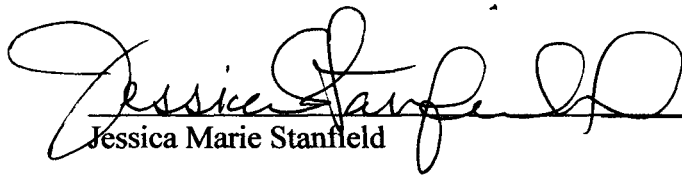
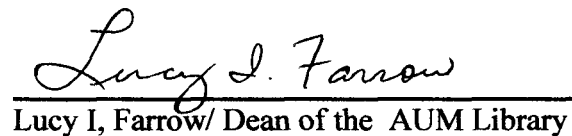


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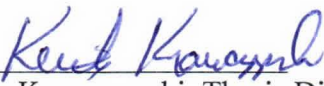
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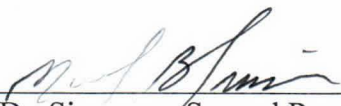
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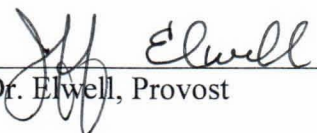
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## Abstract

One of America's loudest boasts is that our right to freedom of religion is a guaranteed Constitutional right. We condemn any government that would deny a person basic religious freedom. Yet, our own history has shown that the dominant Protestant majority has a long history of violating these Constitutional principles by continuously discriminating against minority religious sects within America. Their leading target has been Catholicism.

This thesis demonstrates that religious freedom in the United States is a myth. In order to demonstrate this I will examine discrimination and violence against Alabama Catholics in the early twentieth century by racist organizations, such as the Ku Klux Klan and the True Americans, and those who sympathized with them, such as elected government officials and even Protestant churches. Historically, immigrant Catholics throughout the United States have had difficulty assimilating into the fundamentally Protestant American culture, a culture rife with anti-Catholic sentiment that was based on doctrinal differences, cultural differences, suspicions of parochial schooling, and a fear of "popery" gaining ground in American society and politics.

Though immigrant Catholics have experienced vast discrimination throughout American history, this thesis will focus on anti-Catholic prejudice in Alabama from 1900 to 1940. I chose to focus on this particular era because it represents a truly tumultuous period in Alabama's history, a period when Alabama's citizenry and leaders (government and religious) propagated not only an acceptance of wide-ranging prejudice but practiced it as well. Preying on the public's

fears of foreign immigration, Communism, and race-mixing, white Alabama Protestants recognized and took advantage of both a political and societal benefit by punishing those who either did not share the same skin color or adhere to the same political and religious beliefs.

The thesis will make a significant contribution to this particular subject because scholars have largely ignored the struggle of Catholics in Alabama. There are many works that provide a general synthesis of the Catholic experience in the United States. However, very few concentrate solely on one particular group of Catholics, and even fewer focus their arguments on a specific Catholic population in the South.<sup>1</sup> Regardless of the fact that the South was never a stronghold of Catholicism, the subject of anti-Catholicism in Alabama remains an important one in that violence and hatred were not merely reserved for African-Americans. For example, with regards to racial prejudice, southerners tended to justify their racist actions by claiming that they must maintain white supremacy since blacks outnumbered the southern white population in Alabama. The same cannot be said for Catholics in that they represented a small percentage of the population and were largely concentrated in urban areas. Therefore, the excuse generated to justify racial bigotry cannot be used to justify religious intolerance.

One explanation for the scholarly negligence of this topic could be that the discrimination and violence enacted against African-Americans overshadowed those offenses targeted at

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<sup>1</sup> See Theodore Roemer, *The Catholic Church in the United States* (St. Louis, MO; Herder Book Co., 1950); Andrew Moore, *The South's Tolerable Alien: Roman Catholics in Alabama and Georgia, 1945-1970* (Baton Rouge, LA; Louisiana State University Press, 2007); John J. Kane, *Catholic-Protestant Conflicts in America* (Chicago, IL; Regency Press, 1955); Robert P. Lockwood, ed. *Anti-Catholicism in American Culture* (Huntington, IN; Our Sunday Visitor Press, 2000).

Catholics. Furthermore, because the Catholic population in Alabama was significant in only few urban areas, anti-Catholic prejudice remained relatively isolated compared with the widespread racism throughout the state. Perhaps for this reason, historians have dismissed this topic as insignificant, especially when compared to the racial struggle in Alabama. However, it is imperative that people understand that Alabama Catholics, much like southern African-Americans, also suffered as targets of church bombings, legislative discrimination, and even murder at the hands of those southerners who not only fervently adhered to the ideology of white supremacy but also vigorously promoted and practiced religious and ethnic discrimination. In fact, those individuals deemed morally upright by white Anglo-Saxon standards were the only individuals who escaped the prejudice that pervaded the South at the turn of the twentieth century.

Most of the information for this thesis is taken from newspaper and magazine articles, historical and religious journals, private papers, personal interviews, legislative records, Ku Klux Klan literature, and secondary works focused on immigration patterns in the United States, immigrant culture within America, and the Catholic experience in America. The first chapter will provide a historical background on anti-Catholic sentiment in America and the various reasons used to support those attitudes held by white American Protestants. The next few chapters will detail those prejudices held by many native Alabamians towards Catholics and the various violent and non-violent methods they used to implement their “anti-Catholic” agenda. In doing so, I will focus attention on the activities of groups such as the Ku Klux Klan, who often tried to

mask their racism and intolerance as “patriotism,” and legislative officials who maintained a separation of church and state yet adhered to Protestantism as the only “true” American religion. The conclusion of this work will explain how this anti-Catholic atmosphere affected the Alabama populace in general and how Catholics survived and responded to such a hostile environment that refused to acknowledge them as equal citizens based on the perception that Catholics perpetuated the ambitions of the Holy See and were therefore not considered “true Americans.”

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## Chapter 1

### “Kingdom of Darkness”

“To this and such like resemblances between the papacy and the Kingdom of fairies may be added this, that as the fairies have no Existence but in the fancies of ignorant people, rising from the Traditions of old wives or old poets; so the spiritual power of the Pope (without the bounds of his own civil dominion) consisteth only in the Fear that seduced people stand in of their excommunication, upon Hearing of false miracles, false traditions, and false interpretations of the Scripture.”  
- *Thomas Hobbes, “Leviathan”*<sup>1</sup>

### Roots of Anti-Catholicism

The Roman Catholic Church reigned as the one acknowledged Christian religion since the days of the Roman Empire. However, it was the devotion of strong rulers, such as Constantine of Byzantium (c. 280-337) and Charles Martel of Gaul (c. 688-741), which provided the absolute authority with which the church ruled until various sectional splits forced the Church to reform its ideas. The most notable splits from the Catholic Church resulted from the Protestant Reformation, specifically Calvinism, Lutheranism, and Anglicanism. These divisions occurred as a reaction to perceived problems in the Catholic Church, particularly clerical immorality, ignorance, false doctrines, and pluralism. The reality that numerous people supported these breaks from the Church demonstrates that numerous individuals were discontented with it, and this unhappiness eventually evolved into anti-Catholic sentiment. Therefore, before one can understand

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan. <http://www.bartleby.com/34/5/12>

the roots of anti-Catholicism in America, one must address the abuses of the Catholic Church in Europe and the subsequent sectarian splits.

From the beginning, the Catholic Church experienced an extensive array of unsavory problems perpetuated by priests, bishops, cardinals, and even popes. For instance, during the Renaissance the Vatican tolerated prostitution, and several popes openly accepted the practice and taxed it. Pope Sixtus IV (1471-1484) taxed the “courtesans;” Pope Alexander VI (1492-1503) rented buildings for use as bordellos, and Pope Julius II (1503-1513) set aside a “Prostitute’s Quarter” in Rome in an effort to make certain that no bordellos would operate near the “papal palace.”<sup>2</sup> Other abuses perpetuated by the Catholic Church included gambling, drunkenness, the keeping of personal concubines by clergy, cardinals, and popes, clerical pluralism (in which clerics held more than one office), nepotism of their clergy offspring and relatives, and decrees of supremacy that included pompous rituals like kissing the Pope’s foot.<sup>3</sup> Considering these behaviors, one can understand why many people became disillusioned with the Catholic Church, a body entrusted to save the souls of men. Yet, a great deal of Catholic leaders refused to deny themselves any worldly pleasure while chastising the laity for engaging in similar behavior.

One of the earliest and most effective attacks on the Catholic Church came from Martin Luther, an Augustinian monk who tired of the pageantry and hypocrisy surrounding the Church. As an educated man from Saxony, Luther was appalled at the

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Zacks, An Underground Education: The Unauthorized and Outrageous Supplement to Everything You Thought You Knew About Art, Sex, Business, Crime, Science, and Other Fields of Human Knowledge (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 219.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 219-223.

ignorance of the Catholic clergy, many of whom could only mumble Latin words during Mass that they could not understand. Additionally, the Bible was translated into either Latin or Greek, leaving most people unable to read and interpret the Bible for themselves. Luther took note that even priests, who were largely uneducated, were in no better condition than lay people to interpret the Bible. He therefore argued that there was no authentic rationale to maintain a category of priests since an individual could have his or her own personal relationship with God. This contention negated the need for an integral part of the Church hierarchy and thus the need for lands and money to support the hierarchy.<sup>4</sup>

Martin Luther also questioned the practice of selling indulgences at the behest of the Pope, a theological construct he believed had no Biblical foundation. The inspiration behind the practice of indulgences was the principle that after death, an individual's soul was trapped in "purgatory," a place where one went to make amends for the sins committed during the course of his or her life. Basically, indulgences offered absolution for the temporal penalties of sin. Those who could afford it bought indulgences, which were pardons issued by the Pope as a way to reduce time served in purgatory and ensure swift entry into heaven. Many times the Pope supported the sale of indulgences as a way to raise revenue for the Church. Pope Leo X (1513-1521), for example, approved the sale of these to raise money for the construction to rebuild St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> William Hanes, World History: Continuity and Change (Austin, TX: Harcourt, Brace, & Co, 1999), 380-381.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

Martin Luther also deemed many Catholic rituals as unnecessary to Christianity. In essence, Luther maintained that any Christian practices should come from the Bible alone. Any other ritual was superfluous. He also argued that one could achieve salvation through faith in God alone. Acts and/or works, in and of themselves, could not guarantee salvation in the eyes of God.<sup>6</sup> Although Luther's intentions were not to break from the Church, merely reform it, his notions negated the need for a significant part of its hierarchy. This would result in a reduction both in wealth for the Church and in its powers over the laity that would considerably weaken the institution as a whole. The Catholic Church therefore quickly condemned Luther as a heretic and excommunicated him.<sup>7</sup> However, its actions failed to stem the religious controversy launched by Luther. In the end, Germany was ultimately divided between Protestants and Catholics. The religious crack begun by Martin Luther quickly spread throughout Europe.

One of these religious fractures was Calvinism. This faction originated with a reformer by the name of Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531), who died in battle defending his ideas. John Calvin (1509-1564), a French Protestant, carried out the movement. Inspired by the teachings of St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430), Calvin attempted to force even more doctrinal strictness into the Reformation. Calvin and his followers eventually settled in Geneva, Switzerland. Here, Calvin put his religious philosophy into practice. The basis of his philosophy is the idea of "predestination," a concept which mandates that God, in His infinite wisdom, decided at Creation who would be saved and who would be

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 381.

damned. Therefore, men and women cannot actively work to achieve salvation, a fundamental tenet of Catholicism. Furthermore, John Calvin was so incensed with the immorality of the Catholic Church that he declared dancing, card playing, and offensive language as sinful acts deserving punishment.<sup>8</sup> John Calvin's teachings soon spread throughout Europe and served as the model for the Presbyterian Church in Scotland, the Huguenot Church in France, the Puritan Church in England, and the Reformed Dutch Church in the Netherlands.

England was another nation that did not escape the effects of Luther's Reformation. King Henry VIII of England (1509-1547), who was once called the "Defender of the Faith" and who referred to Martin Luther as "false and wicked," removed the English Church from papal jurisdiction largely for personal and political, not religious, reasons.<sup>9</sup> Henry VIII wanted a divorce from his wife, Catherine of Aragon (of Catholic Spain), because she failed to produce a male successor. He wanted to make his mistress, Anne Boleyn, his queen in the hopes that she would bear him a male heir. He therefore petitioned Pope Clement VII (1523-1534) for an annulment, who refused the petition. In response, Henry VIII pushed through Parliament several acts that declared the king the supreme head of the Church of England, required the churchmen to submit to the King, and forbade the publication of any ecclesiastical laws without royal permission. This action not only revealed the perception that the Pope was fallible, but it also

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 382.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

subverted the “total authority” of the Church itself. The English bishops had no choice but to grant him his divorce.<sup>10</sup>

The English Reformation continued under Edward VI (1547-1553) with the free circulation of Protestant ideas, the government’s confiscation of 2,300 Catholic chantries, and the adoption of the first *Book of Common Prayer*- all of which drastically weakened the Catholic Church in England. Under his successor, Mary I (1553-1558), Catholicism regained favor as the “true religion” of England. Possessing a single-minded purpose to bring her subjects back to Rome, Queen Mary justly earned the moniker “Bloody Mary” for burning at the stake an estimated 300 Protestants for refusing to renounce their faith. After Mary’s death in 1558, her younger Protestant sister, Elizabeth I (1558-1603), came to the throne. During her reign, Catholic Spain attempted to invade England and dethrone Elizabeth while at home, and various Catholic elements plotted to assassinate the Queen. Such actions further engendered a deep hostility in England against Catholics.<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, Elizabeth sought to promote religious stability in England with her “Elizabethan Settlement,” which was a middle ground between Catholic and Puritan extremes that required every subject to attend Church of England services. Not everyone was satisfied with this arrangement and Catholics continued to suffer abuses at the hands of Protestants. Elizabeth I, for example, made it illegal for Catholics to celebrate mass, and passed acts outlawing the sacrament of the Eucharist and refuting transubstantiation, both critical to Catholic rituals. Elizabeth I further antagonized the Catholics in her realm

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 382-383.

<sup>11</sup> John Miller, *Popery and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 76-80

by mandating that even a person who receives absolution from an agent of Rome would be seen as an enemy of the crown. The government considered anyone who refused to comply with these acts as guilty of high treason, and punished violators with forfeiture of property and office, disinheritance, and even execution.<sup>12</sup>

The Catholic Church answered these “reformations” with a reformation of its own. Between 1545-1563, Church officials met in the Italian city of Trent to maintain the doctrines of the Catholic faith and tackle the problems arising from ancient abuses. Widely referred to as the Council of Trent, the Catholic Church banned the sale of indulgences, suppressed pluralism, established new rules regarding the conduct of the clergy, required every diocese to establish a seminary for the education and training of the clergy, and reaffirmed the importance of rituals associated with the Catholic faith. To combat the spread of Protestantism, the Church founded the new orders of the Ursulines and the Jesuits. Both were religious educational orders that established missions, schools, and universities in the hopes of reclaiming some of those previously lost to the Protestant faith. The Catholic counter-reformation worked because it reduced Protestant control over Europe from an estimated forty percent of the population to about twenty percent. In doing so, however, the Church revived the Roman Inquisition, a powerful committee of six cardinals that used hearsay as suitable evidence and sometimes torture as a means to attack heresy. This behavior only fed the Protestant’s view that the Catholic Church was a tyrannical and capricious institution.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Thomas F. Knox. ed., *Records of the English Catholics Under the Penal Laws, Vol.I.; Chiefly from the Archives of the See of Westminster* (London; Wertheimer, Lea, & Co. Printers, 1878), xxi, xliv, lxvii.

<sup>13</sup> Hanes, 383-384.

Unfortunately for the people of Europe, the power struggle between the faiths led to atrocities that endured for nearly 100 years. Germany was torn in two between its Protestant princes and its Catholic ruler, Emperor Charles V. Ultimately, an uneasy peace was achieved by allowing territories to choose its respective religion. In England, as previously mentioned, the religion of the current monarch became the country's principle religion; those who refused to adhere to that respective religion suffered with loss of either property or their lives. In the Netherlands, the third Duke of Alba, Fernando Alvarez de Toledo, the Spanish governor of that country, instituted the Council of Blood (1567-1573), a pro-Catholic committee whose purpose was to handle cases in which Protestants were accused of acting against the Catholic government imposed by Spain. During its six-year existence, the Council heard 10,000 cases and ordered the execution of at least 1,000 Protestants. The council became so aggressive in its search and tactics that both Protestants and Calvinists fled the area.<sup>14</sup>

Religious division in France led to even greater bloodshed with the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre of August 24, 1572. On that day, King Charles IX (1550-1574) ordered the massacre of Protestants in Paris upon rumors that Protestant leaders in the capitol planned to assassinate him. The slaughter of French Protestants, or Huguenots, spread throughout the provinces. In the end, Catholic mobs killed an estimated 20,000 Huguenots. One of the "sick and perverse" acts committed by French Catholics was baptizing Protestant infants in the blood of their parents before being killed themselves. Even though the Vatican condemned this atrocity, non-Catholics associated

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<sup>14</sup> Miller, 92-100.



any act perpetuated by a Catholic leader as being supported, if not instigated, by the Catholic Church.<sup>15</sup>



These conflicts arising between the Catholics and Protestants were largely a battle for autonomy. The religion of a country was ultimately integrated into the body politic of that state. Government leaders did not tolerate any religion that deviated from the established one. Anyone who refused to accept the established faith risked losing his or her title, property, or even their life. These intolerant notions followed those who escaped

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<sup>15</sup> Joseph Cummins, *The World's Bloodiest History: Massacre, Genocide, and the Scars They Left on Civilization* (Beverly, MA: Fair Winds Press, 2010), 45, 48-49.

<sup>16</sup> François Dubois (1529-1584). Reproduction of *La Saint-Barthélemy*, ca. 1572-84. Oil on wood, 94 x 154 cm, Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts de Lausanne. Photo: J.C. Ducret, Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts de Lausanne. The famous painting of the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre in Paris on 24 August 1572 depicts scenes from the most notorious incident in the French wars of religion and one of the most striking examples of the extremes of religious intolerance in the age. The Huguenot (French Calvinist) painter, François Dubois is reputed to have been an eyewitness to the massacre of thousands of his fellow Huguenots on the streets of Paris.

the religious divisions of Europe to come to America. Unfortunately, the schism among the faiths and intolerant attitudes endured in the New World much to the detriment of American Catholics.

### **Colonial Response to Catholicism**

Although many Europeans who settled in America sought to escape religious persecution, these same colonists were not always willing to extend religious freedom and toleration to those adhering to a different faith, particularly Roman Catholicism. Many Puritans, for example, still remembered the considerable control the Catholic Church once had on European society, wealth, and politics. Protestant settlers were unwilling to allow the Catholic Church to assume those same powers in their new homeland. A large part of this apprehension developed from the wars between Protestant England and the Catholic countries of Spain and France during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and was further exacerbated by the French settlement of Canada and the Spanish settlement of Florida. Countless American Protestants viewed these settlements as an “ever-present threat.”<sup>17</sup> Even the colony of Maryland, originally established in the 1630s as a Catholic sanctuary, eventually succumbed to the popular anti-Catholic rhetoric that pervaded early American society. This experiment in religious toleration ended when local Puritans deprived Maryland Catholics of their religious freedom and many civil rights temporarily in the 1650s, and permanently by Anglicans after the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Thereafter, Catholics were excluded from voting

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<sup>17</sup>Keith Krawczynski, “Daily Life in the Colonial City” (unpublished manuscript), 53.

and holding public office, entering certain professions such as law, inheriting or purchasing land, having churches or schools, and, for a while, subject to double taxation.<sup>18</sup>

In examining the other colonies, one finds that Virginia, in its early years, allowed no religious toleration for Quakers, Puritans, and Catholics. Later, as a royal colony, the Church of England became the established church there, which did not allow religious toleration of Catholics. This anti-Catholic policy was standard in all royally-controlled colonies.<sup>19</sup> In the corporate colony of Massachusetts, the General Court there passed a law in 1647 mandating that all Catholic clergymen must either leave the colony or face the possibility of execution. This specific statute remained on the law books until the American Revolution.<sup>20</sup> The independent colony of Rhode Island issued a law in 1669 denying admission of Catholics into the settlement. By 1729 Catholics were admitted there but disfranchised.<sup>21</sup> New Hampshire went so far as to refuse the group the right to hold office or even to worship in public. Instead, Catholics were reduced to holding Mass in their homes.<sup>22</sup> The only colonies that attempted to ensure religious toleration, even of Roman Catholics, were Pennsylvania, a colony controlled by Quakers, and Maryland. Understandably, Catholics tended to congregate in these two colonies. In 1689 Parliament sought to generate religious harmony through the empire by issuing a

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<sup>18</sup> Marian T. Horvat, "Let None Dare Call it Liberty: The Catholic Church in Colonial America." [www.traditioninaction.org](http://www.traditioninaction.org).

<sup>19</sup> Fr. J. S. McGivern, "Catholic Loyalists in the American Revolution: A Sketch," *CCHA Study Sessions* 48 (1981), 91-99.

<sup>20</sup> Krawczynski, 53-54.

<sup>21</sup> McGivern, 91-99.

<sup>22</sup> John T. Ellis, *American Catholicism* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 18-22.

Declaration of Rights that advocated religious toleration and freedom of worship to all except Catholics.

Although many Americans today believe that our nation's earliest settlers believed in religious freedom and a true separation of church and state, that is not the case. From the beginning America has been a Protestant nation. This fact is reflected in a Protestant ideology permeating early American society. One example is found in the Standard English Primer used in colonial schools, which contains several anti-Catholic sentiments. Perhaps the most offensive is the following:

*Abhor the errant Whore of Rome  
And all Her blasphemies;  
And drink not of Her cursed cup  
Obey not Her decrees.*<sup>23</sup>

In this particular parable, the Catholic Church is demonized as the “whore of Rome” and warns schoolchildren to avoid the “blasphemous” teachings of the Catholic Church.

These school readers also portrayed the Pope as the Anti-Christ. Not only were Protestant children instructed to hate the Catholic Church through their textbooks, but also in their schoolyard games on the playground. One game called “Break the Pope’s Neck” was very popular among colonial schoolchildren. This favorite pastime was played much like “crack the whip” in which a line of children hold hands and try to fling the very last person off the “chain.”

Newspapers, too, scandalized the Catholic Church in America. One colonial newspaper, for instance, portrayed Catholic Church officials as alligators in Church

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<sup>23</sup> Robert P. Lockwood, ed. *Anti-Catholicism in American Culture* (Huntington; Our Sunday Visitor Press, 2000), 56.

regalia, crawling onto American soil from the Atlantic Ocean. Refer to the illustration below.



Further promoting anti-Catholic rhetoric is the following excerpt taken from Benjamin Franklin's *Pennsylvania Gazette* in 1754:

Can we endure the thought of having our children enslaved by the Church of Rome and forced contrary to the Light of their Minds, either to comply with all its idolatrous superstitions or fall a sacrifice to the cruel and bloody zeal of bigoted priests, and their blinded Followers, who think they do God a good service by cutting off such as they call Heretics from the face of the earth, and such, in their esteem, are all those who are not of their Community. Nor will it afford us a more agreeable prospect to view the tender offspring of our dear children, whom Priestly rage as murdered, sitting at the feet of those inhuman butchers and meekly receiving for divine truths, all the monstrous tenets of that Anti-Christian Church.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Nast, "The American River Ganges" (Cartoon), *Harper's Weekly*. New York: September 30, 1871. Depicted are Roman Catholic Bishops as alligators in church regalia climbing onto America's shores as Americans protect their children from the approaching "menace."

<sup>25</sup> Krawczynski, 59-60.

In short, many colonists viewed the Catholic Church as a predatory creature determined to reserve a place for itself in American society. A colonial tabloid, the *American Magazine*, informed its audience that “Popery is, by the invention of Commutations and Dispensations for the Breach of Moral Law, the strongest enforcement of Vice, under the sanction of Religion; Protestantism, by placing Religion in the Practice of universal Virtue, as that Virtue is the Will of God, is the strongest enforcement of the moral Law.”<sup>26</sup>

Protestants further demonized Catholics in the annual celebration of Guy Fawkes Day, which commemorated the failed Catholic “Gunpowder Plot” to overthrow Protestant King James I in 1605. This anti-Catholic celebration involved parading effigies of the Pope and the Devil while people marched through the streets hurling insults and rubbish at Satan and his servant (the Pope) and eventually burning both amidst the jeers of heated Protestant mobs. This anti-Catholic ceremony managed to bring the stratified Protestant social classes together in a solidified effort to marginalize Catholics within the community.<sup>27</sup> This practice remained popular until the outbreak of the American Revolution when Catholic France came to the aid of the United States against England. To continue to publicly commemorate such an event would have been considered poor taste while accepting military and financial backing from a Catholic nation.

One might think that with the coming of the American Revolution and its philosophy that “all men are created equal” and are entitled to “life, liberty, and the

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<sup>26</sup> Lockwood, 56.

<sup>27</sup> Krawczynski, 60.

pursuit of happiness,” that anti-Catholic sentiment would wane. If anything, anti-Catholicism increased. Indeed, one might even argue that anti-Catholicism helped push the colonial rebellion against the English government. For instance, the Quebec Act of 1774, considered as one of Britain’s Intolerable Acts, stirred even more vehement repulsion to the Roman Church among American Protestants by making the Catholic Church the established church in Canada and governing it without a representative assembly. Patriot leaders accused the English Crown of establishing “a Popish French government in our rears set up for the express purpose of destroying our liberties.”<sup>28</sup>

Others who have written on the subject agree that religion was a vital concern in the colonists’ desire for independence. Catholic scholar Theodore Roemer states that American independence was “not due solely to oppressive tax laws nor to restrictions on popular rights...it is a question for historical consideration whether these oppressions alone would have moved the body of the people to acts of resistance had not religion been a moving force upon the minds of the people.”<sup>29</sup> In fact, many of our patriot leaders like Paul Revere, Thomas Paine, James Franklin (Ben Franklin’s older brother), and others held distaste for those who adhered to Catholic decrees. The anti-Catholic sentiment expressed by Samuel Adams in 1768 was a commonly held one by his fellow American Protestants: “I did verily believe, as I do still, that much more is to be dreaded from the growth of popery in America, than from the Stamp Act, or any other acts destructive of civil rights.”<sup>30</sup> Thus, while numerous Americans prepared themselves for

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<sup>28</sup> Lockwood, 28.

<sup>29</sup> Theodore Roemer, The Catholic Church in the United States (St. Louis: Herder Book Co., 1950), 67.

<sup>30</sup> Marion T. Horvat, “Let None Dare Call It Liberty.”

an all out conflict with their mother country, many of these men still maintained that they would rather be subjected to continual British occupation and oppression rather than allow “Popery” to spread in America. What makes this paranoia so unnecessary is that Roman Catholics represented a truly insignificant minority in America – about one half of one percent of the population in 1785. Furthermore, only five of the thirteen states granted equal citizenship to Catholics.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, it hardly seems that Catholicism represented a genuine threat in America. Nonetheless, anti-Catholic rhetoric became even more entrenched in the young republic as a mounting xenophobia swept the country.

### **Antebellum Anti-Catholicism**

Between 1830 and 1860 the Roman Catholic population of the United States increased from an estimated 318,000 to an astounding 3,103,000. Nearly two million of this sum resulted from immigration, principally from the Irish escaping famine and Germans escaping economic and political dislocation. In response to this tremendous influx of foreign-born Catholic immigrants, white Americans rallied around new political groups intent on keeping the Catholic surge at bay. Many Americans also acted out in accordance with their preconceived notions regarding Catholics by burning convents and Catholic orphanages, inciting riots in largely Catholic areas, and perpetuating rumors of illicit behavior between priests and nuns. These salacious allegations became popular

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<sup>31</sup> Ellis, 21, 43.



topics of conversations perpetuated by popular literature that aroused even greater suspicions regarding the Catholic Church.

This is clearly seen in Rebecca Reed's *Six Months in a Convent*, a fictitious autobiography, which describes her alleged captivity by an Ursuline order near Boston in 1832. Her claims of imprisonment and grotesque punishment inspired an angry mob to set fire to the convent in 1834.<sup>32</sup> Another such inflammatory work was *The Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk*, published in 1836. Author Humphrey Desmond describes this effort as the "Uncle Tom's Cabin of Know-Nothingism" and describes the story's central character as a "girl of evil character."<sup>33</sup> Written in the fashion of a gothic novel, the book attested to various preconceived notions held by American Protestants. The fraudulent exposé told of how the young girl, Maria Monk, entered the convent but soon discovered that her new existence was only to serve the vulgar fantasies of the priests, who used a series of secret connecting tunnels that allowed the priests to enter the convent to interact with the nuns as they wished. Maria further claimed that any resulting children were murdered after baptism and the remains buried in an undisclosed chamber beneath the convent.<sup>34</sup> Further arousing anger among American Protestant readers was Maria's allegation that she was instructed that any teaching that deviated from Catholic dogma was the work of the Devil and should therefore be completely disregarded as detrimental to one's salvation. Although Maria Monk and her work turned out to be a

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<sup>32</sup> "Burning of the Carlestown Convent" *Boston Evening Transcript*. August 11 & 12, 1834.

<sup>33</sup> Humphrey Desmond, *The Know-Nothing Party: A Sketch* (Washington: New Century Press, 1905), 16.

<sup>34</sup> Maria Monk, *The Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk* (New York: Howe and Bates, 1837), 16-17, 47-49.

fraud perpetuated by two Protestant ministers, its salacious subject matter still became tremendously fashionable gossip at local taverns, parlors, and street corners.<sup>35</sup>

Together, the novel and the increasing discussions on the subject matter of subversive Catholic conspiracies helped to generate a frenzied atmosphere in which acts of violence and vandalism seemed an appropriate response. Famous American literary figures even promulgated the fear of being subjected to the authority of the Roman Catholic Church. Edgar Allen Poe's "Pit and Pendulum" contains notions of female vulnerability at the hands of the clergy, playing on the preconceived notions of the perverse activity taking place inside convents. Poe's descriptions of interrogations in dark, damp cellars called forth memories of the Spanish Inquisition.<sup>36</sup>

These works, along with others, heightened anti-Catholic feelings that erupted in violence in some northern cities. In 1829, a mob in Boston, Massachusetts spent approximately three days stoning and burning the homes of Irish Catholics.<sup>37</sup> The most destructive occurred in Philadelphia in 1844 when angry Protestant mobs tore through Irish Catholic neighborhoods burning schools, churches, and killing over a dozen Catholics in the process. Fueling this wake of anti-Catholicism was the American Protestant Association. Formed in the 1840s, its primary purpose was to circulate literature denouncing the Roman Catholic Church as a deceptive organization successfully gaining ground in America through its parochial schools, missions, and

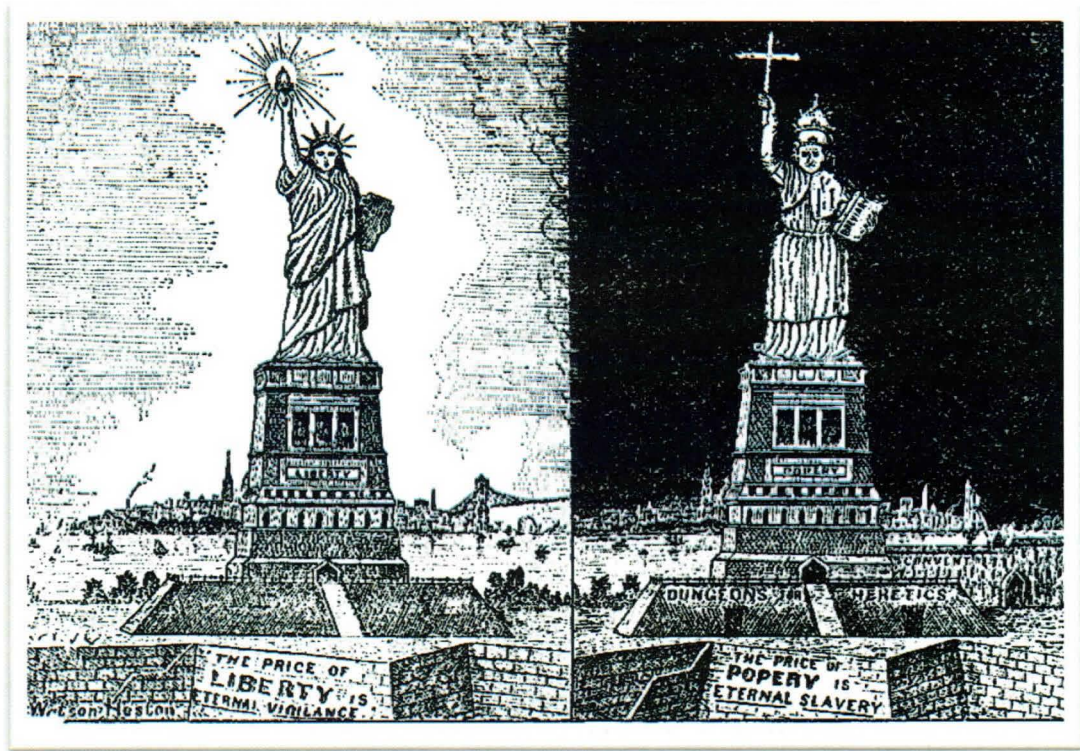
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<sup>35</sup> Catherine McGowan, "Convents and Conspiracies: a Study of Convent Narratives in the United States, 1850-1870." PhD Thesis (Edinburgh; University of Edinburgh, 2009), 25-27.

<sup>36</sup> Jenny Franchot, Roads to Rome: The Antebellum Protestant Encounter with Catholicism (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 162-163.

<sup>37</sup> Robert Asher, Concepts in American History (New York: Harper Collins Press, 1996), 130.

rising immigration, and rallying against the expansion of “popery” within the United States.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, the *American Protestant Vindicator*, another anti-Catholic organ, spread panic among its readers that “Jesuits are prowling about all parts of the United States in every possible disguise, expressly to ascertain the advantageous situations and modes to disseminate Popery.”<sup>39</sup> These inflammatory statements further served to perpetuate apprehension among Protestants that there was a subversive papal plot to gain control of America.



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To subvert this alleged conspiracy some Protestants in 1849 organized the underground anti-Catholic, anti-Irish organization – the Know-Nothing Party - to enact

<sup>38</sup> *Boston Evening Transcript*, August 11 & 12, 1834.

<sup>39</sup> Franchot, 64.

<sup>40</sup> Taken from the pamphlet *Priest Celibacy Exposed* from the Railsplitter Press circa 1920's. This cartoon depicts the difference between liberty and slavery as being “Popery.” Americans must continue to be vigilant in the fight for freedom. If not, popery will take hold in America leading its citizens to eternal slavery.

anti-immigration and anti-Catholic legislation. Modern scholars have characterized the emergence of the Know-Nothing party as one of the most “fantastic alliances of politics and bigotry in the history of the United States.”<sup>41</sup> Followers of the party steadfastly believed that Catholics cast their votes as ordered by their priests, which ultimately added to the apprehension that a papal plot existed to take over the western hemisphere.<sup>42</sup> For this reason, among others, they attacked Catholics as being un-Christian, as members of a cult adhering to a pagan dogma, and as un-American.<sup>43</sup> In fact, American nativists in 1852 went so far as to place an article in the *New York Times* calling for the immigrants to *Americanize* themselves. The article stated, “They have the duty of thoroughly *Americanizing* themselves...they should imbue themselves with American feelings. They should not herd themselves together for the preservation of the customs, habits, and languages of the countries from which they came.”<sup>44</sup> Much to the disappointment of these nativists, the immigrants did huddle together with those who shared their respective ethnic and religious backgrounds as a means of making the transition more palatable from the Old World to the New.

For a brief period, the Know-Nothings wielded considerable political influence. In 1853, they successfully encouraged Protestants to protest the arrival of Archbishop Gaetano Bedini (1806-1864) in America. Even President Franklin Pierce refused official protection for the Archbishop when an Italian revolutionary named Alessandro Gavazzi

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<sup>41</sup> Don Brophy & Edythe Westenbauer eds., *The Story of Catholics in America* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 46-50.

<sup>42</sup> John J. Kane, *Catholic-Protestant Conflicts in America*. (Chicago: Regency Press, 1955), 40.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 40-45.

<sup>44</sup> Asher, 132.

threatened his life. Before the Archbishop's visit, Pope Pius IX (1846-1878) sent a marble block to the United States as a token of friendship. The Pope hoped the marble would be added to the proposed Washington Monument. Instead, a Protestant mob seized the block of marble and tossed it into the Potomac River.<sup>45</sup> Such popular action contributed to the political accomplishment of the Know-Nothing Party. By the mid 1850s the party held significant influence in the Northeast and large parts of the South and managed to elect some members to Congress.<sup>46</sup> The Know-Nothings even passed legislation allowing the public to scrutinize nunneries and churches. Catholic churches were therefore at the mercy of an intolerant Protestant majority who used their authority to defile and demolish Church property and even the homes of Catholics. Typical is the incident in Louisville, Kentucky in August of 1855, referred to as "Bloody Monday," when Protestant mobs pulled Catholics from their homes and then destroyed them.<sup>47</sup> Even Catholic children became targets for Protestant attacks as they were either disbarred from attending public schools or humiliated to the point of not wanting to return.<sup>48</sup> This was especially true in the North, where Irish schoolchildren were referred to as "Paddies" and were forced to read Bible passages from Protestant Scriptures. Authorities in Maine and Massachusetts either punished Catholic schoolchildren for refusing to read Protestant scripture or expelled them for refusing to partake in Protestant Bible readings and

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<sup>45</sup> Roemer, 241-242.

<sup>46</sup> Kane, 54-60.

<sup>47</sup> Roemer, 243.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

Protestant prayers.<sup>49</sup> In the end, the Know-Nothing Party dissolved due to a lessening interest in Popery and a growing interest in the divisive issue of slavery that ultimately led to the Civil War.

Anti-Catholicism has existed in the United States since the country's colonization with its roots stretching across the Atlantic from Europe. These religious foes watched blood spill and empires rise and fall in the name of their respective faiths. Early American colonists, remembering the dominance of the Catholic Church in Europe, sought to protect the United States from following the same path. In doing so, white American Protestants successfully created a society generally opposed to the Catholic Church's existence within her borders, opposed to Roman Catholics themselves exercising their right to religious freedom, and instituted a society and government steeped in Protestant ideology determined to protect its democratic institutions from the suspected "popish" takeover by the Roman Catholic Church.

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<sup>49</sup> Desmond, 79.

## Chapter 2

"The population of the United States will, on account of the great influx of blood from Southeastern Europe, rapidly become darker in pigmentation, smaller in stature, more given to crimes of larceny, kidnapping, assault, murder, rape and sex immorality. And the ratio of insanity in the population will rapidly increase."

*-Charles Davenport, 1911.*<sup>50</sup>

### Anti-Catholicism in the Early Twentieth Century

During the Civil War, Catholics fought nobly on both sides. The United States government even honored those members of the Catholic clergy, especially nuns, with a monument as recognition for their dedication to soldiers on the battlefields. With the passing of the Civil War and Reconstruction came another influx of European immigrants, primarily Catholics from eastern and southern Europe. By the 1880s the Catholic population rose to an estimated 6.25 million. Over the next two decades this number continued to rise, so that by 1900, over twelve million Catholics called America home.<sup>51</sup>

What seemed to concern Protestant Americans the most was the bulk of the latest Catholic (and some Jewish) immigrants who were filtering in from the southern and eastern parts of Europe where people possessed darker skins, varying languages, and so steeped in their religions that they voluntarily congregated among other likeminded immigrants. However, what many failed to comprehend is that these groups stayed together more out of necessity than anything else as these immigrants were generally poor and depended on the support of local parishes, which happened to commonly be

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<sup>50</sup><http://www.pbs.org/fmc/segments/progseg2.htm>

<sup>51</sup> Roemer, 256-258.

located in urban areas. It has been noted that in responding to the ever growing needs of these immigrant Catholic communities, the Catholic Church expanded many of its defining institutions in order to keep up with increased demand. Thus, there were a growing number of Catholic Churches, schools, hospitals, charities, fraternal orders, and parishes.<sup>52</sup> According to historian Richard Bulliet, the immigrants entering the country tended to “gravitate towards their own ethnic communities, where they enjoyed the support needed to adapt to American life...found jobs with the help of their fellow nationals...The parochial school was no less dedicated to helping the immigrants’ children integrate into their new country by helping them to reconcile their religious commitment with their civic ethic.”<sup>53</sup>

African Americans were also apprehensive with regards to the Catholic “alien menace.” An editorial in a 1903 edition of *The Colored American* expressed the African American community’s position: “The first thing they do after landing and getting rid of their sea legs is to organize to keep the colored man out of the mines, out of the factories, out of the trade unions, and out of all kinds of industries in the country.”<sup>54</sup> This sentiment mirrors white Protestant fears with regards to the flood of Catholic immigrants, as well with how whites viewed job competition from the black population.

Some Protestant bigots attempted to substantiate these racist attitudes via pseudoscientific theories, such as Social Darwinism and eugenics. English philosopher Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), the father of the Social Darwinist theory, believed that

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<sup>52</sup> Ellis, 103

<sup>53</sup> Richard W. Bulliet, ed., *The Columbia History of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 133.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*



western and northern European white races were superior to all others because of their alleged success in society and the belief that they were responsible for modern technology, political democracy, and capitalism.<sup>55</sup> In fact, Spencer promulgated the notion that to even aid “inferior” peoples with charitable assistance was “unnatural” and violated the idea of “survival of the fittest.” He contended that these weaker, inferior people would eventually die out by way of natural selection and that to help them, through social programs and further types of assistance, would only postpone the inevitable. Spencer stated:

Inconvenience, suffering and death are the penalties attached by nature to ignorance, as well as incompetence—are also the means of remedying these. Partly by weeding out those of lowest development, and partly by subjecting those who remain to the never-ceasing discipline of experience, nature secures the growth of a race who shall both understand the conditions of existence, and be able to act up to them. It is impossible in any degree to suspend this discipline by stepping in between ignorance and its consequences, without, to a corresponding degree, suspending *the* progress. If to be ignorant were as safe as to be wise, no one would become wise. And he stresses the general point that transgression of the law of equal. Freedom hinders the multiplication of those best fitted for existence—leaving, as it does, less room for them.<sup>56</sup>

Of course this suggestion is erroneous, but for a time Protestant elites used this racist ideology to justify the discrimination and persecution of Catholics and other ethnic and religious minorities flooding into the United States from eastern and southern Europe.

While the antebellum “anti-Catholic” groups dissolved due to the larger problem of slavery, other groups emerged to meet this new perceived Catholic threat at the turn of the century. Some of these nativist groups were disguised with harmless names, such as the American Defense Society, the National Security League, and the American

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<sup>55</sup> John Offer, “Spencer’s Sociology of Welfare.” *Sociological Review* 31 (November 1983), 720-725.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

Protective Association, all of which were intended to build up military armaments, silence internal opposition, and protect the homeland from outsiders. However, the actions perpetuated by these groups were more “nativist” rather than protective. Scholar Robert Asher defines “nativism” as involving xenophobia – a fear of foreigners, which is generally accompanied by demands to exclude undesired immigrants and an insistence that “suspect immigrants be forced to adopt the culture of the groups that dominate the territory to which the migrants are moving.”<sup>57</sup> He further explains that “cultural nativism” is often accompanied by both economic and political nativism, which basically translates to fear of job competition and political competition with the immigrants.<sup>58</sup> Although these “protective” groups had difficulty uniting under the banner of total and complete anti-immigration, it was anti-Catholicism that actually lent the nativist movement its true impetus.<sup>59</sup>



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<sup>57</sup> Asher, 128.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 129.

<sup>59</sup> Desmond, 10.

<sup>60</sup> Terry Golway, “Portal Of Dreams: The History of Ellis Island and of a Century Old Immigration Debate.” *The Wall Street Journal*. June 13, 2009. Photograph depicts the stereotypical immigrant arriving

This was especially true during and after World War I, when some states banned the German language in churches and in schools, and the federal government passed legislation that was aimed directly at containing suspicious foreign activity among immigrants. To that end, the United States Congress passed the Espionage Act (1917) and the Sedition Act (1918) that worked against any group or person that might be construed as a foreign threat, and this included labor unions and immigrants.<sup>61</sup> Geoffrey Stone, author of *Perilous Times: Free Speech in Wartime*, maintains that World War I was one of the top three worst eras in history for free speech. He states that this was a time when the Wilson administration instilled fear into the public to silence their critics. The administration also created the Committee of Public Information which perpetuated the notion that any criticism of the war effort or the government itself was tantamount to treason and could be met with persecution, prosecution, or in the case of immigrants, deportation.<sup>62</sup> Other groups, such as the Ku Klux Klan, made no effort to hide their agenda of reducing the influx of Catholic immigrants and attacking those that remained.

The Klan advanced an ideology of white Anglo-Saxon supremacy. As historian Robert Paxton explains: "Their [the Klan] only moral yardstick is the prowess of the race, of the nation, and of the community. They claim legitimacy by no universal standard except a Darwinian triumph of the strongest community."<sup>63</sup> This belief came together and culminated in a movement comprised of self-righteous individuals who deemed themselves superior to the rest of society, determined to bring closer together their

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at Ellis Island at the turn of the twentieth century. White Protestant Americans feared being overrun by immigrants deemed dirty, disheveled, and shiftless.

<sup>61</sup> Glen Feldman, *Politics, Society, and the Klan in Alabama 1915-1939* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999), 3.

<sup>62</sup> <http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/analysis.aspx?id=14124>

<sup>63</sup> John McClymer, "The KKK in the 1920s" <http://www1.assumption.edu/ahc/1920s/Eugenics/klan.html>

ethnically, racially, and religiously exclusive brotherhood at any cost necessary, clinging to the “grandeur of the group” that reinforces the individual’s self-esteem, headed by patriarchal authority under the direction of one national leader (i.e. the Imperial Wizard) who attempts to determine the direction of the group, and finally, the use of pseudoscientific theories and cultural notions to support their respective struggle to justify their ideologies.<sup>64</sup> One of these “opportunistic ideas” was the pseudoscientific theory of eugenics, which was a notion predominately used to justify white Protestant America’s racist notions towards those of different races, ethnicities, and religious affiliations. Medical ethicist and author Daniel Wikler explains the appeal and power of this pseudoscientific theory: “Eugenics is a valuable case study which demonstrates how the prestige of science can be used to disguise the moral premises and motives for a social movement, and how class, racial, and other biases can exert powerful and damaging influence over such a movement while remaining virtually invisible to its advocates.”<sup>65</sup>

Eugenics, the practice of selective breeding to improve hereditary qualities, might seem the stuff of science fiction and “parlor talk” save for the fact that it was supported by influential white Anglo-Saxon Protestant leaders and their institutions in American society in the early twentieth century. The Carnegie Institution, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Edwin Harriman railroad fortune supported not only the scientific study of eugenics, but also its implementation against alleged undesirables from

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Alison K. Thompson and Ruth F. Chadwick, ed., “Can We Learn From Eugenics?” in Daniel Wikler, ed., Genetic Information: Acquisition, Access, and Control (New York; Kluwar Academic/Plenum Publishers, 1999), 1.

American society. Professors from institutions such as Harvard, Stanford, and Yale added prestige to the movement. For example, Stanford's President, David Starr Jordan, wrote "Blood of a Nation" in 1902, a book that compares the breeding of men to the breeding of cattle. "In selective breeding with any domesticated animal or plant," Jordan argues, "it is possible....to produce wonderful changes for the better...To select for posterity those individuals which best meet our needs or please our fancy, and to destroy those with unfavorable qualities, is the function of artificial selection."<sup>66</sup> Not only did he favor perpetuating those deemed "favorable persons" while destroying those deemed unfit for society, but he went even further by stating that "Indiscriminate charity has been a fruitful cause of the survival of the unfit. To kill the strong and feed the weak is to provide for a progeny of weakness."<sup>67</sup> In short, this elitist Protestant scholar claimed that not only is it the obligation of a nation to weed out the weak from society, but to even offer them any charity can bring ruin to a country because it takes away from the strong.

Wealthy industrial capitalists of Anglo Saxon Protestant heritage used part of their fortunes to implement and apply the "science" of eugenics to "inferior" residents, particularly Catholics and Jews from southern and eastern Europe. For example, the Rockefeller Foundation provided a venue for scientists and doctors to work together to figure out measures to reduce the births of those deemed unfit for society, generally through programs such as sterilization. Ironically, one of the doctors supported by Rockefeller's funding was Dr. Joseph Mengele, the infamous Nazi doctor from

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<sup>66</sup> David Starr Jordan, The Blood of a Nation: A Study of the Decay of Races Through Survival of the Unfit (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1902), 12-14.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.33

Auschwitz who experimented on many of the camp prisoners in his twisted attempt to find ways of eliminating undesirable qualities from the human race.<sup>68</sup> The Edwin H. Harriman railroad fortune funded projects such as the New York Bureau of Industries and Immigration, which sought to deport dark featured European immigrants (i.e. Jews, Italians, etc.) out of the overcrowded urban areas and, in some instances, force them to undergo sterilization. Andrew Carnegie supported the scientific research that produced the “Preliminary Report of the Committee of the Eugenic Section of the American Breeder’s Association to Study and to Report on the Best Practical Means for Cutting Off the Defective Germ-Plasm in the Human Population” in 1911.<sup>69</sup> This report suggested euthanasia as a means to weed out undesirable genetics. The Supreme Court in 1927 even allowed for the legal sterilization of people deemed by American society as “idiots.” In the case *Buck v. Bell*, Supreme Court Justice Oliver W. Holmes endorsed the idea of legal sterilization by adding the opinion that : “It is better for all the world, if instead waiting to execute degenerate offspring for crime, or to let them starve for their imbecility, society can prevent those who are manifestly unfit from continuing their kind...Three generations of imbeciles are enough.”<sup>70</sup>

This racist ideology was even supported by the United States Congress when, in 1907, it proposed an in depth and comprehensive study of immigration into the United States. Led by Senator William P. Dillingham of Vermont, the commission compiled varying social science data and studies that put forth in a forty one volume collection that

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<sup>68</sup>Edwin Black, “The Horrifying American Roots of Nazi Eugenics” *History News Network* (November 25, 2003) <http://hnn.us/articles/1796.html>

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> <http://www.hsl.virginia.edu/historical/eugenics/3-buckvbell.cfm>

they believed confirmed many previously held prejudices by native born Americans against the so-called “new immigrants” from eastern and southern Europe.<sup>71</sup> The commission depicted these individuals as “unskilled industrial workers who brought down wages, crowded out [ the allegedly superior] native whites and northern/western European immigrants, contributed significantly to rising crime rates, and triggered economic crises” such as the Panic of 1907.<sup>72</sup> Summarizing each ethnic group, the report informed the country that the Italians were an inherently immoral race, the Poles were lagging in intelligence, the Irish were nothing more than shiftless, superstitious drunkards, and the Jews were incapable of honest business. Collectively, the report added that these immigrants suffered from high levels of insanity, mental retardation, physical handicaps, and “disease.” The commission informed Americans that these “inferiors” could never truly assimilate into American society.<sup>73</sup> The findings put forth by this report eventually led Congress to enact immigration quotas during the 1920s that severely restricted immigration from eastern and southern Europe while allowing immigration from northern and western Europe to continue unabated. It was no coincidence that those individuals from southern and eastern Europe were mostly of the Jewish and Catholic faiths.

This racist and anti-Catholic attitude and behavior perpetuated by the American government, the courts, and leading scholars and scientists ultimately trickled down to the average American and spread among the masses. Alabama native Hiram Evans, Imperial Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan from 1922-1939, explained the position of the Klan

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> <http://courses.washington.edu/setclass/Soc496>

with regard to the eugenics movement by stating, “We are pleased that modern research is finding scientific backing for these convictions (about the importance of racial instincts).”<sup>74</sup> Evans claimed that most of white America “knows” that these racial theories are right in the way that “a good Christian knows that he has been saved and that Christ lives – a thing which the intellectual could never understand. These convictions are no more to be argued about than is our love for our children.”<sup>75</sup> It is worth noting that one of the largest claims against Catholics in the United States is that they could never truly be Americans due to their alleged inability to separate church from state. Yet, here we witness a leading figure of an influential Protestant organization guilty of the same offense by supporting a political ideology with a spiritual one. Historian Andrew Moore writes in his book, *The South’s Tolerable Alien*, that oftentimes white American Protestants believed that their opposition to the Catholic Church somehow cemented and/or enhanced their own patriotism and “proved their American identity.” This form of nationalism remained “distinctly religious” in Alabama and Georgia, explains Moore, where Protestants believed that Catholics looking to truly assimilate must choose between their respective church dogma or the Bible.<sup>76</sup>

Exacerbating this anti-immigrant/Catholic sentiment were various publications put forth by Protestants in an effort to warn the American public of the imminent dangers of allowing “Romanists” to crowd America’s shores. For example, popular anti-Catholic author Chattin Bradway published *Political Romanism* in 1914. Bradway sought to

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<sup>74</sup> McClymer, 4.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Andrew Moore, *The South’s Tolerable Alien: Roman Catholics in Alabama and Georgia, 1945-1970* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 34-35.



“prove” to white Protestant Americans that “the aim of this church government (Roman Catholicism) is to control the United States Government and the government of each of the other states throughout the world.”<sup>77</sup> Of course, Bradway does not clearly prove anything save for his anti-Catholic prejudice. For example, Bradway makes the ridiculous assertion, quite popular among Protestants, that the Pope behaves like a king by writing Church laws that direct his Catholic “subjects” to obey him or else face damnation by the Church and the loss of eternal salvation. With this contention, Bradway implies that Catholics can never truly be free democratic-minded Americans because of their allegedly blind allegiance to the Pope deprives them of “the right to vote as free Americans.”<sup>78</sup> Indeed, he claims that Catholic voters are “trained to oppose free institutions.”<sup>79</sup> Bradway therefore urges non-Catholics to fight against this Romanism because they are the only group who possess the power to stop any “political evil doings.”<sup>80</sup> One of his favorite targets is the Pope, who he believes is a vengeful king who will severely punish his subjects who fail to perform as he dictates. To support his arguments, Bradway cites the anti-Catholic rants of historian John Commons, whose 1907 book *Races and Immigrants in America* helped propel the eugenics movement. Commons writes:

But the peasants of Europe, especially of Southern and Eastern Europe, have been reduced to the qualities similar to those of an inferior race that favor despotism and oligarchy rather than democracy. Their only avenues of escape ...have been through the army and the church...Thus it is the peasants of Catholic Europe, who constitute the bulk of our immigration

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<sup>77</sup> Chattin Bradway, “Publicity Bureau for the Exposure of Political Romanism” (New York: Harvard University Collection Department, 1914), 3-4.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 11

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 16.

of the past thirty years, have become almost a distinct race, drained of their superior qualities...If in America our boasted freedom from the evils of social classes fails to be vindicated in the future, the reason will be found in the immigrations of races INCOMPETENT TO SHARE IN OUR DEMOCRATIC OPPORTUNITIES.’’<sup>81</sup>

To avert such evils, Bradway calls for the outlaw of any Catholic dogma that conflicts with laws in the United States. By referring to the Catholic Church as a mere corporation, and a “foreign” corporation at that, he states that the people may at any given time request that the Catholic Church change its course within America’s borders.<sup>82</sup> Of course, this idea completely conflicts with the first Constitutional Amendment of freedom of religion. Thus Bradway, who so adamantly conveys his love of liberty and democracy, cuts off his own nose to spite his face in suggesting such an unconstitutional and un-American idea.

The second Ku Klux Klan, which emerged in 1915 in response to the influx of Catholic immigration, also advanced the inflammatory idea that the Catholic Church was attempting to gain control of the United States government in order to control its democratic institutions. This conspiracy theory is revealed in Ezra Cook’s 1922 book, *Ku Klux Klan Secrets Exposed*, which lists various counterfeit accusations: that Abraham Lincoln’s assassination by a Catholic was part of a Catholic plot to take over the government; that Catholics were the swing vote, allowing Woodrow Wilson to win the Presidency in 1912 ; that five states already had Catholic administrations; that twenty thousand public schools are at least one-half Catholic; that sixty-two percent of all offices in the United States (both elective and appointed) are held by Catholics; that six hundred

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 303-304.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. 386

public schools use Catholic readers and teach from the Roman Catholic catechism; that an average of over ninety percent of local police forces in large cities are Roman Catholic; that Catholics are in the majority of city council administrations of 10,000 cities and towns; and that, finally, over sixty-five percent of prisoners are Catholic.<sup>83</sup> These accusations raise an obvious question: if the Catholics had this much power, then why were they unable to expand their hold on America, or at the very least, protect themselves from vicious attacks from Protestant Americans?

To further demonize Catholics, the Klan published a bogus “Oath of the Knights of Columbus” that in part reads: “That I will in voting always vote for a Knight of Columbus in preference to a Protestant....That I will not deal or employ a Protestant if it is in my power to deal with or employ a Catholic. That I will place Catholic girls in Protestant families, that a weekly report may be made of the inner movements of the heretics...That I will provide myself with arms and ammunition...when word is passed...to defend the church...of the Pope.”<sup>84</sup> The Klan fabricated this oath to advance their anti-Catholic agenda. But even if the Knights of Columbus had taken oaths to make preferences on behalf of Catholics over Protestants, how would this be any different from the oaths that Protestant organizations took that looked to ensure the advancement of those who adhered to Protestant beliefs? This conviction among the Klan that Catholics were part of a “Popish Plot” to take over American society and government is graphically

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<sup>83</sup> Ezra Cook, Ku Klux Klan secrets exposed: attitude toward Jews, Catholics, foreigners, and Masons: fraudulent methods used, atrocities committed in name of order (Chicago: Ezra A. Cook, Inc., 1922), 53-54.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid*, 50.

revealed in one of its questions to respective candidates: “Do you owe any kind of allegiance to any foreign nation, government, institution, sect, people, ruler, or person?”<sup>85</sup>

This anti-Catholic propaganda convinced most Protestant Americans that Catholics acted, voted, and lived however the Catholic Church and its prelates advised. Many Protestant Americans were even apprehensive about Catholic teachers within the public school systems. The inventor, Thomas Watson, a fanatical anti-Catholic, published a book in 1928 insinuating that Catholic teachers were sneaking into America’s public school systems and “poisoning the minds of Protestant schoolchildren.”<sup>86</sup> He claims that parochial schooling is dangerous because it refuses to allow for children to independently think for themselves; instead, these children would be inculcated into a Romanist way of thinking, ultimately lending the Catholic Church even more support. “Educate youth in this Catholic way,” he adds, “and the consequences are logical: the children graduate in obedience; feel no divine thirst for free knowledge; depend upon authority, rather than upon investigation; cringe to the priest; look to him for guidance and control; lose mental self-reliance, and gradually cease to be liberals.”<sup>87</sup>

While some who have attended Catholic school might agree that, to a certain degree, this is what they experienced during their parochial schooling, Watson fails the hypocrisy test by refusing to reveal that public schools, at this time, were controlled by Protestants who used education to indoctrinate children with a heavy dose of anti-intellectualism, unquestioning obedience to authority, and anti-Catholicism. Illustrative is

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>86</sup> Thomas Watson, Roman Catholics in America Falsifying History and Poisoning the Minds of Protestant Schoolchildren. (Thomson, GA: T. Watson Book Co, 1928), 4-13.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

the example of Billie Ruth Peterson, a Roman Catholic who attended a one room schoolhouse in MacDonough, Mississippi during the 1920s. She claimed that every day she was reminded of just how different her religion made her. The teacher would often humiliate her in front of her classmates by referring to her, and “her kind,” as Roman idolaters who worshipped Mary when they should have been praying to the Lord Jesus Christ. Even at the age of ninety, she could remember the way her classmates would call her names after the teacher would publicly denounce her faith and embarrass her to the point of tears.<sup>88</sup>

As this personal story reveals, anti-Catholicism was particularly pervasive throughout the South. According to an article published in a 1920 edition of *The Nation*:

anti-Catholicism is not a new phenomenon in the Southern states. Men are swept to Congress on it, men ride into executive mansions on it, and whole legislatures and county and city administrations are elected on that single issue. It stands second only to the hatred of the Negro as the moving passion of entire Southern communities...Permitted a steady development, we might someday expect to see the burning of Catholics at the stake.<sup>89</sup>

Communities throughout the South supported hate groups such as the Ku Klux Klan and the “True Americans” that spread anti-Catholic propaganda. One Protestant critic of this hate mongering was M. B. Grace, a candidate for Attorney General from Alabama in 1930, and a member of the First United Methodist Church in Birmingham, who bravely stated that:

[these groups] are ranting about safeguarding liberty and American institutions they are largely responsible for the widespread belief existing

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<sup>88</sup> Personal interview with Billie Ruth Peterson on 10/16/2009.

<sup>89</sup> Charles Sweeney, “Leo Frank and Bigotry in the South” *The Nation* (April 6, 2009).

in the South today that lynch law is God's law – if the party to be lynched is black of face, goes to confession, or reads the Talmud! Intolerance, when it joins so many citizens in a common hatred, and dominates the politics of whole American States, is a proper and immediate subject for serious reflection by the whole people, for freedom of conscience and of action are menaced while it continues to advance.<sup>90</sup>

Unfortunately for Catholics in Alabama in the early twentieth century, such religious toleration was in the minority among the Protestant majority. The Protestant majority believed that the spreading of their anti-Catholic literature, public humiliation, and their rabid political opposition to what they perceived to be the Catholic agenda in the United States was not only completely reasonable but their duty as true American citizens. Southern Protestants even believed that the federal government should protect and encourage this anti-Catholic agenda.

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter Three

“The Roman Catholics of every country on the earth are backing his (Al Smith) campaign. Already they are spending money in the South buying up newspapers, seeking to control the vehicles that carry the news to the people. They are sending writers down there from New York and other places to misrepresent and slander our State, all this to build a foundation on which to work for Al Smith for President. "The Knights of Columbus slogan . . . is make America Catholic."  
-Thomas Heflin, *Congressional Speech, 1928*<sup>91</sup>

### Anti-Catholicism in Alabama

Although not a prominent religion in Alabama, Catholicism has a long history in the state. Prior to American settlement, the territory was largely inhabited by French and Spanish Catholics, some of whom sought to convert the native inhabitants to Catholicism. Because of its strategic port location, Mobile tended to be the place where the bulk of incoming Catholics settled. The Catholic Church there was largely an immigrant church. This fact leads to several distinct aspects concerning the history of Catholicism in Alabama. First, this would mean that the Catholic population would remain a small minority compared to other religious groups within Alabama. Second, it would mean that there would be an insufficient number of priests to serve their respective Catholic communities.<sup>92</sup> Third, it would also mean that the bulk of Catholic immigrants

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<sup>91</sup> Thomas Heflin's speech to Congress, *Congressional Record* (January 28, 1928), 1st Session, 70th Congress, vol. 69, pt. 2, 1654–55, 1658.

<sup>92</sup> Charles G. Herbermann, ed., *The Catholic Encyclopedia : An International Work of Reference on the Constitution, Doctrine, Discipline, and History of the Catholic Church* (New York; The Robert Appleton Co., 1907), 242-244.

who settled in Alabama would generally tend to settle where the Catholic parishes were, which were largely in urban areas such as Birmingham, Mobile, and Montgomery. Finally, the majority of priests in Alabama would therefore have to be recruited from Catholic areas of Europe. Indeed, the first Catholic bishop to serve the area was a Frenchman by the name of Michael Portier. In addition to setting up what would become the basic foundation of the diocese in Alabama, Portier, in 1820, founded Spring Hill College, a Catholic institution and the state's first institution for higher learning. The Mobile diocese served as the center of the Alabama diocese, and the priests, mainly recruited from Ireland, went out into the state's interior to serve whatever small groups of Catholics they could find. At times, other religious groups (mainly Methodist and Episcopalians) would lend the Catholics their buildings for their church services.<sup>93</sup>

As previously mentioned in Chapter 1, Catholic priests and nuns in Alabama served faithfully in ministering to those who fought during the Civil War. Some priests served as chaplains among the Confederate troops, and many nuns served as nurses to those who were wounded. And while the war interrupted the growth of the diocese and the training of new priests, the Catholic Church in Alabama made it through the war with little incident.<sup>94</sup> However, regardless of their loyalties to the South, many white Alabama natives, both prior to and following the War Between the States, were already at the forefront opposing further immigration of Catholics into Alabama. Mobile Congressman Percy Walker, who was affiliated with the Know-Nothing party, warned against allowing such immigration to take hold in Alabama. Walker stated that "the South could not be the

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.



gainer by this flood of foreign immigration. . . . I contended that the South, if she were mindful of her interests and safety, should unite to prevent such dangerous additions to the population.”<sup>95</sup>

This anti-Catholic sentiment intensified after the Civil War when the Catholic population in the state began to swell with numerous Italian and Irish immigrants who were settling in the Birmingham area to find work on the railroads and in the iron mines. According to historian Marlene Rikard, the post Civil-War “new South” sought to industrialize its economy in order to compete with the industrial north. To that end, Alabama businessmen lured immigrants to supply much of its labor needs. Unfortunately, this need for cheap immigrant labor clashed with the “New South Creed,” a doctrinal trinity among white Protestant natives that combined the gospel of work, Social Darwinism, and patriotic nationalism.<sup>96</sup> In 1907, the Alabama General Assembly recognized the state’s quandary with regard to rapid industrialization versus a shortage in cheap manual labor, but maintained that a certain “quality of labor” should be upheld. In an immigration act passed that year, the legislature argued that with such a heavy Negro population, it would be unwise for the state to assume the potential burden of supporting even more indigents such as “coolies” and “South Italians.”<sup>97</sup> Nevertheless, the government still allowed growing numbers of these “lowly” immigrants to fill the state’s labor shortage. This ultimately led to intense job competition between these foreign workers and local whites and blacks, which in turn further fueled anti-Catholic sentiment especially since business leaders brought in many Italians as strike breakers at the turn of

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<sup>95</sup> Jeff Frederick, “Unintended Consequences: The Rise and Fall of the Know-Nothing Party in Alabama,” *Alabama Review* 55 (January 2002), 28

<sup>96</sup> Marlene Rikard, *The New South: A Social and Economic View*, Part 7 of the *Year in Alabama History* lecture series for the Alabama Department of Archives and History. (Montgomery, AL) July 18, 2009.

<sup>97</sup> *Acts of the General Assembly of the State of Alabama*, 1907, 58.

the twentieth century.<sup>98</sup> Additionally, Protestant Alabamians considered these Catholic Italians as illiterates, uneducated, and “shiftless” who were unable to make their way in their respective homelands only to come to the shores of America and become her burden to bear.<sup>99</sup> Such an attitude toward these Catholic immigrants only served to encourage immigration restrictions against the *contadini* or peasants.

When Congress did pass the National Origins Act in 1924 severely restricting immigration largely from Catholic eastern and southern Europe, there were an estimated forty thousand Catholics residing in Alabama with the majority living in the major commercial and industrial centers of Birmingham, Mobile, and Montgomery.<sup>100</sup> In an effort to provide a Catholic education to these residents, various convents and parishes set up schools such as the Sisters of Loretto, who founded Montgomery Catholic Preparatory School in 1873.<sup>101</sup> The establishment of such institutions enabled Catholics to send their children to school without fear of Protestant indoctrination prevalent in the public school system.

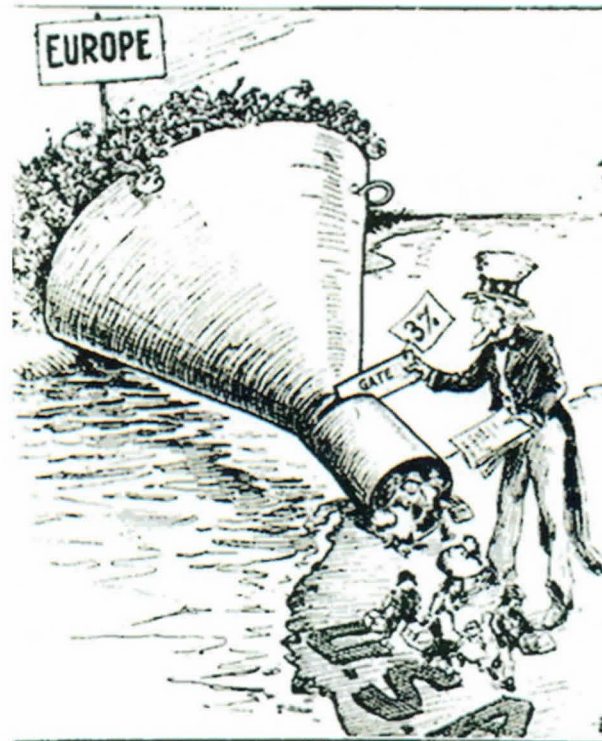
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<sup>98</sup> Rikard, Part 7 in Lecture series ADAH.

<sup>99</sup> Frank Cavaoli, “Patterns of Italian Immigration to the United States” *Catholic Social Science Review* 13 (2008), 213-229.

<sup>100</sup> Herbermann, 242-244.

<sup>101</sup> <http://www.knights.pvt.k12.al.us/about.cfm?subpage=75115> (Montgomery Catholic’s Website)



THE ONLY WAY TO HANDLE IT

Editorial cartoon, 1921 [Library of Congress]

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When the eugenics movement and anti-Catholic sentiment spread throughout the country during the early twentieth century, Alabama Catholics fared little better than their brethren in other states. Of the thirty-two states that passed sterilization legislation, Alabama ranked fifth in the number of sterilizations.<sup>103</sup> One might ascertain that the

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<sup>102</sup> <http://www.pbs.org/fmc/segments/progseg2.htm>. Many white Protestant Americans during this time believed that it was imperative that the federal government intervene in the current mass immigration influx into the United States. The government passed restrictive immigration legislation, specifically targeted at immigrants from eastern and southern Europe, in an effort to reduce the number of “undesirables” in the country.

<sup>103</sup> <http://www.uvm.edu/~lkaelber/eugenics/AL/AL.html>. by **Lutz Kaelber, Associate Professor of Sociology, University of Vermont**, who is responsible for its contents and any errors or omissions. This project was commenced in the fall of 2010 and concluded in the spring of 2011. The literature was expanded to include many undergraduate, master's, and doctoral theses at various institutions, as well as the most recent available scholarly literature and journalistic reports. Web-based information was also updated.

pseudo-science of eugenics was, in effect, not only used as a means to control certain demographics in the white population, but it was also a means to limit the procreation among those very Catholic immigrants that Protestant white America deemed so inferior and dangerous. In fact, Klan leader and Alabama native Hiram Evans stressed that there was not only a spiritual crisis brought on by the influx of Catholic immigrants, but an economic one as well. “We found our great cities and the control of much of our industry and commerce taken over by strangers,” he claimed, “and therefore, we could no longer guarantee our children’s futures.”<sup>104</sup> Consequently, Nordic Americans, he said, were having fewer children in order to secure a better future for them. Evans added that while the white Protestant American could outwork any other race, he could never “underlive the immigrants...the mere force of breeding of these low standard peoples would inevitably displace the Nordic race.”<sup>105</sup> Evans therefore asserted that Catholic immigrants were anti-American aliens who had stolen America from its rightful owners. “The Roman Church is fundamentally and irredeemably, in its leadership, in politics, in thought, and largely in membership, actually and actively alien, un-American, and usually anti-American,” Evans blasted: “Old stock Americans see in the Roman Church today the chief leader of alienism, *and the most dangerous alien power with a foothold inside our boundaries.*”<sup>106</sup> By deeming these individuals as “inferior” and coupling such a diagnosis with “scientific” evidence to support the sterilization of such allegedly flawed

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<sup>104</sup> McClymer, 8.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

individuals, Protestant Americans believed that they had found a way to limit the impact of Catholics and the Catholic Church on the United States.

In fact, there existed in some Alabama medical circles during the twentieth century a belief in the need for the sterilization of those deemed “inferior.” Not coincidentally, the Protestant majority placed Catholic immigrants from eastern and southern Europe into this category, a belief reflected in the earlier cited Dillingham Commission report. To justify the forced sterilization of inferior people, Dr. William Sommerville, Trustee of the Alabama Insane Hospitals, asserted in 1901 that “the moral disposition for good and evil, including criminal tendencies....are transmitted from...one generation to another...and is as firmly believed by all scientific men as the fact that parents transmit physical qualities to their children.”<sup>107</sup> A decade later, Walter H. Bell, a physician and editor of the *Alabama Medical Journal*, echoed Sommerville’s concerns by arguing that “any person who would produce children with an inherited tendency to crime, insanity, feeble-mindedness, idiocy, or imbecility should be sterilized.”<sup>108</sup> Further advancing this racist, anti-Catholic agenda was William Partlow, who in 1915 formed and led the Alabama Society for Mental Hygiene, an organization with the goal of surveying Alabama’s “defectives.” Partlow proposed a bill to allow the superintendent of Tuscaloosa’s Home for the Feeble-Minded (today’s Bryce Hospital) to sterilize its patients, both current and released patients. The bill passed both the House and the Senate, but Governor Bibb Graves recognized the unconstitutionality of such a measure

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<sup>107</sup> <http://www.uvm.edu/~lkaelber/eugenics/AL/AL.html>.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

and successfully vetoed it.<sup>109</sup> While Graves held true to the Constitution, the group of which he was a dues paying member, the local Ku Klux Klan, would create other ways in which to marginalize those that they deemed unfit for American society from increasing its numbers.

The Birmingham Klan, for example, had ample opportunity to express their feelings regarding Catholicism as the city witnessed a burgeoning Catholic community replete with welfare and charity organizations, churches, schools, community centers, and hospitals. This furthered the already mounting Catholic discrimination in the area. In 1905, the Ladies of Charity formed the first Christian welfare agency in the area. Although the organization was formed by members of St. Paul's Catholic Church, the agency catered to locals of all denominations. Their efforts coupled with the founding of St. Vincent's Hospital in 1900, of which served all of the city's poor residents. The Catholic community also founded an orphanage at East Lake.<sup>110</sup> While these religiously affiliated social institutions might commonly be viewed as a positive step forward toward alleviating much suffering in the community, it appeared to local Protestant whites as evidence of the Catholic Church attempting to insert itself as a mainstay in the city's infrastructure. This opinion ignited local Protestants to counter such action by whatever means they could.

Encouraging such actions were politicians from neighboring states, like Georgia's Tom Watson, who in 1917 warned southerners of the possible dangers in voting for presidential candidate Woodrow Wilson. Watson insinuated that Wilson, the Catholic

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Sarah Woolfolk Wiggins, *From Civil War to Civil Rights: Alabama 1860-1960* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1987), 270.

Church, and the League of Nations were entwined and that this involvement would ultimately lead to The Catholic Church dominating American foreign relations.<sup>111</sup> Therefore, Watson urges Americans to oppose President Wilson's involvement in the League of Nations. This ideology found its way to Birmingham, Alabama where the Catholic population during this time was an estimated 10,000 Catholics out of 200,000 inhabitants of the city. Yet even with Catholics comprising a mere five percent of the population, historian Charles Sweeney explains:

The good people of Birmingham have been led to believe that Catholics are plotting to take over the city, the state, and the national government in the name of the Pope, that they seek the destruction of public schools, and that they are a menace to the existence of the home as the basic unit of organized society. So firmly do the great majority of inhabitants believe these things that they go to the polls and elect men to public office on the single issue of protecting the government and community from Popery. Thus the present Governor of Alabama, Thomas E. Kilby, was elected because he induced the voters to believe him a stauncher foe of Catholicism than his opponents.<sup>112</sup>

Fueling this anti-Catholic sentiment in Alabama at this time was the Ku Klux Klan, which re-emerged in 1915 to, in part, to counter mass immigration, promote prohibition, and act as a moral compass for the United States. While still a racist organization, this new Klan considered itself a moral and religious force in the fight for their idea of "100% Americanism." Historian Richard Hofstadter refers to these "patriotic" individuals as "true believers" who secularized "a religiously derived view of the world to deal with political issues in Christian imagery" and considered it their American duty to stop invasive plots from outsiders and save the millions of unaware

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<sup>111</sup> Evangelical Synod of Missouri, Ohio, and other States, *Theological Monthly: Volume I*, *The Theological Observer*, "Bigots vs. Bigots" (St. Louis; Concordia Publishing House, 1921), 20-22.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

Americans who were in danger.<sup>113</sup> The organization sought to demonize immigrant Catholics as a threat to the American way of life by manipulating the Catholic stance on the consumption of alcohol. Basically, the Klan acted as a “moral force” in maintaining that the Catholic “pro-wet” stance would cripple American integrity by supporting that which would lead to immoral behavior. Many Protestant Americans believed that it was alcohol that led to problems within the family sphere, an important precept of what they believed to be the American way. They thought that it would lead to violence and infidelity, two traits that Protestants consistently attached to Catholics. Additionally, they viewed the Catholic “pro-wet” position as undermining Protestant-supported prohibition and, therefore, undermining what Protestants held as an integral part of American culture. Historian Wayne Flynt eloquently conveys the southern Protestant perspective towards Catholics and their stance on the consumption of alcohol by stating: “Catholicism is the religion of the ‘whiskey seller.’ Fornication and adultery are common among them, and they treat the Sabbath as a holiday rather than a ‘holy day.’”<sup>114</sup>

The Klan’s anti-Catholic views were lent further support by Alabama’s political leaders. Governor Thomas E. Kilby, for example, won office in the 1920s partly due to his staunch anti-Catholic stance. He pledged that, if elected, he would find a “legal means to compel priests to marry.” In 1919, Kilby also put forth and passed the “Convent Inspection Law,” which would allow the state to inspect any Catholic convent under “due suspicion,” a phrase that obviously leaves much room for interpretation. Justification for this law was based on the unfounded belief that local Catholics were stockpiling arms

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<sup>113</sup> Hofstadter in Glen Feldman, *Politics, Society, and the Klan in Alabama 1915-1939* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999), 3.

<sup>114</sup> Wayne Flynt, *Alabama Baptists: Southern Baptists in the Heart of Dixie* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998), 232.



inside the convent walls and holding Protestant girls against their will.<sup>115</sup> Obviously, Alabama Protestants considered it acceptable for the government to infringe upon the First and Fifth Amendment rights of Catholics, but not against people of other faiths. To Alabama Protestants, Catholics should not be allowed to practice their faith as dictated by their respective dogma (celibate priests), and convents should be subject to unreasonable search and seizure according to the guidelines of the Protestant majority. Even President Woodrow Wilson, in promoting 100% Americanism during the First World War, espoused such nativist and fear-mongering beliefs against “the dangers of hyphenated Americanism...who have poured the poison of disloyalty into the very arteries of our national life...Such creatures of passion, disloyalty, and anarchy,” he added, “ must be crushed out...The melting pot has not melted.”<sup>116</sup>

With such encouragement from the president, Alabamians soon set up numerous “Klaverns” in several counties, particularly those with high concentrations of blacks and holding Catholic communities (i.e. DeKalb, Jefferson, Tuscaloosa, Montgomery, Bullock, and Calhoun).<sup>117</sup> By the end of 1924 the Alabama Klan claimed as many as 115,000 members in 149 Alabama chapters.<sup>118</sup> Although the Klan was notorious for its secrecy, it was never quiet about its existence or its opinions. The Alabama Klan held massive parades down main streets of every major city in Alabama, and several chapters of the Klan marched as a whole in the nation’s capitol. Viewing itself as a “family,” the

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<sup>115</sup> Sweeney, “Bigotry in the South,” 1.

<sup>116</sup> Feldman, 13.

<sup>117</sup> House of Representatives, Eighty-ninth Congress. Activities of the Ku Klux Klan Organizations in the United States: Parts 1-5. Index to Hearings Before the Committee on Un-American Activities House of Representatives. House of Representatives, Eighty-ninth Congress; First and Second Sessions.(Washington; U.S. Government Printing Office, 1966), 48.

<sup>118</sup> Feldman, 16.

Alabama Klan held large gatherings and picnics, lovingly referred to as “Klan Days,” and used them both as opportunities for recreation and recruiting potential members. At these gatherings, Klan members circulated pamphlets warning those in their presence of the dangers of unrestricted immigration, especially of those with darker complexions, and the horrible possibilities of a “wet” society. More ominously, the Alabama Klan circulated pamphlets throughout entire cities to known supporters warning them of the imminent dangers that threatened their beloved country and the dangers that awaited those individuals who would oppose the group and its beliefs. One of these “imminent dangers,” according to the Alabama Klan, were the Catholics living amongst them.

Evidence of the Alabama Klan’s anti-Romanist views can be found in an “Official Document” from the Grand Dragon of the Alabama Klaverns. This newsletter, which was circulated among Klan members, is replete with anti-Catholic and anti-alien rhetoric. The local Grand Dragon, James Esdale, told his followers that “the Catholic Church keeps the conscience of its members,” which illustrates their belief that the majority of Catholics vote according to the dictates of the Mother Church. As a “true American,” the Grand Dragon states in his “document” that the Klan would never behave in such an authoritative and undemocratic manner. Instead, Esdale claimed that the Klan allowed for the free white Protestant man to vote according to his own conscience.<sup>119</sup> Later evidence would belie that statement, especially given that the aforementioned circulated literature would generally include veiled, and some not so veiled, threats to those who would vote against the causes of the local Klan.

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<sup>119</sup> “Official Document” from the Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan in Alabama. File# Q17300, Q18301-Q18307. June, 1926.(Birmingham, AL), Vol.4 #10. Alabama Department of Archives and History, 3.



HANDS OFF

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With regard to the Catholic menace rooting itself into America's soil, Esdale claims that deportation must be aggressively implemented to purge the country of the "lunatics, incompetents, and criminals in our midst."<sup>120</sup> He happily reported that the United States government deported 938 undesirable aliens from the country in March, 1926. One hundred and forty-five were deported because of criminal and/or immoral actions, and two hundred and twenty-six were deported because they were burdens on the

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<sup>120</sup> Picture copied with permission from <http://crooksandliars.com/david-neiwert/bishop-tobin-doing-his-best>. This depiction illustrates the notion that democratic institutions must be protected from any "Popish" involvement. It also illustrates how the Klan viewed itself as the "protector" of American democracy from what many white Protestants believed to be the "evils of Romanism."

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. 5

public taxpayer (i.e. the mentally/physically handicapped, orphaned children, illiterates, etc.).<sup>122</sup> Heartened by the actions of the federal government, Esdale expressed urgency in getting local members together in an effort to fight, socially and politically, the influx of these European puppets of the Roman Catholic Church. This belief was so widely held among Alabama Protestants that the group's membership increased exponentially.

Many Alabamians supported the Klan in its endeavor to mitigate the perceived threat of Catholicism. These perceived threats were propagated in Klan bulletins, newspapers, and Protestant sermons. A Klan Bulletin entitled "Did You Know" lists some of the alleged offenses committed by the Pope. Some of these include, but are not limited to: the Pope is a "political autocrat" who made a secret treaty that instigated World War I; that he has secret courts on American soil that enforce canon law; that he controls the daily press and the magazines; that federal government placed war industries in Roman Catholic hands; and that Roman Catholics compose only one-sixth of the population but hold three-fourths of the government's public offices. Of course, this list is not backed by any evidence as it merely reflects widely held opinions by many white Protestant Americans.<sup>123</sup> This perception of the Catholic Church was so ingrained on the Protestant American psyche that federal immigration restrictions were put into place specifically against Catholics, the Klan flourished and was allowed to spread its anti-Catholic hatred, and Protestants attacked Catholic schools and churches with little repercussion, while Protestant leaders engaged in unreasonable searches of Catholic churches and convents ultimately marginalizing Catholics in American society. These unfounded notions of corruption and abuse of power within the Roman Catholic Church

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> "Official Document" from the Grand Dragon: 6.

at the hands of the Pope is further illustrated by an anti-Catholic poem entitled “The Pope’s Last Call” published in the Alabama Klan Newsletter of June, 1926. While the poem is lengthy, its message is summarized in the following lines:

The Pope said “Now listen and I will try to tell, The way that I am running here on earth a modern hell/ I’ve planned this for many years, and I’ve started out to kill/ All those who refuse to bow, in submission to my will... We tore up all their Bibles and killed all the Protestants we found/My dupes sneaked through their cities, killing both old and young/ And those who escaped the sword were taken out and hung./ I started out for the U.S.A., with the aid of the poison cup,/The Ku Klux Klan darn them, stopped us, and wouldn’t take a sup./My K.C.’s are devils. Why you should see them fight...When the Ku Klux Klan warned me to go more slow./ They say Mr. Pope, we don’t want to make you sore,/ So be sure to tell your K. of C.’s [Knights of Columbus] not to bother our schools any more.../Now that’s why I called you, Satan, for I want advice from you, I know that you would tell me just what I ought to do.”/ “My dear Old Father Pope, there’s not much to tell,/For the Ku Klux will make it hotter than I can for you in hell./I’ve been a mean old devil, but not half as mean as you./And the minute that you get here, I will give my job to you.../For the boys in white will get you, I have nothing more to tell;/Hang up the phone and get your hat and meet me here in hell.<sup>124</sup>

This poem conveys much of the anti-Catholic sentiment throughout the United States, not merely in Alabama and not just those belonging to the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). Hiram Evans, the Imperial Wizard of the KKK, made the following statement in 1926 when asked about its membership: “Though men and women drop from the ranks they remain with us in purpose, and can be depended on fully in any crisis. Also, there are millions who have never joined, but who think and feel and – when called on – fight with us. This is our real strength, and no one who ignores it can hope to understand America today.”<sup>125</sup>

Evans was correct in stating that millions of white Protestant Americans believed in the

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<sup>124</sup> Alabama KKK Newsletter, June 1926.p4. Box 16, Folder 11: Association Records, Ku Klux Klan, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery.

<sup>125</sup> John McClymer, “The KKK in 1920s” <http://www1.assumption.Edu/ahc/1920s/Eugenics/klan.html>

Klan's efforts and its cause for saving America from the allegedly immoral and inferior Catholic immigrants from eastern and southern Europe. The Klan merely reflected a standard viewpoint among many Protestant Americans at the time. Historian Glen Feldman mentions that many Alabamians believed that these "uppity Negroes" and religious and ethnic minorities "somehow had it coming to them anyway." This is probably how many of the whites rationalized the Klan's threatening and violent activities, regardless of how deplorable they might have seemed.<sup>126</sup>

Popular support for the Klan in Alabama is reflected in its political success. The historical election of 1926 placed members of the Alabama Klan in the governor's mansion, the attorney general's office, the United State Senate, the Alabama Supreme Court, various other judicial positions, county/city solicitors, sheriffs, police chiefs and policemen, county clerks, and city and county commissioners. In short, the Klan controlled Alabama's political, economic, and social spheres.<sup>127</sup> The *New York World* referred to Alabama at this time as being absolutely "Klan-ridden."<sup>128</sup> Since the Alabama Klan held all of the important positions of power in the state, no individual could have effectively opposed the group.

Basking in its newly acquired power, the Alabama Klan promptly instituted its version of social control. This was not difficult since the organization was supported by several labor unions, teachers' unions, women suffragists, prohibitionists, and the assorted civic associations.<sup>129</sup> While earlier opponents of the Catholic Church came

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<sup>126</sup> Feldman, 5-7.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid, 35.

<sup>129</sup> Sam Webb, "The New South: A Political View." Part 8 in lecture series *Year of Alabama History* Alabama Department of Archives and History. August 20, 2009.

together in political efforts to combat the “Roman menace,” the first two decades of the twentieth century saw an increase in various illegal and violent actions taking place on the part of many in the Protestant community towards the Catholic community. In 1916, Jefferson County Klansmen burned a Catholic Church and Catholic school to the ground near Pratt City, a community near the urban Birmingham area. Federal agents learned of plots against certain Catholic institutions and placed the Catholic community on notice.

On several occasions Klan members accosted and brutalized immigrants for not adequately supporting the nation’s efforts during World War I. In 1918, the Birmingham Klan confronted an Italian neighborhood parade with its own demonstration of American allegiance by publicly seizing an immigrant they deemed to be a “slacker,” forcing him to publicly confess that he had dodged his patriotic duty by avoiding military service, and finally running him out of town. The Birmingham Klan also flogged an immigrant soft-drink stand operator for “not holding a steady job during the war.”<sup>130</sup> Less threatening, but still reflecting an anti-Catholic sentiment, was the Klan’s efforts to raise funds to keep Alabama’s Protestant controlled public schools open during the immediate postwar economic depression. However, historian Glenn Feldman explains that this effort was largely due to the fact that Protestants did not want Catholic schools to thrive while “American” public schools suffered.<sup>131</sup> The consequences, they believed, would be disastrous to American democracy and freedom. In short, only Protestant controlled public schools could promote and protect “100% Americanism.”

One of the most notorious examples of anti-Catholic Klan behavior in Alabama is the 1921 murder of Father James Coyle, a Catholic priest in Birmingham, Alabama.

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<sup>130</sup> Moore, 23.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid, 24.

Father Coyle was dispatched after his ordination in Rome to Alabama to meet the growing needs of the small but expanding immigrant Catholic community. Father Coyle soon gained the attention of the Birmingham Klan by avidly opposing mounting anti-Catholic views in the area. Father Coyle, prior to his death, was informed of a plan to burn St. Paul's Catholic Church where he preached in 1917 and was instructed to have someone on security detail. This threat was in response to Father Coyle's editorial opposition in the Birmingham *Age-Herald* Baptist minister R. L. Durant's piece speaking out against Catholics in the area.<sup>132</sup> His defense of Catholics to those who questioned Catholic loyalty in America is illustrated in the following poem he penned:

#### **Our National Flag**

Rev. James E. Coyle

Do they dare, do they dare, to say we love not thee,  
That we love thee not Old Glory, that floats above the free.  
That we're traitors to the Nation, that we cannot both be true  
To the glorious Church Christ founded, and the Red, White and Blue.

They say the Roman Pontiff may ask us to betray  
The glorious flag of Freedom's land, and we must needs obey.  
We must haul down at his behest, and in the mire must drag  
The folds of dear Old Glory, our nation's glorious flag.

Oh, they lie, they lie and know it, the base and bigot crew  
Who say such things do basely lie. They know that we are true.  
They know full well, that all the years that saw Old Glory wave  
Saw sons of Mother Church stand staunch, the bravest of the brave.

We've shed our blood on many a field, we've fought on every sea  
For the Stars and Stripes, the Nation's flag of the brave and the free.  
Again we swear if called to fight, we'll gladly, proudly go  
To man your ships and serve your gun's gainst any foreign foe.

We'll go, and Holy Church will bless the guns and swords of ours,  
We use to bring destruction dire' gainst any hostile powers.  
Our love of Country does not change the love to God we bear.  
God and our Country, both we love, for both we ll do and dare.

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<sup>132</sup> Wiggins.271-272.



Pray when did Pontiff message send, to ask us traitors be  
To that dear flag, the Stars and Stripes, that waves above the free?  
Not any year, of all the years since first Old Glory flew  
Were sons of Church base traitor knaves. No, they were real and true.

And real and true are we today, we'll follow where it waves;  
We'll follow even though if floats above our foreign graves.  
We've sworn to serve that Glorious Flag, Let us swear the oath anew,  
Our flag, Old Glory, Freedom s Flag, the Red and White and Blue.<sup>133</sup>

Further fueling one local Klansman into a murderous rage was Father Coyle's presiding over a marriage ceremony of a local Protestant female, Ruth Stephenson, to Pedro Gussman, a Catholic Puerto Rican immigrant. The girl's father, Reverend Edwin Stephenson, a Klansman and Methodist minister, was vehemently opposed to such an abomination and promptly went to St. Paul's cathedral in Birmingham to confront the priest. He ascended the steps to the cathedral and shot Father Coyle, who died minutes later.<sup>134</sup>

The Alabama Klan quickly rallied behind the minister and implemented a statewide fundraiser for his defense. The Klan procured the legal services of Hugo Black, who would later serve as a member of the United States Senate and a justice on the United States Supreme Court. Even though most jury members and the presiding judge were affiliated with the Alabama Klan, Hugo Black decided to amend the minister's plea to one of "not guilty by reason of insanity."<sup>135</sup> Black argued that local Catholics had attempted to "seduce" the young, naïve Protestant girl away from her faith. In court Black argued that: "A child of a Methodist does not suddenly depart from her religion

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<sup>133</sup> Father James Coyle, "Our National Flag," <http://www.fathercoyle.org/writings.htm>

<sup>134</sup> Sharon Davies, "Remembering the 1921 Slaying of Father James E. Coyle" *Columbia: The Online Edition*. <http://www.kofc.org/un/eb/en/publications/columbia/detail/549315.html>

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

unless someone has planted in her mind the seeds of influence... There is such a thing as imprisonment of the human will by influence, vice and persuasion. When you find a girl who has been reared well, persuaded from her parents by some cause or person, that cause or person is wrong.”<sup>136</sup> Therefore, Black contended that Reverend Stephenson could not be held legally accountable for his actions and further defended the Protestant divine by suggesting that he was acting in self-defense. Black even went so far as to question the ethnicity of Pedro by insinuating that he was of African-American heritage. However, this was difficult in that the 1920 census for the Birmingham area has Gussman listed as “white” and he was known to frequent white boardinghouses. Yet, many southern whites at this time believed that many darker skin ethnicities were related to the Negro. In short, Gussman had two strikes against him – he was both Catholic and dark skinned. Not surprisingly, the all white, male, Protestant, and Klan-affiliated jury acquitted Reverend Stephenson, who truly was tried by a jury of his peers and set free by the same.<sup>137</sup>

According to Helen McGough, a Mobile Catholic, “The death of Father Coyle was the climax of the anti-Catholic feeling in Alabama. After the trial, there followed such revulsion of feeling among the right-minded who before had been bogged down in blindness and indifference that slowly and almost unnoticeably the Ku Klux Klan and their ilk began to lose favor among the people.”<sup>138</sup> Mrs. L.T. Beecher described the mood in Birmingham following the murder of Father Coyle: “When the news of their calamity that had befallen us was spread through the Catholic population, hundreds

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<sup>136</sup>Sharon Davies, Rising Road: A True Tale of Love, Race, and Religion in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 275.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Corpus Christi Catholic Church, “Father James Edwin Coyle.” *Corpus Christi Church Bulletin* (June 2005), 6-7.

hurried to the hospital, to the parsonage, hoping against hope that the sheer finality of the message would be reversed. When all hope was gone the crowds quietly dispersed, and that night of grief and prayer in a thousand homes is an invisible bond between us forever.”<sup>139</sup> The local Catholic community was visibly shaken by the event. Not only had they lost their parish priest but also an outspoken opponent of Protestant intolerance and Catholic prejudice.

Father Coyle’s murder did nothing to stem the Klan’s attacks against Catholics for their consumption of alcohol and their use of wine during Communion.<sup>140</sup> Catholics viewed alcohol consumption as a personal liberty and opposed any government attempts to restrict that liberty. This behavior and attitude undermined many Protestants’ crusade to abolish the sale and consumption of alcohol. Further agitating the Klan and many local Protestants were the Catholics general opposition to segregation, a position based on their fervent belief in universal brotherhood. Additionally, Catholics upset many conservatives by supporting labor unions because they correctly believed that the contemporary trend of capitalism within the country was benefitting a few at the top at the expense of the many at the bottom. Of these, the “moral violation” of alcohol consumption probably provoked more violence at the hands of the hooded order more than any other offense.<sup>141</sup> Intense competition for jobs and housing further exacerbated

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<sup>139</sup> Mrs. L.T. Beecher, “The Passing of Father Coyle” *Catholic Monthly*, 12 (September 1921).

<sup>140</sup> While Catholics believe that this wine turns into the blood of Christ during transubstantiation, technically it is still alcohol, and thus went against Protestant ideology.

<sup>141</sup> Feldman, 42.

tensions between white native Alabamians and immigrants pouring into local communities.<sup>142</sup>

Inflaming such anti-Catholicism was the Catholic political leader Al Smith, a four term governor of New York who ran for President in 1928 on a platform opposed to Prohibition at the federal level (he believed it should be decided at the state level). The Klan deemed him a “wet” and actively worked against his presidential campaign. The popular periodical, the *Fellowship Forum*, argued that the real issue behind the 1928 election was “Protestant Americanism versus Rum and Romanism.” Thomas J. Heflin, a junior Democratic senator from Alabama, delivered a ferocious anti-Catholic speech on the senate floor admonishing Smith and the Democratic Party for opposing the Klan for its intolerance, bigotry, and moral absolutism. Heflin attacked the Democratic Party as hypocritical for disapproving of the Klan’s practice of limiting membership to Protestants while failing to denounce the Catholic Knights of Columbus for only allowing Catholic membership. Heflin told his fellow senators:

They put the Roman Catholic government above everything, above the Democratic Party, and above their country. That is plain talk, but it is the plain truth...Mr. President, in the name of all that is dear to us as a free people I call on my countrymen to wake up. The climax of this move is Al Smith’s candidacy for President... The Roman Catholics of every country on earth are backing his campaign...Here they tell you in their book that they will force the propaganda of Protestants to cease, they will lay the heavy hand of a Catholic state upon you and crush the life out of Protestantism in America.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>143</sup> *Congressional Record* (January 28, 1928), First Session, 70<sup>th</sup> Congress, vol. 69, pt. 2, 1654-1655, 1658.

Senator Heflin's rhetoric, while mildly paranoid, exemplified the apprehension among many Alabamians at this time regarding Catholic attempts to gain political power, especially at the national level. To further deter southerners from voting for Smith, several groups engaged in standard but effective race-baiting by insisting that the Catholic candidate favored blacks over whites, supported interracial marriage, and opposed the Ku Klux Klan. All of these issues were tremendously important to southerners, Alabamians included. This race baiting and anti-Catholic rhetoric made it all but certain that Al Smith would not gain the highest office in the land. Surprisingly, Al Smith actually carried the vote in Alabama, leaving many academic scholars befuddled.<sup>144</sup> Nevertheless, anti-Catholic groups were willing to say and do whatever necessary to keep the Southern public from voting a Catholic into presidential office. For many Americans, having Catholics serve in office at the local level was one thing, but to have a Catholic president was a threat that Protestant America was unwilling to bear. To them, this would mean that the leader of the free world would bend to the direction of the Pope.

With Alabama politicians like Thomas Heflin spewing such anti-Catholic hatred, it is no surprise that some of his Protestant constituents would respond accordingly. The *Birmingham Age-Herald*, for example, dismissed a staff member for simply speaking out against the anti-Catholic rhetoric and behavior in the area.<sup>145</sup> Additionally, anti-Catholic vigilance committees in Birmingham threatened to boycott local merchants if they did not

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<sup>144</sup> Wayne Flynt, *Alabama in the Twentieth Century* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2004), 46.

<sup>145</sup> Sweeney. "Bigotry in the South."

fire their Catholic employees.<sup>146</sup> Journalist Charles P. Sweeny investigated and reported: "The sign is up. No Catholics are wanted in Birmingham and those now there are desired to leave." The Protestant boycott of local businesses that employed Catholics was mostly successful. "The efforts to dislodge Catholics from their jobs was carried out systematically and with considerable success...Each employer was visited by a vigilance committee, which demanded dismissal of Catholic workers under penalty of a boycott."<sup>147</sup>

The *Birmingham Age-Herald* fueled the anti-Catholic hysteria by claiming that local Irish Catholics were responsible for the torching of two public schools in the area in retaliation for the burning of the local Catholic school.<sup>148</sup> Even Protestants who failed to fall in this anti-Catholic line faced ostracism from their peers. As a child growing up in 1920s Birmingham, Alabama, Mrs. Mary Louise McLean remembers her mother, who she described as a "God fearing woman" with little tolerance for bigotry, assisted in charity work at St. Paul's Catholic Church despite her Protestantism. For this inter-religious altruism, local ladies' Protestant groups shunned her. Mary Louise also remembers how visibly upset her mother was upon hearing the news of Father Coyle's death stating, "How could anyone commit such a crime and then blame the victim for his own behavior."<sup>149</sup>

Alabama was not unique in its application of anti-Catholic rhetoric and aggression. The southern state merely reflected a popularly held notion in the United States that foreigners, especially Catholics, were detrimental to American society.

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Charles Sweeney, "Bigotry Turns to Murder," *The Nation* (August 1921): 230-233.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Personal interview with Mary Louise McLean of Birmingham, Alabama. September 16, 2010.

Political, fraternal, and social organizations rose and fell trying to combat the perceived Roman threat lingering within America's borders. Indeed, the legislation restricting immigration succeeded in stopping the influx of immigrants from outside America's borders. However, the federal government was unable to achieve much effect with the immigrants that were already settled. This sphere was largely acted upon by local and community organizations like the Ku Klux Klan, the True Americans, and other groups that worked to limit the impact of immigrants and their strange un-American cultures upon white Protestant American citizens. These groups marched and paraded for their cause, they actively recruited members to join them in their fight against immigrant invasion, circulated hate propaganda, boycotted and threatened local businesses who employed Catholics, burned Catholic institutions, and even committed murder in order to maintain "100% Americanism." And while this sentiment was not unique to Alabama in general, it was distinctive in that most people ignore the blatant religious discrimination and instead focus on the systemic racial discrimination in Alabama and other surrounding southern states. Perhaps recognition of religious discrimination took a backseat in Alabama to the racial bigotry because racism was so very widespread in the state; whereas, anti-Catholicism was limited to a few urban areas with a decent sized Catholic population like Birmingham, Montgomery, and/or Mobile. Or perhaps because of the history of abuse in the Catholic Church, anti-Catholicism was therefore justified and not warranting recognition. Either way anti-Catholic discrimination did die down after the Klan's popularity waned in the late 1920s. Thereafter, the Great Depression of the 1930s turned America's attention to more pressing economic concerns, followed quickly by the nation's wars against racist Nazism and "atheistic communism."

## Chapter Four

“There is a glamour about Romanism which delights the natural man, and at the same time hoodwinks him. It caters for the natural senses. It provides splashes of colour to please the eye. The ear is entertained with the melodious. There is an appeal to the sense of the aesthetic. The chief representative of Rome claims to fill the most ancient of 'thrones'; he dominates the ecclesiastical world like a colossus. He goes on pilgrimage and the world wonders after him. He greets the Jewish and Moslem and Orthodox communities as one who seeks their highest interests not only in this world but in that which is to come. He continually lifts his hands in supposed blessing. At the same time he claims to exercise a universal kingship conferred on him by high heaven.”

-S.M. Houghton<sup>150</sup>

### Anti-Catholicism through the Present

One of the contributing factors to the decline of the Klan was the spectacular 1925 trial of the Grand Dragon of the KKK, David Stephenson, who was convicted of abducting and raping Madge Oberholtzer. It was reported by officials that the young lady consumed mercury pills after her forced intoxication and rape at the hands of Stephenson. She reported that he had bitten her all over her body. She stated, “all over my body, particularly my neck and face, chewed my tongue, chewed my breasts until they bled, my back, my legs, my ankles, and mutilated me all over.”<sup>151</sup> She claimed that she had overheard him say that he had been in worse messes than this in his life and that “he would get out of it...he is the law.”<sup>152</sup> Stephenson attempted to hide what had happened, and Madge had gone too long without medical care and passed away. This public scandal

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<sup>150</sup> S. M. Houghton, MA, “The Advance of Romanism( Part One): The Present Danger,” *Errors of Rome*. European Institute of Protestant Studies (June 5, 2002). Rev. Ian Paisley’s website ( notorious for anti-Catholic prejudice) <http://www.ianpaisley.org/article.asp?ArtKey=advance1>.

<sup>151</sup> Robert Grant & Joseph Katz., *The Great Trials of the Twenties: the Watershed Decade in America’s Courtrooms* (Rockville Centre: SARPEDON Publishing, 1998),130-134.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.



rocked the Ku Klux Klan exposing its leaders as being just as corrupt as the enemies that they so desperately fought against in the hopes of protecting America's morality.

Anti-Catholic rhetoric reappeared in 1960 with the presidential nomination of the Irish-Catholic John F. Kennedy. Many Protestants openly questioned whether he would stay true to America, or would he serve as a "puppet" to the Pope? While Kennedy maintained his religious affiliations, he swore that he was an American first and foremost and would not allow his religious beliefs to counter what he thought was the right path for the United States. Nevertheless, two popular mainstream evangelical preachers, Billy Graham and Norman Vincent Peale, voiced their opposition for such a candidate by stating that his allegiance to the Pope would come into question.<sup>153</sup> When confronted with Kennedy's assurance that he was an American first, they further denounced him for NOT putting his religious beliefs above the American Constitution, leaving Kennedy and his supporters in a no win situation. Fortunately for Kennedy, most Protestants during this era did not feel as threatened by the Roman Catholic Church as had their predecessors. Historian Mark Hulsether explains that with the perceived communist threat, Americans of all faiths were willing to stand together to confront the communist "menace." Hulsether states, "Over time Roman Catholics became part of the mainstream ...Fortunately, the current generation presupposed religious pluralism."<sup>154</sup> During the 1960 presidential race, *Life Magazine* conducted a survey asking American voters the following two questions: Is it probably best for the country to have a Protestant for President? In any issue in which the church takes a stand, a Catholic President would find it difficult to go against the policy of his Church? The findings were as follows. To the

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<sup>153</sup> Mark Hulsether, *Building a Protestant Left: Christianity and Crisis Magazine, 1941-1993* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999), 64-65.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

first question regarding the religious affiliation of the President, fifty-six percent of Protestants asked answered “yes.” To the second question, a whopping seventy-three percent of Protestants asked agreed that they believed it would be exceedingly difficult for a Catholic to go against the Church’s policy on an issue.<sup>155</sup> This poll shows that many Protestant Americans do think that a Catholic President would have trouble going against the Catholic Church if the legislation in question contradicted Catholic teachings. Some of the individuals interviewed regarding Kennedy’s candidacy spoke of his determination and that they believed that he would fight for whatever it was he truly believed in. It is this kind of conviction that made him attractive to certain voters. Yet, there were some individuals who were interviewed that stated that his religion would be a defining factor and that “it was a shame” that it was so. One lady commented that, “it was a shame that in a free country like this religion would make a difference, but it would.”<sup>156</sup> Despite such sentiments, Kennedy still won the Presidency. Today Kennedy is remembered, and almost idolized, as one of America’s best and most beloved presidents.

While it would appear that a Roman Catholic achieving the highest office in the land would come to mean the end of anti-Catholicism in America, that has unfortunately not been the case. That would be like saying that racism no longer exists in the United States because the American people voted Barack Obama into the Presidential office. Attitudes toward Roman Catholics have vastly improved in that Catholics are no longer dismissed from employment solely based on their religious beliefs and that convents and parishes are exempt from infringing legislation like the “Convent Inspection Law.” Catholics are allowed the same religious freedoms as any other religious group in the

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<sup>155</sup> Daniel Yankelovich, “U.S. Voters’ Image of Ideal President,” *Life Magazine*, 48, 11 (March 21, 1960), 128-131

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

United States. Yet even with such societal “acceptance,” the Catholic Church today is still demonized as a secretive, odd, and morally and financially corrupt institution. For example, Hollywood has both financially capitalized and propagated such negative stereotypes of Catholicism. Movies such as *The DaVinci Code*, *Stigmata*, *The Magdalene Sisters*, *The Exorcism of Emily Rose*, *The Order*, *The Golden Compass*, and others have provided for the curious masses a hostile anti-Catholic portrayal of the Catholic Church. Hollywood movie producers show their anti-Catholic bias by refusing to make numerous movies demonizing Lutherans, Episcopalians, Christian Scientists, Muslims, and other denominations. In all fairness, Hollywood merely reflects popular attitudes, and in doing so, reveals that there is still anti-Catholic sentiment in the United States.

Hollywood director Scott Derrickson, who directed both *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* and *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, discusses the various stereotypes that Hollywood has assigned to Catholics, such as George Carlin’s role as a Cardinal in *Dogma*, The overbearing vigilant Catholic mother played by Nicole Kidman in the thriller *The Others*, and John Standing’s role as the bishop in *V for Vendetta*.<sup>157</sup> Derrickson states that the majority of depictions are, “unqualified portrayals of Catholics as sexually repressed killjoys, corrupt moneygrubbers, maddening hypocrites, fanatical criminals, medieval moralists, and predatory child rapists.” He further mentions that the same politically correct measures that are taken seriously when depicting Muslims, or any other minority group, are not extended to deviant Catholic characters portrayed in film.<sup>158</sup> Other producers and directors would tend to disagree. One apologist, producer Mark Joseph, contends that the Catholic Church is so often portrayed because it is so very visual: the

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<sup>157</sup> Steven Greydanus. “Is Hollywood Anti-Catholic?” *Christianity Today: A Magazine of Evangelical Conviction*. (May 24, 2011), 1-3.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

rituals, the opulence, the vestments and sacraments are all visual elements making it attractive to viewing audiences.<sup>159</sup> Still others in Hollywood simply maintain that the Roman Catholic Church is so large that it makes for an easy target and enables Hollywood to convey certain intricacies of the Church as a whole without focus on individuals. Greydanus also notes that there have in fact been several Hollywood productions that paint the Catholic Church in a more favorable light: *Angels with Dirty Faces*, *Heaven Knows*, *Lilies of the Field*, *The Flying Nun*, and *Going My Way*. In actuality, it would appear that both sides could possibly be argued. However, what one cannot argue is the influence on popular thought these types of movies have on the public masses. Since we seem to live in a very visual society, it would only make sense that the majority of Americans get their information from visual sources. Indeed, mainstream America was never truly curious about the Knights Templar prior to the release of Dan Brown's *The DaVinci Code*. After the release of the film, many Americans were convinced that the Catholic Church was hiding the secret of the Holy Grail. This level of exposure via movies and television has undoubtedly made the Catholic Church and its followers a trendy topic

Of all the negative attacks against the Catholic Church in recent years, the most virulent and persistent involves the controversy regarding the sexual abuse of children by Catholic priests. Fueling this scandal is the Church's attempt for decades to hide this abuse. Of course, the Catholic Church has not cornered the market on sexual abuse by religious leaders, but seems to be the only denomination that the media targets for such salacious stories. One can only conclude that anti-Catholic bias is at the heart of this singular infatuation with the Catholic Church sex scandals. Indeed, rarely reported is the

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

Church's attempt in recent years to alleviate the problem. Not only have secular authorities and non-profit organizations, such as SNAP (Survivor's Network of those Abused by Priests) worked tirelessly at bringing child predators to justice, but the Catholic Church has indeed increased its efforts to reprimand the offenders and make restitution to those harmed. Leading this crusade is the current Pope, Pope Benedict, who recently told American bishops that, "It is your God given responsibility as pastors to bind up the wounds caused by every breach of trust, to foster healing, to promote reconciliation, and to reach out with loving concern to those so seriously wronged."<sup>160</sup>

When discussing the subject of anti-Catholicism, Reverend Andrew Greely states that the sentiment has always existed. And while the situation may perhaps have improved over the past several decades, there still exists animosity towards Roman Catholics from other religious and political groups. Greely titles his commentary "Prejudice Still". His heading makes the declaration that it is not a matter of question. It is a statement. Catholics in America might not suffer the indignities visited upon the millions of immigrants or the Colonial persecution experienced by colonial Catholic settlers. However, the Catholic Church and her followers do continue to experience blatant hostility from segments of the non-Catholic American population.

Because of the Catholic Church's staunch conservative stance on many social issues, it received much political opposition from various "leftist" groups, like the Pro-Choice Movement, Gay Rights' groups, feminist groups, and others, most especially once religious groups became a part of the political fray. With the advent of a woman's choice for legalized abortion in *Roe v. Wade* and homosexuals fighting for the right to marry, the

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<sup>160</sup> Father Roger Landry, "Pope Benedict's Response to the Sexual Abuse of Minors," *CatholicCity: The Catholic Church Simplified*. (May 16, 2008), <http://www.catholicity.com/commentary/>

Catholic Church, along with various other denominations, have stepped up to fight political legislation that contradicts their respective religious beliefs, and Catholics appear to be at the forefront making them a more likely target than any other group. Reflecting this anti-Catholic sentiment is a recent Gallup Poll survey revealing that forty-one percent of Protestants in the United States hold an unfavorable opinion of Catholics, while only fourteen percent of Catholics reciprocated the sentiment.<sup>161</sup> The demonization of the Catholic Church in novels, movies, television, and the media undoubtedly contribute to the persistent and popularly negative views of Catholicism.

Greatly facilitating anti-Catholicism in recent years is the increased use of the internet, which contains thousands of anti-Catholic websites that anyone can access. Thus, while one might be able to argue that anti-Catholicism has waned concerning a Catholic American's protected Constitutional rights, it is safe to say that the potential for the unmitigated hatred of Roman Catholics and the Church has exponentially increased with the advent of such mass communication technology. One notorious anti-Catholic site was created by Jack Chick. His webpage condemns Catholics as "unchristian" and instructs his readers to love Catholics enough "to tell them the truth," that Catholics cannot be accepted as Christian brothers and sisters until they accept that they have been fed false information by a corrupt institution and ultimately separate from the Catholic Church. Other websites echo Chick's and include similar anti-Catholic rhetoric. Some of them suggest that Catholics are really pagan, that the Pope hates the Sabbath because he changed it from Saturday to Sunday, that the Catholic Church is the whore referred to in Revelation and will be destroyed by God, that the Catholic Church is involved in every

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<sup>161</sup> Reverend Andrew Greeley, "Prejudiced Still," *America: The National Catholic Weekly*, 189, 12, Whole No. 4626; October 20, 2003 (New York; American Press, Inc, 2011), 28. A review of Mark Massa S.J.'s lecture symposium titled Anti-Catholicism in America

manner possible in international intrigue and world domination, that the Church must hate women since females are not allowed to enter the priesthood, and that its policy of celibate priesthood attracts pedophiles. Sadly, this is the propaganda perpetuated by the better funded and more advanced anti-Catholic websites and does not even begin to represent the more vile attitudes held by those religious bigots posting on message boards and blogs. These seem to be largely written by those who get the majority of their knowledge of the Catholic Church from Hollywood and the media. Generally they think that Catholics are outdated in their beliefs, and are either pedophiles or joykills trying to thrust their beliefs onto the public via politics. Obviously, the majority of those engaging in this anti-Catholic rhetoric are ignorant of how the Catholic Church really works or what the Church actually teaches.

Present day anti-Catholic prejudice is not merely limited to the internet, however. Books are still published today accusing the Catholic Church of being involved with a myriad of plots involving world domination. Indeed, conspiracy theorists have published numerous works dealing with what they believe to be the “truth” about the Catholic Church’s true intentions. One such writer, John Daniel, believes that the Roman Catholic Church is an enemy of the “righteous Christian.” He further states that, “The Pontifex Maximus [sic] pope of Rome will give orders to the whole world, backed up by his occultic [sic] enforcing agent, the United States of America, to worship according to his Babylonian Mystery Religion. Those refusing, will be denied the privilege to buy or sell (Revelation 13: 15-18). If that is not effective enough, then the death decree will go out for those who continue to disobey.”<sup>162</sup> He basically believes that the Catholic Church is working through foreign “puppet” governments, as well as our own, in an effort to

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<sup>162</sup> John Daniel, The Grand Design Exposed (Middleton: CHJ Publishing, 1999), 300-301.

dominate the world, implement the “mark of the beast,” and bring about the era prophesied in Revelations. He warns that the Freemasons are the Church’s “most magnificent and effective tool, accomplishing their purposes among Protestants, yet remaining completely hidden and unknown.” He also seems to presume that the Virgin Mary is Rome’s Isis and that the Church will make her their central figure of worship.<sup>163</sup> Surely, the Catholic Church has had ample resources throughout its history in order to do what Daniel accuses them of trying to pull off now, and the Church has yet to succeed in such matters. Also, if the Church wanted to make Mary the central figure of their faith, why would they have not done so with the development of Marian theology during the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D.?

John Daniel, however, is not alone in his opinions. The Internet has numerous pages dedicated to such accusations, and like Daniel’s, most of them are half cocked with regard to the flimsy evidence used to support such notions. Perhaps because of inventions like the Internet, and the media attention paid to the Church by means of television and film people seem to think that they “know” about Catholicism. Yet, knowledge of Roman Catholicism and its workings means getting information from sources other than the television or movies. Unfortunately, many would rather buy into the propaganda, much like they did in early American history. Of course, in early American History, the separation of Church and State was imperative, especially since many witnessed the strife of religious conflict on the European continent. Americans today cannot say the same, but many continue to pretend as though the Catholic Church is still committing atrocities like the Inquisition.

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid, 302-303.



However, there are groups that stand ready to defend the Roman Catholic Church and its followers. High profile organizations such as the Catholic League, headed by William Donohue, are working to ensure that American Catholics' religious freedoms are protected. For example, a San Diego woman attended mass on Ash Wednesday in 1997, received the ashes on her forehead, and then went to work. Her supervisor reprimanded her for the ashes and ordered her to remove them. After the woman refused, the supervisor wiped them off of her forehead. It was only after the Catholic League became involved that the offending supervisor was forced to apologize and was disciplined for his intolerance.<sup>164</sup> This type of discrimination is not limited to singular individuals. The Catholic League is also fighting against government interference in private Catholic schools. For example, a Louisiana Catholic school attempted to expel two of its high school athletes for the rape of a fifteen year-old girl. However, a court declared that the boys should be allowed to not only return to the school but be allowed to continue to play on the football team. Eventually, the two boys transferred of their own volition, rendering the case moot. Yet, this incident demonstrates elements of anti-Catholicism by the government and its officials and the hypocritical nature of both when dealing with parochial schools.<sup>165</sup>

While anti-Catholicism is still prevalent in today's society, Catholics are exerting their guaranteed Constitutional rights with the help of organizations, like the Catholic League, effectively working to protect Catholics in the United States. This was not the case during the early twentieth century. While there were churches and individuals that

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<sup>164</sup> Lockwood, 98-101.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

tried to oppose anti-Catholicism, these attempts were largely ineffective and served to only further agitate hostility against Catholics.

## Chapter 5

“Stupidity is also a gift from God, but one mustn't misuse it.”  
-Pope John Paul II<sup>166</sup>

### Conclusion

The lives of Roman Catholics who chose to settle in America were not easy by any means. They sailed across the ocean, with little to no money, in the hopes of providing themselves and their families with the possibility of a better life filled with occupational and educational opportunities, and a protection of “certain unalienable rights,” like religious freedom that was not to be infringed upon by any person or government body. However, this fairy tale turned into a nightmare once these brave immigrants stepped on the shores of the United States. They soon learned that religious, cultural, and political freedom was largely a myth. This is because the United States was founded as a Protestant country, replete with built in distrust of the Roman Catholic Church and its followers, and a distaste for people ethnically and culturally different from them. Early American Protestant settlers believed that it was possible for the small local Catholic communities to enable the Holy See to gain a foothold on America's shores. Yet, many Catholic Americans tried their hardest to prove that this was not so. Catholics fought for America in its wars, spread their charity amongst the poor of all faiths, wholly supported education through their parochial schools and Catholic Universities, which opened its doors to people of all faiths, and continues to push for the betterment of the United States. Even with this show of support to America, Protestant Americans still question the loyalties of Catholics and accuse them of putting their religious loyalties

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<sup>166</sup> Pope John Paul II. <http://catholicfire.blogspot.com/2006/04/john-paul-ii-quotes.html>

above patriotic loyalties. Ultimately, it would seem that the only way Catholic Americans can prove their ability to think for themselves is to separate from the Catholic Church. Otherwise, American Catholics are largely viewed with curious apprehension as somehow being backwards in their thinking, superstitious, medieval in their ideologies, and the natural born enemy of those who adhere to a “live and let live” ideology.

In Alabama these notions are a bit more exaggerated since the Catholic population is still small when compared to other southern religions, such as the Southern Baptists and Methodist Churches. Unlike some states that boast a large Catholic population, such as Massachusetts, New Jersey, and New York, Alabama simply does not possess the necessary Catholic population to make a difference either politically or culturally, unless they align themselves with another religious group. Therefore, it would appear strange for a huge portion of the population, representing Protestants and other anti-Catholics in the area, to accuse them of plotting to take over their communities (these small groups of Catholics did not possess the numbers or the means to take on such a battle).

Unfortunately, darker skinned immigrants who adhered to Catholic beliefs were largely hated throughout the nation. Perhaps this is one reason why not much attention was paid to the anti-Catholic activities and rhetoric at the time. Another explanation as to why limited scholarship has been written on this topic might be because the racial issue took precedence over religion in the South. The fall of the Second Klan left a bitter taste in the mouths of those who supported the organization for so long. Once the group was linked to scandal, political corruption, and gratuitous violence, many decided that the group did *not* represent the larger population’s opinions on moral values. So, as the Klan began to take a backseat, so did issues with Catholics, who had begun to carve out a niche for

themselves in several areas, particularly in the Northeast. The next resurgence of the Klan would be in response to the civil rights movement in which Catholics participated. Therefore, if Catholics were hurt or harassed at this juncture it would be due to their involvement in the struggle for civil rights rather than their respective religious affiliation.

Unfortunately, the by-product of diversity is often racism and intolerance. As Americans, we tend to pride ourselves on the principles upon which we believe our nation to be founded: religious freedom, free speech, free press, the right to bear arms, and the opportunity of procuring the “American Dream” for any individual born in or emigrating into the United States. Unfortunately, this was not the case. The diversity brought about by incoming Catholics stirred up feelings of distrust, resentment, xenophobia, apprehension, and superiority among the Protestants. These feelings were physically transformed into anti-Catholic prejudice resulting in the advancement of political parties (such as the Know Nothings), led to immigration discrimination towards Catholic (and Jewish) immigrants, allowed for the racist theory of Eugenics to make the leap from parlor talk to the forced sterilization of thousands in America, and led to the resurgence of the second Ku Klux Klan, who deemed themselves the protectors of America’s morality and their Protestant women. With the resurgence of this organization, Alabama became a state referred to as “Klan ridden” by the *New York Times*. And as the Klan rose to its zenith of power during the mid-1920s in Alabama, Catholic discrimination reached an all time high, with the most notorious of occurrences being the murder of Father Coyle of St. Paul’s in Birmingham, Alabama. The Klan swept office from the Governor to the Sheriff, and subsequently used the leverage generated by such

offices to alleviate themselves of the foreign menace they believed to be taking over their community.

It would be a lie to state that anti-Catholic rhetoric and prejudice are no longer with us. It is very much with us today. However, unlike the discrimination experienced by Catholics during the early part of the Twentieth Century or even in colonial times, this mistreatment today is one largely of opinion. There are no longer deputies coming to local businesses threatening them to fire their Catholic employees, Catholics are allowed to celebrate the Mass (and with wine), Knight Riders are no longer burning crosses on an immigrant's lawn or beating them in the streets, and while there are in place certain immigration restrictions, they are not particularly levied against one specific religious or ethnic sect. However, one might be able to equate the Mexican immigration issue with anti-Catholicism, but it would seem more about their incoming numbers than their religious faith.

The prejudice that is still exposed is largely via visual media, which can reach many more people than can a local Klavern passing out literature at parks. Endless websites featuring news reports, association (pro-Catholic or anti-Catholic) blogs and articles, individual blog postings, message boards, and the like. In cooperative with these are Hollywood and television movies portraying Catholics as they see fit. Much of it is unfounded and can be opposed if deemed worthy of the effort. That being said, one must also realize that there are just as many websites, and the like, dedicated to the Catholic faith and those who follow her teachings. There are also several sites that entertain notions of Catholics who could possibly be termed "liberal" Catholics. Even so, the Catholics definitely now have groups on watch to make sure that today's anti-

Catholicism is not too anti-Catholic, such as the Catholic League and its leader, William Donohue. Fortunately for Catholics in America today, they can do what every other American can do when they hear and/or view something that they deem offensive or inappropriate, they can change the channel or turn it off.

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