

Spring 5-13-2016

## The "True American": William H. Christy and the Rise of the Louisiana Nativist Movement, 1835-1855

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The “True American”:  
William H. Christy and the Rise of the Louisiana Nativist Movement, 1835-1855

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
University of New Orleans  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts  
in  
History

by

Brett Todd

BA, University of Southern Mississippi, Fall 2012

May 2016

## Acknowledgments

Though the following thesis is an individual work, I could not have completed this study without the advice, support, and guidance of many people. First and foremost, I would like to thank my fiancé, Rebecca Ann Ratliff, for sticking by side throughout the entirety of this intellectual journey. Her love and affection gave me much needed emotional support during some of the more difficult parts of this study. I would like to thank Dr. Connie Atkinson, my committee chairman, for acting as my chief supervisor throughout the course of this study. Her ability to point out the strongest and weakest points in my work proved vital in helping me construct a thorough and comprehensive thesis. I would also like to thank Dr. Molly Mitchell and Dr. Robert L. Dupont, my committee members, for providing additional guidance as this study progressed over the years. Lastly, I would like to thank my family and friends who, with their endless encouragement and reassurance, helped make this thesis possible.

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## Abstract

In New Orleans during the 1830s, Irish immigration became a source of tension between newly settled Anglo-American elites and the long-established Creole hegemony. Out of this tension, in 1835 Anglo-American elites established the Louisiana Native American Association (LNAA) to block Irish immigrants from gaining citizenship and, ultimately, the right to vote. The Whig Party, whom most Louisiana Anglo-Americans supported, promoted nativism to prevent naturalized Irish from voting Democrat, the preferred party of the Creoles. This study will argue that the LNAA, under the leadership of William H. Christy, was not merely a reaction to increased Irish immigration, but was also a strategy used by the Louisiana Whig Party to gain dominion over state politics. In the end, this strategy did more harm than good to the Whigs as the nativist movement led to a fatal split within the party.

Keywords: Nativism; Immigration; Irish; New Orleans; Politics; Louisiana; William H. Christy

Throughout the Jacksonian and Antebellum eras in Louisiana, local politics often played out not only in the halls of state government, but also in the streets and taverns of its cities like New Orleans and Baton Rouge. It was a time when a political disagreement could lead to a brawl and legislation could lead to a lynching. Often the conflict stemmed from the evolving debate regarding Irish immigration to Louisiana. A central figure who aroused public opinion during this volatile period was William H Christy (1791-1865), an attorney, notary public, city council member, philanthropist, and staunch supporter of the nativist movement in Louisiana.<sup>1</sup> His unrelenting fight against Irish immigration not only shaped the nativist movement in Louisiana, but stood as a model for future nativist groups to grow and organize throughout the United States as the immigration debate engrained itself within national politics.

Nationally, opposition to immigration, particularly Irish immigration, increased significantly following the potato famine of 1848 and the resulting dramatic increase in immigration from Ireland to America that followed. In 1853, after internal grievances amongst its party members in Washington and after a disastrous defeat in the presidential election of 1852, the National Whig Party formally split, giving rise to a political party based solely on immigration reform by any means necessary. This new party became known as the Know-Nothing Party, also referred to as the American Party, and made its goal to repeal the Naturalization Act of 1802.<sup>2</sup> As elsewhere throughout the country, the Know-Nothings created

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<sup>1</sup> The term *nativist* refers to supporters of the anti-immigration movement. Most nativists used the term Native American to identify themselves because it represented their native Anglo-Protestant background and, supposed, connection to the first colonists to the Americas.

<sup>2</sup> The Naturalization Laws, originally enacted by Congress in 1790, provided federal requirements for immigrants who wished to become U.S. citizens. The original act only pertained to whites, so people of Asian, African, Native American, or any other nonwhite race were excluded from full citizenship. The original act allowed a white immigrant to become a citizen if he or she resided in the U.S. for five years. In 1798, Congress passed the Alien and Seditions Act which extended residency requirements for white immigrants to 14 years, but the act was repealed in 1802 to make the time of residency five years again. The LNAA and other nativist organizations sought to repeal or reform the Naturalization Act of 1802 to make it nearly impossible for Irish immigrants to attain citizenship. For more on the Naturalization Laws see Michael C. Lemay and Elliot Robert Barkan, eds., *U.S. Immigration and*

an atmosphere of intense violence in Louisiana geared towards the growing population of Irish immigrants in the state. Historians have often dated the height of the nativist movement in Louisiana to the 1850s, following the potato famine. However, nearly two decades prior to the formation of the Louisiana Know-Nothing Party in 1853, the Louisiana Native American Association (LNAA) was first to promote anti-immigration policies in Louisiana.

The LNAA was arguably one of the first nativist groups to emerge in the United States but was certainly not the last. At the same time the LNAA was spreading its message across Louisiana, other nativist groups were organizing in cities like Boston, Philadelphia, and New York.<sup>3</sup> With these new nativist groups conversing and gathering, ideas about how to approach the immigration issue began to transform. Unlike in the Northeast where anti-immigrant sentiment rose out of resentment to European immigration, the creation of the LNAA was tied directly to the political struggle between the Whig Party, predominately supported by Anglo-Americans, and the Democratic Party, predominately supported by Creoles. While recent historical literature has made note of this early nativist group in Louisiana, it has failed to emphasize how the Louisiana Whig Party, in a strategy to gain votes, used the LNAA and fear of immigration to attract Whig voters. This study will argue that the LNAA, under the leadership of William H. Christy, was not merely a reaction to increased Irish immigration, but was also a strategy used by the Louisiana Whig Party to gain dominion over state politics. A look at the career of William H. Christy can provide a glimpse of this earlier movement and reveal a complexity of issues not obvious when dating nativism to later events.

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*Naturalization Laws and Issues: A Documentary History* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group Inc., 1999), 11-16.

<sup>3</sup> For more on the evolution of the nativist movement in the United States see David H. Bennett, *The Party of Fear: From Nativist Movements to the New Right in American History* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 53-54.

## Historiography

Historians have generally framed the study of nativism in the United States around the idea that early anti-immigration movements were born solely out of American resentment towards immigration to the country, the chief concept being that foreigners were seen as a threat to America's cultural identity. One of the leading scholars on immigration, John Higham, defines nativism as "an inflamed and nationalistic type of ethnocentrism,"<sup>4</sup> and as an "intense opposition to an internal minority on the grounds of its foreign connections."<sup>5</sup> However, deeper studies reveal that nativism in the United States has been influenced by a range of issues, not merely the introduction of new cultures or ethnicities to the population. A more concentrated theory, and one this study supports, is that nativism was born out of opposition towards foreign-born citizens *entering into politics*. Arthur Cole ascribes the rise of nativism in the southern United States as "a movement of protest against the part in which foreigners and foreign-born citizens were allowed to play, whether legally or fraudulently, in the practical workings of the American political system," asserting that nativism did not emerge out of abhorrence towards the presence of immigrants, but rather out of protests against these immigrants obtaining positions in politics.<sup>6</sup>

Historians Edward Pessen, John M. Sacher, and Joseph Tregle center their studies on nativism in the political rabble-rousing of the Jacksonian era in the United States. In *Jacksonian America: Society, Personality, and Politics*, Pessen channels earlier theories in which he

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<sup>4</sup> John Higham, "Instead of a Sequel, or How I Lost My Subject," *Reviews in American History* 28, no. 2, (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 2000), 330.

<sup>5</sup> John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925*, (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 4.

<sup>6</sup> Arthur C. Cole, "Nativism in the Lower Mississippi Valley," *Proceedings of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association for the years 1912-13*, ed. Benjamin F. Shambaugh, vol. 6 (Cedar Rapids, IA: The Torch Press, 1913), 258.



describes the basic idea of nativism as being an “emotion only masquerading as a theory.”<sup>7</sup> Pessen’s study focuses on nativism in cities like New York and St. Louis where Whig elites used fear to, as he states, “stir up the emotions of urban voters against a religious plot” supposedly being hatched by the Catholic church.<sup>8</sup> Sacher and Tregle provide a more contemporary study on nativism in Louisiana. They consider the movement’s rise to be ethnically and politically based in hostilities between the Creole-Democrats and the Anglo-American Whigs during the 1830s.<sup>9</sup> Both historians follow a similar trend as Pessen, assigning the rise of Louisiana’s nativist movement to “ambitious political adventurers” who, they argued, played on the “emotional reactions” of its followers.<sup>10</sup> As this study will show, politics were a key component of the LNAA and the nativist movement in Louisiana. However, historians have failed to emphasize how the LNAA and its Whig supporters used the element of fear to garner votes.

More recently, historians such as David Roediger, Noel Ignatiev, and Bret Carol have placed the study of nativism within the context of class and race. In *How the Irish Became White*, Ignatiev defines the hallmark of racial oppression as “the reduction of all members of an oppressed group to one undifferentiated social status, a status beneath that of any member of any social class.”<sup>11</sup> Ignatiev explores how Irish immigrants, upon arrival in the United States, were treated as racially “other” or nonwhite before assimilating into white-American society.<sup>12</sup> He stresses that, unlike African Americans, the Irish immigrants’ whiteness would allow them to be

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<sup>7</sup> Edward Pessen, *Jacksonian America: Society, Personality, and Politics* (Homewood, IL: The Dorsey Press, 1969), 297.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 302.

<sup>9</sup> For more on contemporary studies regarding Jacksonian politics in Louisiana see, Joseph George Tregle, Jr., *Louisiana in the Age of Jackson: A Clash of Cultures and Personalities* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1999) and John M. Sacher, *A Perfect War of Politics: Parties, Politicians, and Democracy in Louisiana, 1824-1861* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2003).

<sup>10</sup> Tregle, *Louisiana in the Age of Jackson*, 302.

<sup>11</sup> Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York, NY and London, UK: Routledge, 1995), 2.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

easily assimilated into American society over the course of the nineteenth century. Roediger writes that nativists in antebellum America viewed the Irish immigrants' Catholic faith and perceived "subservience to a religious superiority" as a reason to label them as, what Roediger termed, a "race incapable of freedom."<sup>13</sup> Unlike Roediger and Ignatiev, Carol frames nativism within the context of both race and gender by stating that "nativist ideology in the U.S. has typically defined new immigrants (and often nonimmigrant racial and religious minorities) as unable or unwilling to become true Americans or real men, and also as threats to the rightful dominance of white, Protestant, heterosexual males."<sup>14</sup>

Thus, historians have long offered varying explanations as to specific motivations that may engender nativism. However, a wider study reveals that the rise of nativism has not been confined to one stimulus. Historically, nativism has formed out of a combination of dynamisms such as geography, politics, economics, demographics, ethnicity, religion, class, and race. This study will encompass all of these factors while looking to offer a new understanding of the history of nativism in Louisiana.

### **Creole/American Rivalry and the "Foreign French"**

To understand how nativism gained support in Louisiana during the 1830s, it is useful to note the demographic transformation of the state in the years prior to the formation of the LNAA. By focusing on the social, political, and ethnic demographics of Louisiana following the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, it is clear how what Tregle called "long-standing ethnic rivalries" helped the nativist movement emerge in the state. In Louisiana's early years as an American

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<sup>13</sup> David Roediger, *Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London, UK and New York, NY: Verso, 1991), 144.

<sup>14</sup> Bret E. Carol ed., *American Masculinities: A Historical Encyclopedia* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2003), 338.

territory, many of the state's citizens came from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds and voted along these ethnic lines.<sup>15</sup> This section will focus on two of these groups: the Creoles, who were mainly French-speaking Catholics who remained in Louisiana after French colonialism ended, and the Anglo-Americans, who were predominately English-speaking Protestants from other parts of the United States who came to Louisiana seeking to invest in the newly acquired territory.<sup>16</sup> While both the Creoles and the Anglo-Americans lived together under the same laws and flag, differing views on culture, politics, and immigration caused rivalries between the two groups.

Following the Louisiana Purchase, Tregle states that Anglo-American citizens from all over the United States traveled to Louisiana to “seek their fortunes in the rich acres of the new territory and in its markets, banks, court, and thriving trading centers.”<sup>17</sup> For example, by 1830 the lower *faubourg*<sup>18</sup> of New Orleans had a demographic of forty-five percent Anglo-American, thirty-five percent Creole, and twenty percent free persons of color, the population of Anglo-Americans having quadrupled since 1810.<sup>19</sup> The population growth in New Orleans was so significant that in 1835 the city was divided into three municipalities, each identified by its respective ethnic and cultural heritage.<sup>20</sup> As more and more diverse populations moved to the

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<sup>15</sup> Tregle, *Louisiana in the Age of Jackson*, 302.

<sup>16</sup> This term, *Creole*, refers here to New Orleans citizens of French-Catholic heritage. Creole would eventually be used to incorporate people of other ethnicities, including those of African-American heritage.

<sup>17</sup> Tregle, *Louisiana in the Age of Jackson*, 26.

<sup>18</sup> *Faubourg* is a French term for suburb or neighborhood and was commonly used to refer to specific areas in New Orleans. In this case, the lower faubourg refers to the neighborhoods east of the French Quarter such as the Marigny and Bywater neighborhoods.

<sup>19</sup> Paul F. Lachance, “Foreign French,” in *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization*, eds. Arnold R. Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 101-130.

<sup>20</sup> The First Municipality, encompassing the French Quarter, and the Third Municipality, comprising of the lower faubourg, were the Creole sectors while the Second Municipality, located in the upper faubourg in what is now considered the Uptown area, was the American sector. Tregle, *Louisiana in the Age of Jackson*, 308.

state, the days of Creole hegemony over Louisiana began to wane, changing the predominately French linguistic and cultural heritage that had long dominated the area.

The rivalry between Anglo-Americans and Creoles was fought not so much in the streets as it was at the polls. When it came to Louisiana politics during the 1830's, Creoles voted predominately Democrat, while Anglo-Americans voted predominately Whig. Both groups vied for control over city politics and the only way to win, with the groups fairly evenly divided, was through garnering more votes from outside their ethnic group. As the first wave of Irish immigrants came to the state around the early 1830s in search of work, the Creole Democrats, largely Catholic themselves, found a way to garner the votes they needed from this group to remain in power. Creole Democrats also had allies in the poor immigrant farmers of Louisiana who, like them, were against the taxation of property.<sup>21</sup> Louisiana Whigs, on the other hand, knowing that the Irish immigrants would vote Democrat, opposed immigrants having the right to vote, favored the extension of residency for non-native born citizens, and claimed that immigration would pose an economic and social threat to the stability of the state.

Just like in other parts of the country, many Irish immigrants coming to Louisiana were drawn almost immediately to the Democratic Party. During the presidency of Andrew Jackson, himself a son of Scots-Irish immigrants, the Democratic Party popularized American politics by giving immigrants the opportunity to get involved in the political fray.<sup>22</sup> The Irish immigrants, who were predominately Catholic, knew all too well the hardships faced under a Protestant aristocracy in Britain, and most became what Gleeson termed "ready-made Democrats" upon

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<sup>21</sup> Roger W. Shugg, *Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana: A Social History of White Farmers and Laborers during Slavery and After, 1840-1875* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1939), 130.

<sup>22</sup> David T. Gleeson, *The Irish in the South, 1815-1877* (Chapel Hill, NC and London, UK: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 95.

arrival in Louisiana.<sup>23</sup> Following the political principles popularized under Jackson, Creole Democrats favored the Naturalization Laws and promised citizenship and voting rights to incoming Irish immigrants who they viewed as future, potential voters. By offering citizenship, the Creole Democrats were easily able to gain the loyalty of Irish who would have to wait only five years to become citizens under the laws outlined in the Democratic-backed Naturalization Act of 1802.<sup>24</sup> For the Creole Democrats in Louisiana, immigration would provide a boost to its membership, saving the party by swelling its ranks with foreigners eager to acquire American citizenship.

Adding to Louisiana's population growth during the Antebellum period were an estimated 28,618 French who immigrated to the state between 1820-1852, further supplementing the ranks of the Creole Democrats.<sup>25</sup> These French immigrants became known around South Louisiana as the "Foreign French" to distinguish them from the Creole inhabitants.<sup>26</sup> They came in three waves to Louisiana, from 1820-1839, 1840-1848, and 1849-1852. Most of them came to Louisiana to escape poor living conditions in France brought on by famine, wealth disparity, war, political changes, persecution, and overpopulation, all of these factors influenced by the French Revolution, the Napoleonic Wars, the French Industrial Revolution, the Revolution of 1830, and, finally, the Revolution of 1848. The majority of the Foreign French were farmers and merchants, but along with them came French artisans, chefs, actors, and musicians as well as

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<sup>23</sup> Gleeson, *The Irish in the South, 1815-1877*, 95.

<sup>24</sup> *Naturalization Act of 1802*, ch. XXVIII, 7<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., (April 14, 1802), 153-155. From Library of Congress, *Acts of the Seventh Congress of the United States*, accessed December 30<sup>th</sup>, 2015, <http://www.loc.gov/law/help/statutes-at-large/7th-congress/c7.pdf>.

<sup>25</sup> For more on the statistics of the "Foreign French" immigration and the causes and effects that influenced French immigration to Louisiana from 1820-1852, see Carl A. Brasseaux, *The "Foreign French": Nineteenth-Century French Immigration into Louisiana, 1820-1852*, vols. 1, 2, & 3 (Lafayette, LA: The Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1992).

<sup>26</sup> Brasseaux, *The "Foreign French": Nineteenth-Century French Immigration into Louisiana, 1820-1852*, ix.

Catholic priests and missionaries. The Foreign French not only helped reestablish the declining French cultural heritage in Louisiana, but also helped to strengthen the Catholic religion in the state. In addition, the Foreign French provided the Creole Democrats with even further gains as they integrated into Louisiana society and brought with them more French speakers, bolstering the waning French language in the region.

Despite the fact that many Creoles and Irish immigrants identified themselves as Catholics, the two groups practiced their faith very differently. While nearly all the Irish were predominately devout followers who, as Doorely wrote, considered Catholicism to be “deeply rooted in their history and culture,” Creole men treated Catholicism with a “lackadaisical” attitude, usually attending church “only for weddings and funerals.”<sup>27</sup> P.G.T. Beauregard, a prominent Catholic Creole and future Confederate general, spoke for many Catholic Creoles when he declared, “If an individual was good and followed the Ten Commandments, the matter of his religious affiliation was of small consequence.”<sup>28</sup> Regardless of their differences pertaining to Catholicism, the Creole Democrats needed the Irish vote if they were to remain in power. As more and more Irish immigrants arrived in Louisiana throughout the decades that followed, Creole Democrats used Irish immigration as a means to tip the political spectrum in their favor.

If the Irish immigrants gained their citizenship and the right to vote, it posed a serious threat to the Louisiana Whig Party. During the Jacksonian era, elections in Louisiana could be decided by a small margin of the voting bloc because the percentage of registered voters was no

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<sup>27</sup> Michael Doorley, “The Irish and the Catholic Church in New Orleans, 1835-1918” (master’s thesis, University of New Orleans, 1987), 2-3.

<sup>28</sup> P.G.T. Beauregard to Major J.G. Barnard, November 16, 1853, Beauregard Papers, Archives of the Howard Tilton Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA, quoted in Doorley, “The Irish and the Catholic Church in New Orleans, 1835-1918,” 2.

higher than ten percent of the white male population.<sup>29</sup> This made the Irish vote an essential asset to the Democratic Party. As Niehaus recalls, “After 1835, there were more Irish qualified to register to vote than the total number of voters at any election.”<sup>30</sup> To counter the threat posed by Irish immigration, the Whigs sought to lessen or block the flow of Irish immigrants coming to Louisiana, the goal being to restrict potential Democratic voters from gaining citizenship and the right to vote. The white, Anglo-American identity was used to promote the Louisiana Whig Party and create an “us against them” state of mind. This resulted in an ideology that pitted Anglo-Americans against the perceived foreign invasion of Irish. Political nativism would become a platform for the Louisiana Whig Party to create an atmosphere of fear within Louisiana society. By using fear to unite Louisianans against Irish immigration, the Louisiana Whigs thought they could gain the support they needed to tip the balance of power in their favor.

Tregle states that early nativism in New Orleans “fed on the long-standing ethnic rivalries in the state that pitted Creole against American” and “grew ever stronger as great numbers of Irish immigrants” flooded into New Orleans in the 1830’s.<sup>31</sup> The rivalry between Anglo-American Whigs and Creole Democrats became a major factor in transforming the political momentum in Louisiana. As immigration continued, the rivalry intensified. This study will show that the rise of nativism in Louisiana was steeped in ethnic rivalry just as much as it was in political rivalry. William H. Christy’s Louisiana Native American Association became a weapon in that conflict.

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<sup>29</sup> Roger Shugg, “Suffrage and Representation in Antebellum Louisiana,” *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, XIX (April, 1936), 396-97.

<sup>30</sup> Earl F. Niehaus, *The Irish in New Orleans: 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University, 1965), 71.

<sup>31</sup> Tregle, *Louisiana in the Age of Jackson*, 302.

## Early Irish Immigration to New Orleans and the Construction of the New Basin Canal

More than a decade prior to the potato famine of 1848, thousands of Irish immigrants came to New Orleans as various development projects offered opportunities for the employment of unskilled laborers. Most of these immigrants labored in jobs such as ditch diggers, construction workers, farm hands, and other menial positions. At the time, it was not an uncommon site to see Irish laborers working on roads or cleaning streets around the city. The exploitation of immigrant labor was profitable for investors. Desperate for work, immigrant laborers were willing to work dangerous jobs for little pay. The Irish immigrants, especially, were known to be willing to work for lower wages than the average local laborer. A commonly asked question is why were slaves not used to do these sorts of arduous jobs? The answer is simple: the life of a slave could be worth thousands of dollars, whereas an immigrant was seen as cheap, expendable labor.<sup>32</sup> This early form of labor exploitation can be exemplified through the history of the New Basin Canal Project.<sup>33</sup> This part of the study will focus on how the New Basin Canal Project was a catalyst to the mass immigration of Irish to the region and how its construction coincided with the rise of the nativist movement in Louisiana.

Prior to the mass immigration of Irish to Louisiana in the late 1840s and early 1850s, thousands of Irish immigrants had already come to New Orleans to work on the construction of

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<sup>32</sup> Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*, 109.

<sup>33</sup> The New Basin Canal was a canal built to rival that of Bayou St. John, and to provide a route for ships to enter into the city via a direct waterway from Lake Pontchartrain. The project was thought up and financed by local businessmen, most notably Maunsel White, and was approved for construction in 1832. The canal was dug by mainly Irish laborers who immigrated to the city with the promise of work. It was six miles long, six feet deep, and sixty feet wide. It ran along where West End Boulevard and Pontchartrain Boulevard are today, on through to Loyola Avenue and near where the Mercedes Benz Superdome and Smoothie King Arena now stand. Due to the lack of use and to make way for road construction, the New Basin Canal was gradually filled in over the course of the early twentieth-century until 1949 when it was completely filled in. For more on the construction of the New Basin Canal, see Tim Pat Coogan, *Wherever Green Is Worn: The Story of the Irish Diaspora* (New York, NY: Palgrave, 2001), 315-316 and Margaret Varnell Clark, *The Louisiana Irish: A Historical Collection* (Lincoln, Nebraska: iUniverse Books, 2007), 36-40.



the New Basin Canal. Approved for construction in 1832, the canal served as an outlet from Lake Pontchartrain to the central business district of the city.<sup>34</sup> Digging the canal was an extremely dangerous job. The laborers dredged through swamps and marsh, exposing many of the workers to cold, wet weather during the winter and hot, muggy weather during the summer. Sickness ran rampant through the camps along the canal. Death rates among these laborers was high. Although no accurate statistics exist, some historians claim that by 1838, when the New Basin Canal was completed, over 10,000 Irish laborers had died building the canal.<sup>35</sup> The high death rate is attributed to laborers contracting yellow fever and cholera from working to dig out and dredge the canal through the mosquito-infested swamp. Today, a stone Celtic cross stands between West End Boulevard and Pontchartrain Boulevard where work first began in 1832, a memorial to the Irish who died building the New Basin Canal. An old Irish hymn featured in a 1937 issue of the *Times Picayune* is inscribed on the cross and depicts the struggles faced by these Irish laborers while building the canal:

“Ten thousand Micks, they swing their picks  
To dig the new canal  
But the cholera was stronger 'n they  
And twice it killed them all.”<sup>36</sup>

Throughout the 1830's, the flow of Irish immigrants coincided with rising anti-immigrant sentiment amongst some Louisiana Whigs who viewed the Irish, the majority of whom were Catholic and tended to vote Democrat, as a threat to their dominance over the state. As Creole Democrats and Louisiana Whigs fought for control of state politics, both used the immigrant debate to further their aspirations. To solidify their support among Anglo-Americans, Louisiana

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<sup>34</sup> Clark, *The Louisiana Irish: A Historical Collection*, 36-40.

<sup>35</sup> “Filling Recalls Death of 10,000 in Digging Canal,” *The Times Picayune*, July 18, 1937.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

Whigs spread fear that immigration would lead to intense labor competition between working-class Anglo-Americans and European immigrants, and that increasing immigration would be a threat to the city's newly emerging Anglo-American identity. These threats caused further resentment towards the Irish by the white Protestant working class, while playing into the ambitions of local Whig elites. At the same time, the Louisiana Whigs' anti-Irish rhetoric gained some support from local Creoles and Catholics, such as the Whig politician Charles Derbigny who feared the flood of Irish immigrants posed a threat to the labor market.

As the two parties solidified their political stances over the course of the 1830s, the Louisiana Whigs were supported by a growing radical anti-immigration movement in the state. Their alliance, created in a desperate move for votes, would ultimately destroy the Whig Party after the failure of the Know Nothing Party and the rise of the Republican Party in the 1850s, but for twenty years the Whigs used fear as a political rhetoric to stay the influx of potential Democratic voters. As the anti-immigration movement began to grow and organize in the 1830s, Louisiana would be gripped by a political debate so fierce that its cultural and social landscape would be greatly tested in the years to come and the Irish would be at the center of it all.

### **Edward D. White, Sr. and the Gubernatorial Election of 1834**

During the 1834 Louisiana gubernatorial election, both the Democratic Party and the Whig Party focused on the state economy as well as the naturalization laws.<sup>37</sup> Edward Douglas White, a Whig member of Congress from Tennessee, won the Louisiana gubernatorial election with 62.7 percent of the popular vote and 95.08 percent of the assembly vote against Democratic

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<sup>37</sup> Edward L. Miller, *New Orleans and the Texas Revolution* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), 10.

candidate John Bennet Dawson.<sup>38</sup> In his first inaugural address on February 4, 1835, White defended his support for the Tariff Compromise of 1833,<sup>39</sup> a compromise strongly opposed by Southerners of all parties, and he stressed his plans to boost agriculture in the region in order to stimulate the state's economy.<sup>40</sup> The year 1834 marked a defining period in the nativist movement in Louisiana as the events following the election parallel the rise of the LNAA. To better understand how the immigration debate became a central point in Louisiana politics during the 1830s and 1840s, it is important to first delve into circumstances regarding the 1834 Louisiana gubernatorial election and the socio-political fallout it produced within the Louisiana Whig Party.

Upon his inauguration, White faced considerable backlash from members within his party for his support of the compromise as well as his blasé approach towards Irish immigration. The biggest criticism of White's tenure, however, came in his appointment of naturalized Irish Whigs to government positions.<sup>41</sup> Unlike many within the Louisiana Whig party, White was not opposed to immigration and favored the laws as outlined in the Naturalization Act. Even though, according to the *New Orleans Bee*, out of the ninety appointments made by White, only eight or ten were naturalized foreigners, White's appointments angered many within the Louisiana Whig Party who sought to keep the state administrated solely by Anglo-Americans.<sup>42</sup> White's actions

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<sup>38</sup> Jeanne Frois, *Louisiana Almanac, 2006–2007 Edition* (Gretna, La: Pelican Publication Co., 2006), 547.

<sup>39</sup> This was a compromise pushed forth by Speaker of the House Henry Clay and Vice President John C. Calhoun in response to the Nullification Crisis brought on by South Carolina's opposition to the Tariffs of 1828 and 1832. The tariffs protected northern U.S. industries by placing a tax on low-priced imported goods, which had been driving northern industries out of business. It was perceived as a move by the North to isolate the southern states' economy and was met with considerable opposition from both southern Whigs and Democrats. To address these woes, the 1833 compromise allowed for tax reductions over a ten-year period but it proved ineffective and was abandoned following the enactment of the Black Tariff of 1842. For more on the Tariff Compromise of 1833 see: "1816–1860: The Second American Party System and the Tariff," Tax History Museum, accessed January 7, 2016, <http://www.taxhistory.org/www/website.nsf/Web/THM1816?OpenDocument>.

<sup>40</sup> "Governor White Inaugural," *New Orleans Bee*, February 3, 1835.

<sup>41</sup> Niehaus, *The Irish in New Orleans*, 77-78.

<sup>42</sup> *New Orleans Bee*, April 6, 1835.

sparked a flame that would ignite the nativist movement in Louisiana and, as will be shown, further divided New Orleans along cultural, racial, and ethnic lines.

Louisiana Whigs scrambled to find a way to block White's appointments and bar foreign-born representatives from holding government positions. William De Buys, a Creole Whig representative from New Orleans, presented a resolution to the Louisiana Legislature in an effort to block White's appointments. In his resolution, De Buys stressed that White's appointments of "foreigners who have been naturalized in preference to native born citizens of Louisiana" was in "opposition to the principles and true policy" of the country.<sup>43</sup> He called on the Louisiana Legislature to revoke White's appointments, but his efforts went unheeded as the resolution was defeated by a vote of eighteen to twelve.<sup>44</sup> White failed to win over his contemporaries with promises of focusing his leadership towards economic progress and, quickly, discontent grew among Louisiana Whigs towards White's leadership, causing major changes to take place within the party.

One of White's greatest critics was John Gibson who, at the time, was an editor of the *Louisiana Advertiser* and *New Orleans Argus*. Nicknamed the "Faithful and the Bold," Gibson was known to focus many of his articles on the perceived threat posed by Irish immigration to the country and he used White's actions as a focal point for his hostility.<sup>45</sup> He criticized White for being a "weak and prejudiced governor"<sup>46</sup> for appointing Irish-born representatives over native born, and for having given the post of register of conveyances to a Frenchman, who

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<sup>43</sup> *Louisiana House Journal*, 1835, 133 quoted in Tregle, *Louisiana in the Age of Jackson*, 302.

<sup>44</sup> Tregle, *Louisiana in the Age of Jackson*, 302.

<sup>45</sup> Library of Congress, "True American," *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, accessed January 8, 2016, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83016527/>.

<sup>46</sup> *Louisiana Advertiser*, March 27, 31, 1835 quoted in Tregle, *Louisiana in the Age of Jackson*, 300.

happened to be the son-in-law of Etienne Mazureau, a prominent Louisiana statesman.<sup>47</sup>

Following a string of disagreements with his fellow editors over his polemics and diatribes over immigration, Gibson left the *Louisiana Advertiser* and *New Orleans Argus* sometime in 1835 and went on to found the *True American*, a vehemently nativist newspaper that would later become the unofficial voice of the LNAA. His brand of nativism, grounded in intolerance and divisiveness, would become the basis of much of the rhetoric used by Christy and other nativists to promote hostility towards Irish immigrants in Louisiana.

As Tregle attests, nativist sentiments in Louisiana “erupted” almost immediately out of White’s appointment of Irish Whigs to office and “triggered a movement waiting to happen.”<sup>48</sup> In the wake of protests against White by prominent Louisiana Whigs, such as the wealthy New Orleans architect and businessman James H. Caldwell, the Louisiana Whig Party sought to reorganize itself and consider new ways to appeal to voters.<sup>49</sup> The Louisiana Whig Party needed to reformulate its strategy if the Whigs were to ensure Anglo-American dominance over state government. Irish immigration became the obvious issue of choice.

Louisiana Whigs promoted opposition to Irish immigration as a mechanism to garner votes. To create a cause that voters would rally behind, the Louisiana Whigs sought to incite voters against Irish immigrants, the idea being that if the Whigs could control public opinion then they could control the vote and eventually replace the ruling Creole/Catholic political leadership of New Orleans with an Anglo-Protestant leadership. The Louisiana Whig Party’s ultimate goal was to build a state government that closely mirrored that of the rest of the United

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<sup>47</sup> Mazureau was a prominent Louisiana lawyer, originally from France, who served three times as Attorney General of Louisiana and as Secretary of State of Louisiana. Tregle, *Louisiana in the Age of Jackson*, 300.

<sup>48</sup> Tregle, *Louisiana in the Age of Jackson*, 302.

<sup>49</sup> Miller, *New Orleans and the Texas Revolution*, 10-12.

States. The only question was, who would lead this rally of fear mongering? The Louisiana Whig Party needed someone with a bombastic manner who could manipulate public opinion and stir up local indignation. William H. Christy was the perfect candidate for the job.

### **William H. Christy**

As a famed resident of New Orleans, Christy had a colorful yet contentious history in the city. Christy's immense popularity is echoed through his obituary, published in 1865 in the *New Orleans Times*: "He was so well known that in his case, no labored eulogium is necessary."<sup>50</sup> Today, Christy is remembered mostly for his efforts in raising a company of New Orleans volunteer militia known as the "New Orleans Greys" to fight in the Texas Revolution. He is commonly referred to as a "forgotten Texas hero," and his contributions to the conflict are memorialized in Edward L. Miller's book *New Orleans and the Texas Revolution*.<sup>51</sup> Regardless of what is written on Christy today, what historians tend to skim over is his involvement in implanting nativism within Louisiana politics during the 1830s. To understand how Christy became the father of Louisiana's earliest nativist movement, we must first look at the timeline of events in Christy's life that transformed him into the controversial character that he became.

Unlike many of his constituents in the LNAA that came from wealthy Anglo-American families, Christy had a rather humble beginning. He was born December 6, 1791, the second eldest of six children to George W. Christy and Mary Cave Christy of Georgetown, Boone County, Kentucky.<sup>52</sup> According to the *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, the

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<sup>50</sup> Obituary, "Col. Wm. Christy," *New Orleans Times*, November 9, 1865.

<sup>51</sup> Miller devotes much of the first two chapters of his book to the political situation in New Orleans during the 1830s, and provides a brief section on Christy while touching on his formation of the LNAA. Miller, *New Orleans and the Texas Revolution*, 10-18.

<sup>52</sup> While saturated in propitious accounts of Christy's life, Livingston's work gives an asynchronous history on Christy and his political ventures. John Livingston, *Portraits of Eminent Americans Now Living: With Biographical*

Christy family were of Anglo-Protestant heritage and could trace their lineage to Reverend William Cave, the official chaplain of King Charles II.<sup>53</sup> Shortly before his death in 1804, George W. Christy sold the bulk of his land to become a merchant. Having invested much of his wealth into his new business venture, the elder Christy died leaving next to nothing to his wife and their children.<sup>54</sup> Not long after the death of his father, Christy's youngest brother, Morton, died from illness, followed by the death of his mother in 1806. At the age of 15, Christy and his eldest sister, Elizabeth, were left with the task of taking care of the household and raising their three remaining siblings: Simeon, Uriel, and Frances.

At the age of eighteen, Christy left school to join the American cause in the War of 1812 where he served as a quartermaster under General William Henry Harrison, an old friend of his father and the future ninth president of the United States.<sup>55</sup> Christy's involvement in the war instilled in him a sense of American nationalism that influenced his later attraction to the nativist movement. Christy garnered recognition following the Battle of Fort Meigs when he abandoned his post to take part in a skirmish against Chief Tecumseh's warriors. According to Livingston, Christy was responsible for saving a group of soldiers from "certain death" at the hands of

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*and Historical Memoirs of Their Lives and Actions* (Cambridge, MA: Lampport and Co., Harvard College Library, 1854), 375-405.

<sup>53</sup> "William H. Christy," in *The National Cyclopedic of American Biography: Being the History of the United States as Illustrated in the Lives of the Founders, Builders, and Defenders of the Republic, and of the Men and Women who are Doing the Work and Molding the Thought of the Present Time*, vol. 11 (San Francisco, CA: James T. White Co.), 436.

<sup>54</sup> George W. Christy's will and testament shows that at the time of his death his estate was worth only \$1,160.94. His assets included various livestock, personal belongings, and a slave named Jane along with her son, John. Ruth Turner Ziegel, "George W. Christy and Mary Cave, Their Children," *The Descendants of Julius and Agatha Barnett Christy*, Rootsweb: Ancestry.com, April 6, 2000, accessed December 3, 2015, <http://homepages.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~bakhelvy/christypages/Chapter09.htm>.

<sup>55</sup> During the 1840 presidential election, Christy accompanied William Harrison on the campaign trail where he gave charismatic speeches to Harrison's Whig supporters. According to Livingston, Harrison had so much admiration for Christy that he even offered him a future cabinet position that Christy respectfully declined. Livingston, *Portraits of Eminent Americans Now Living*, 383-387.

Tecumseh's men.<sup>56</sup> For his heroism, Christy was praised by his superiors and was promoted to colonel. In 1813, he accompanied General Harrison and General Andrew Jackson during the Creek Campaign, and, in 1815, was employed by Jackson as a paymaster following the Battle of New Orleans.<sup>57</sup> During the second year of his employment, Christy had, as Livingston states, a "misunderstanding with the department in Washington regarding his disbursements," after which he resigned with approval of Jackson.<sup>58</sup> It was then that Christy decided to take up a permanent residence in New Orleans.

Christy would find his way into the New Orleans business community by way of the tobacco trade. By the end of 1816, Christy became a successful tobacco merchant where he was introduced to other Anglo-American businessman who, like himself, held similar nationalistic beliefs. In 1818 he married Catherine Pauline Baker, a wealthy widow of former Orleans Parish postmaster and businessman Blaise Cenas,<sup>59</sup> and daughter of Hilary Baker, former Philadelphia mayor (1796-1798).<sup>60</sup> Not long after his marriage to Baker, Christy's tobacco venture was ruined after his bookkeeper squandered the wealth of the business while Christy was away on a commercial trip.<sup>61</sup> Now financially ruined and out of work, Christy decided to go back to school where he passed the bar and became a successful lawyer. In 1826 Christy published the first *Digest of Decisions of the Supreme Court of the State of Louisiana*, which garnered him praise

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<sup>56</sup> Livingston, *Portraits of Eminent Americans Now Living*, 377.

<sup>57</sup> Christy's name can be found along with fellow LNAA founder, John Gibson, under a muster roll of soldiers who were stationed in New Orleans during 1815. "Battle of New Orleans, War of 1812 American Muster and Troop Roster List," Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, accessed September 22, 2015, <http://www.nps.gov/jela/learn/historyculture/upload/Battle-of-New-Orleans-Muster-Lists-final-copy-01062015.pdf>.

<sup>58</sup> It is unsure exactly what Livingston meant by "misunderstanding," but we can assume that Christy had been accused of mismanaging funds. Livingston, *Portraits of Eminent Americans Now Living*, 391.

<sup>59</sup> Miller, *New Orleans and the Texas Revolution*, 64.

<sup>60</sup> "Col. Wm. Christy," *New Orleans Times*, November 9, 1865.

<sup>61</sup> Livingston, *Portraits of Eminent Americans Now Living*, 393-394.



from state legislators and politicians alike, including the then governor, Henry Johnson, who purchased one hundred copies to be used by courts throughout the state.<sup>62</sup>

The publication of Christy's digest marked a turning point in his career. Although Christy had been elected as alderman of New Orleans's First Ward three years prior to the publication, it was the first time he gained statewide recognition, thrusting him into the political spotlight.<sup>63</sup> As a member of the city council, Christy became popular among the Anglo aristocracy of New Orleans. According to Livingston, Christy was the first to propose the stone paving of Gravier Street, which led the way for the paving of most of New Orleans's streets in the years to come.<sup>64</sup> In 1827, he was granted the right to become a notary public in New Orleans and ran a successful notary business along with his stepson, Hilary B. Cenas.<sup>65</sup> Making a substantial income as a lawyer and notary, Christy was able to reestablish himself within the high society of New Orleans, rubbing shoulders with the likes of James H. Caldwell as well as other prominent Anglo-American elites. Caldwell, an actor/entrepreneur famous for an array of accomplishments such as building the Camp Street Theatre (the American Theatre) and establishing New Orleans's first gas-light company, would become a leading member of the LNAA and close associate of Christy and John Gibson.

Just like many of his constituents, Christy first began to sympathize with the growing anti-immigration movement after White's appointment of naturalized Irish politicians to public office in February 1835. In addition to White's actions, the Democratic Party had been

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<sup>62</sup> Livingston, *Portraits of Eminent Americans Now Living*, 395.

<sup>63</sup> *Louisiana Gazette*, December 27, 1823.

<sup>64</sup> Livingston, *Portraits of Eminent Americans Now Living*, 396.

<sup>65</sup> Ads for Christy's notary business can be found in many New Orleans newspaper issues throughout the 1830s, 40s, and 50s. The majority of his notary business involved signing off on the sale of land and slaves. Dale N. Atkins, "Christy, William Indexes, 1827-1857," New Orleans Notarial Archives: New Orleans, La, accessed January 11, 2015, <http://www.oreanscivileclerk.com/wchristy.htm>.

successful in courting the Irish vote during the alderman elections in New Orleans that same year.<sup>66</sup> As a former city alderman and a Whig Party member, Christy strongly objected the idea of a Democrat taking his former council position in part due to the Irish vote.<sup>67</sup> Seeing an opportunity to further his own political aspirations, Christy seized upon the immigration debate, hoping to elevate himself to a level of that of his cousin, Richard M. Johnson, who was nominated in May 1835 to be Martin Van Buren's vice-presidential running mate in the 1836 presidential election.<sup>68</sup>

The day after William De Buys's resolution was defeated in the Louisiana Legislature, Christy held a meeting at Banks Arcade in New Orleans where he gave a rallying speech against Gov. White and the perceived dangers posed by these actions to Louisiana. Christy's meeting at Bank's Arcade marked the beginning of Louisiana's nativist movement. It was the first time that nativists in Louisiana organized to debate and rally against what they perceived as foreign-influences infiltrating the political establishment. In April, Christy convened another two meetings that the *New Orleans Bee*, a French-language newspaper whose editors usually sympathized with the Democratic Party, called a "disappointment" in which Christy played the "jurist and the judge" receiving just as many "nays as ayes" after proposing series of resolutions to White's appointments.<sup>69</sup> The *Bee* devoted an entire week of articles bashing Christy and his meeting, using the term "Native Americanism" to refer to the growing anti-immigration movement it promoted.<sup>70</sup> Regardless of the press's criticism of him, Christy had an uncanny

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<sup>66</sup> *New Orleans Bee*, April 4, 1835 as found in Miller, *New Orleans and the Texas Revolution*, 10.

<sup>67</sup> When referring to the Irish vote, this study implies that these individuals were naturalized citizens who originally immigrated from Ireland. As stated earlier in this study, after 1835 naturalized Irish voters made up a significant percentage of the voting bloc in Louisiana.

<sup>68</sup> Tregle, *Louisiana In the Age of Jackson*, 303.

<sup>69</sup> *New Orleans Bee*, April 4, 1835.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, April 8, 11, and 13, 1835 as found in Tregle, *Louisiana in the Age of Jackson*, 302.

ability to rally people behind him and achieved influence by playing on the frustrations felt by many Louisianans at the time.

As the immigration debate in Louisiana evolved over the course of the 1830s, the rhetoric used by politicians and their supporters shifted from general displeasure with the current state of affairs to outright panic. There was a growing fear of an impending economic crisis and the immigration debate weighed heavily in these fears. Prominent Louisiana Whigs, seeing how the Irish vote had become a substantial player in the elections of 1835, turned to nativism as a means to ensure future Anglo-American dominion over state politics. The Irish had now become a significant threat to the Louisiana Whig Party and its Anglo-American supporters, and the only way to counter this threat would be to try to block potential Irish immigrants from gaining the right to vote. It was Christy's bombastic personality coupled with his fearlessness towards opposition, his Anglo-American heritage, and his history of armed service that became so attractive to the Louisiana Whig Party. To supplement their aspirations at the polls, the Louisiana Whig Party looked to men like Christy and the growing nativist movement he supported as a strategy in their quest for electoral control of the region.

### **The Birth of the Louisiana Native American Association**

Three months after White's inflammatory appointments and amidst the growing immigration debate, Christy and John Gibson held a meeting with "twenty to thirty friends" to discuss a course of action to halt the ever-growing number of Irish entering Louisiana.<sup>71</sup> It was then, on July 28, 1835, that the Louisiana Native American Association was founded. Unlike the

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<sup>71</sup> Most of the friends Gibson claims attended this meeting would most certainly have been local Whig politicians and Anglo-American elites. *True American*, August 15, 1835, as found in Tregle, *Louisiana in the Age of Jackson*, 303.

later Louisiana Know-Nothing Party, the LNAA was not a political party but a collection of nativist sympathizers and groups that sought to influence political action against the Naturalization Act. Even though it was not a political party, the LNAA structured itself much like one in that it had a president, vice-president, treasurer, recording secretary, and corresponding secretary.<sup>72</sup> Christy would become the LNAA's first president and overall figurehead, while Gibson and his nativist newspaper, the *True American*, became the mouthpiece of the LNAA. This part of the study will look at the history of the LNAA, dissect its establishment, explore its propaganda tactics, and examine Louisiana's nativist movement as it evolved over the course of the 1830s.

Christy would help establish the LNAA alongside many Anglo-American elites and local Whig politicians.<sup>73</sup> Some of the many prominent Anglo-Americans who became members of the LNAA include James H. Caldwell, who became the lead beneficiary of the *True American* and a New Orleans councilman<sup>74</sup>; Dr. James McFarlane, a native of South Carolina who had been head of the New Orleans Marine Hospital and became the author of the first issue of the LNAA's *Annual Address to the Authorities of the United States*<sup>75</sup>; and James H. Leverich, a wealthy New Orleans merchant.<sup>76</sup> Whig politicians who joined the LNAA include Louisiana District Judge Theodore H. McCaleb; Thomas Wharton Collens, whose poem "The Martyr Patriots" depicted

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<sup>72</sup> Tregle, *Louisiana in the Age of Jackson*, 303.

<sup>73</sup> Signatories on the LNAA's annual address show that at its height there were one hundred members. It is likely that they had many more supporters, but only its actual members are listed. *Address of the Louisiana Native American Association: To the Citizens of Louisiana and the Inhabitants of the United States*, (New Orleans, LA: D. Felt & Co. 1839), 4. In the Joseph Meredith Toner Collection, YA Pamphlet Collection Library of Congress.

<sup>74</sup> Tregle, *Louisiana in the Age of Jackson*, 303.

<sup>75</sup> This pamphlet was an annual publication produced by the Office of the *True American* and was distributed throughout the country. It listed a series of demands by the LNAA to Congress, chiefly, the total repeal of the Naturalization Act. James McFarlane, *Address to the Public Authorities of the United States by the Louisiana Native American Association* (New Orleans, LA: True American Office, January 4, 1836).

<sup>76</sup> Niehaus, *The Irish in New Orleans*, 87.

Governor O'Reilly, himself an early Irish immigrant to Louisiana, as a fiend<sup>77</sup>; and Charles Magill Conrad, who became the president of the LNAA following Christy's resignation and went on to serve in the U.S. Senate, U.S. House of Representatives, Confederate Congress, and was appointed Secretary of War under President Millard Fillmore.<sup>78</sup> It was no accident that the LNAA was composed of some of Louisiana's most powerful Whig politicians and Anglo-American elites. LNAA members used their political and financial influences to promote Whig candidates who vowed to block potential Irish voters from gaining U.S. citizenship, the goal being to weaken the Creole Democrat support base.

James H. Caldwell is a good example of an Anglo-American elite who sought to reshape Louisiana's long-standing Creole hegemony. Caldwell had been a thorn in the side of Creole elites ever since he came to New Orleans in 1820. While he was one of the leading developers of the American quarter in New Orleans, Caldwell routinely tried to undermine Creole influence by developing American-styled buildings and promoting the new, but emerging, American arts around the city. He opened the Camp Street Theater in 1824 followed by the St. Charles Theatre in 1835 in direct competition with the Creole-run Theatre d'Orleans.<sup>79</sup> Unlike his competitor, Caldwell's theatres offered their audiences English-speaking actors as oppose to French-speaking. As the American population began to grow in New Orleans, English-speaking audiences flocked to Caldwell's theatres. The Theatre d'Orleans would have likely been run out

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<sup>77</sup> Niehaus, *The Irish in New Orleans*, 87.

<sup>78</sup> *The Daily Picayune*, February 18, 1841.

<sup>79</sup> Both the Camp Street Theatre and the St. Charles Theatre are remembered for being two of the most luxurious theatres in New Orleans. They featured gas-lit chandeliers and exquisite décor unmatched by any other theatre in the city at the time. For more on James H. Caldwell and his theatres, see Noah Miller Ludlow, *Dramatic Life as I Found It* (St. Louis, MO: G. I. Jones and Co., 1880), 247-249 & 404.

of business had not the Camp Street Theatre burned down in 1842, followed by the St Charles Theatre in 1855.<sup>80</sup>

When Caldwell joined the LNAA and helped launch the *True American* in 1835, it was yet another attempt by him to expunge the age-old Creole influences in New Orleans.<sup>81</sup> What is clear is that many of the Anglo-American elites who joined the LNAA were opportunistic individuals who aimed to dominate Louisiana society. The LNAA provided them with a voice they would have, otherwise, never had in politics. They had Christy, the leader; Gibson, the propagandist; fear, the mechanism; and Irish immigration, the vehicle. With these four components, the Louisiana Whig Party and its Anglo-American supporters formulated a scheme to bring down the deep-rooted Creole Democratic establishment and succeed in building an Anglo-American hegemony.

As the Louisiana Native American Association (LNAA) rose in popularity during the mid-1830s, the group regularly published nativist pamphlets that included discussions about local elections, current events, and the immigration debate. Out of all the fears that the LNAA tried to stir up within the community, one of the biggest fears was of naturalized foreigners entering into politics. The LNAA warned that assigning naturalized foreigners to public positions would undermine the foundation of American democracy, arguing that foreign-born politicians would form styles of government that mirrored that of their homeland. Fear was the underlying rhetoric used by the LNAA to frighten its followers to the polls to prevent what they threatened could result in a foreign takeover of the American way of life.

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<sup>80</sup> For more on James H. Caldwell and the history of the Camp Street and St. Charles theatres, see Paul S. Hostetler, "James H. Caldwell: Theatre Manager" (PhD diss., Louisiana State University, 1964).

<sup>81</sup> Tregle, *Louisiana in the Age of Jackson*, 304.

As a mouthpiece of the LNAA, Gibson was a methodical propagandist when it came to promoting the nativist cause to the Louisiana public. By 1836, the *True American* began publishing the LNAA's annual pamphlet, *Address to the Public Authorities of the United States by the Louisiana Native American Association*, which further extended the reach of the Louisiana nativist movement to incorporate a national audience. This pamphlet became an important outlet for the LNAA by stressing its goal to repeal the Naturalization Act, declaring that "the ignorant, the corrupt, the perfidious, the vile, the seditious, and the hostile foreigner may eventually warp, distort, or overthrow our republican form of Government!"<sup>82</sup> Tregle writes that Gibson used the *True American* to regularly lambast Irish immigrants as "chief tools of demagogues who made every election an orgy of debauchery, where whiskey flowed and men died by the knife or the shellelah (shillelagh)."<sup>83</sup> Gibson conveyed to his followers that foreign influence was plaguing the country and blamed the Democratic Party for allowing it to happen. Gibson's nativist rhetoric is a clear sign that he was trying to turn the public against the Irish and paint them as political thugs who would use violence as a means to further the Democratic Party's perceived agenda.

The year 1838 was a particularly important year for the Louisiana Whig Party being that it was a gubernatorial election year and the state, like the rest of the country, was still reeling from the economic downturn produced by the Panic of 1837.<sup>84</sup> During the campaign, the *True American* posted daily columns about the progress of the election year while also attacking

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<sup>82</sup> At the end of the publication, William H. Christy's name can be found among ninety-nine other LNAA members. *Address of the Louisiana Native American Association: To the Citizens of Louisiana and the Inhabitants of the United States*, (New Orleans, LA: D. Felt & Co. 1839), 4. In the Joseph Meredith Toner Collection, YA Pamphlet Collection Library of Congress.

<sup>83</sup> A shillelagh is a long blunt stick that is used as a weapon, typically in Ireland. Tregle, *Louisiana in the Age of Jackson*, 305.

<sup>84</sup> The Panic of 1837 was a time of economic recession in the United States caused by an array of international factors, but in Louisiana it was due in part to the curtailment of loans from English banks to the United States effectively dropping the price of cotton in New Orleans from 15.5 to 9 cents between 1835 to 1838. For more on the effects of the Panic of 1837 in Louisiana, see Sacher, *A Perfect War of Politics: Parties, Politicians, and Democracy in Louisiana, 1824-1861*, 86-88.

Democratic Party candidates, especially John Slidell, who was running as the Democratic candidate for Congress. Slidell was reviled by Gibson for reaching out to naturalized immigrants for votes. Gibson likened Slidell to a “chameleon” who changed his views and stance depending on the “opinion of the present company,” particularly naturalized foreigners, for the purpose of obtaining votes.<sup>85</sup> He mockingly listed Slidell’s name as it would appear in German, Spanish, Italian, Creole, and Russian as reference to Slidell’s quest for the immigrant vote.<sup>86</sup>

In his coverage of the election, Gibson also promoted the Whig candidate for governor, Andre B. Roman. Unlike the opposing candidate Dennis Prieur, a Creole-Democrat and mayor of New Orleans, Roman favored instituting a national banking system and focused on civic improvements for the state. Most Louisiana Whigs believed a national banking system would help stimulate the state economy by lifting the stringent restrictions on lenders that state banks required. Gibson rallied support behind Roman’s appeal for a national banking system, reprinting a column from the *Baton Rouge Gazette* that stated that the importance of the election “goes far beyond the question of Prieur or Roman: it is a question of *bank* or *no bank*; of *renewed prosperity* or of *continued distress*.”<sup>87</sup> Gibson even went as far as to reach out to Creole Whigs, calling them “brothers” of the Anglo-Americans and warned that a Creole vote for the Democratic Party “would prove detrimental to the Whig cause.”<sup>88</sup> This was a vastly different approach by Gibson who, only three years earlier, had run a column in the *Louisiana Advertiser* criticizing Creoles for remaining loyal to their “darling France.”<sup>89</sup> Whatever effect Gibson’s columns may or may not have had on the gubernatorial election is uncertain, but in the end, the

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<sup>85</sup> *True American*, July 2, 1838.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> *True American*, July 2, 1838, *Baton Rouge Gazette*, July 2, 1838.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> *Louisiana Advertiser*, March 27, 31, 1835. As found in Tregle, *Louisiana in the Age of Jackson*, 300.



Louisiana Whig Party successfully pulled out a victory, tallying up 7,590 votes for Roman versus 6,782 votes for Prieur.<sup>90</sup> It was a huge win for the Louisiana Whig Party that had left the previous election of 1834 feeling divided and uncertain.

In July 1839 Christy was elected for a second term as president of the LNAA, further solidifying his grip over the nativist movement in Louisiana.<sup>91</sup> When Christy was not tending to his notary business or leading the LNAA, he was actively traveling the country promoting the nativist cause. Much of Christy's reputation during this period was not only noted in the press, but was created by Christy himself. In an 1854 pamphlet addressed to the Know Nothing Party of Louisiana, Christy recounts a series of his letters, newspaper columns, and speeches over the course of the 1830s and 1840s to defend accusations that he had drifted away from the nativist cause. Although it is unclear what these accusations were, Christy published this pamphlet to demonstrate to the Louisiana Know-Nothings the many examples of how he had helped form the original nativist movement in Louisiana. This document, which has eluded other studies on the nativist movement in Louisiana, provides strong evidence regarding Christy's nativist activities prior to the formation of the Louisiana Know-Nothing Party. While the pamphlet is dated over a decade later than the time period of this study, it helps support the argument that Christy's leadership of the LNAA was used as a political strategy for Whig elites to block the Irish vote.

In the pamphlet, Christy recounts stories of his courageousness in the face of opposition and his attempts to propel the nativist cause through political rallies and legislation. He gives details of several incidents where he got into physical confrontations with Irish immigrants who opposed his nativist views. He describes how, at a political rally in Galveston in 1839, he was

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<sup>90</sup> Frois, *Louisiana Almanac*, 2006–2007 Edition, 547.

<sup>91</sup> *The Native American*, Washington DC, July 13, 1839.

once surrounded by over “two-hundred Irishmen” who threatened him with violence.<sup>92</sup> Christy claims he had stood his ground and not one Irishmen would “bell the cat” or “lay a finger” on him.<sup>93</sup> He also details a similar incident in Cincinnati where over 5,000 Irishmen surrounded him and nearly caused a riot after a speech he gave denouncing immigration. He states that he was lucky enough to walk away from the mob being that the Irish found that “prudence was better off than valor” and left him alone.<sup>94</sup>

Christy also recounts an instance where he and his eldest son, 17-year-old George William, attacked the staff of an Irish newspaper called *The Anti-Native American*,<sup>95</sup> or as he called it, the “Anti-Humbug.” The newspaper had published an unfavorable article about Christy and the LNAA so he felt inclined to respond to the slight with brut force. Christy claims they went to the office of the newspaper and physically assaulted its staff. He states that George William flogged the author of the article, causing a severe cut on his head while Christy suffered a “pistol ball” lodged into his forehead.<sup>96</sup> Surprisingly, Christy survived the melee with only minor injuries. According to Christy, after he and his son attacked *The Anti-Native American* it only published two more issues before halting publication permanently. While Christy may have fabricated some of his stories to amuse his supporters and frighten his opponents, his popularity

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<sup>92</sup> Although references to this encounter have been mentioned in other historical studies, such as Niehaus, *The Irish in New Orleans: 1800-1860*, 79 and W. Darrel Overdyke, “History of the American Party in Louisiana,” *Louisiana Historical Quarterly*, XV (October, 1932), 582, no other mention other than Christy’s own words have been found for this study. William H. Christy, *To the Know-Nothings of the State of Louisiana* (New Orleans, LA: Office of The Creole, September 30, 1854), 6-7, Call #: JK2341.A8 L85, ID Number 69-7-L.7, Williams Research Center, The Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans, LA.

<sup>93</sup> Christy, *To the Know-Nothings of the State of Louisiana*, 6-7.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 10.

<sup>95</sup> Niehaus, *Irish in New Orleans*, 79.

<sup>96</sup> Just like in Christy’s previous claim, no other primary sources have been found that note this encounter. It has been referenced to in other secondary works such as Niehaus, *The Irish in New Orleans*, 78-79. Christy, *To the Know-Nothings of the State of Louisiana*, 6-7.

is well-documented and these type of stories only added to his reputation as a fierce champion of the nativist cause.

Another revelation in Christy's pamphlet is that he was actively involved in trying to repeal the Naturalization Act at the federal level. In the spring of 1840, Christy said that he approached Congress to request that they reconsider the naturalization laws and asked that they repeal them or extend the time of residency to twenty-years rather than five. He details his meeting with Congress in an address to the Native American Repeal Party (NARP) on March 9, 1840.<sup>97</sup> He writes that Congress responded to his request by presenting a series of five resolutions to the naturalization laws. As the resolutions show, Congress merely answered Christy's request by reasserting itself as the dominant body over the issue of naturalization and asked him to remain "cautious" towards the issue of immigration.<sup>98</sup> In response, Christy blasted Congress for what he saw as a contradiction in Article Five of the resolution that said the need to modify the Naturalization Act was "expedient" yet offered no solution to address that need.<sup>99</sup> He believed that these resolutions dodged the real issue of immigration and called them "absurd," concluding that if he had the power he would "repeal the naturalization laws in total."<sup>100</sup> In the end of the address, Christy reassures the NARP that they can still "expel the enemy (the Irish) through the ballot-box."<sup>101</sup> By asking his followers to go the ballot-box, Christy is implying that their vote for the party could effectively repeal the naturalization laws. The only party at the time that would have advocated repealing the naturalization laws would have been the Louisiana

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<sup>97</sup> The Native American Repeal Party was a nativist organization within the LNAA that was dedicated to repealing the Naturalization Act. The address is recounted in a column posted in *The Native American*, April 4, 1840.

<sup>98</sup> Christy, *To the Know-Nothings of the State of Louisiana*, 4-5.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 5-6.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>101</sup> *The Native American*, April 4, 1840.

Whig Party. Thus, Christy was actively working to garner support for the Louisiana Whig Party by using the nativist cause as vehicle to drive voters to the polls.

Christy used the issue of Irish immigration much like current politicians use immigration to further their own agenda. While the details have changed, the strategy still remains the same: the use of fear as a mechanism to garner votes. Nativist ideology produces the sense that a foreign body is inflicting damage on the foundations of a society, producing a sense of fear within a community, and the community rallies behind a solution to that fear. This tactic can drive a campaign. Christy employed these fear tactics to garner Whig votes. Although, with all of Christy's and the LNAA's fear-mongering, did these tactics work in favor of the Louisiana Whig Party?

### **The Rise of Political Nativism and Demise of the Louisiana Whig Party**

By the summer of 1840, something happened within LNAA that changed the course of the nativist movement in Louisiana forever. LNAA members, fed up at how they felt the Louisiana Whig Party was not focusing enough attention on Irish immigration, started calling for the formation of an independent nativist party that would enter the election cycle with the sole purpose of repealing the Naturalization Act, the first time that the nativist movement considered entering into politics directly rather than influence politics from the outside. For the LNAA to put forth members of its own group to run as independent candidates was a different direction for the organization. Their politicization of Louisiana's nativist movement would ultimately be disastrous for the Louisiana Whig Party because it divided the party's voter-base, but by this time nativism had grown to such an extent that the success of the Whig Party was not of the LNAA's concern any longer; stopping Irish immigration was. This part of the study will look at

events that transpired within the LNAA that caused a severe rift among its members.<sup>102</sup> This rift would not only contribute to the downfall of the Louisiana Whig Party, but would provide the foundation for the Louisiana Know-Nothing Party to rise out of its ashes.

In Christy's 1854 pamphlet addressed to the Louisiana Know-Nothing Party, he provides an in-depth look into the 1840 rift and how it affected his position within the nativist movement as well as the path in which the movement was heading. He describes how, around this time, there was talk within the LNAA of running independent nativist candidates for state offices. Christy opposed the idea of a political party based solely on nativism on the grounds that the LNAA was too weak to succeed alone, and that a failure would only throw the movement back. According to Christy, some of the younger LNAA members differed from his opinion that the organization should not become a political party and even became "quite violent in their feelings" towards him.<sup>103</sup> On May 28, 1840, in light of the difference of opinions, Christy reluctantly resigned from his position as president of the LNAA to form, along with Theodore H. McCaleb, a similar nativist group, called the American Society. Following Christy's resignation, *The Native American* ran a scathing column denouncing his new society as nothing more than a "Whig electioneering movement."<sup>104</sup> It appears that members within the LNAA had begun to recognize that the very movement they supported had been nothing more than a vote-generating tactic by Anglo-American elites like Christy. By the winter of 1841, the LNAA and the

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<sup>102</sup> Political nativism refers to the time period when nativist movements formed their own political party rather than just a movement. For more on political nativism see, Angela F. Murphy, *American Slavery, Irish Freedom: Abolition, Immigrant Citizenship, and the Transatlantic Movement for Irish Repeal* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 174-191.

<sup>103</sup> *The Native American* was another nativist newspaper in Louisiana that was started by Caldwell around the same time as Gibson's *True American*. Christy, *To the Know-Nothings of the State of Louisiana*, 7.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

American Society would eventually cooperate with each other, but their differences in opinion in regards to forming a political nativist party would remain until around the mid-1840s.

The nativist movement in Louisiana seemed to have had no participation in the gubernatorial election of 1842 between Henry S. Johnson, a Whig Party member from Tennessee who had once served as governor of Louisiana from 1824 to 1828, and Alexandre Mouton, a Creole-Democrat from Lafayette Parish. Christy laments this fact when he says that the nativist cause “languished and lost nearly all its vitality, until some electioneering movement [as he supposes], revived it in 1844.”<sup>105</sup> Democrat Alexandre Mouton won the 1842 election, tallying 9,669 votes against Whig Henry S. Johnson’s 8,104 votes.<sup>106</sup> Following the 1842 Louisiana gubernatorial election, the Louisiana Whig Party suffered a serious setback after a Creole had won the governor’s seat for the first time since 1828, all of this happening at time when the Whig Party nationwide was beginning to splinter following divisions within its party over the immigration debate. Although Christy does not mention the 1842 election specifically, Johnson’s loss undoubtedly had an adverse effect on Christy’s political leanings. From this period on, Christy seems to have completely severed ties with the Louisiana Whig Party. He neither describes any sort of support nor admiration for the party, and focuses his full attention to promoting a newly emerging national political party called the American Republican Party. This party entered United States politics with the sole purpose of repealing the Naturalization Act and would eventually become known as a precursor to the more radical Know-Nothing Party of the 1850s.

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<sup>105</sup> Christy is most likely referring to the surge of political nativism that arose in the United States following Democratic candidate James K. Polk’s victory over Whig candidate Henry Clay in the 1844 presidential election. Ibid, 12.

<sup>106</sup> Frois, *Louisiana Almanac, 2006–2007 Edition*, 547.

During much of the 1840s, Christy faced a series of financial setbacks that plagued his career and may have shifted his political views. During the Texas Revolution in 1836, Christy had collected hundreds of thousands of dollars through loans he had taken out and from various supporters to put towards the Texan cause. Following the Panic of 1837, Christy lost a vast sum of his own wealth causing him to default on the many loans he had taken out over the years. Records show that by 1841, Christy owed to various banks and personal lenders over \$38,000 in loan payments.<sup>107</sup> To try to pay back the loans, Christy relied on the help of friends and family such as his stepson, Hilary B. Cenas, who, records show, lent over \$13,000 to Christy to help him pay back some of the defaulted loans.<sup>108</sup> In an 1844 letter, while in Boston on a failed attempt to ask a cousin for financial support, Christy wrote to Cenas expressing the anguish his financial troubles had caused him, claiming that as bad as his circumstances were, he would “never commit the cowardly act of suicide, whilst my mind is sound.”<sup>109</sup> Christy concludes the letter by saying that he would use a few hundred dollars he had collected to travel elsewhere, enough only to keep him “from the scoffs of the white man.”<sup>110</sup>

From 1840 to 1844, Christy had fallen from prominence as the founder and president of the LNAA, as well as an associate of some of Louisiana’s most powerful Anglo-American elites and Whig politicians, to near financial ruin. Even though Christy’s debt would follow him into the 1850s, he retained his place in Louisiana society with financial support from his stepson and other friends and family. Following this experience, Christy’s dealings with the Whig Party went

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<sup>107</sup> “Debts due by William Christy when he failed in 1840,” Accession Number: M571.2.35.1, Cenas Family Papers, Louisiana Historical Center, New Orleans, LA.

<sup>108</sup> William H. Christy, “Letters to HBC from William Christy,” Boston, MA, September 1, 1844, Accession Number: M571.2.35.1, Cenas Family Papers, Louisiana Historical Center, New Orleans, LA.

<sup>109</sup> Christy, “Letters to HBC from William Christy,” Boston, MA, September 1, 1844.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

no further than occasional correspondence with nativist sympathizers still within the party. He would, instead, come to advocate the formation of a national nativist party, an idea he had previously opposed, and work to influence the rise of political nativism throughout Louisiana and the United States. Although it is not certain if Christy's financial crisis drove him to resent the Whig Party, it did coincide with his shift in support for the politicization of nativist movement nationally.

The summer of 1844 was an especially violent time for Irish immigrants living in the United States and a defining period of the nativist movement in the country. In Philadelphia on May 6 to 8 and July 6 to 7, two riots broke out between local nativists and Irish Catholics. Believing a rumor that Irish Catholics were trying to remove the teachings of the Bible from schools, nativist rioted in the city attacking and burning Irish Catholic churches, businesses, and neighborhoods. By the end of hostilities, twenty-nine people lay dead on both sides.<sup>111</sup> Nativism had begun to raise its angry head across the nation as immigration steadily increased. The Philadelphia riots serve as an example of the type of nativism that was beginning to envelope the country at the time. The nativist movement had become more violent and more disassociated from the federal establishment, and eventually nativists broke away from the national Whig Party they once supported. Out of this break, former Whig supporters, longtime nativists, and even some Democrats formed their own national party based solely on anti-immigration policies called the American Republican Party.

Although Christy would never take on a direct leadership role in this new national nativist party as he did nine years' previously with the LNAA, he would promote the American

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<sup>111</sup> For more on the 1844 Philadelphia Nativist Riots, see Michael Feldberg, *The Philadelphia Riots of 1844: A Study of Ethnic Conflict* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1975) and Kenneth W. Milano, *The Philadelphia Nativist Riots: Irish Kensington Erupts* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2013).



Republican Party throughout Louisiana and the entire United States. He describes in his 1854 pamphlet how in December 1844 he reached out to the then Whig Senator of Virginia, William S. Archer, to support the American Republican Party as a viable contender to the Whig and Democratic parties. He recognized that Archer was sympathetic to the nativist cause and offered him a leadership role if the new party proved successful. To encourage Archer, Christy provides him with a three-step outline of how he plans to build up the American Republican Party:

“First: No exertions will be necessary to induce the Whig Party, to a man, to espouse the cause with avidity, including the naturalized citizens of the party. We only then to gain proselytes from the *locos*<sup>112</sup> to enable us to triumph.

Second: How is this to be done? By raising a half million dollars by subscriptions in small sums; by appointing proper agents, of well known standing and talents, who shall be well paid, and who (without the particular arrangements being generally known) shall devote their whole time to the promotion of the cause. They must visit every city, town, country and village in the Union, armed with statistical and historical facts, they must be able to address the people in a judicious manner, and bring the real danger with which the country is threatened to every man’s door.

Third: This course being followed, we shall be able, in about two years, to succeed in electing members of Congress on the strength of the question. They will be instructed by their constituents, and will finally vote for a total repeal, or very material modification of the present naturalization laws.

Then, and not until then, will we be able to bring forward a presidential candidate from our party *and elect him.*”<sup>113</sup>

Although this study does not argue that Christy’s plan alone caused the rise of the national American Republican Party, his plan provides an outline of the methods that the party was using to reach out to voters. This argument is supplemented by the fact that the American Republican Party’s first Congressional candidate, Lewis Charles Levin, was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives from Philadelphia’s first district right around the same time Christy’s

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<sup>112</sup> *Locos* was a common derogatory term used during the Jacksonian and Antebellum periods to refer to a faction of Democrats who opposed monopoly systems. They were also referred to as *loco-focos*. Christy uses both terms occasionally in his writing when talking about the Democratic Party.

<sup>113</sup> Christy, *To the Know-Nothings of the State of Louisiana*, 13.

letter was written, all this happening while the city was still reeling with tension following the nativist riots that previous summer. The American Republican Party used the same fear-mongering tactics that Christy and the LNAA had used a decade earlier. The only difference was that they were now using these tactics on their own terms.

By 1845, the American Republican Party officially changed its name to the Native American Party (NAP). During the 1846 Louisiana gubernatorial race, the NAP put forth its own candidate, Charles Derbigny. A former Creole-Whig and one-time Speaker of the Louisiana House of Representatives (1843-1844), Derbigny had just recently joined the NAP following the 1844 Plaquemines Frauds,<sup>114</sup> but had been sympathetic towards the nativist cause for most of his career. Derbigny was an unusual choice for the party being that not only was he a Creole, he was also a Catholic. Unlike most of its membership throughout the United States, the Louisiana chapter of the NAP did not exclude Catholics from its ranks. Louisiana had historically been a Catholic state and NAP members knew that they could not succeed without courting the Catholic vote. The NAP's arrival in Louisiana marked a new beginning for the nativist movement in the state. For the first time ever in Louisiana, a nativist party was running an independent candidate for governor, pitting itself against the very party that gave it birth. Although it failed in the election, gaining only two and half percent of the vote, the NAP was instrumental in promoting

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<sup>114</sup> Plaquemines Parish received national attention during the presidential election of 1844, when the parish gave Democratic candidate James K. Polk a majority of 970 votes where only 272 voters had been listed in the 1843 census. It was believed that a Judge Leonard was ordered by John Slidell to charter two boats from New Orleans with 350 naturalized immigrants onboard to go to vote in Plaquemines Parish. Even though Polk still received the votes, all persons involved were charged with voter fraud. The Plaquemines Fraud, as it was called, was a key factor in influencing the rise of the Native American Party in the region. Christy himself claims to have prosecuted another judge involved in the plan named Judge Elliot. Christy, *To the Know-Nothings of the State of Louisiana*, 14. Also see Murphy, *American Slavery, Irish Freedom: Abolition, Immigrant Citizenship, and the Transatlantic Movement for Irish Repeal*, 235.

political nativism across the state, and would lay the groundwork for the future, more radical, Louisiana Know-Nothing Party to gain notoriety in the 1850s.<sup>115</sup>

In response to the new threat that nativism posed to its political agenda, the Louisiana Whig Party shifted its 1846 gubernatorial campaign strategy away from the nativist movement and the repeal of the Naturalization Act all together to garner naturalized immigrant and Creole votes. Sacher claims that “although many Whigs might have harbored nativist sentiments, they saw the existence of a party dedicated to nativism as a pernicious movement that could only take votes from their candidates.”<sup>116</sup> The Louisiana Whig Party nominated a New Orleans Creole, Guillaume De Buys, as candidate for governor and a naturalized Irish immigrant, Edward Sparrow, as candidate for lieutenant governor.<sup>117</sup> Only a decade earlier De Buys, a former nativist, had presented a resolution against the naturalization laws to Louisiana Congress.<sup>118</sup> Seeing De Buys’s record as an opportunity, the Louisiana Democratic Party repeatedly brought up De Buys’s nativist past during its campaign.

During the 1846 gubernatorial election, the Louisiana Democratic Party launched a full-scale smear campaign that portrayed the Louisiana Whig Party as a violent anti-immigrant, anti-Catholic, and even anti-constitutional group. The election successfully turned voters against the Louisiana Whig Party and the party would, arguably, never recover from it. In January 1846, De Buys lost the election to Democratic candidate Isaac Johnson by 2,491 votes.<sup>119</sup> Ultimately the Louisiana Whig Party would blame its loss on what Sacher claimed was “bad weather, bad luck,

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<sup>115</sup> Murphy, *American Slavery, Irish Freedom: Abolition, Immigrant Citizenship, and the Transatlantic Movement for Irish Repeal*, 175.

<sup>116</sup> Sacher, *A Perfect War of Politics*, 141.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Refer to page 15.

<sup>119</sup> Frois, *Louisiana Almanac*, 547.

and the negative impact of Native Americanism.”<sup>120</sup> The loss of the 1846 gubernatorial election marked the beginning of the end for the Louisiana Whig Party. It lost to Democratic candidates in the next two elections (1849 and 1852) and lost its grip over state politics as new parties, such as the Louisiana Know-Nothing Party, began to emerge as viable contenders in the region.

Most American political historians agree that the Louisiana Whig Party’s association with nativism ultimately destroyed the party. Shugg argues that by the mid-1840s, the party “was already stricken by the plague of Native Americanism that was to prove their mortal disease.”<sup>121</sup> As the 1840s came to a close, Adams states that the Louisiana Whig Party was unable to maintain its position in power in state politics as European immigration increased due to the fact the “new immigrant vote was solidly Democrat.”<sup>122</sup> From a national perspective, David Walker Howe argues, “the nativist movement harmed the Whig party politically more than its rival; Catholic immigrants rallied to defend themselves against it by voting for the rousingly pro-immigrant Democratic Party.”<sup>123</sup> All of these historians might agree that the nativist movement, which had been orchestrated by Whig politicians and Anglo-American elites to garner votes, had transformed into a movement that would eventually destroy the very party that gave it birth. As the evidence shows, the Louisiana Whig Party could not escape the dilemma that nativism had put it in, and this is what ultimately led to the demise of the party.

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<sup>120</sup> Sacher, *A Perfect War of Politics*, 142.

<sup>121</sup> Shugg, *Origins of Class Struggle in Louisiana*, 128.

<sup>122</sup> William H. Adams, *The Louisiana Purchase Bicentennial Series in Louisiana History: Antebellum Louisiana, 1830-1860*, vol. 6, ed. Carolyn E. DeLatte, (Lafayette, LA.: Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Louisiana at Lafayette, 2004), 197.

<sup>123</sup> Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848*. New York (NY: Oxford University Press, 2007), 827.

## Aftermath and Conclusion

The failure of the Louisiana Whig Party to capture the 1846 gubernatorial election caused a split between those who supported the emerging Republican Party and those who still supported the nativist movement. By 1853, as Irish immigration increased dramatically following the Great Irish Potato Famine,<sup>124</sup> the nativist element of the Louisiana Whig Party split from the Whigs and joined the Know-Nothing Party of Louisiana, attracting former supporters of the now defunct Native American Party.<sup>125</sup> Despite the nativist movement's transformations during the 1850s, Christy continued to remain an influential figure.

In an 1855 issue of the *New Orleans Crescent*, a writer addressed a speech made by Christy to Louisiana Know-Nothing Party officials and supporters at a nativist rally in New Orleans. In the speech, Christy detailed his contributions to immigration reform and his promotion of the nativist cause. Christy stressed “the existing naturalization laws, and the necessity for their modification or repeal.”<sup>126</sup> The paper noted that Christy's speech was the “speech of the day” and that he ended with “such applause” that it “touched the chord of the hearts of his hearers.”<sup>127</sup> A decade after the demise of the Whig Party, Christy still had a profound effect on the nativist movement in Louisiana, although, as Christy pamphlet shows, sometime around 1854 he was rebuked by the Louisiana Know-Nothings for having

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<sup>124</sup> While New York and other northeastern cities took in the majority of immigrants coming to the United States, New Orleans took in 80 percent of all immigrants that came to the southern states. An 1850 census found that out of the free people of New Orleans, 54 percent were foreign born, 32 percent were Louisiana born, and 14 percent were born elsewhere in the United States. Joseph G. Tregle, Jr., “Creoles and Americans,” *New Orleans: Race and Americanization*, eds. Arnold Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 166.

<sup>125</sup> Leon Cyprian Soule, *The Know Nothing Party in New Orleans* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana Historical Association, 1961), 1.

<sup>126</sup> Editorial, “A Meeting at Claiborne,” *New Orleans Crescent*, August 24, 1855.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

“backslided” from the movement.<sup>128</sup> Exactly what Christy did or said to cause this rebuke may never be known, but his response in his 1854 pamphlet provides historians with a look into Christy’s career and motives.

In conclusion, as ethnic rivalries between Creoles and Anglo-Americans simmered in the years following the Louisiana Purchase, both sides looked for ways to turn the electoral tide in their favor. Creole-Democrats, seeing the vast number of Irish immigrating to the state in the 1830s, sought to capture their vote by favoring laws outlined in the Naturalization Act. Louisiana Whigs and Anglo-American elites, seeing Irish immigrants as a political threat to their expanding political power in the region, sought ways to repeal the naturalization laws to prevent Irish immigrants from gaining the right to hold political office or the right to vote against them. Christy, the LNAA, and the nativist movement in general acted as a fear-mongering vehicle to promote the Louisiana Whig Party and influence Congress to repeal the naturalization laws. As this study has shown, the nativist movement had the reverse effect on the Louisiana Whig Party. Instead of attracting voters and successfully repealing the naturalization laws, the nativist movement offered only a temporary solution, and created a division within the Louisiana Whig Party that, ultimately, led to the party’s destruction.

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<sup>128</sup> Christy, *To the Know-Nothings of the State of Louisiana*, 1.

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## Vita

Brett Todd was born in Mandeville, Louisiana in 1989. At the University of Southern Mississippi, he became a member of the Alpha Tau Omega fraternity and served as his fraternity's Public Relations Chairman, Historian, and as a delegate on the Interfraternal Council of the Southern Miss Greek Life Organization. In the summer of 2012, Brett finished his last six credits while studying abroad at Kings College in London, UK through the University of Southern Mississippi's International Studies Program. In the spring of 2013, he entered the Graduate School of the University of New Orleans where he completed an internship with the Midlo Center of New Orleans Studies and went on to work as a research assistant on various projects. Brett currently resides in Metairie, Louisiana, where he lives with his beloved fiancé, Rebecca, and his two dogs, Gambit and Maggie.