



# **Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings and the Politics of the 1850s**

*Tyler G. Anbinder*

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Politicians have used immigrants as scapegoats for the nation's problems throughout American history. No group achieved more success with this tactic than the Know Nothing Party, which directed its attacks primarily against Catholic immigrants. Within a year of its appearance in 1854, the party had elected eight governors, over one hundred members of Congress, and thousands of local officials. Prominent politicians of every persuasion joined the organization, which eventually became known as the American Party. Many observers predicted that the party would elect the next President. The Know Nothings experienced a precipitous decline, however, and in the 1856 election their presidential candidate, Millard Fillmore, carried only one state. The Know Nothings have not attracted much interest from historians, because the events involved in the coming of the Civil War eclipsed interest in a movement that was apparently only peripherally involved with Civil War issues. In this important new book, however, Anbinder argues that the Know Nothings's phenomenal success was inextricably linked to the firm stance their northern members took against the extension of slavery. *Nativism and Slavery* presents the first comprehensive history of the Know Nothings as well as a major revision of the political crisis that led to the Civil War.

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