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"Thousands Upon Thousands of Democrats at the South Were Induced, Honestly, To  
Join This Order": The Know-Nothing Party of Mobile, Alabama and Southern Politics,  
1851-1859

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In the last forty years, there has been a significant increase in the historical scholarship on the Know-Nothing party – a nativist political organization that appeared in the 1850s. Historians were well aware of the group before the mid-1960s, but until then, they treated the movement in a number of different ways. Some of the first studies of the Know-Nothings appeared in the 1920s as dissertations written under Richard Purcell at Catholic University. These studies typically condemned the party for its anti-Catholicism and rarely examined the Know-Nothings as a genuine political movement. Other early studies of the Know-Nothings argued that the party was a culmination of a strong anti-Catholic tradition in the early United States, or that the movement grew on the strength of Unionist ex-Whigs who joined the party in a time of sectional strife created by the Kansas-Nebraska Act.<sup>1</sup>

The reappraisal of the Know-Nothings that began in the mid-1960s accompanied the flourishing of the “ethnocultural” school of historical interpretation pioneered by Lee Benson in 1961. Historians of the ethnocultural school emphasize the examination of aggregate voting behavior and voting allegiances based on religious and ethnic affiliations as a primary factor in explaining political developments. Historians often

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<sup>1</sup> For the dissertations completed at Catholic University, see Mary Evangeline Thomas, *Nativism in the Old Northwest, 1850-1860* (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1936), Mary De Lourdes Gohmann, *Political Nativism in Tennessee to 1860* (Washington: Catholic University of American, 1938), and Mary St. Patrick McConville, *Political Nativism in the State of Maryland, 1830-1860* (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1928). Ray A. Billington published what was for much of the twentieth century the most influential study of anti-Catholicism before the Civil War. See Ray A. Billington, *The Protestant Crusade, 1800-1860: A Study in the Origins of American Nativism* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1938). While Billington’s study traces the evolution and spread of anti-Catholic prejudice, it does not really analyze the Know-Nothings until the concluding chapters. On the Know-Nothings as a Unionist movement of ex-Whigs, see Allan Nevins, *Ordeal of the Union: Volume I. Fruits of Manifest Destiny, 1847-1852* and *Volume II. A House Dividing, 1852-1857* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1947). A very recent study of the northern Know-Nothings that echoes Nevins’ caricature of the movement as one of Whigs transformed is Bruce Levine, “Conservatism, Nativism, and Slavery: Thomas R. Whitney and the Origins of the Know-Nothing Party” *The Journal of American History* 88(2) (2001): 455-488. Levine argues that

identified with the ethnocultural school include Joel Silbey, Ronald Formisano, Michael Holt, and William Gienapp. Where the Know-Nothings are concerned, this group of historians has argued that nativism and anti-Catholicism are central in explaining the success of Know-Nothingism, and downplay the importance of slavery and the burgeoning sectional conflict. Holt, among others, emphasizes an antiparty sentiment and voter rejection of traditional politicians driving the movement, and argues that Know-Nothing constituencies offer evidence for a primarily blue-collar, working-class movement. According to ethnoculturalists, these facts explain the locus of Know-Nothing popularity in large, urban areas. In other words, members of the ethnocultural school have argued that Know-Nothingism in its origins was a grass-roots movement that experienced widespread success independent of and unrelated to slavery and the sectional conflict.<sup>2</sup>

Part of the reason the Know-Nothing party was so appealing to these historians of the ethnocultural school was their interest in studying the voter realignment of the 1850s, and the importance of the role that Know-Nothingism played in the rise of the Republican party in the North. Scholars agree that the flow of Know-Nothing voters into the ranks of

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the Know-Nothings were a conservative expression of northern Whiggery, and claims that the nativists were simply a transformation of the Whig party, consisting primarily of conservative elites.

<sup>2</sup> Good examples of the ethnocultural school include Joel H. Silbey, *The Partisan Imperative: The Dynamics of American Politics Before the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), Ronald P. Formisano, *The Birth of Mass Political Parties: Michigan, 1827-1861* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), Michael F. Holt, *Forging a Majority: The Formation of the Republican Party in Pittsburgh, 1848-1860* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1969), and William E. Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). Holt, by far, has produced the most influential studies of the Know-Nothings. See Holt, "The Politics of Impatience: The Origins of Know-Nothingism" *The Journal of American History* 60 (1973): 309-31. Holt revisits and revises this earlier interpretation in his later works as well, arguing that Know-Nothingism was a national, not a sectional, movement. See Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979), pgs. 166-169, and Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pg. 856. There, in his most recent

the Republican party in part carried Abraham Lincoln to victory in 1860, and therefore played a role in the coming of the Civil War. Just as the ethnoculturalists eschew slavery and the sectional conflict and place anti-Catholicism and nativism as central to the rise of the Know-Nothings, so they argue that there were clear strands of anti-Catholicism and nativism in Republican propaganda, platforms, and legislation, and that anti-Catholic sentiment significantly influenced erstwhile Know-Nothings' voter support for the Republican party.

Other scholars, however, have reasserted the importance of the slavery issue in northern politics during the realignment of the 1850s. Eric Foner argues that the slavery extension issue was central to the rise of the Republican party, and that northern Republicans made no concessions whatsoever to the fundamental tenets of Know-Nothingism when they absorbed the majority of northern Know-Nothing voters between 1856 and 1860. Tyler Anbinder, a student of Foner, went even further. Anbinder, in his work, not only echoes his mentor's claim that Republicans made no concessions to Know-Nothing principles; he also argues that anti-slavery sentiment in the North was the primary impetus in explaining Know-Nothing success. Anbinder thus argues that the reason Republicans were so appealing to northern Know-Nothings was their anti-slavery leanings. Whereas the ethnoculturalists insist that Know-Nothingism emerged for reasons entirely separate from the sectional crisis, Anbinder stakes his claim that the rise and success of northern Know-Nothingism is inextricable from the sectional crisis.<sup>3</sup>

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study, Holt argues "Know Nothingism originally grew in the South for the same reasons it spread in the North – nativism, anti-Catholicism, and animosity toward unresponsive politicians."

<sup>3</sup> On the role northern Know-Nothings played in Republican ascendancy see Silbey, "The Undisguised Connection," Know Nothings into Republicans: New York as a Test Case," in Silbey, *The Partisan Imperative*, pgs. 127-165, Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s*, pgs. 183-217, Dale Baum, "Know-

What the majority of this scholarship has in common, though, is that by and large it has ignored the southern wing of the Know-Nothing party – a wing of the party that flourished just as much as the Know-Nothings in the North. The scholarship that does exist on the movement in the South suffers by comparison in terms of its quantity as well as its quality. Older studies include those by W. Darrell Overdyke and James Broussard that essentially agree with the work of Allan Nevins in arguing that southern Know-Nothingism was a refuge for conservative, ex-Whig Unionists. Indeed, Overdyke prefaces his study with a claim that “one explanation of the appeal of Know-Nothingism to Southerners was undoubtedly this desire to find a way out of the increasing sectional difficulties and animosities.”<sup>4</sup>

Two more recent studies of the movement in the state of Maryland suggest instead that southern Know-Nothingism, at least in that state, was similar to its northern counterpart. These studies argue for a lower-class constituency, intensely anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant sentiment, and voter realignment among Maryland voters. As mentioned previously, Michael Holt argues in several of his works that southern Know-Nothingism was identical to its northern counterpart in its origins, composition, and the

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Nothingism and the Republican Majority in Massachusetts: The Political Realignment of the 1850's” *Journal of American History* 64(4) (1978): 959-986, Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party*, pgs. 69-102, Gienapp, “Nativism and the Creation of a Republican Majority in the North Before the Civil War” *Journal of American History* 72 (1985): 529-559, Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party Before the Civil War*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), pgs. 226-260, and Tyler Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings and the Politics of the 1850s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), pgs. 246-278. As stated above, Silbey, Holt, and Gienapp argue that Republicans clearly demonstrated strands of nativism in their propaganda, and that was what helped Republicans to attract former Know-Nothings into their ranks. These historians also make their argument based on a negative reference group theory of voting behavior. Dale Baum’s article appeared several years before Gienapp’s and Baum argues that Know-Nothings were inconsequential to the rise of the Republicans in Massachusetts. Gienapp’s article in the *Journal of the American History* was an explicit attempt to refute Baum. Foner and Anbinder argue that nascent Republicans made no concessions towards nativism in absorbing Know-Nothing constituencies.

impetus for its success. Meanwhile, Anbinder, who has produced by far the most extensive examination of the Know-Nothing party in the North, insists that southern Know-Nothings were so different from the movement in the North that this difference alone provided the justification for his exclusion of the southern wing of the party from his work. Anbinder argues explicitly, “southern Know Nothingism bore little resemblance to its northern counterpart,” dismissing the movement in its entirety, rather than explaining its differences.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, in the last ten years, two unpublished dissertations have appeared. One of these dissertations, by John Bladek, argues “the southern Know-Nothings were a genuine nativist and anti-party movement with much in common with the Know Nothings in the North.”<sup>6</sup> In the other dissertation, Brian Crowson examines four southern port cities and seems to agree with Holt, claiming that Holt “offers perhaps the most complete explanation of the appeal of the American party.”<sup>7</sup> Crowson qualifies that statement with an assessment that while “Holt clearly acknowledges the popularity of the American party in the South...still missing in this picture of Know Nothingism is the South’s

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<sup>4</sup> W. Darrell Overdyke, *The Know-Nothing Party in the South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1950), pg. v.

<sup>5</sup> Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, pg. xii. Older studies of the Know-Nothings in the South include Overdyke, *The Know-Nothing Party in the South*, and James H. Broussard, “Some Determinant of Know Nothing Electoral Strength in the South, 1856” *Louisiana History* 7(1) (1966): 5-20. The more recent studies of Maryland mentioned are Jean H. Baker, *Ambivalent Americans: The Know-Nothing Party in Maryland* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), and William J. Evitts, *A Matter of Allegiances: Maryland From 1850-1861* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974). Baker, while acknowledging the anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant nature of the party, also emphasizes that much of the Know-Nothings’ propaganda was pro-American as well. Evitts locates his discussion of the Know-Nothings amidst his larger narrative of Maryland’s place in the secession crisis. Evitts argues that the Know-Nothings used tactics of violence and intimidation in coming to power, and once in power, were a genuine reform movement. For Holt’s emphasis on the continuity between northern and southern Know-Nothings, see note 2.

<sup>6</sup> John David Bladek, “America for Americans: The Southern Know Nothing Party and the Politics of Nativism, 1854-1856” (Ph.D. Dissertation: University of Washington, 1998), pg. 5.



peculiar interpretation of the movement.”<sup>8</sup> The remaining literature on the southern Know-Nothings consists mostly of local studies of southern communities.<sup>9</sup>

What the existing literature on the Know-Nothings in both the North and South indicates is that we need much more study of the southern half of the party in order to answer the questions raised directly, or suggested indirectly by these historiographical debates and disagreements. Was southern Know-Nothingism fundamentally different from northern Know-Nothingism, as Anbinder argues, or was the southern half an extension of its northern counterpart? Did southern Know-Nothing parties combine Whigs and Democrats, or were such parties merely continuations of Whiggery as most older as well as some newer studies suggest? Were anti-Catholic, anti-immigrant, and antiparty sentiments central to the southern half of the party, thereby indicating that the growth of southern Know-Nothings was independent of the sectional conflict as Holt and the ethnoculturalists argue, or was the growth of Know-Nothingism in the South entirely dependent on that controversy, as Anbinder suggests it was in the North?

Additional questions also need answering. In his most recent work, Holt has argued that “the transition from Whiggery to Know Nothingism in the South was conflicted, often costly to individual Whigs politicians and far from complete” and that “Know Nothingism, in short, did not simply replace (or forcibly displace) the southern Whig party. It also turned former Whigs against each other, provided a new arena in which to renew old factional struggles, and drove some Whigs into an alliance with

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<sup>7</sup> Brian Edward Crowson, “Southern Port City Politics and the Know Nothing Party in the 1850s” (Ph.D. Dissertation: The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, 1994), pg. 16.

<sup>8</sup> Crowson, “Southern Port City Politics,” pg. 17.

<sup>9</sup> A good example of a localized study of southern Know-Nothingism is James Marchio, “Nativism in the Old South: Know Nothingism in Antebellum South Carolina,” *Southern Historian* 8 (1987): 39-53. The

Democrats to crush a movement they abhorred.”<sup>10</sup> In other words, did southern Know-Nothingism harbor dissident politicians who exploited the movement for their own, personal gain while at the same time repelling some Whigs as Holt suggests?

Finally, while Tyler Anbinder is certainly correct that the study of southern Know-Nothingism cannot reveal anything about the “role of anti-immigrant sentiment in the rise of the Republican party”<sup>11</sup> can one ask comparable questions about southern politics? Did southern Know-Nothingism play a similar role in the South in the realignment, or dealignment, from a two-party to a one-party system and the rise of secessionism? In sum, in its political impact was southern Know-Nothingism the mirror image of northern Know-Nothingism? If northern Know-Nothings contributed to the rise of the Republicans, can one identify any impact that southern Know-Nothings had in converting southern Democrats into a militantly pro-southern and secessionist bloc?

This paper seeks to address those questions, and to do so, I shall focus on the port city of Mobile, Alabama. As a bustling port city, Mobile had all the demographic and economic conditions to test Holt’s argument that the impulses behind northern and southern Know-Nothingism were one in the same. Holt argues that northern Know-Nothingism was most successful in large, urban areas that were experiencing extreme social change; Mobile in the 1850s fits such criteria exactly. Between 1850 and 1860, Mobile was the second fastest growing southern city; its free population increased 59 percent. By 1849, Mobile was also the third leading port in the United States in terms of the value of its exports, exporting \$12,000,000 annually behind only New York and New

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two dissertations cited above appear to be the most recent scholarship on the Know-Nothings across the South. Local studies continue to appear.

<sup>10</sup> Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party*, pgs. 933-934.

Orleans. In 1855, Mobile had dropped behind Boston to fourth, but by 1860, Mobile was again third behind New York and New Orleans.<sup>12</sup>

As a port city that primarily exported cotton, Mobile saw much of its population growth come from European immigrants and unskilled laborers – many of whom qualified as both. Between 1850 and 1860, the free foreign-born population increased at a rate of 72.8 percent, while the free native-born population grew at a rate of 52.7 percent. By 1860, 51 percent of Mobile's free workingmen were unskilled, and among adult, free, workingmen, 64 percent were foreign-born. While Mobile, with a population of approximately 30,000 in 1860, did not have as many immigrants as most northern cities in absolute numbers, immigrants made up a comparable proportion of the city's overall population: nearly one-third in 1860. According to many of the interpretations cited, such a demographic makeup would seemingly offer the same socio-economic criteria that spawned substantial Know-Nothing success in the North.<sup>13</sup>

The Know-Nothing party did in fact experience electoral success in Mobile – most of it coming in 1855. In the December 1855 municipal election, the Know-Nothings captured every single office they contested, winning the mayor's office as well as all seven city councilmen, and aldermen for each of the seven wards. In the races for

<sup>11</sup> Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, pg. xii.

<sup>12</sup> For information on the value of Mobile's exports in the antebellum period, see Alan Smith Thompson, "Mobile, Alabama, 1850-1861: Economic, Political Physical and Population Characteristics" (Ph.D. Dissertation: The University of Alabama, 1979). See especially pgs. 15-16, and Table 5, where Thompson lists Mobile as the third leading port in terms of the value of its exports in 1849, behind only New York and New Orleans. Baltimore, by contrast, was sixth in 1849, with its exports valued at \$8,000,000 annually. For this information, Thompson cites as his source, Robert G. Albion, *The Rise of New York Port: 1815-1860* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939), p. 390.

<sup>13</sup> For demographic and population characteristics of Mobile, Alabama, see Ira Berlin and Herbert G. Gutman, "Natives and Immigrants, Free Men and Slaves: Urban Workingmen in the Antebellum American South" *The American Historical Review*, 88(5) (1983): 1175-1200, and Thompson, "Mobile, Alabama, 1850-1861. In Berlin and Gutman, see especially tables 1-6. In Thompson, see pgs. 106, 263-281, and tables 12 and 25.

the mayor's office and the city councilmen, the Know-Nothings took an average of 70.1 percent of the citywide vote. The Know-Nothings' Democratic opponents carried not a single ward in any race. Know-Nothing success was not only limited to the municipal level. The Know-Nothings also elected Percy Walker to the United States House of Representatives and Charles C. Langdon to the State Legislature in August of 1855. Know-Nothing success was fleeting, however; by 1856 Congressman Percy Walker and the mayor, Jones M. Withers (both former Democrats), had formally abandoned the party and returned to the folds of the Democratic party. By the summer of 1856, then, Know-Nothing strength in the city had clearly ebbed, and in November, the American (or Know-Nothing) Presidential candidate Millard Fillmore would garner 52 percent of the city's popular vote, significantly lower than the 70 percent Jones M. Withers had won in 1855 (admittedly, though, this was still a relatively strong showing given Fillmore's lack of success elsewhere in the South). After Fillmore's poor showing nationally, moreover, Know-Nothingism essentially expired as a political force in Mobile, just as it did in most of the nation. Indeed, Democrats would easily carry the city's next municipal election.<sup>14</sup>

Know-Nothing strength in Mobile, in sum, proved ephemeral, but historians have not sufficiently studied either the party's initial success or subsequent decline there. Certainly, no previous historian of the city or of Alabama politics in the antebellum period attempts to explore the questions about southern Know-Nothingism raised above.<sup>15</sup> By attempting to place the Mobile Know-Nothings amidst the larger

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<sup>14</sup> Vote totals for 1855 municipal elections taken from the *Mobile Daily Register*, December 8, 1855. Also see Thompson, "Mobile, Alabama, 1850-1861," pg. 131.

<sup>15</sup> Alan Thompson's dissertation on Mobile in the 1850s contains a basic narrative of party and electoral success throughout the decade, but makes no attempt at answering the questions posed above on southern Know-Nothingism. Thompson later published a portion of his dissertation as an article on southern rights

historiographical debates surrounding both southern and northern Know-Nothings, I seek to discover not only the nature of southern Know-Nothingism as it related to Mobile, but also the effect Know-Nothing success had on the Democratic party – a question that few, if any, historians have asked. As historians like Holt and Joel Silbey have argued, one can best study and understand political parties when examining their competitive relationships with rival parties. My study, therefore, not only examines the

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and nativism as issues in Mobile politics. Some excellent broader works exist on Alabama politics in general, and while they also contain some information on the Mobile Know-Nothings, they too are lacking when one considers the historiographical questions already mentioned. In particular, Lewy Dorman's classic work on party politics in Alabama and J. Mills Thornton's equally important book on the coming of secession in Alabama politics discuss the Know-Nothings in the broader scope of Alabama politics over the course of the 1850s. Neither work, however, fully examines developments in Mobile. See Thompson, "Mobile, Alabama, 1850-1861" and Thompson, "Southern Rights and Nativism As Issues in Mobile Politics, 1850-1861," *The Alabama Review* 35(2) (1982): 127-141. Thompson's article is an archetypal example of a localized study of the southern Know-Nothings that appears in a localized historical journal. For broader works on Alabama politics see Lewy Dorman, *Party Politics in Alabama From 1850 Through 1860* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1995. Originally issued in 1935 by the Alabama State Department of Archives and History, Historical and Patriotic Series No. 13), and J. Mills Thornton III, *Politics and Power in a Slave Society: Alabama, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978). The thrust of Thornton's study is to explain secession in Alabama. When he does discuss the Know-Nothings, he claims that they served primarily to offer a refuge for former Whigs. He argues, "it is not difficult, therefore, to understand why the Whig leadership should have regarded the advent of Know-Nothingism as a gift from heaven." See Thornton, *Politics and Power in a Slave Society*, pg. 354. Finally, during the completion of this paper, an article appeared in the *Alabama Review* on the Know-Nothings in Alabama. In this article, Jeff Frederick offers an examination of the rise and fall of the party, arguing that Know-Nothings consisted of ex-Whigs and rogue Democrats who aligned on the state aid to internal improvements issue. Frederick concludes by characterizing Know-Nothing rhetoric as attempts to protect the interests of the South in the guise of Unionism, but ironically, he argues, the fall of the Know-Nothings led to the rise of the Democrats as a Southern Rights bloc and, ultimately, secession. While the article does recognize the role rogue Democrats played in the rise of the party, links Know-Nothingism explicitly to the sectional conflict and also speculates on the role Know-Nothings had on secession, ultimately this study is very limited. It is really a history of the gubernatorial election of 1855 and therefore maintains its focus on Montgomery and suffers in its examination of the rest of the state. There is no sense of the place of Alabama's Know-Nothings in the rest of the South, or at the national level for the matter, and Frederick uses minimal voting evidence to support his claims. While Frederick maintains that this is a study of Alabama at large, the sources are overwhelmingly from Montgomery, and the only locale discussed at any length outside of Montgomery is Mobile, and discussions there are interspersed sparingly. Moreover, Frederick does not ground his study in much of the surrounding literature. Ironically, he does conjecture that the American party in the South "is a worthy subject for a monograph or doctoral dissertation" yet does not reference the two dissertations on the Know-Nothings in the South cited above in this essay. Important to note, though, is that Frederick, too, recognizes the paucity of available sources in attempting to study Know-Nothingism in Alabama. See Jeff Frederick, "Unintended Consequences: The Rise and Fall of the Know-Nothings Party in Alabama," *Alabama Review* 55(1) (2002): 3-33; pg. 26, quote.

party's rhetoric and personnel, but also the response of Democrats in Mobile and the state as a whole to it.

In order to understand the brief rise and fall of the Know-Nothings in Mobile between 1854 and 1856 as best as possible, one must also understand the tenor of Mobile politics throughout the politically tumultuous decade of the 1850s. In the early 1850s, party politics in Mobile grew increasingly unstable, as the so-called Second Party System of Whigs and Democrats began to unravel. Southern Rights as a political issue began to flourish in the context of the southern-wide reaction to the Compromise of 1850, punctuated by the famed "Nashville Convention" in 1850. This convention met specifically as a forum for southern protests to the Compromise. By March of 1851, Southern Rights had become a significant issue in local politics in Alabama, as Southern Rights' meetings appeared all over the state. A statewide convention met in Montgomery with the goal of producing an Alabama platform, and a smaller organizational meeting of the Southern Rights Association convened in Mobile in the same month.<sup>16</sup>

In Mobile, the Democratic newspaper, the *Mobile Daily Register* noticed the emergence of the Southern Rights movement, at both the city and statewide level. On March 21, the *Register* reported on the Southern Rights convention in Montgomery, observing that "it [the Southern Rights platform] announces that its object is the organization of a party, who shall make secession their sole principle and watchword"

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<sup>16</sup> For perhaps the best discussion of the Nashville Convention and the emergence of Southern Rights in Alabama party politics, see Thornton, *Politics and Power in a Slave Society*, pgs. 184-188. Specifically, Thornton argues on page 186 that "it is essential to note, however, that the Compromise of 1850 was probably not so much the cause as it was the trigger of this reorientation." For the emergence of Southern

and cynically concluding that “we fear all the good that has been hoped and expected from the Southern Rights movement in our city, will be thrown away, under the influence of the wild and suicidal scheme promulgated at Montgomery.”<sup>17</sup>

In April of that year, the *Register* began looking to the August Congressional, gubernatorial, and state legislative elections. Reflecting on the rise of Southern Rights as a political issue, the *Register* commented that:

It is time that the Democratic party of the State was organizing for the August elections. – There was never a more important period in its history. Its enemies of every hue are conspiring its overthrow, and if its accustomed vigilance, watchfulness and energy are at all relaxed, there is danger of defeat. The Whigs on the one hand are sounding the notes of preparation, but conscious of their inability to meet us on the fair and manly ground of principle, they are resorting to disguises and masked batteries in the hope of getting into position under another names. Hence the effort to found a new party under the imposing title of the “Constitutional Union party;” – on the other hand a small but active and energetic combination of individuals composed of the most heterogeneous materials is seen openly organizing for Secession and Revolution. Many of them, in the last Presidential election, while calling themselves Democrats, were busily engaged in assailing the party through what they denominated the *neutral* press – through pamphlets and stump speeches, - others, are disaffected Whigs, who, dissatisfied with their party and lacking the moral courage to unite with the Democracy, take an extreme position, to show their independence of both parties; while a few unthinking or overheated Democrats, indignant at the aggressions of Northern fanaticism, throw themselves without due reflections, into these excited counsels. To aid in this work of mischief, the organs of this little cotery [sic], some two or three in number with characteristic audacity recklessly announce the annihilation of the Democratic party, and either covertly or frankly hoist the Secession standard. The Democratic party of Alabama has no affinity with either of these movements.<sup>18</sup>

It is clear that the emergence of a Southern Rights movement in Mobile (as well as other groups like a Constitutional Union Whig faction) had complicated politics in Mobile (as

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Rights in Mobile, see Thompson, “Southern Rights and Nativism As Issues in Mobile Politics,” pgs. 131-136. Also see Dorman, *Party Politics in Alabama*, pgs. 49-51.

<sup>17</sup> *Mobile Daily Register*, March 21, 1851.

<sup>18</sup> *Mobile Daily Register*, April 7, 1851. Emphasis theirs.

well as elsewhere in the state, particularly in northern Alabama) and divided the Democrats in the city.

In the elections of the early 1850s in Mobile, the Southern Rights movement enjoyed considerable success. The Southern Rights Democrats won the Congressional Elections in both 1851 and 1853, turning out the Whigs who had won the previous two elections by safe margins. In the 1851 elections, Southern Rights Democrat John Bragg walloped the Whig candidate and second-term Whig mayor of Mobile, Charles C. Langdon by a 16 percent margin.<sup>19</sup> Langdon, who was originally from Connecticut, faced a storm of criticism in the campaigns of 1851 because of his northern heritage. Southern Rights Democrats took full advantage of this and soundly defeated the Mobile mayor. In response, Whigs did not run Langdon for mayor again in that year's December municipal election, going with William Brooks who lost to Joseph Sewell, another Southern Rights candidate. By the Congressional elections of 1853, the Whigs were able to close the gap, but still found themselves on the wrong end as the Southern Rights Democratic candidate, Phillip Phillips, defeated the Whig candidate, Edward Lockwood, in an election decided by only 103 votes. Within Mobile county, however, the vote was not quite as close, with Phillips winning by 237 votes.<sup>20</sup>

The Congressional Elections of 1851 and 1853, however, do not provide an adequate example of the divisions among the Democrats over the Southern Rights issue, as the Democrats remained relatively united under the banner of Southern Rights in those

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<sup>19</sup> Despite the tendency of many northern Alabama Whigs to rename their party the Constitutional Union party in the early 1850s, Mobile Whigs took part in no such name tampering.

<sup>20</sup> For vote totals, see Appendix I, Tables 8 and 9. On the controversy over Langdon's northern heritage see note 69 below, Thompson, "Mobile, Alabama, 1850-1861," pgs. 135-143, and Thompson, "Southern Rights and Nativism As Issues in Mobile Politics," pgs. 133-135.



elections. One must look instead to the mayoral election of 1852 to see the divisions among the Democrats over Southern Rights. Whereas in the Congressional elections of 1851 and 1853 the Democrats were able to present a united front, in the municipal election of 1852, old-line National Democrats led by John Forsyth and Thaddeus Sanford of the *Daily Register* split with the Southern Rights group. J. Mills Thornton attributes this split to differing opinions on commercial concerns. According to Thornton, Southern Rights Democrats viewed the South as enslaved financially to the North, and therefore disapproved of the policies of the national Democracy. Old-line Democrats would have none of this, as Thaddeus Sanford referred to the Southern Rights men as “a little band of factionists that in my soul I hope will go over to the Whigs.”<sup>21</sup>

The results of this split in the municipal election of 1852 were disastrous for the Democrats. A slew of candidates appeared across the board for all positions – alderman, councilmen, and mayor. If one pays attention to just the mayoral election, it is easy to see the ramifications of the divisions amongst the Democrats. Charles C. Langdon returned from his own political disasters in 1851 and won election as the Whig candidate for mayor. The two closest Democrat were Joseph Sewell, the Southern Rights candidate who took just 18 percent of the vote, and Price Williams, the old-line Democrat who took 25 percent of the vote. The two Democratic candidates put together, combined with a handful of miscellaneous candidates also in the race would have made up the votes

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<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Thornton, *Politics and Power in a Slave Society*, pg. 255. On the split between old-line Democrats and Southern Rights Democrats in Mobile, see Thornton, *Politics and Power in a Slave Society*, pgs. 254-258. Interestingly enough, on page 257, Thornton identifies Percy Walker as one of these Mobilian Southern Rights men who “believed in the efficacy of a separate third-party organization.” Walker would later become one of the leading Know-Nothings in the city. On this split among the Democrats, also see Thompson, “Southern Rights and Nativism As Issues in Mobile Politics,” pgs. 135-136.

necessary to challenge the Whig hegemony. In response to the victory, the Whig newspaper printed the following editorial:

Mobile has gloriously redeemed herself from the great error of August, 1851, and proudly honored the man whose sacrifice was then demanded by an apparently powerful and relentless faction. Charles C. Langdon is elected Mayor of Mobile for the next three years.<sup>22</sup>

Following the Whig victory, the Southern Rights issue in Mobile subsided, not to reappear until 1856. What is most interesting about the emergence of a Southern Rights faction of the Democratic party in the early 1850s is the dramatic divisions in the Democrats as a result. These divisions would play a major role in political realignments during the flourishing of the Know-Nothing party between 1854 and 1856. Dissident Democrats and former Whigs would always be lurking behind the scenes of the upstart nativists. Earlier splits in the Democratic party created one impetus for many politicians and voters to seek out the Know-Nothings a few years later.

By the summer of 1854, the future of the Whig party was unclear. Southern and northern Whigs had split over Congress's passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in May. Southern Whigs generally supported the bill, and northern Whigs usually dissented. In February of 1854, southern Whig Senators had met in a "caucus" to announce, "that the southern Whigs were a unit in favor of the bill." Northern Whigs responded by calling this meeting "the funeral of the National Whig party." Still, following the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in May of 1854, the Whigs were unsure of where to turn. Some were optimistic that the party would survive, while others expressed a desire to turn to new coalitions in both the North and the South. As it turned out, the fate of the Whig

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<sup>22</sup> *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, December 7, 1852. Beginning in 1852, the term length for Mobile's mayors changed, going from a one-year term to a three-year term.

party would hinge on the electoral success of a new political organization that began its rapid rise at exactly the same time that northern and southern Whigs were attempting to assess how permanent the sectional split within the party over passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act might be.<sup>23</sup>

In assessing such a split, Whig and Democratic leaders in the South decided not to react until they saw the results of northern elections in the fall of 1854, given the absence of important elections in their own states that same year. In Mobile, the Whig newspaper, the *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, had remained steadfastly hopeful of a Whig resurgence despite the foreboding nature of the sectional split in the party. In July of 1854, there were rumors circulating across the South of a southern Whig Convention to determine what was next for the party, a convention that most saw as marking an irrevocable rupture between northern and southern Whigs.

The Democratic paper in Mobile, the *Mobile Daily Register*, had first made reports of this rumored Convention, claiming that the majority of Whigs in the South supported it. The *Advertiser* quickly denied such reports, insisting that “few Whig papers have yet spoken at all on the subject, but when they do speak, we have not a doubt that we shall find a very large majority of them coinciding in sentiment with us. At all events, we think we shall be safe in proposing to furnish the names of three Whig journals against a Convention at present, for every one the Register can show in favor of it.”<sup>24</sup> Proponents and opponents of such a gathering understood it to be the symbol of a permanent rupturing of the national Whig party.

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<sup>23</sup> For the split of the Whigs over the Kansas-Nebraska Act, see Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party*, pgs. 804-835. Quotes taken from pg. 819.

<sup>24</sup> *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, July 1, 1854.

Thus, the Democratic paper, in first implying that the majority of southern Whig newspapers supported such a gathering was attempting to emphasize the national fracture of the Whig party. In contrast, by denying a regional bloc of Whig approval for a sectional convention, the *Advertiser* was asserting that there was a continuing national unity of the party in the face of an obvious sectional split. An emphasis on national unity is something that the editors of the *Advertiser* would employ again and again, even well after they had become supporters of the Know-Nothing party. The basic lesson of this exchange, as will be further demonstrated below, is that political developments in Mobile were inextricably connected to events on the larger national political stage, however much Know-Nothingism in that city served or reflected local conditions and interests.

At the same time that the Whigs were splintering along sectional lines over the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854, the Know-Nothing party was experiencing dramatic electoral success in the North and then the South. The Know-Nothings had begun as a handful of ultra-patriotic, secret, fraternal orders in New York City with names like the “Order of the Star Spangled Banner” and the “Order of United Americans.” Whatever the reasons they first joined, members of these social fraternities by the fall of 1853 had determined to use the political influence they could marshal to reduce and restrict the political influence (or power, as nativists saw it) of immigrants and Catholics. The various orders had spread from a paltry number of forty-three members in the early 1850s to over one million members by the end of 1854.

As their popularity and membership increased, the Know-Nothings entered the political arena – in many cases without formally declaring a ticket. Instead, Know-Nothings often ran for office as “surprise” candidates. Over the course of 1854 and into

1855, Know-Nothings experienced electoral success in every state and at nearly every level. They elected mayors of major cities, governors, congressmen, and state representatives. Their meteoric success was truly remarkable, and it was not just limited to the North. Know-Nothings experienced success in the South as well. It was this Know-Nothing success, coupled with sectional splits over the Kansas-Nebraska Act that finished off the Whig party.<sup>25</sup>

Reactions to the widespread success of the Know-Nothings varied among Whigs and Democrats. In the North, there was a definite voter realignment against the Democrats – a voter realignment from which Whigs often failed to benefit precisely because Know-Nothings, not Whigs, defeated Democratic candidates. In the South, however, the situation was different. As the order began to appear in southern cities, including Mobile, Democrats and Whig leaders were not sure how to react. Rank-and-file voters within each party were exploring the Know-Nothing order as a social fraternity, while Whig and Democratic leaders, including newspaper editors, were waiting to see what happened in the North before they decided what to do in the South. Politicos of both parties questioned whether they should they feel threatened by the order, join forces with it, or simply ignore the nativist movement altogether.

Michael Holt asserts that what is essential to explaining the varied reactions of southern Whigs and Democrats to the Know-Nothing success in the North was that 1854 was an off year for elections in many southern states, including Alabama. Thus, Holt

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<sup>25</sup> On the rise of the Know-Nothings and the death of the Whigs, see Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, pgs. 20-74, and Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party*, pgs. 836-908. In explaining the demise of the Whigs, Anbinder almost totally emphasizes the slavery issue. To be sure, Holt identifies the destructive force of the sectional conflict, but also argues that the astonishing success of the Know-Nothings played a central role in finishing off the Whigs.

argues “without elections and the partisan fervor whipped up by them, in contrast, men could view the order [Know-Nothings] as a pressure group that they could join without discarding their old party allegiances.”<sup>26</sup> Holt goes on to contend that party reactions were divergent. Whig leaders remained relatively indifferent and unsure of what to do even into 1855, while renegade rank-and-file Democrats as well as some dissident Democratic politicians flocked to the order almost immediately.

Democrats all over the South proclaimed their fears at the actions of their fellow party members, including one Alabama Democrat who referred to Know-Nothing growth as “this stupendous and far-spreading leprosy.”<sup>27</sup> A Virginia Whig, Alexander H. H. Stuart observed, “many of the democrats who are tired of party dictation have joined the order.”<sup>28</sup> As Holt then deduces, “most Democratic politicians were terrified by the heavy Democratic defections to the order in the South, and they bent every effort to break up the order and to woo those men back to the Democratic column *before* the 1855 elections.”<sup>29</sup> In short, the timing of developments, according to Holt, was central in how southern politicians reacted to the Know-Nothing successes in northern elections in 1854.

In Mobile, just as elsewhere in the South, the nativist order began to appear during the summer of 1854. In July of that year, the *Daily Advertiser* first observed the presence of the Know-Nothings and their organization in the city, saying only, “this mysterious body and its mysterious organizations attracts no small share of public

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<sup>26</sup> Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party*, pgs. 855-856.

<sup>27</sup> Quoted in Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party*, pg. 856.

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party*, pg. 856.

<sup>29</sup> Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party*, pg. 856. His emphasis.

attention.”<sup>30</sup> The *Advertiser* seemed to print this statement out of sheer curiosity rather than a sense of satisfaction or contempt, reflecting the indecisiveness of Whig leaders.

A few weeks later, the *Advertiser* again ran reports of the presence of Know-Nothingism in Mobile, this time running an anonymous letter. The letter was a response to several comments the editor of the Democratic organ, the *Mobile Daily Register*, had made regarding Know-Nothingism. It was the contention of the author of this letter that John Forsyth, the editor of the *Register*, “has certainly, of late, been rather disturbed by the contemplation of the possibility of the existence of this dreaded order amongst us.” The letter trumpeted recent Know-Nothing success,<sup>31</sup> and insisted that the Know-Nothing order was very much alive in Mobile, contrary to what others may have believed. The letter-writer then went on to add three points: “First, The editor of the *Mobile Register* is most violently opposed to a certain association called (whether rightly or wrongly) the Know Nothings. Secondly, And as a corollary of the first proposition, that the aforesaid Know Nothings are quite as much opposed to the said editor. Thirdly, That there is such a society as the Know Nothings existing in Mobile.”<sup>32</sup> With this, it seems the presence of the Know-Nothings in Mobile was irrefutable.

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<sup>30</sup> *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, July 28, 1854.

<sup>31</sup> It is unclear, either from the comments in the *Advertiser* or in the *Register*, as to exactly what success this letter refers. In 1854, there were no major elections in Alabama, and municipal elections in Mobile did not take place until December of 1855. In his study on Alabama party politics, Lewy Dorman references major Know-Nothing success in Montgomery in the fall of 1854. Dorman, however, also refers to electoral success in Mobile in 1854, yet there were no municipal elections held that fall, so his observations are suspect. See Dorman, *Party Politics in Alabama*, pg. 103, where he says “The Americans were successful in the first elections in Alabama in which they had participated. In the fall of 1854 this party had elected mayors in both Mobile and Montgomery over Democratic candidates.” While it is possible that Know-Nothings in Montgomery experienced success, it is certain that there was no mayoral race in Mobile until 1855. It seems likely that Forsyth, like other southern Democrats, was growing increasingly concerned about the spread of the Know-Nothings throughout the South and Alabama and the defection of both rank-and-file Democratic voters and Democratic politicians to the order. A Democratic defeat in Montgomery could have easily set him off.

<sup>32</sup> For the anonymous letter to the *Advertiser*, see the *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, August 12, 1854.

It is certainly not surprising that Know-Nothingism as a secret, social fraternity appeared in Mobile. As noted previously, Mobile had a substantial immigrant population, particularly made up of Roman Catholic Irish. While the total immigrant population of Mobile numbered only around 30 percent of the total population in 1850 and 33 percent of the total population in 1860, the percentage of voting age males of foreign birth was much higher. In 1850, adult males of foreign birth made up just less than 50 percent (49.2) of the total white, adult, male population in Mobile, and in 1860, voting age males were just over 50 percent (51.5).

The majority of these immigrants were of Irish heritage, with the Irish making up 39 percent of the foreign-born population in 1850, and jumping to 45 percent of the Mobile foreign-born population by 1860. Among adult, white, males, the percent increase remained surprisingly even. For the aggregate Mobile white population, the percent increase was 73 percent for immigrants to 52 percent for native-born. For adult males, however, the percent increase was 61 percent for foreign-born, and 59 percent for native-born. Immigrants were seemingly spread evenly across the city as well, with no one ward maintaining a hegemony of foreign-born as was often the case in northern cities like New York, Boston, or Chicago. Only in the fourth and fifth wards did adult male immigrants maintain a sizeable majority. What is interesting then, is that while Mobile was certainly more “northern-like” in its demographics as compared to the majority of the South, in some ways, Mobile’ demographic reality differed significantly from major, northern, urban centers.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> See Thompson, “Mobile, Alabama, 1850-1861,” pgs. 154-158 for a discussion of the correlation of the foreign born and the Catholic church, as well as discussions of Mobile’s demographics. For figures on the foreign-born adult males in Mobile in 1850 and 1860, see Appendix II, Tables 1 and 2.



To be sure, though, nativism and anti-Catholicism were hardly nonexistent in Mobile. In 1852, for example, with the exception of the mayor's office, the Democrats had gained control of the city government. Under their tenure, the Board of Aldermen gave the operation of the city-owned City Hospital to a Roman Catholic Order, the Sisters of Charity. When the Whigs regained control of the city government in 1853, they succumbed to pressure by a few Protestant ministers in the city to investigate accusations that the Sisters of Charity were using their privileged positions at the City Hospital to promote the Catholic faith. A joint committee of the Common Council and the Board of Aldermen investigated the charges and found them to be false. The Whig mayor, Charles C. Langdon (who was a Presbyterian), however, along with the majority of the members of the boards, disagreed with the findings and voted to remove the Sisters of Charity as directors of the City Hospital. The Sisters of Charity then moved to organize a Catholic hospital in Mobile, separate from the City Hospital.<sup>34</sup>

Other evidence of growing anti-Catholic sentiments in the city includes a controversy over the public schools in 1852. In a referendum held in August of that year, the people of Mobile voted 2,225 to 244 to approve the development of a true public school system that was free of any "sectarian religious ties." Local Bishop Michael Portier protested, arguing that the Catholic Church provided the best public education. The school board disagreed, and from then on, the Catholic Church had to direct its own

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<sup>34</sup> See the City of Mobile, Board of Aldermen, Minutes of September 1852, September 1854, meetings of June 29, July 13, 1854. Mobile Public Library, Local history Department, Mobile, Alabama, Microfilm 2P, microdex no. 4. See also the Mobile *Daily Advertiser* for July 1, 4, 6, 1854. I am indebted to Thompson, "Mobile, Alabama, 1850-1861," pgs. 159-169, and Thompson, "Southern Rights and Nativism As Issues in Mobile Politics," pg. 138 for pointing me to this incident.

efforts at education without any support or subsidies from the Mobile County Board of School Commissioners.<sup>35</sup>

Yet, however much local religious and ethnic animosities, political grievances, and/or sheer curiosity contributed to the emergence of Know-Nothingism as a secret, social fraternity in Mobile, its career as a political force in the city was dependent first upon Know-Nothing success in northern elections in the fall of 1854 and then inextricably connected with the larger national, sectional conflict. While Holt seems correct in some respects, at least about the early mushrooming of the secret order, those who argue, contrary to Holt, that the sectional conflict shaped, indeed largely determined the history of Know-Nothingism as a political force are right, at least with regard to Mobile and its particularly southern case.<sup>36</sup>

With the clear presence of Know-Nothingism in Mobile, Whig and Democratic leaders' reactions seemed to follow the form outlined by Michael Holt. Whig politicians, taking advantage of the electoral lapse in Alabama in 1854, did not join up with the Know-Nothings until the northern election returns in the fall of 1854 showed that Know-Nothings had ousted the Whig party in New York, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Indiana. Democrat politicians, most certainly reacting to Democratic defections to the order, on the other hand, expressed a stark fear of Know-Nothing success and made every attempt at discrediting and undermining the Know-Nothings, while at the same time

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<sup>35</sup> See the *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, August 5, 1852 and Thompson, "Mobile, Alabama, 1850-1861," pgs. 161-165. Such anti-Catholic sentiment over the role of the Catholic Church in public institutions, especially schools, is very similar to anti-Catholic sentiment prevalent in the North (especially the Northeast and Midwest) that was central to the rise of Know-Nothingism there. See Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, pgs. 24-26.

<sup>36</sup> Here it is important to note that while flawed in many other respects, Frederick's article on the Know-Nothings in Alabama reaches this same conclusion. Frederick, too, argues that Know-Nothings in the

attempting to woo back those rank-and-file voters and rogue politicians who had abandoned their party.

Beginning in October of 1854, the *Daily Advertiser* officially switched its political affiliation from Whig to Know-Nothing. Following the publication of the anonymous letter discussed above, the *Advertiser* refrained from outwardly expressing its political affiliation – either for Whigs or for Know-Nothings. It was not until Tuesday, October 17, after state and Congressional elections had taken place in several northern states like Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey, that the editors of the *Advertiser* apparently made up their mind. On this day, the *Advertiser* ran an editorial, noting the “speedy and utter overthrow of the Pierce administration and the Modern Democracy.” Here, the *Advertiser* debated what organization they could hold responsible for electoral defeats of Democrats in both Indiana and Pennsylvania: “It will not do to charge this mighty reverse tide to Free Soilism, or even, what is a very different thing, to hostility to the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, though both, doubtless, had considerable influence in the result.” The *Advertiser*’s editor concluded, “the Know Nothings seem to have held the sceptre of victory, and that too, where the most determined and unscrupulous means have been resorted to by the Administration party to compass their defeat.” The editors then applauded the Know-Nothing surge:

Well, the battle has been fought, and amid the smoke now lifting from the field of contest, we see the eagle of victory perched up on the standard of the reviled Know Nothings, while their arrogant accusers are so badly beaten they scarcely know themselves. As the Baltimore American well says, these election returns “indicate the downfall of modern Democracy – in the citadels of its strength – that it is falling to pieces from its mal-administration of the powers delegated to it, and the internal corruptions that have destroyed all the principles of true American

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South differed from their northern counterparts. See Frederick, “Unintended Consequences,” pg. 27 where he posits that “substantial differences existed between Know-Nothings in Alabama and those in the North.”

Democracy, and left nothing but the name under which it has heretofore achieved its triumphs.”<sup>37</sup>

With the printing of this editorial, the *Advertiser* switched its political affiliation to the Know-Nothings. This editorial also shows that much of what was appealing about the Know-Nothings’ successes to former Mobile Whigs was not their nativist and anti-Catholic doctrine, but rather, the fact that they could turn the Democrats out of office. Moreover, the timing of this editorial also marked an opportunity for Mobile Whigs to distance themselves from victorious northern Whigs in Vermont, Maine and elsewhere. Those Whigs had run stridently anti-Nebraska, antislavery, and anti-southern campaigns in the fall of 1854. In short, it was political events in the North that led Whig editors in Mobile and elsewhere in the South to get off the political fence and abandon Whiggery for Know-Nothingism.<sup>38</sup>

Over the course of the next two months, the *Advertiser* further solidified its Know-Nothing affiliation. On October 24, it attacked several New York Whig candidates for their apparent freesoil connections while lauding Know-Nothing success in that state. The *Advertiser* also began referencing the Baltimore *American*, Baltimore’s Know-Nothing organ, almost daily. On November 22, the *Advertiser* noted that:

We have received the first number of the *American Organ*, a new daily and weekly paper, published in Washington, which made its first appearance on Monday week. It is devoted to the cause of the “American Party,” and is under the editorial control of Vespasian Ellis, Esq., and B.M. Heath, Esq. Both gentlemen are said to men of ability, and the specimen number reflects credit on all concerned. We welcome the “organ” into the ranks of newspaperdom.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Mobile *Daily Advertiser*, October 17, 1854.

<sup>38</sup> For more on Whig coalitions with anti-Kansas-Nebraska, antislavery, and anti-southern movements in the North, see Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party*, pgs. 871-875.

<sup>39</sup> Mobile *Daily Advertiser*, November 22, 1854. Emphasis theirs.

By the end of 1854, then, the *Advertiser* was no doubt a Know-Nothing newspaper.

This marked a six-month evolution wherein the *Advertiser* transformed from an ardent Whig publication to a solid Know-Nothing organ. While Mobile's almost northern-like demographic reality certainly allowed for the presence of Know-Nothingism as a secret, social, fraternity, politically, it was events in the North that drove Whig politicians to seek out the Know-Nothings as a political option in Mobile.

To be sure, once the editors of the *Daily Advertiser* discarded Whiggery for Know-Nothingism, they indulged in occasional rants against immigrants and Catholics. Nonetheless, what is striking is that the *Advertiser* generally ignored the local significantly large Catholic and immigrant population of Mobile itself and instead pilloried the effects of immigration in the distant North, or even as far away as Europe. This disingenuous nature of Know-Nothing nativist rhetoric in Mobile becomes even more striking when compared to northern Know-Nothing publications.<sup>40</sup> In November 1854, for example, the paper lamented the threat that immigrants posed to public health in New York City:

Almost every vessel which arrives at New York with foreign immigrants, reports sickness and death among the passengers during the voyage. — Several ships arrived Monday week, bringing upwards of 3500 immigrants, chiefly from Bremen and Havre. One of these ships reports five deaths, another eighteen, and four other five each.<sup>41</sup>

By emphasizing the death and sickness immigrants brought with them, articles such as this hoped to cast an overall negative light on immigration in general. Other issues of the

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<sup>40</sup> Such publications include the *American Organ* in Washington, D.C., the *Baltimore American* in Baltimore, or the *Literary Budget* in Chicago. Know-Nothings also relied on books and pamphlets to spread their nativist propaganda. The classic example in that genre is Thomas R. Whitney, *A Defence of the American Policy* (New York, 1856).

<sup>41</sup> *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, November 28, 1854.

paper pointed to reported scandals in Catholic convents in Europe, or the poor performance of foreign-born immigrants in the army, and then disingenuously lamented that “it is a new state of things when political writers like myself, find themselves necessarily discussing sectarian, religious questions; but the reason why we do so, need not be explained – every one can see, feel, and appreciate it.”<sup>42</sup>

The external thrust of this nativist rhetoric towards northern cities or even when directed at scandals in European convents is difficult to explain. Of course, such rhetoric no doubt reflects the sheer opportunism and desperation of Whigs who switched to Know-Nothingism only after it was clear that the Whig party had disintegrated or been captured by antislavery elements in the North in the 1854 elections. Another possible explanation is that because immigrants in Mobile were not overwhelmingly concentrated in one ward or area of the city, native-born Mobilians found themselves more familiar with immigrants in general. This demographic makeup of Mobile is directly opposed to many northern cities where immigrant life remained unfamiliar to native-born whites because immigrants were generally concentrated in a specific area of the city. Still another possibility is that some of the former Whig politicians in Mobile who were now Know-Nothings were the employers of immigrant laborers and did not want to antagonize them – either politically, or socially. This possibility remains tenuous and difficult to prove, though, as impressions from the 1850 and 1860 census records show the make-up of the political leaders of the Know-Nothings to be overwhelmingly

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<sup>42</sup> *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, February 18, 1855 (quotation). For other examples of weak nativist rhetoric directed outside of Mobile in the *Advertiser*, see the *Mobile Daily Advertiser* for March 1, 1856, March 5, 1856, and May 6, 1856.

merchants. While these former Whig politicians were certainly a wealthy elite, it is not clear what economic ties they maintained with the foreign-born.<sup>43</sup>

While all of the explanations listed above are possible, perhaps the most probable and convincing explanation of why the nativist rhetoric in Mobile remained disingenuous and different from comparable examples elsewhere in the North and South, is that the foreign-born population in Mobile simply did not vote. Ecological regression estimates for the 1855 mayoral election in Mobile show that of the adult, male, foreign-born population in Mobile, 77 percent of the population chose not to vote in 1855. Election results from the 1852 municipal elections would produce comparable figures, lending considerable evidence to the fact that the foreign-born in Mobile did not turn out in great numbers in the 1850s. Thus, the leaders of the Know-Nothing contingent in Mobile had little reason to feel threatened politically by the local immigrant population and subsequently, the nativist rhetoric of the Mobile Know-Nothings appears rather weak.<sup>44</sup>

Democratic reactions to the emergence of Know-Nothingism in Mobile in late 1854 and early 1855 were somewhat mixed. To be sure, the Democrats were concerned with the political threat the Know-Nothings represented, even if they expressed confusion (or perhaps condescension) at times as to whether or not the Know-Nothings were an entirely new political party, or simply the Whigs in disguise. As Michael Holt has conjectured about southern Democrats based on manuscript evidence, the Democrats in Mobile were also certainly concerned about Democratic defections (both in rank-and-file voters and amongst politicians) to the Know-Nothings and thus were preoccupied with

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<sup>43</sup> On the demographic distribution of adult, immigrant males across the wards of Mobile in 1860, see Appendix II, Table 2.

<sup>44</sup> For estimates of voter turnouts by ethnicity for each political party see Appendix I, Table 11.

winning those renegade Democrats back to their party before the major Congressional and state elections in the fall of 1855. While no major elections took place in 1854, these concerns are certainly understandable, as rifts had begun to appear amongst the Democrats in Mobile in the early 1850s. As mentioned above, the Democrats found themselves split down the middle by a Southern Rights faction in the municipal election of 1852. Thus, Democratic unity and cohesion in Mobile would have certainly been a major concern in 1854 and 1855.<sup>45</sup>

As early as August of 1854, Forsyth and his *Register* were attacking the Know-Nothings and expressing concern at the rise of the order in the South and its spread to Mobile.<sup>46</sup> For the most part, though, however privately terrified the Democratic leaders in Mobile were of the appeal of Know-Nothingism to Democratic voters and politicians, Mobile Democrats remained publicly silent until it was clear that Know-Nothingism presented a political threat to their party. In early January of 1855, shortly after the *Advertiser* had officially switched its political affiliation and only after the Know-Nothings had made astonishing electoral gains in the North and had clearly established themselves in the South, the *Register* printed the following editorial:

We warn the Democratic Party of Alabama that its supremacy of years, its integrity and its principles are threatened. Foes without are seeking to take advantage of schisms within the fortress to carry it by storm. The Democracy knows how to meet and repel the assaults of open foes; let it learn to watch the plotters within. There is the danger. In politics as in war, there is no room for compromisers! The question should be inexorably put to men, are you for us or against us? Speak and decide. Let us know who we have to fight. If the Whigs,

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<sup>45</sup> See Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party*, pgs. 856-857 where he discusses immediate reactions to Know-Nothingism among Democrats and Whigs.

<sup>46</sup> Unfortunately, the issues of the *Mobile Daily Register* are not extant for August of 1854. I base this assertion solely on comments made in the *Mobile Daily Advertiser* referencing the reactions of the *Register*. See the *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, August 12, 1854. For further discussion of this exchange in the *Advertiser*, see pages 19-20 above.



we are ready – if the Know Nothings, we are ready – if some of our own former friends who are impatient at the slow rewards of Democratic fidelity, we are ready; if a general “fusion” of all the discontented isms, let us know it. In any case the Democracy must prepare for the battle and not surrender its principles and its power without a stern, united, manly and consentaneous [sic] struggle. Nothing but this is needed to quell discontent and rout the “fusion” army of assembled Isms.<sup>47</sup>

On the one hand, Democrats were still unsure of the nature of their political opposition: they were not convinced that the Whigs would completely give up the ship and join the Know-Nothings. On the other hand, the Democrats were also clearly terrified at the apparent appeal Know-Nothings had for Democrat rank-and-file voters as well as political leaders such as Percy Walker in Mobile.<sup>48</sup>

With the establishment of the Know-Nothings as a political force in the North, and the clear presence of the order emerging as a political party in the South and in Mobile, both the Democrats and the Know-Nothings began to set their sights on the important elections of 1855. In Alabama, 1855 was the year of the gubernatorial race, Congressional and state legislative elections, and at the end of the year, municipal elections in Mobile. In Mobile (as well as elsewhere in the state), the Know-Nothings adopted a strategy to “split the Democrats.” Meanwhile, the Democrats attempted to undermine the legitimacy of the nativists as a political party – both by emphasizing the disingenuous manner in which former Whigs had switched party affiliation, as well as by accusing the northern wing of the party of being simply a vehicle for antislavery sentiments and freesoilism.

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<sup>47</sup> *Mobile Daily Register*, January 6, 1855.

<sup>48</sup> Again, see Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party*, pgs. 855-856 for his assessment of Democratic fears of the appeal of Know-Nothings to their rank-and-file voters as well as some dissident politicians.

As January of 1855 rolled on, political events began to take shape. The two parties were beginning to consider candidates for governor. The logical choice for the Democrats was the incumbent, Governor John Winston. In Mobile, though, Forsyth and his *Register* appeared to be unsure whether or not Winston was the man for the job. Since 1853, there had been an apparent rift in the Alabama Democrats over the issue of state funding for internal improvements: mainly, state aid for railroad building. In his first term, Winston had made a policy of vetoing state aid and temperance acts. Winston's decisions seemed to be popular among the masses, but many Democratic leaders were not as convinced. Most Democrats eventually saw the political advantage of an anti-state aid stance, but some Democrats in the state had become converts to a pro-state aid position. Forsyth and the editors of the *Daily Register* in Mobile appeared to lean toward the pro-state aid flavor.

As a result, in January of 1855, the *Register* began attacking Winston from the angle of the Know-Nothing question, asking if Winston belonged to "the Administration party, breathing threats, vengeance and slaughter against the Know-Nothings, or to the minority of the party, willing to tolerate them, or to judge their principles by their fruits."<sup>49</sup> Resentment over economic issues led Forsyth to raise obviously trumped up questions about the incumbent Democratic governor. In response, state aid Democrats had suggested Robert A. Baker, a prominent planter of Dallas County, as a gubernatorial

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<sup>49</sup> Mobile *Daily Register*, January 13, 1855. On the role of the state aid issue in Alabama politics and the Democratic party, see first Dorman, *Party Politics in Alabama*, pgs. 82-83, and 104-106. See also Thornton, *Politics and Power in a Slave Society*, pgs. 327-331. Thornton outlines the state aid question and the rift in the Democrats as part of the long-standing resentments between northern Alabama and southern Alabama. Winston was the champion of the anti-economic development northern Alabama Democrats. This regional divide in Alabama politics is crucial to Thornton's explanation of secessionism in Alabama. The tendency of Forsyth and other old-line Democrats towards support of state-aid to internal

candidate. On January 5 of 1855, John Hardy of the *Alabama State Sentinel* printed a petition signed by eighty-three men, urging Baker as the Democratic candidate. Baker also owned a commission house in Mobile, and this combined with his planting interests in Dallas County made him an ideal candidate for the southern Alabama state aid Democrats.<sup>50</sup>

Mobile Democrats' wavering support of Winston's candidacy did not last, though. In response to the disagreement over economic issues, the Know-Nothings took full advantage, and attempted to split the Democrats further over the issue. In late January, the Know-Nothings held a party convention in Mobile, with the intent of officially organizing their party in the state, and adopting a platform. Lewy Dorman gives the best account of this incident:

Encouraged by these local successes [elections in Montgomery], the Americans began to organize for the state elections of 1855. In January, they held a convention in Mobile for organizing a party, adopting a platform and nominating a candidate for governor. The convention adopted a policy of attempting to make a fusion with the Democrats who were opposing Winston and his state aid policy. It made no nomination for governor but discussed the candidacy of four men, all of whom were Democrats.<sup>51</sup>

The four Democrats Dorman refers to as potential candidates were Jones Withers (a Mobile politician who would end up mayor on the Know-Nothing ticket in 1855), George D. Shortridge, James Price, and Robert A. Baker, with Baker being the front-runner.<sup>52</sup>

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improvements is likely one possible explanation for the relative Democratic unity in the early 1850s under the Southern Rights issue, outside of the municipal election of 1852. See also note 55 below.

<sup>50</sup> On the presentation of Robert Baker as a Democratic candidate, see Dorman, *Party Politics in Alabama*, pgs. 104-105. For Democrats' antebellum emphasis on the negative state, see Michael F. Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s*, pg. 33 where he observes that in the context of the Panic of 1837 Martin Van Buren's "doctrine of the negative state became Democratic dogma until the 1850s."

<sup>51</sup> See Dorman, *Party Politics in Alabama*, pg. 103. He cites the *Alabama Journal*, January 27, 1855 as his source for this report.

<sup>52</sup> *Mobile Daily Register*, January 20, 1855.

The strategy ultimately would not work. The *Daily Register* observed the presence of the convention in the city and acknowledged the Know-Nothings' strategy of splitting the Democrats. The *Register* responded by remarking that "the enemy seems to be determined to steal him [Baker] *vi et armis* and force him to desert. – We think better of him then [sic] to believe he will do it."<sup>53</sup> As Dorman states, the Know-Nothings made no nomination for governor at the January convention. They reconvened in June at Montgomery and nominated George D. Shortridge. Of the original four candidates mentioned in January, Robert Baker and James Price remained with the Democrats, while Jones Withers stood as Mobile's Know-Nothing mayoral candidate in the December elections of 1855. Despite the rifts over economic policy, the Democrats who remained with the party – including those in Mobile – stood united behind Winston's candidacy. The Democrats nominated him without a convention. Know-Nothing opposition in Mobile had led, in part, to the strengthening of Democratic party unity.

By August of 1855, the Democrats began to step up their rhetoric in attempts to undermine the national unity of the Know-Nothings as well as to convince the Democrats who had joined the Know-Nothings' order that its political future was not promising. About the same time as the controversy over Know-Nothing efforts to split the Democrats, the *Daily Register* quoted a report in the New York *Herald* that "Know Nothingism at the North has made common cause with the anti-slavery and anti-Nebraska elements of political power." The *Register* then went on to say that:

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<sup>53</sup> Mobile *Daily Register*, January 20, 1855. Emphasis theirs. Interestingly enough, the Mobile *Daily Advertiser* made no reference to or report of the convention in Mobile, and there are no proceedings or speeches extant. One can only assume it was because of the tradition of secrecy of the order. The *Register* was the only newspaper to report on the convention. Ironically, then, because of the secrecy associated with the order and the convention, other Democratic newspapers across the state began accusing Forsyth of

The “Organ” at Washington has told us that anti-slavery forms no part of the Know-Nothing platform – we have been taught to believe that Know-Nothingism at the North was nothing more than a great strike of Northern labor against foreign labor. The confessions of the New York Herald flatly contradict these allegations. What Know-Nothingism is at the South, we have been at a loss to comprehend. *Here*, at least we have no foreign labor pressing upon American competition, worthy of a strike; and here, certainly, the tendencies to heretical association in the Northern wing of the party must be viewed with suspicion and dislike by Southern Know-Nothings. We give the facts as we find them, leaving it to Southern gentlemen who are in the councils of the order to take heed, that the South “receive no detriment” from their association with a party at the north, avowing principles and holding affinities as contrary to Southern well-being.<sup>54</sup>

The Democrats continued attempts to woo back their voters as well as their politicians by linking Know-Nothingism with anti-slavery in the North. In so doing, the Democrats were also explicitly linking Mobile politics with the growing sectional conflict by invoking the mantra of Southern Rights. Here one should note that Southern Rights Democrats were also likely those who left the party for the Know-Nothings, as they were the most unsatisfied with the Democrats. Additionally, if J. Mills Thornton is correct that the Southern Rights Democrats in Mobile were commercially oriented and Forsyth and the old-line Democrats were first attacking Winston on the state-aid issue in 1855 before rallying under his candidacy, this might explain why the Democrats in Mobile appeared relatively unified in the early 1850s, before splitting in 1852. Democrats may also have been consciously using sectional rhetoric to appeal to those Southern Rights Democrats still in the fold of the Know-Nothings.<sup>55</sup>

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being a member of the Know-Nothings, which he then had to deny, leading to one of the more humorous events in the rise and fall of the Mobile Know-Nothings.

<sup>54</sup> *Mobile Daily Register*, January 25, 1855. Emphasis theirs.

<sup>55</sup> Thornton makes the observation that most disaffected Democrats were pro-state aid men, arguing that “the fire-eaters of Alabama’s metropolis, Mobile, were quite distinctly commercial in outlook.” Frederick, too argues that Know-Nothings and Whigs aligned on pro-state aid policies. While Forsyth and the *Daily Register* fell in line with Winston on this issue in early 1855, it is conceivable that one reason Know-Nothings remained appealing for former Southern Rights Democrats was their nomination of George

For the most part, though, the Know-Nothing press in Mobile paid no immediate attention to such Democratic jeremiads. Instead, the Know-Nothings seemed to be focused on organizing at the statewide level, and nominating candidates for the gubernatorial race, as well as Congressional elections, both of which were held in August of 1855. As mentioned above, party members from across the state reconvened on June 12 of 1855 in Montgomery to formally adopt a platform and nominate a candidate for governor. Behind closed doors, one hundred fifty delegates (two-thirds of whom many thought to be former Whigs) met and nominated former Democrat George D. Shortridge. The delegates also passed a platform emphasizing traditional Know-Nothing tenets of opposition to immigration, extended naturalization periods for voting, and the requirement that only native-born Americans run for office.

The platform, however, was different from traditional northern Know-Nothing platforms, in that it called for “the non-intervention by the Federal Government with slavery, except for the protection of the constitutional rights of the South” and “the perpetuity of the Union upon the principles of the Constitution; the full exercise by the states of all powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution.” Again, the sectional conflict seemed to play an important role in the Know-Nothing movement in Alabama.<sup>56</sup>

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Shortridge, a former state-aid Democrat. See Thornton, *Politics and Power in a Slave Society*, pgs. 254 (quote), and 327-331. Also, see Frederick, “Unintended Consequences,” pg. 31.

<sup>56</sup> On the political composition of the delegates at the Know-Nothing convention, see the *Montgomery Advertiser*, June 14, 1855, quoted in Dorman, *Party Politics in Alabama*, pg. 106. The *Montgomery Advertiser* made the estimate that two-thirds of the convention were former Whigs. Also see Dorman, pgs. 106-107 for a discussion of the state platform. For a typical northern Know-Nothing platform that de-emphasizes slavery and supports federal legislation prohibiting slavery in the territories, see the Know-Nothing platform for the state of Illinois, printed in the *Literary Budget* (Chicago), August 25, 1855.

The long-term fortunes of the Know-Nothing party, both nationally and in Mobile, would begin a steady decline because of events elsewhere in May and June of 1855. In May of 1855, the Know-Nothing candidate in the gubernatorial race in Virginia, Thomas S. Flournoy, lost the election to Henry Wise. Virginia was a heavily Democratic state, so Wise's victory should have come as no surprise. Wise, however, had repeatedly accused the Know-Nothings of being in league with abolitionists in the North, particularly in Massachusetts. Wise's victory convinced many southern Know-Nothings that the stigma of cooperating with the northern antislavery men had cost them the Virginia election. Consequently, heading into the party's national convention in Philadelphia in June of 1855, southern members of the party had made up their mind to pursue, very aggressively, a pro-slavery stance.<sup>57</sup>

Know-Nothing delegates from around the country convened in Philadelphia on Friday, June 8, 1855 for the party's national convention. Beginning on Saturday the platform committee began its work, presenting its completed platform to the full convention on Monday afternoon. Included in this platform was the controversial "Twelfth Section," written by Virginian William Burwell, which decreed that "the National Council has deemed it the best guarantee of common justice and of future peace, to abide by and maintain the existing law upon the subject of Slavery, as a final and conclusive settlement of that subject, in spirit and in substance." Because Section Twelve acquiesced in the finality of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, it caused an uproar among northern delegates, and debate over the platform continued through Wednesday, June 13.

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<sup>57</sup> On the impact of the 1855 Virginia gubernatorial election in southern Know-Nothings' turn to pro-slavery, see Bladek, "America for Americans," pgs. 99-132, Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, pgs. 164-165, and Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party*, pgs. 929-932.

Eventually, with the help of eleven conservative northern delegates, the infamous Section Twelve won approval. The convention adjourned with a tenuous, if artificial, sense of unity. The platform had passed, and while only a few northern delegates walked out on the convention (as opposed to dozens), a definite national rift in the party over the issue of slavery had appeared.<sup>58</sup>

Back in Mobile, the immediate effects of the national convention were not apparent. The *Daily Advertiser* reported on the convention and emphasized that in spite of initial disagreement over the proposed platform, the platform still passed. The editors of the *Advertiser* downplayed any potential national split. The Democrats, on the other hand, surprisingly passed up the opportunity to attack the Know-Nothings' rupture over the slavery issue. The failure of the Mobile Democrats to jump on this national divide went against the pattern of their political rhetoric dating back to the Whig split over the Kansas-Nebraska Act in early 1854.

Rather than discussing the national Know-Nothing convention, both parties trained their sights on the August elections. The gubernatorial election took place in early August of 1855. The incumbent Democrat, John Winston, easily won the statewide election over the Know-Nothing candidate, George Shortridge by a total of nearly 12,000 votes: 42,501 for Winston to 30,715 for Shortridge. Despite the crushing defeat at the statewide level, in Mobile county Shortridge took 60 percent of the vote, winning 1,778 to 1,141. In the Congressional elections later that month, Democrats again proved victorious across the state, as "the Democratic victories were more pronounced against

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<sup>58</sup> For discussion of the platform at the national convention in June of 1855, see Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, pgs. 167-170 (quotation); and Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party*, pgs. 930-932.



the Americans than they had been against the Whigs in 1853.”<sup>59</sup> Following the pattern of the gubernatorial race the Know-Nothings in Mobile elected their candidate to Congress, Percy Walker. Walker won a hotly contested election in the district, 5,656 votes to 5,137 for James A. Stallworth, the Democratic candidate. While Walker easily won the votes in Mobile county (1,760 to 1,162), he only won three of the other nine counties in the first congressional district. Thus, in the gubernatorial and Congressional elections in August of 1855, Know-Nothingism appeared to alive and well in Mobile, but mostly stillborn in the rest of the state.

In the elections of August of 1855, the Know-Nothings made a stronger showing in Mobile and Mobile county than the Whigs had made in previous years, indicating that the Know-Nothings were drawing new voters. In the gubernatorial election, the Know-Nothing George Shortridge experienced far greater success than the Whigs had seen just two years earlier. In an election that saw a minimal 4 percent increase in voter turnout, the Know-Nothings gained a 17 percent increase in the total vote, indicating a swing of 400 votes in the Know-Nothings’ favor from the Democrats’ side.<sup>60</sup>

In the Congressional election of that same month, the Know-Nothing candidate, Percy Walker, also experienced increased success over his previous Whig counterparts. While at the level of the district, Walker only gained 3 percent of the total vote over the 1853 Whig candidate, at the level of Mobile county, Walker enjoyed nearly identical results as compared to the gubernatorial race. Voter turnout in the Congressional race in Mobile County in 1855 actually decreased 4 percent in turnout from 1853, the Know-Nothings still gained 14 more percent of the vote than Whigs had won in 1853. Nearly

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<sup>59</sup> Dorman, *Party Politics in Alabama*, pg. 119.

500 Democratic voters abandoned the party, while the Know-Nothings gained about 350 voters, indicating that while 4 percent of the voters from 1853 stayed home, former Democrats swung to the Know-Nothings' side. Many of the former Southern Rights and state-aid Democrat voters certainly found both Percy Walker and George Shortridge appealing candidates, even dressed up as Know-Nothings. The absentee voters in 1855 were also, at least in part, former Whigs who refused to vote the Know-Nothing ticket.<sup>61</sup>

In Mobile, the interpretations of and reactions to these August results by each of the parties diverged dramatically. Despite the general lack of success at the statewide level, the Know-Nothings seemed encouraged by success in Mobile county. On the other hand, the Democrats, in spite of local Know-Nothing strength, seemed encouraged by their success throughout the rest of the state. Therefore, each party looked to the Mobile municipal elections in December with confidence. In response to the gubernatorial election in early August, as well as oppositional attacks on the strength of the Know-Nothing movement, the *Advertiser* stated, "the county ticket runs pretty evenly, and is, of course ad [sic] elected. We imagine the Anties will be satisfied, now that Mobile county is American to the core. They cannot say, as they did in May – 'We had no organization. Democrats were suspicions [sic] of the candidates,' &c. &c. They have boasted quite too largely, and worked quite too diligently, thus to apologize for their defeat, and we trust they will philosophically submit to the lesson of wisdom it reaches."<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> For voting results of the Gubernatorial elections in Mobile county, see Appendix I, Table 2.

<sup>61</sup> For voting results of the Congressional elections at both the district levels and at the county level, see Appendix I, Tables 8 and 9. For the reluctance of former Whigs to join Know-Nothings in the South, see Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party*, pgs. 856-857, and 933-934.

<sup>62</sup> *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, August 7, 1855.

By contrast, the Democrats were also brimming with confidence that fall. In September, the *Register* continued to attempt to woo back renegade Democratic voters and politicians, and began to question the political staying power of the Know-Nothings. In response to comments in the *Advertiser* about the likelihood of Know-Nothing victory in the December municipal elections, the *Register* commented that:

The force of old sympathies, old associations, opinions and feelings, will be found dangerous to the success of the new programme the Advertiser has ventured to lay down, especially when it is remembered that the doors of the Democratic temple stand wide open, and its altars remain accessible to those who, under various and subtle temptations, have temporarily strayed from its worship. The excitement of the canvass has not passed over, the exacerbations of feeling which it created, have, we trust, died with the occasion which caused their exhibition – our Democratic friends, who went into the new party under the belief that they were laboring for a reformation in the politics of the country and the building up a constitutional union sentiment co-extensive with the limits of the Confederacy and conservation of Southern rights, have had time to see that they have been woefully [sic] deceived.<sup>63</sup>

This editorial strongly suggests, again, that a significant number of Democrats did defect to the Know-Nothings, but had first defected in 1854 when no elections were scheduled that could demonstrate the extent of those defections. By August and September of 1855, then, Democratic politicians could begin to assess the extent of the damage the defections had on their party and to make continued attempts to lure such deserters back. It also seems to suggest that near the end of 1855, Democrats were still in fact attempting to lure back those defectors, as Tables 2 and 9 lend evidence to show that approximately one-fourth of Democratic voters had abandoned the party, as well as politicians, such as Percy Walker. The tone of the editorial does suggest, though, that the Democrats were growing more confident about the success of their attempts to reunify their party.

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<sup>63</sup> *Mobile Daily Register*, September 11, 1855. The “new programme” referred to was likely in reference to the *Advertiser*’s brazen predictions of victory for the December municipal elections.

Near the end of September, the Democrats were looking ahead not only to the municipal elections in a few months, but also to the following year's Presidential race. In speculating about the Know-Nothings' role in that race, Forsyth and the Democrats insisted that southerners must place no trust in such a movement for it could never be a genuinely national party capable of defending southern rights:

As for Know Nothingism, it is scarcely "in the ring" at all. It is simply ridiculous to think of electing a Know Nothing President. Indeed, it is worse than madness to suppose that any man acceptable to the South can even be nominated by a *National Know Nothing Convention*. Know Nothingism has no controlling [sic] strength anywhere except in the free states, and every intelligent man can easily see that all the strength of the party in that section will be thrown in favor of the fusionists. The Southern Know-Nothings, therefore will be forced to do one of three things: they will have to either support the Democratic nominee, the abolition fusion nominee, or nominate a man of their own on a strictly southern sectional platform.<sup>64</sup>

In response to accusations that their party was incapable of defending southern rights while at the same presenting a national, united front, the Mobile Know-Nothings denied such accusations, and emphasized efforts at repairing sectional divides. On November 21, 1855, moderate northern Know-Nothings met in Cincinnati attempting to patch up the sectional rupture over the Twelfth Section of the 1855 national platform. While some conservative Know-Nothings feared that delegates at the Cincinnati meeting would "injure the Order's prospects for 1856 'by acting in too sectional a manner,'" their fears were unwarranted as those in attendance at Cincinnati sought conciliation with the southern wing of the party. Know-Nothings in Mobile made no small notice of this event, observing that:

It has recently been published upon which we fully believe to be good authority without absolutely knowing it, that the Know-Nothings in a recent national

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<sup>64</sup> *Mobile Daily Register*, September 21, 1855. Emphasis theirs. "Fusionists" referred to northern Know-Nothings who attempted to align with anti-slavery forces following the sectional rift in the party in 1855.

convention or council at Cincinnati ordained authoritatively, as one of the great principles of their order, that they would adhere steadfastly to the Constitution and the union in every emergency. It has furthermore been published that this ordaining, though at first opposed by some of the members present, was after a little reflection and discussion, ratified by an unanimous vote. So it is one of the fundamental principles of the Know-Nothing order, that in any and every emergency all its members shall in persuasion of the fearful obligation of a solemn oath, stick to the Constitution and the Union in any and every emergency... If this fundamental principle, said to have been adopted by the Know-Nothings has been really adopted, as we presume it has, they are unquestionably as formidable enemies as the Abolitionists have in the country. They stand between the Northern Abolitionists and the Southern Fire-eaters – opposed alike to the efforts of both to bring about a dissolution of the Union.<sup>65</sup>

The Cincinnati convention of November 1855 offered hope to the Know-Nothings in Mobile, as well as elsewhere in the South, that the national rupture that appeared in June of 1855 could be repaired heading into the Presidential race in 1856.<sup>66</sup>

Before the presidential campaign of 1856, immediate concerns in Mobile for each party centered around the municipal elections in December; elections that would show that if Know-Nothingism was in decline elsewhere in the nation or at the statewide level in Alabama, this was not the case in Mobile. In those elections, held on Monday, December 3, the Know-Nothings trounced the Democrats. As stated in the introduction, the Know-Nothings took every office they contested. Their mayoral candidate, Jones M. Withers – a former Democrat who received brief consideration as a potential gubernatorial candidate at the Know-Nothing convention in Mobile in April of 1855 – won by a tally of 1,206 votes to 521 – a majority of 69.8 percent. This mayoral election is interesting, in that while the Know-Nothings added only 44 votes to the Whig total in 1852, their percentage of the vote jumped nearly 19 percent (18.8). This jump reflects

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<sup>65</sup> *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, November 27, 1855.

<sup>66</sup> For further discussion of the Know-Nothing convention in Cincinnati in 1855 see Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, pg. 196; and Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party*, pgs. 942-945.

the fact that turnout in this election dropped almost 20 percent from 1852. Why there was such a drop in turnout is unclear. Tables 1 and 5 of Appendix I strongly suggest that while some 400 ex-Democrats continued to vote Know-Nothing in the municipal election, almost as many former Whigs refused to vote for a Know-Nothing candidate.<sup>67</sup>

Vote tallies for the other contests in the municipal election of 1855 proved to be nearly identical, with totals usually matching up to within a dozen votes. There was no Democratic stronghold within the individual wards, as was often the case in northern, urban elections. The failure of any ward to produce a Democratic stronghold in the election is partly representative of the fact that Irish Catholic voters, traditional supporters of the Democratic party, settled evenly across the city, rather than overwhelmingly in a single ward. Yet the more probable explanation for the complete Know-Nothing victory in the 1855 Mayoral election is that very few foreign-born, white, males actually voted. According to ecological regression estimates based on population estimates for 1855, only 23 percent of the foreign-born, adult white males voted in the 1855 election whether for the Democrats or Know-Nothings. In other words, 77 percent of the foreign-born were nonvoters. Native-born voters had a slightly better turnout, with 36 percent voting Know-Nothing, but even among native-born voters, nonvoters remained a high percentage at 56 percent. As a result, every single ward fell in line with the Know-Nothings, and again, as mentioned above, this helps to explain why the local immigrant population never appeared to be much of a threat to the Know-Nothing press.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> For the mayoral elections in Mobile in the 1850s, see Appendix I, Table 1.

<sup>68</sup> For complete vote totals, see Appendix I, Table 5. For estimates of voter turnout and percentage of native-born and foreign-born who voted Know-Nothing and Democratic, see Appendix I, Table 11.

Another interesting aspect of the Know-Nothing victories in December of 1855 was the composition of the party personnel. Here, Holt seems to be correct when he argues that Know-Nothings were not simply old-line Whigs. To be sure, the party in Mobile included the most prominent former Whigs in the city, but Holt's assertion that renegade Democrats collaborated with these former Whigs is most certainly correct. Of the Know-Nothing regime elected in December of 1855, nine of the fourteen aldermen were former Whigs, which suggests that five were either former Democrats, or previously without political affiliation. Additionally, Charles C. Langdon, the former three-time Whig mayor of Mobile, delegate to the 1848 Whig national convention, and Whig candidate for the Mobile district in the 1851 Congressional election (he lost to Southern Rights candidate John Bragg), was involved with the Know-Nothings on some level. While not amongst the Know-Nothings elected to the city offices, Langdon did gain election to the Alabama State Legislature in the same year on the Know-Nothing ticket.<sup>69</sup> Henry Levert, the president of the Common Council, was also a former Whig. Jones M. Withers, the mayor, and of course, Percy Walker, the Congressional representative elected in 1855, were former Democrats.

Ultimately, then, evidence of the political affiliations of the party personnel and analysis of election results in 1855 suggests that Mobile Know-Nothings seem to have been a coalition of both old-line Whigs, and renegade Democrats. Also worth nothing in

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<sup>69</sup> Langdon's role in the Know-Nothing movement in Mobile is unclear. While he was certainly one of the most prominent Whigs in the city, Langdon was northern-born, and had experienced severe criticism in 1851 for being anti-southern during the brief flourishing of Southern Rights as a political issue in Mobile (see pages 12-15, above). Thompson speculates that Langdon was actually outside of the inner circles of the Know-Nothing movement. This is difficult to verify, as it was Langdon who pioneered the anti-Catholic movements on the Board of Aldermen as mayor in 1853 (see pages 21-23, above) and he did stand as a Know-Nothing candidate for the State Legislature in 1855. See Thompson, "Mobile, Alabama, 1850-

the 1855 election is that not one of the Know-Nothing Council or Aldermen had run for office in the 1852 municipal election. Outside of some of the Know-Nothing politicians who ran for the higher-up offices, all of the other Know-Nothing politicians appeared to be politicians new to the game, so to speak. This evidence supports historians like Michael Holt who have argued that because Know-Nothingism was often a rejection of party politics, Know-Nothing politicians, then, were often relative newcomers, or, as Holt has said, politicians “fresh from the people.”<sup>70</sup>

Responses to the Know-Nothing victory in the municipal election were predictable. Expectedly, the Know-Nothings gloated over their triumph, while the Democrats fumed. The day after the election, the *Advertiser* ran their response to the results:

The election passed off yesterday with remarkable quiet and order – and with an unusual absence of excitement. This “unfortunate Know Nothing ridden city” as our good neighbor in the opposition calls it, has thus again exhibited a marked contrast in favor of law and order, as compared with our elections previous to the advent of Americanism amongst us. The quiet of yesterday was the legitimate trait of the principles of the American party when properly carried on, and when it shall succeed in governing the country, as it will at no distant day we shall find election disturbances “few and far between.” Of the result yesterday, the American party has reason to be proud – all things considered it was the greatest triumph yet achieved by the party in Mobile. Our ticket carried all before it, electing Mayor, Councilmen, Aldermen, *every name on it; carrying every Ward in*

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1861,” pgs. 167-168, and Thompson, “Southern Rights and Nativism As Issues in Mobile Politics, 1850-1861.”

<sup>70</sup> On the political composition of Mobile government over the decade of the 1850s, see Appendix I, Table 7 as well as an “expose” of Mobile Know-Nothings printed in the *Mobile Daily Register* on December 15, 1855. Also see Thompson, ‘Mobile Alabama, 1850-1861,’ pgs. 169-170, and Thompson, “Southern Rights and Nativism As Issues in Mobile Politics,” pgs. 138-139. Thompson, like many historians of the southern Know-Nothings, argues that they were in fact almost entirely old-line Whigs. On Holt’s assertion that this assessment of southern Know-Nothingism is largely incorrect, see Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party*, pgs. 933-934. For the political affiliation of Know-Nothing politicians, or lack thereof, compare Appendix I, Tables 3 and 4 with Table 5. For a discussion of the Know-Nothings’ turn to politicians “fresh from the people” see Holt, “The Politics of Impatience,” *passim*. For a sustained attempt to refute this claim, see Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, *passim*.



*the City...* We call this a pretty good day's business – at all events it finished Anti-Americanism here, which is all our party set out to do.<sup>71</sup>

Democrats naturally fumed at their loss and remained extraordinarily pessimistic, condemning members of the party for failing to unite and allowing an upstart party to win the city. After a week, the editors of the *Register* had not calmed down and continued to blame the loss on renegade Democrats, while resorting to their usual condemnations of the Know-Nothings as a sectional party incapable of defending the needs of the South:

During the early days of the rise and progress of Know Nothingism at the South, we were again and again personally importuned to join the Order, and the favorite mode of appeal to us was to our sense of duty as a Southern Rights man...Thousands upon thousands of Democrats at the South were induced, honestly, to join this order. Large numbers of them, as soon as they were undeceived, had the moral courage to retrieve the false step and go back to their old political friends. Many others – and more in Mobile than anywhere else – either lacked the nerve to acknowledge their error and atone for it by doing right and repairing it, or else were tempted to pursue their mistaken path by the magnificent prospects held out by what appeared to be then an invincible party of the people. Both of these promises of Know Nothingism to the South have utterly failed and been broken to the hope. The Order has proven to be neither a *National* nor a *Southern* organization, but a mere party subject to all the infirmities and incongruities of other parties, and containing within it all the elements of division in sentiment and corruption and ambition in practice common to other parties.<sup>72</sup>

Regardless of Democratic dissatisfaction with the outcome of the election, the Know-Nothings had won the day. Their staying power, however, would prove to be very brief.

In office in Mobile, the Know-Nothings avoided much explicitly nativistic legislation, especially when compared to their northern counterparts. Know-Nothings in Mobile for the most part passed laws that emphasized issues of race. The Board of Aldermen did pass laws prohibiting business activities on Sundays which may have been aimed at groceries frequented by immigrants, but the Board also passed increasing

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<sup>71</sup> *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, December 4, 1855. Emphasis theirs.

penalties on owners of slaves who hired the slaves out but did not keep a close enough track on their activities, as well as stiffened laws against slaves and free blacks congregating with lower class whites. Much like their political rhetoric demonstrated, nativism and anti-Catholicism never seemed to be the top priority of Mobile's Know-Nothing politicians.<sup>73</sup>

Very soon after the Know-Nothing victory in the municipal elections, the party had to deal with the sectional divide at the national level over slavery. On February 22, 1856, the Know-Nothings convened their national convention in Philadelphia with the intention of nominating a candidate for the 1856 presidential election. Know-Nothings from around the country who descended upon Philadelphia also hoped to mend the widening sectional divide between northern and southern members – the same divide that the June 1855 national convention in the same city had exposed. In attendance at the 1856 convention were the Know-Nothing delegates from Alabama, including Congressman Percy Walker, who represented Alabama's First Congressional District.

The convention began with a stark debate over the issue of slavery in the Know-Nothing's national platform, adopted at a contentious National Council meeting four days before the nominating convention opened. At that earlier meeting, which a smaller, more select group of party leaders from each state attended, northern delegates had sought to replace the controversial Twelfth Section of the national platform adopted in June 1855. Section Twelve decreed "that Congress could not deny a state admission to the Union

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<sup>72</sup> *Mobile Daily Register*, December 15, 1855. Emphasis theirs

<sup>73</sup> City of Mobile, Board of Aldermen, Minutes of November 15, 1855-December 22, 1857, meetings of January 11, 25, 1856, Mobile Public Library Local History Department, Mobile, Alabama, Microfilm 3P, microdex no. 2; City of Mobile, Common Council, Minutes of 1853-1857, meetings of November 28,

because it did or did not permit slavery; that Congress could not prohibit slavery from a territory; and that Congress should not abolish slavery in the District of Columbia.”

Northerners had succeeded in replacing this language with a plank that simply agreed to “abide by the principles and provisions of the Constitution of the United States...yielding no more and claiming no less” on the slavery issue. This change outraged many Southern delegates who wanted an explicitly pro-slavery platform and who had found Section Twelve to be to their advantage, and therefore threatened to abandon the party unless the National Convention revised the now changed Section Twelve.<sup>74</sup>

Southern delegates’ unhappiness with the repeal of Section Twelve manifested itself in the case of Percy Walker. When asked to vote on a seemingly unrelated motion to postpone the presidential nomination until July 3 and thus postpone any change in the new platform adopted by the National Council, Walker abstained and left the convention. The *Mobile Daily Advertiser* reported that “when Alabama was called: Percy Walker declined to vote, and took his farewell, saying that he felt he was witnessing the obsequies of the American party, and standing over the grave of its nationality.” Another Alabama delegate, William R. Smith of Montgomery, “spoke in a different strain, and eloquently urged an immediate nomination as the salvation of the party. Men, not platforms, were what we wanted – men in whom the country North and South, could repose confidence.”<sup>75</sup> Ultimately, Walker’s withdrawal from the convention had nothing to do with whether or not the Know-Nothings delayed their presidential nomination five months. Rather, it was Walker’s reaction to the repeal of Section Twelve that motivated

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December 5, 1856, Microfilm 16P. See also Thompson, “Mobile, Alabama, 1850-1861,” pg. 170, for a brief discussion of the Know-Nothings in office.

<sup>74</sup> Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, pgs. 167, 206-207 (quotations).

his walkout, and the possibility of delaying a Presidential nomination and the subsequent approval of the party platform to which he so objected.

That night, Smith persuaded Walker to return to the convention the next day. When questioned by the other delegates about his sudden departure from the convention, as well as the departure of so many other southern Know-Nothing delegates, who in fact did not return the following day, Walker stated that:

He had spoken firmly and frankly, and he had endeavored to speak kindly. When he left the Convention, he was impelled by a strong sense of duty. He had endeavored to let the position of the South be distinctly understood. He felt constrained to abandon this Convention, but he had yielded to the entreaties of men from all sections of the country, and returned. The circumstances are now entirely changed. The Convention had shown a desire to reform, and relinquished abstracts. He felt that in returning to these Councils, he in nowise forfeited his self respect or subjected himself to the charge of sudden change of opinion. When the time arrived he would indicate the preference of Alabama for a candidate for the highest office in this government.<sup>76</sup>

In the following days, the national Convention would nominate Millard Fillmore as the Know-Nothings' 1856 Presidential candidate. Historians often see Fillmore, who was Zachary Taylor's running mate in 1848 and ascended to the presidency as a Whig upon Taylor's death in July of 1850, as a candidate nominated primarily by the southern wing of the party, and a candidate whose nomination was a vain attempt by the Know-Nothings at uniting both the North and the South as the sectional conflict within the party reached new heights. The efforts proved futile, as most northern Know-Nothings refused to support the ex-President, and many northern delegates bolted the convention – far

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<sup>75</sup> *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, March 2, 1856.

<sup>76</sup> *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, March 5, 1856. "The circumstances are now entirely changed" refers to northern conservatives who joined forces with southern Know-Nothings to recast the party platform without the new Section Twelve in response to the southern walkout. See Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, pg. 207.

more than had bolted in June 1855. The 1856 convention marked the beginning of the end for the Know-Nothings, at the national level and in Mobile.<sup>77</sup>

In Mobile, the events of the national convention took their toll on the Know-Nothings. The Democrats and the *Register*, as they had all along (with the exception of the 1855 Know-Nothing national convention), took advantage of the split, and continued to link the northern Know-Nothings with antislavery movements, thereby further undermining the legitimacy of the party in Mobile. The *Register* especially emphasized the repeal of the Twelfth Section. The *Advertiser*, however, fully supported and upheld Fillmore's nomination, refused to abandon the northern wing of the party, and continued to downplay any sectional split. The *Advertiser* insisted that Fillmore's nomination was nearly a unanimous choice, reporting that "as it was he [Fillmore] received more than *three-fourths* of the votes cast, and was afterwards nominated by acclamation. This remarkable unanimity among the delegates respecting the man to be nominated, doubtless led to the abandonment of the project to postpone, particularly as the South who had mainly urged such postponement, was gratified by the selection of her first choice as the candidate."<sup>78</sup> Rather than abandoning their affiliation with northern Know-Nothings and emphasizing a strengthening of the southern wing of the party, Know-Nothings in Mobile remained true and discounted any national conflict within the party.

As the *Register* and *Advertiser* exchanged jabs about the Convention, the *Advertiser* contended, "we suspect it is the odor of nationality about the proceedings at Philadelphia – particularly of the nominating convention – that so disturbs our friend

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<sup>77</sup> On the split at the February 1856 nominating convention, see Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, pgs. 206-219.

<sup>78</sup> *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, February 27, 1856. Emphasis theirs.

[Forsyth of the *Register*]. Instead of finding a distracted and sectional party to contend against, the Cincinnati nominees will have to meet a powerful, conservative national party, having the unity, the will, and the ability to carry off the victory in the coming struggle.”<sup>79</sup>

Furthermore, the Know-Nothings in Mobile even went so far as to lie in emphasizing their national solidarity. Again, following the much-maligned Philadelphia convention of 1856, the *Advertiser* reported that:

It was stated in the report of the concluding proceedings of the American Nominating Convention that a portion of the Illinois Convention withdrew with the bolters, to whom the National position of the Convention and the nomination of Mr. Fillmore was distasteful. We are authorized to state, on the authority of a member of the Illinois delegation, that no such withdrawal took place. All the delegation remained, and all but one voted for Mr. Fillmore. Several of the delegates were elected expressly as the friends of Mr. Fillmore’s nomination, and he is believed to have been the choice of a large majority of that party in that State.<sup>80</sup>

This statement was entirely false. The delegation from Illinois, led by William W. Danenhower of Chicago, bolted the convention, as it appeared that the pro-Southern majority would in fact nominate Fillmore. Danenhower and his delegates returned to Illinois, where the Illinois Know-Nothing Council passed the Illinois platform that contained absolutely no mention of the slavery question, and instead focused entirely on issues of anti-Catholicism and immigration. Such evidence indicates that the Know-Nothings in Mobile were perfectly willing to go to great lengths to demonstrate some

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<sup>79</sup> *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, February 29, 1856. In this quote, the “Cincinnati nominees” refers to the Democratic candidates who would be coming out of the Democratic nominating convention in Cincinnati in June of 1856.

<sup>80</sup> *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, March 6, 1856.

sense of national solidarity even by lying or stretching the truth. The reality of the situation was that their national solidarity was unraveling rapidly.<sup>81</sup>

The growing sectional conflict in the national party even altered the focus of Know-Nothings' disingenuous nativistic rhetoric. Surrounding the days of the national convention, the *Advertiser* reported that:

A meeting of German citizens has been held at Galena, ILL., at which resolutions were adopted, and signed by one hundred and fifty-seven persons, declaring that slavery is a curse, and the fight against its propagation is the most urgent issue of the present time, and that they will support only such candidates for State offices as are opposed to the Kansas bill, and Know-Nothingism.<sup>82</sup>

The dating of this editorial (late February of 1856) clearly relates to the bolt of the northern Know-Nothings from the Philadelphia convention and Democratic charges that linked northern Know-Nothings to antislavery movements. To rebut that charge, and remind its readers of the need for a nativistic party, the *Advertiser* now stressed the antislavery sentiments of the immigrants who were the avowed foes of northern Know-Nothings.

The Democrats, in turn, emphasized the rapid decline of the Know-Nothing party. After a set of county elections in May, the *Register* noted that the returns had a "strong Democratic flavor" and that "all this exhibits an awakening sense of the people to the danger to the country and the necessity of concerted action at the South against its enemies."<sup>83</sup> Even after Know-Nothings ruptured along sectional lines at their 1856

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<sup>81</sup> By coincidence, the *Mobile Daily Advertiser* happened to mention the Illinois delegation at the national convention, which I am familiar with having completed a previous study on the Know-Nothings in Chicago. See Erik Alexander, "Temperance, Slavery, and Nativism: Chicago and the Origins of the Know-Nothing Party, 1850-1856" (B.A. Honors Thesis: University of Illinois, 2001), pgs. 60-61.

<sup>82</sup> *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, February 26, 1856.

<sup>83</sup> *Mobile Daily Register*, May 11, 1856.

convention, Democrats insisted that southern Know-Nothings would not dare to stick with Fillmore, the favorite of Southerners at that convention:

If Mr. Fillmore keeps the field, he will receive the smallest vote ever cast for a Presidential candidate. According to present appearances, it would be difficult to put one's finger on a single State that will vote for him. The only contest lies between the Constitutional Democracy and the Seward Republicans.<sup>84</sup>

Democrats continued to claim that if antislavery northern Know-Nothings could not win on their own, they would combine with Republicans in the 1856 presidential election. The Know-Nothings' national unity appeared to be broken beyond repair.

In the face of such unraveling, several of the leaders of the Mobile Know-Nothing party jumped ship and declared themselves Democrats. In particular, Congressman Percy Walker and the Know-Nothing mayor, Jones Withers, defected back to the Democrats, justifying their decisions by the rapid decline of the Know-Nothings at the national and state level. Lewy Dorman states that Walker "left his party and stumped his district against the principle of religious proscription of the American Party, as typified by C.C. Langdon, his former political ally."<sup>85</sup>

J. Mills Thornton argues that Alabama Know-Nothings were unhappy with the national platform and its treatment of southern rights, and that they held a general distaste for the candidacy of Millard Fillmore. The unhappiness with issues of southern rights should come as no shock as both Jones and Withers were ex-Southern Rights Democrats. Thus, Thornton observes, "in the late spring and early summer of 1856 the conversion from the Know-Nothing cause became a flood...Included in this number were

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<sup>84</sup> *Mobile Daily Register*, May 16, 1856.

<sup>85</sup> On Walker's and Withers's defections, see the Mobile Board of Alderman, Meeting of July 1, 1856, Minutes of November 15, 1855 to December 22, 1857, *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, October 1, 1856, and Dorman, *Party Politics in Alabama*, pg., 126 (quote).



Congressmen Percy Walker – who was hanged in effigy for the action.” Whatever the cause, the central aspect of the matter is that the defections occurred after the national convention in February. This timing is crucial with Walker, who was clearly displeased with the proceedings at Philadelphia. Additionally, there appeared to be a lack of confidence in the candidacy of Millard Fillmore, whether that was a general distaste for the man or a belief that only Buchanan could defeat Frémont. A sagging confidence in the future of the Know-Nothing party was apparent both in Alabama and in the nation.<sup>86</sup>

Over the summer of 1856, then, Know-Nothing politicians – both in Mobile and in Alabama at large – began abandoning the party in droves. Throughout the presidential campaign, Know-Nothing editors across the state carried different opinions on what to do. Some abandoned the party entirely, others supported Fillmore but expressed disapproval at the national platform, while still others approved of the national platform but refused to support Fillmore.<sup>87</sup> In Mobile, the *Advertiser* remained committed to the platform, Fillmore, and the party in spite of the defections and deteriorating structure of the party organization. When the presidential elections of that year took place, Fillmore made a poor showing. Nationally, he received only 22 percent of the vote; in Alabama, the number was slightly higher at 30 percent. Mobile still proved to be a Know-Nothing stronghold, as Fillmore captured 52 percent of the vote there. Still, this was very different from the 70 percent of the vote that the party had claimed in the municipal elections just one year before. There were no municipal elections in the fall of 1856, as the races took place every three years beginning in 1852. With no municipal or

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<sup>86</sup> See Thornton, *Politics and Power in a Slave Society*, pg. 359.

<sup>87</sup> Dorman, *Party Politics in Alabama*, pgs. 126-128.

gubernatorial elections until 1858 and 1859, a quick look at the 1857 Congressional race will help us to better understand the demise of the Know-Nothings in Mobile.

In 1857, with the party organization being all but dead at both the state and national level, and despite the utter failure of Fillmore in 1856, the Know-Nothings still ran a candidate for Congress, James McCaskill. Expectedly, McCaskill, did not show nearly as well as Walker had two years earlier, losing to none other than John Stallworth, the very same Democrat whom the Know-Nothing candidate, Percy Walker had defeated! At the level of the first Congressional District, the Know-Nothings took only 38 percent of the vote. McCaskill did moderately better in the county, taking 43 percent of the vote. Election turnout remained steady, returning to the similar levels of the 1853 Congressional election, and jumping 6 percent from 1855. What is striking is that the Democrats gained over 600 votes from 1855 – more than 50 percent of their 1855 polling – suggesting that all the voters who had abandoned the party in 1855 returned in 1857.<sup>88</sup>

In response to this election, the *Daily Register* rejoiced, running an editorial headlined by a large American flag and proclaiming that “the enemy had stolen even our war-cry and assumed the guardianship of those sacred Southern Rights which the Democracy from the foundation of the government have preserved with jealous vigilance, over division and desertion in our own ranks we have achieved a glorious victory...Our victory is complete, our triumph overwhelming. In the city of Mobile, the heretofore impregnable fortress of Know Nothingism, we have carried the election.”<sup>89</sup> A few days later the *Register* reflected on the outcome of the election and determined that:

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<sup>88</sup> For election results see Appendix I, Tables 8 and 9.

<sup>89</sup> *Mobile Daily Register*, August 4, 1857.

Every indication assures us that the night mare of Know Nothingism is over. The name has lost its power; the party its prestige. The principles retain not even the nominal respect of those who formerly pronounced them almost inspired. The offspring of error and fanaticism, it disfigured for awhile the fair face of this free land, but has perished, and will soon be forgotten, or remembered only as a warning. In less than twenty years the very existence of such an "order" will be denied, and nurses will silence the cries of their wards with tales of the "bloody dark lanterns."<sup>90</sup>

This would be the last showing of the Know-Nothings in an election in Mobile. By 1858 and 1859, the Democrats had regained complete control of the city's party competition, and once again split into old-line Democrats and Southern Rights Democrats. In 1858, Jones M. Withers, the former Know-Nothing, stood for mayor as a Democrat with no opposition. In 1859, both the Congressional and gubernatorial elections saw old-line Democratic and Southern Rights Democratic candidates. In the 1858 and 1859 elections with turnouts at the same levels or higher, voting results suggest that the Southern Rights Democrats likely absorbed the former Whig and Know-Nothing constituencies. The Know-Nothing party in Mobile had officially died and left a one-party system of Democrats and Southern Rights Democrats in its place.

Following a minor set of municipal judicial elections in May of 1859, the *Mobile Daily Advertiser* commented that the "judicial elections passed off yesterday very quietly, and appeared to excite little interest." The *Advertiser* also noted, "both the candidates are Democrats, but we could not hear that party questions were brought into the contest."<sup>91</sup> This is evidence that by 1859, the political system of Alabama had become a one-party system. The gubernatorial candidates for 1859, for example, were both Democrats, with

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<sup>90</sup> *Mobile Daily Register*, August 6, 1857.

<sup>91</sup> *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, May 3, 1859.

one standing as a Southern Rights Democrat and the other as an old-line Democrat.

Much of the legacy Know-Nothing failure left in Mobile, Alabama at large, and across the South was the one-party system that faced that the 1860 presidential election and the prospect of secession. If such historians like Michael Holt, J. Mills Thornton, and Daniel Crofts are correct, and it was the lack of an effective two-party system in the Lower South that helps to explain the differences in the timing of secession between the Upper and Lower South, understanding the rise and fall of the Know-Nothings, then, is central to explaining the chronology surrounding secession and the coming of the Civil War.<sup>92</sup>

In trying to understand the role southern Know-Nothings played in secession, a very recent study of political culture in Mississippi by Christopher Olsen implicates the Know-Nothings in the eventual secession of Mississippi from the Union. Olsen takes a brief look at the Know-Nothing party in Mississippi, in an attempt to place that party within the context of a political culture of honor, masculinity and antipartyism he outlines earlier in the book. On the Know-Nothings, Olsen offers a somewhat surprising and revisionist interpretation. Traditional interpretations of the Know-Nothings routinely emphasize antipartyism as a central component to the party's meteoric rise and fall, and one would think Olsen would follow suit in the context of his antiparty Mississippi. Yet,

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<sup>92</sup> On Alabama's move towards a one-party system, see Dorman, *Party Politics in Alabama*, pgs. 137-153; and Thornton, *Politics and Power in a Slave Society*, chp. VI. For further discussion of the implications of the one-party system to southern politics and secession, see Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s*, pgs. 219-259. See also Daniel W. Crofts, *Reluctant Confederates: Upper South Unionists in the Secession Crisis* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989), pgs. 37-65. Here, Crofts echoes many of Holt's assertions regarding the importance of effective two-party systems in the Upper South in delaying secession. On Alabama's Know-Nothings implications in secession, see Frederick, "Unintended Consequences," pg. 31 where he argues that "the cruel fate of unintended consequences sent Whigs, Americans [Know-Nothings], and almost every other interest group or political faction into the camp of the Democrats by the end of the decade. Americans [Know-Nothings], seeking compromise from within the Union, had instead helped to make the case for a more unified South that aggressively opposed the *isms* of the North." Emphasis his.

rather than emphasizing the antipartyism so central to Know-Nothing popularity elsewhere, Olsen does exactly the opposite, arguing that the Know-Nothings were in fact a brief interlude of party loyalty and “produced a temporary revolution in Mississippi’s antiparty political culture.” Ultimately, though, as the Know-Nothings split at the national level over sectional issues, they failed as well in Mississippi, and the state moved ever closer to secession.<sup>93</sup>

Know-Nothing failure, for Olsen, thus paved the way for secession, and in his final chapter, Olsen examines the political reaction of secession, contending that “Mississippi’s secession resulted primarily from the perceived affront to southern honor and men’s visceral anger, both inflamed by the state’s antiparty, community-based political culture.”<sup>94</sup> According to Olsen, Mississippi’s political culture forced Mississippians into secession, as they interpreted Republican actions in the North as direct attacks on their own personal honor. Voters supposedly followed the lead of politicians in questioning their role in the Union as northern Republicans gained popularity and Lincoln won the Presidency in 1860. Furthermore, Olsen also argues that if Mississippians had embraced a two-party system during the antebellum period, as did states in the Upper South, perhaps the face of secession would have looked much different. Olsen thus identifies secessionism in Mississippi as the result, in part, of a long tradition of a political culture defined by masculinity, honor, and antipartyism. The Know-Nothings, then, were simply a part of that long tradition, not a central trigger in the coming of the secession crisis.

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<sup>93</sup> Christopher Olsen, *Political Culture and Secession in Mississippi: Masculinity, Honor, and the Antiparty Tradition, 1830-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pg. 166. Olsen was a student of Ronald Formisano, one of the ethnoculturalists discussed in the introduction.

Olsen's analysis is unconvincing and remains inapplicable to the case for Mobile and Alabama. Olsen himself admits that Mississippi's tradition of antiparty political culture was unique with the possible exception of South Carolina. Additionally, in Mobile, there was not a comparable level of antiparty rhetoric in the emergence of the Know-Nothings as Michael Holt has argued about the party in the North and similarly in the South. Therefore, we must look elsewhere to explain the role of Know-Nothings in secession.

One historian has argued that in Mobile, "the brief electoral success of the Know-Nothings in 1855-56 had the effect of unifying a divided Democratic Party."<sup>95</sup> This conclusion does seem correct, as ultimately, Know-Nothing political maneuverings did force Alabama Democrats to unite over certain issues, like opposition to state aid for internal improvements. Know-Nothing failure also proved to be the impetus for dissident Democrats to return to the party's fold. Finally, Know-Nothing failure to create a viable two-party system in Alabama resulted in the one-party system so crucial to the success of secessionism.

If many dissident Southern Rights voters had abandoned the Democrats in Mobile, it seems likely that they turned to the Know-Nothings. When the Know-Nothings did not succeed, it seems likely that those Southern Rights Democrats and former Whigs (with the possible exception of staunch old-line Whigs like John Gayle, William Alston, and Charles Langdon) and Know-Nothings funneled into the Southern Rights Democrats. Much like the Republicans in the North, Know-Nothing (and some

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<sup>94</sup> Olsen, *Political Culture and Secession in Mississippi*, pg. 194.

<sup>95</sup> Michael Thompson, *Mobile: The New History of Alabama's First City* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2001), pg. 100.

former Whig) voters flowed into the ranks of the Democrats, or Southern Rights Democrats, and certainly influenced the eventual secession of Alabama from the Union. We need further research, though, to determine exactly where former Know-Nothing voters turned, and precisely what role they played in a voter dealignment to a one-party system in Alabama.<sup>96</sup> In Mobile, it seems that a rogue group of Southern Rights Democrats who favored state aid policies were intrinsically involved in the rise and fall of the Know-Nothings.

Otherwise, traditional assessments of southern Know-Nothings seem mostly incorrect, at least as Mobile was concerned. The Know-Nothings of Mobile were not merely continuations of Whiggery as Tyler Anbinder argues, nor were they a conservative, Unionist party as W. Darrell Overdyke argued over a half-century ago. Here, Michael Holt's most recent contention that the Know-Nothings were on the one hand a refuge for former Whigs, but at the same time proved tremendously appealing to southern Democratic voters and politicians (who likely found the Know-Nothings appealing as a result of their previous splits with the Democratic party in Mobile) is surely correct. As election results show, Know-Nothingism in Mobile harbored dissident Whig and Democrat politicians who exploited the movement for their own, personal gain and likewise repelled some Whigs who abhorred the movement.

The case of the Know-Nothings in Mobile also seems to lend further evidence for Brian Crowson's argument that the southern Know-Nothing party was a product of "local

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<sup>96</sup> One possibility for further research in attempting to link southern Know-Nothings to secession would be to track down reports of Cooperationist Conventions during secession elections allowing one to crosscheck names in attendance at those conventions with former Know-Nothing politicians.

circumstance.”<sup>97</sup> Crowson examines four different port cities in his dissertation, and finds that the political rhetoric of the Know-Nothings varied in each city. Mobile appears to have been yet another variation of the southern wing of the party. Consequently, while the emergence of the Know-Nothings as a political movement may have been entirely dependent on the sectional conflict in Mobile, this may have varied across the South, as Crowson certainly emphasizes the centrality of nativism elsewhere. We still need a broader study of the party in the South in order to flesh out the exact nature of southern Know-Nothingism.

Holt, though, appears to be incorrect, at least in Mobile, in his assessment that the Know-Nothings in the South spread for the same reasons that they did in the North. It is likely that the order as a social, secret, fraternity spread for many of the same reasons as it did in the North – particularly in Mobile with its significant foreign-born and Catholic population. The emergence of the order and its evolution as a political movement, however, seemed to have been independent of ethnocultural issues and instead entirely dependent on the sectional conflict. Here, then, Anbinder would be correct in his assessment that the order in the South was different than in the North. Anbinder’s justification for excluding the southern wing of the party from his study is still incorrect, however, as he argues that study of the southern Know-Nothings cannot shed light on the collapse of the Second Party System. This is faulty reasoning. Know-Nothings were central to the collapse of the Second Party System in both northern and southern politics.

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<sup>97</sup> See Crowson, “Southern Port City Politics,” pg. 18 where he posits “the Know Nothings in these cities [Norfolk, Wilmington, Charleston, and Savannah] responded to uniquely local sets of circumstances that produced a marked hybridization of the movement.” I find this argument compelling in that entirely independently I came up with the exact same hypothesis – that the Know-Nothing Party was one of local



Thus, while southern Know-Nothingism may indeed have been different from its northern counterpart, we still need much study of the southern wing of the party in order to understand its precise role in the collapse of the Second Party System and the coming of the Civil War.

# Appendix I: Tables of Election Results for Mobile, 1848-1861

**Table 1**  
**Mayoral Elections in the City of Mobile, 1849-1861**  
 (\* = winning candidate)

Year	Whigs/Know-Nothings	Democrats
1849	*Charles C. Langdon(W) 1,037 votes (59%)	Charles LeBaron 707 votes (41%)
1850	*Charles C. Langdon (W) 959 votes (50.3%)	Joseph Sewell 947 votes (49.7%)
1851	William Brooks (W) 842 votes (44%)	*Joseph Sewell 1,053 votes 56%
1852	*Charles C. Langdon (W) 1,162 votes (51%)	Joseph Sewell 408 votes (18%)  Price Williams 575 votes (25%)
1855	*Jones M. Withers (KN) 1,206 votes (69.8%)	Hugh Monroe 521 votes (30.2%)
1858	No opposition	*Jones M Withers

**Table 2**  
**Gubernatorial Election Returns For Mobile County, 1853-1859**  
 (\* = Winning Candidate For Mobile)

Year	Whigs/Know-Nothings	Democrats
1853	William Earnest (W) 1,230 votes (43.9%)	*John Winston 1,575 votes (56.1%)
1855	*George Shortridge (KN) 1,778 votes (60.9%)	John Winston 1,141 votes (39.1%)
1859	No Opposition	*A.B. Moore 2,047 votes (61.3%)  William Samford (So. Rights Dem.) 1,290 votes (38.7%)

**Table 3**  
**Municipal Election held Monday, December 6, 1852**  
 (Source: Mobile *Daily Register*, Thursday, December 9, 1852)  
 \*=Winning Candidate

								Totals
Ward	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
<b>Mayor</b>								
*C.C. Langdon, W	187	173	169	239	45	241	126	1,162
Price Williams, D	65	73	78	95	51	141	67	575
Joseph Sewell, SRD	47	10	28	66	90	110	57	408
Jno. Rolston, D	14	22	16	12	7	26	3	91
T.J. DeYampert, SRD	2	5	3	2	1	6		19
Drury Thompson, D			3	5	5	2		15
J.D. Humphreyville, SRD					2			2
	302	287	297	125	201	523	253	2,275
<b>Common Council</b>								
*R.S. Banker, W	208	243	237	317	109	410	190	1,714
*C.W. Gazzam, W	207	229	212	259	87	348	167	1,500
*L.T. Woodruff, W	143	132	146	206	159	288	145	1,219
*A.H. Ryland, W	132	156	146	219	40	237	230	1,071
*Thos. St. John, W	144	156	155	216	37	219	99	1,023
*Chas. T. Kerchum, D	148	57	121	207	31	224	121	1,010
*P.B. Pomeroy, D	123	98	116	179	144	230	108	992
A.S. Dumeé, D	131	140	142	208	36	225	128	977
A.R. Wesher, D	116	122	94	192	34	204	83	849
Thos. T. Bolling, SRD	105	111	134	119	74	193	76	812
John King, SRD	79	93	124	118	89	187	73	763
G.A. Kitchum, W	83	91	135	115	73	172	58	728
N. Chamberlain, SRD	74	41	66	148	112	125	86	702
W.A. Williams, D	48	14	38	59	79	101	56	397
C.P. Gage, D	60	17	37	96	92	100	57	353
A. Auld, W		8	29	79	86	93	54	344
P. McDermott, D	46	9	17	58	89	87	45	351
A.M. Quigley, W	23	38	60	65	20	44	38	293
Jno. B. Todd, SRD	5	5	2				2	14
J.S. Gliddon, D	2			-	1			3
Scattering, W	6	5		6				17

**Table 4**  
**Municipal Election Held Monday, December 6, 1852**  
 (Source: Mobile *Daily Register*, Thursday, December 9, 1852)  
 \*=Winning Candidate(s)

Wards	Alderman	Party	Vote Totals
1	*R. Greig	W	185
	*R.H. Slough	W	183
	*Fred Hall	D	130
	T.J. Carver	SRD	83
	M. Robinson	D	82
	Owen Casey	SRD	67
	I. Parmly	W	36
2	*B.F. Scattergood	W	168
	*H.W. Brodorn	W	161
	*C.W. Austin	D	128
	Jarvis Turner	SRD	108
3	*John B. Todd	W	252
	*W.G. Wright	W	212
	*J.C. Turner	D	175
	Wm. Barnewall, Jr.	D	91
	James Sanda	SRD	49
4	*J. Kirkbride	W	211
	*A. Gage	D	157
	*A.L. Pope	W	155
	John Roberts	SRD	115
	Chas. H. Bostwick	D	108
5	*John Rogers	W	157
	*T McGonigal	D	155
	*S.C. Stramler	W	145
	Michael Hines	SRD	12
6	*S.T. Douglas	W	277
	*R.B. Roulston	W	254
	*Gen. Shifflin	D	197
	E.J. Roilings	SRD	175
	C.S. Shreve	D	167
	O Woodbury	SRD	144
	Samuel Penny	W	119
	Thos. E. Bass	D	86
7	*Geo. A Cleveland	D	134
	*Geo. E Sherwin	W	132
	*Wm. E. Fisher	W	126
	E.B. Lott	SRD	106
	H. Steinberg	D	75
	John Stockey	SRD	65
	J.O. Cummings, Sr.	W	62

**Table 5**  
**Municipal Election held Monday, December 3, 1855**

								<b>Totals</b>
<b>Ward</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	
<b>Mayor</b>								
Hugh Monroe, D	58	45	62	68	58	135	95	521
J.M. Withers, KN	170	153	170	170	107	340	146	<b>1,206</b>
<b>Councilmen</b>								
Evan Aust. II, D	54	45	63	60	57	130	90	503
Thos St. John, KN	171	155	166	121	106	338	157	<b>1,204</b>
Lloyd Bowers, D	58	46	64	65	57	133	93	516
Thos P Miller, KN	167	153	166	121	106	334	146	<b>1,193</b>
James Sands, D	58	45	64	65	57	131	93	504
L.T. Woodruff, KN	170	155	165	121	106	337	147	<b>1,201</b>
A.C. Waugh, D	55	42	62	65	57	129	94	504
H.S. Levert, KN	169	156	168	120	106	337	147	<b>1,203</b>
Geo. Blakeslee, D	56	46	64	66	57	134	93	516
W.C. Jennings, KN	169	153	164	119	108	336	146	<b>1,193</b>
C.P. Gage, D	57	47	65	95	57	135	93	519
Geo. Schiefflin, KN	167	152	166	119	105	341	148	<b>1,198</b>
P.B. Pomeroy, D	59	45	64	65	57	135	92	517
J.J.T. Wilson, KN	168	152	167	119	106	342	148	<b>1,202</b>

<b>Ward</b>	<b>Aldermen</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>Vote Totals</b>
1	R.H. Slough R.B. Owen	KN D	<b>157</b> 48
2	Wm. B. Seawell R.G. Cook	KN D	<b>143</b> 19
3	A.G. Ross Wm.D. Prout	KN D	<b>178</b> 54
4	J. Kirkbride L.D. Spear	KN D	<b>109</b> 35
5	S.C. Stramler Dr. W.A. Williams	KN D	<b>122</b> 41
6	E.G. Pratt Thos. E. Bass	KN D	<b>332</b> 137
7	R.L. Bufoot C.F. Moulton	KN D	<b>128</b> 111

**Table 6**  
**Presidential Election Returns, 1848-1856:**  
**City of Mobile, Mobile County, State of Alabama**  
 (Percent of the Vote Received)

	<b>City of Mobile</b>	<b>Mobile County</b>	<b>Alabama</b>
<u>1848</u>			
Democratic	n/a	45%	55%
Whig	n/a	55%	45%
<u>1852</u>			
Democratic	53%	53%	61%
Whig	44%	43%	34%
Troup Candidacy	3%	4%	5%
<u>1856</u>			
Democratic	48%	51%	70%
Know-Nothing	52%	49%	30%

**Table 7**  
**Political Composition of the Board of Aldermen and of the Common Council of The  
 City of Mobile, 1850-1860**

(Source: Thompson, "Mobile, Alabama, 1850-1861," pg. 141)

	<b>Board of</b>	<b>Aldermen</b>		<b>Common</b>	<b>Council</b>	
	Whigs/Know Nothings	Democrats	Not Known	Whigs/Know Nothings	Democrats	Not Known
1850	11	3		7	0	
1851	8	6		7	0	
1852	5	9		0	7	
1853	13	8		5	2	
1854	13	8		6	1	
1855	14	7		6	1	
1856	14	6	1	7	0	
1857	11	4	6	7	0	
1858	9	8	4	7	0	
1858	4	9	8	2	1	4
1860	3	14	4	2	3	3
1861	2	10	9	1	3	3

**Table 8**  
**United States Congressional Elections in the First Congressional District**  
**of Alabama: 1847-1859**  
 (\* = Winning Candidate)

Year	Whigs/ Know-Nothings	Democrats
1847	*John Gayle (W) 5,050 votes (53%)	John Taylor 4,490 votes (47%)
1849	*William Alston (W) 4,922 votes (52%)	Charles Sellers 4,588 votes (48%)
1851	Charles C. Langdon (W) 3,849 votes (42%)	*John Bragg 5,372 votes (58%)
1853	Edward Lockwood (W) 4,777 votes (49.5%)	*Phillip Phillips 4,880 votes (50.5%)
1855	*Percy Walker (KN) 5,656 votes (52%)	John Stallworth 5,137 votes (48%)
1857	James McCaskill (KN) 4,330 votes (38%)	*John Stallworth 7,058 votes (62%)
1859	No Opposition	*John Stallworth 7,352 votes (63%)  Francis B. Shepard (So. Rights Dem.) 4,258 votes (37%)

**Table 9**  
**Results from Mobile County of United States Congressional Elections in**  
**the First Congressional District of Alabama: 1847-1859**  
 (\* = Winning Candidate in Mobile County)

<b>Year</b>	<b>Whigs/ Know-Nothings</b>	<b>Democrats</b>
1847	*John Gayle (W) 1,280 votes (53%)	John Taylor 1,117 votes (47%)
1849	*William Alston (W) 1,343 votes (53%)	Charles Sellers 1,192 votes (47%)
1851	Charles C. Langdon (W) 1,225 votes (42%)	*John Bragg 1,678 votes (58%)
1853	Edward Lockwood (W) 1,407 votes (46%)	*Phillip Phillips 1,644 votes (54%)
1855	*Percy Walker (KN) 1,760 votes (60%)	John Stallworth 1,162 votes (40%)
1857	James McCaskill (KN) 1,321 votes (43%)	*John Stallworth 1,775 votes (57%)
1859	No Opposition	*John Stallworth 1,925 votes (55%)  Francis B. Shepard (So. Rights Dem.) 1,578 votes (45%)

**Table 10**  
**Estimated Population of Voting Age Males in Mobile, 1855**  
 (Estimated by calculating growth rate between 1850 and 1860. Growth rates  
 calculated citywide and by ethnicity.)

<b>Wards</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>Totals</b>
Native-born	275	621	451	283	138	847	397	3,060
Foreign-born	114	332	423	379	305	752	399	3,099
<b>Totals</b>	<b>389</b>	<b>953</b>	<b>874</b>	<b>662</b>	<b>443</b>	<b>1,599</b>	<b>796</b>	<b>6,159</b>



**Table 11**  
**Ecological Regression Estimates of Percentage of Voters by Ethnicity and**  
**Political Party in 1855 Mayoral Election**  
 (Calculated from 1855 Population Estimates and equation  $y = a + bx$ )

	% Know-Nothing	% Democratic	% Non-Voters
% Native-Born	36%	8%	56%
% Foreign-Born	11%	12%	77%

**Appendix II: Population Figures of Voting-Age Males in Mobile: 1850-1860**

(Sources: U.S. Census Population Schedules for Mobile, AL, 1850 and 1860)

Note: "Other foreign-born" includes all nations reported outside of Ireland and Germany

**Table 1**  
**1850 Census**

(Note: 1850 Census was recorded city-wide, instead of by ward)

Origin of Birth	Population
United States	2,447
Ireland	936
Germany	355
Other foreign-born	1,088
<b>Total</b>	<b>4,826</b>

**Table 2**  
**1860 Census**

Origin of Birth	Ward							Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
United States	322	727	528	332	171	992	465	3,537
Ireland	67	165	198	138	187	390	151	1,686
Germany	17	75	65	107	31	138	100	671
Other	53	159	239	210	148	376	228	1,413
<b>Total</b>	<b>459</b>	<b>1,126</b>	<b>1,030</b>	<b>787</b>	<b>537</b>	<b>1,896</b>	<b>944</b>	<b>7,307</b>