusting of traditional political authority than were their German counterparts, and tended to embrace anarchist ideas that advocated the abolition of all forms of political inequality. Among the immigrant Jews of New York there was no doubt a vibrant Zionist tradition, but more often than not the Jewish radicals of the Lower East Side embraced the internationalism of Marxian socialism. And in the eyes of Italian emigrants the Risorgimento had been the cause of much of the social and economic distress that had afflicted southern Italy since 1870. Most Italian socialists and anarchists, who harbored deep distrust toward both political and religious authority, conceived of nationalism as a predominantly middle-class ideology advocated by northern Italian merchants and manufacturers to the detriment of the rural working-class.

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13 Philip V. Cannistraro and Gerald Meyer, eds., The Lost World of Italian-American Radicalism, 1-99; Burrows and Wallace, Gotham, 1148-1154.
14 On the impact of state repression on German radical thought, see Beer and Revolution, 52-85.
Irish-Americans, by contrast, tended to embrace nationalism and loudly proclaimed their loyalty to republican institutions. Of course, the legacy of British colonialism had engendered a deep distrust of state authority in rural Ireland, and given rise to a number of secret agrarian societies prone to violence. But in nineteenth-century Ireland much of the animosity toward the British was channeled into efforts to secure an independent Irish nation-state, rather than into movements that denied the authority of the nation-state itself. Irish politicians like Daniel O’Connell and Charles Stewart Parnell, moreover, had demonstrated that Irish nationalists could have some success working within the liberal-constitutional channels of the British parliamentary system. As Tony Michels has argued, this emphasis on nationalism divided the Irish and Irish-Americans from the internationalist tilt of Continental radicalism. Irish immigrants in the United States, furthermore, had traditionally celebrated the American republican order as a political model for a free and independent Ireland. In reaction to nativist screeds that Irish-Catholicism was incompatible with republican institutions, leading Irish-Americans like Bishop John Hughes had in the 1840s and 1850s loudly proclaimed Irish-Catholic fealty to American republican institutions—in particular, to the constitutional order that afforded them religious and political freedoms amid hostile Protestant majority. For decades Irish Americans had proclaimed not only that they were unswervingly loyal to American political institutions, but that their loyalty typically exceeded that of their Anglo-American counterparts.

Finally, cultural struggles over sexuality, the patriarchal family, and bourgeois domesticity alienated Irish-Americans from turn-of-the-century radicals. Of course, a “cultural left” that sought liberation from the repressive Victorian moral order comprised
only a minor faction with the broader radical movement in America at 1900, and this cultural left often failed to make inroads into working-class immigrant communities otherwise amenable to various forms of labor radicalism. Nevertheless, a “bohemian” ethic that fused Marxian socialism with antinomian impulses directed against the Victorian moral order did take hold in cosmopolitan urban neighborhoods like Greenwich Village by 1900, and would exert a powerful influence over the politics of the American Left in the twentieth century. This cultural left, in part, grew out of the anarchist politics of German and Russian intellectuals who sought to overturn all forms of social and political hierarchy. Few intellectuals better articulated the parallels between capitalist exploitation and patriarchal domination, for instance, than did the Russian-born Emma Goldman, who gained a mass following as a street-lecturer and radical organizer in Greenwich Village at the turn of the century. But as Christine Stansell has suggested, an equally vital constituency of the early cultural left were of Anglo-American middle-class radicals who found in the cosmopolitan radicalism of bohemia a means of revolt against the Victorian moral order of their youth. Directed against the dogmatism of organized religion, the spiritual sterility of bourgeois material comforts, and the repressive sexual ethic associated with Victorian gender norms, this flight from Victorian orthodoxy drew on the broader sense of cultural ennui that T.J. Lear's suggested afflicted the Anglo-Protestant establishment between 1880 and 1920.

Of course, this “culture of rebellion” (to use Michael Kazín's phrase) had only a marginal impact on many working-class immigrant cultures in this period. The Irish, most

however, proved particularly resistant, especially around issues of sexuality and the family. As Hasier Diner has argued, the sexually permissive Gaelic culture of rural Ireland was all but destroyed amid of the devastation of the Irish potato famine of 1846-51, and was soon supplanted by the rigid moralism of the Irish middle-class, which emphasized gender segregation and sexual restraint as pillars of social order.17 In the United States, Irish immigrants were typically vilified for their failure to embody Victorian ideals of middle-class respectability, and as a result many Irish immigrants came to identify ever more strongly with the Victorian ideals of the Anglo-Protestant elite. Indeed, leading Irish-American novelists like Mary Anne Sadlier typically cast pious Irish immigrants, grounded as they were in the rigid orthodoxies of the Catholic Church, as the true embodiments of Victorian middle-class ideals, against an increasingly decadent and secular Anglo-Protestant majority.18 Perhaps most importantly, most Irish-Americans had only just begun to achieve middle-class status at the same time that many Anglo-Protestants were beginning to revolt against bourgeois ideals. For the newly ascendant Irish-American middle-class of the late nineteenth century, bourgeois domesticity was less a source of spiritual suffocation than a means liberation from the poverty and hardship of the famine generation.

In short, Irish-Americans like Patrick Ford found themselves in a strange predicament at the turn of the twentieth century. The famine generation had immigrated at a time when republican values and Victorian ideals of respectability were deeply

interwoven into American culture. Irish assimilation into antebellum American culture was no doubt painful and traumatic, but by the 1870s the Irish had begun to ascend into the middle-class and forge alliances with Anglo-Protestant reformers. By the 1890s, however, many of these antebellum American values themselves now seemed under attack, both from an Anglo-Protestant middle-class in flight from Victorian moralism and from an increasingly diverse urban working-class steeped in the radical traditions of Eastern and Southern Europe.\(^{19}\) As was true of Patrick Ford, many Irish Americans responded by casting themselves as the true embodiments of “Americanism”—the only loyal defenders of the “traditional” American values of faith, nation, and family.\(^{20}\) The Irish, on this view, would be more American than Americans themselves, and would serve as the guardians against radicalism both foreign and domestic in the twentieth century.\(^{21}\) “Harvard men were to be checked,” the Irish Catholic Daniel Moynihan famously remarked. “Fordham men would do the checking.”

William Cardinal O’Connell, one of the leading spokesmen of Irish America at the turn of the century, captured this sense of Irish-American triumphalism in 1908 when he claimed that the “Puritan has passed, the Catholic remains.” What O’Connell failed to note, however, was that Irish-Americans had not merely supplanted their long-time Puritan adversaries; they had in many respects become them.

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19 William Halsey has argued that the Catholic Church served as a staunch defender of nineteenth-century ideas amid the intellectual flux of the twentieth century. I think Halsey’s argument can also be adapted to Irish-Americans more generally, and as much in the cultural sphere as the philosophical. See William Halsey, The Survival of American Innocence: Catholicism in an Era of Disillusionment (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980).

20 On the view that the Irish would emerge as forces of “Americanization” within the Catholic Church, see Timothy Meager, Inventing Irish America: Generation, Class, and Ethnic Identity in a New England City, 1880-1928 (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001) and Barret, The Irish Way.

21 The best account of Irish-American assimilation into the values of the middle-class remains Paula Kane, Separatism and Subculture: Boston Catholicism, 1900-1920 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1994).
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